

*Anthology
of Soviet
Ukrainian
Poetry*



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PAVLO TYCHINA
MAXIM RYLSKY
VASIL CHUMAK
VASIL ELLAN-BLAKITNY
VOLODIMIR SOSYURA
DMITRO ZAHUL
VALERIAN POLISHCHUK
MIKOLA TARNOWSKY
IVAN KULIK
MIKOLA TERESHCHENKO
PAVLO USENKO
MIKHAILO YOHANSEN
MIKOLA BAZHAN
YEVHEN PLUZHNIK
OLEXA VLIZKO
TEREN MASENKO
VASIL MISIK
SAVA HOLOVANIVSKY
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TAMARA KOLOMIYETS
VOLODIMIR BROVCHENKO
YEVHEN LETYUK
STANISLAV STRIZHENYUK
VOLODIMIR LUCHUK
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MIKOLA SINHAYIVSKY
MIKOLA KARPENKO
VITALIY KOROTICH
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HANNA SVITLICHNA
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VOLODIMIR ZABASHTANSKY
LEONID TALALAI
SVITLANA YOVENKO
PETRO PEREBIYNIS
VOLODIMIR ZATULIVITER

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The first edition of its kind and caliber, this anthology covers the past 65 years, representing 73 Soviet Ukrainian poets of different generations in all of their thematical, technical, and temperamental diversity. Selected with taste and attention, their poems create a vast panorama of life in Soviet Ukraine which ranges from the turbulent and hard years of the Civil and Great Patriotic wars to the creative time of the first five-year plans and the present day. The voice of the Ukraine rings out loud and clear in this book, which will be a helpful and informative guide in every reader's discovery of the Ukrainian SSR.

CONTENTS

PAVLO TYCHINA

- 27 Harps Ringing, Harps Ringing...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 28 Enharmoniques
- 28 The Sun
- 28 Wind
- 28 Rain
- 29 Fog
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 29 Pastels
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 30 The Plough
Translated by Walter May
- 31 On the Square
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 31 Wind From the Ukraine
Translated by Walter May
- 32 La Bella Fornarina
Translated by Walter May
- 33 We Live and Toil Communally
Translated by Walter May
- 34 In the Cosmic Orchestra
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 39 Tractor Girl's Song
Translated by Walter May
- 41 One Family Feeling
Translated by Walter May
- 42 Song of John Ball
Translated by Walter May
- 43 Funeral of a Friend
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 49 I Grow Strong
Translated by Walter May
- 51 Sword Dance
Translated by Walter May

MAXIM RYLSKY

- 54 Swallows now are flying...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 54 Sign of Libra — sign of the new age
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 55 The Competition
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 57 Friendship
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 58 Chant of My Native Land
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 61 Cup of Friendship
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 62 Fidelity
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 64 Pigeons Over Moscow
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 65 Late Nightingales
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 65 Wild Carnations in the Wood
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 66 Grapes and Roses
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 66 The Bells of Avignon
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 67 Rio de Janeiro
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 68 Thirst
Translated by Gladys Evans

VASIL CHUMAK

- 73 Spring Hubbub
Translated by Walter May
- 74 May
Translated by Walter May
- 74 The Call
Translated by Walter May
- 75 Boundary
Translated by Walter May
- 75 Asters
Translated by Walter May
- 76 Cornflowers
Translated by Walter May
- 76 Tempered Poetry
Translated by Walter May

VASIL ELLAN-BLAKITNY

- 77 Forward
Translated by Walter May
- 77 Hammer Blows
Translated by Walter May
- 78 Letter
Translated by Walter May
- 79 Forgive Me...
Translated by Walter May

VOLODIMIR SOSYURA

- 80 Oh No, 'Twas Not in Vain!..
Translated by John Weir
- 81 The Red Winter
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 84 No one loved so before
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 85 As a night thain goes rumbling afar
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 86 I recall the cherries ripening...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 86 To Maria
Translated by John Weir
- 87 Cornflowers
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 87 A Letter to My Fellow-Countrymen
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 90 Joy of victory...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 91 Love Your Ukraine
Translated by John Weir
- 92 My Donbas
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 93 Sunflower past the fence there...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 93 Hear the nightingale...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 94 I love the ancient world of trees
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 94 What are trees whispering of within
the evening darkness?
Translated by Gladys Evans

DMITRO ZAHUL

- 96 I Gaze Afar...
Translated by Gladys Evans

- 97 Changing Motifs
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 98 The Trumpeter
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 99 The Sun and the Heart
Translated by Gladys Evans

VALERIAN POLISHCHUK

- 100 First Snow
Translated by Walter May
- 101 The Colossus of Memnon
Translated by Walter May
- 102 To My Father
Translated by Walter May

MIKOLA TARNOWSKY

- 103 To Our Brothers Overseas
Translated by John Weir
- 104 My Beautiful Ternopil
Translated by John Weir
- 105 Let Seed Be Sown!..
Translated by John Weir
- 105 Under My Country's Skies
Translated by John Weir

IVAN KULIK

- 107 Sowing
Translated by Walter May
- 107 Fifth Letter
Translated by Walter May
- 109 Sixth Letter
Translated by Walter May

MIKOLA TERESHCHENKO

- 111 Light From the East
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 111 A Girl From the Ukraine
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 112 Harvest
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 113 Kibalchich's Testament
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

PAVLO USENKO

- 114 Spring Song
Translated by Walter May

- 115 Letter
Translated by Walter May
- 115 For Our Ukraine
Translated by Walter May
- 117 I'll Bind, Embrace, and Close Entwine
Translated by Walter May
- 119 Snowdrops all are gone
Translated by Walter May
- 119 My Spring
Translated by Walter May
- 120 From this earth I'll not be parted
Translated by Walter May

MIKHAILO YOHANSEN

- 122 A new Atlantis arose from blue abyss
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 122 The Commune
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 123 The Red Army
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 124 Spring
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 124 September
Translated by Gladys Evans

MIKOLA BAZHAN

- 125 The Trooper's Song
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 126 Hoffmann's Night
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 131 The Wind From the East
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 132 The Break-Through
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 135 The Cliffs of Dover
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 136 Before Michelangelo's Statues
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 138 On Sardinia
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 142 Second Variation
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 145 The Gods of Greece
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 153 Shostakovich: Seventh Symphony
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

- 156 Leontovich's Well
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

YEVHEN PLUZHNIK

- 159 Lenin
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 160 I know that
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 160 To learn wisdom — others don't employ
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 160 Night world in beauty wrought
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 161 Oh, when September-golden comes to pass
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 161 Just a small town...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 162 Night... a boat — like a silver bird!
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 162 Blue madness yonder!..
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 162 Evenfall..
Translated by Gladys Evans

OLEXA VLIZKO

- 163 Rich red blood, and my strength...
Translated by Walter May
- 163 Ninth Symphony
Translated by Walter May
- 165 I Speak For All
Translated by Walter May
- 165 Ironic Overture
Translated by Walter May
- 167 Roadstead
Translated by Walter May
- 168 Ballad of "The Flying Dutchman"
Translated by Walter May

TEREN MASENKO

- 171 To My Mother's Memory
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 172 Premonition
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 172 Meditation
Translated by Peter Tempest

VASIL MISIK

- 174 The Spirit of Today
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 174 Wormwood
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 175 The Cranes of Hiroshima
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 176 The Path
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 177 The Planet
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 178 The twenties...
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 179 The Heart of Burns
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 180 Chornotrop
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 181 The Drop
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 181 Conscience
Translated by Peter Tempest

SAVA HOLOVANIVSKY

- 183 Maples
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 184 Meeting Sunrise on Chernecha Hill
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 185 A Song About My Ukraine
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 186 Harkusha
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 188 Lady Godiva
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

YEVHEN FOMIN

- 189 Shchors
Translated by Walter May
- 190 Ocean Etude
Translated by Walter May
- 191 Landscapes
Translated by Walter May
- 192 The Dnieper
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 192 Golden Slavic Soul
Translated by Walter May

LEONID PERVOMAISKY

194. Ah, for a taste of bitter apples
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 195 Earth
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 197 Song
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 198 Master
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 199 The Two Giants
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 200 When a fir tree falls in the forest
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 200 The Tree of Life
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 201 François Villon
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 203 The past brooks no denial
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 203 Lessons of Poetry
Translated by Peter Tempest

VASIL BOBINSKY

- 205 Song of the Winged Centaurs
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 206 Black-Earth
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 208 Sunlight Against Show-Windows
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 208 To Far Lands
Translated by Gladys Evans

IVAN HONCHARENKO

- 210 That Was Not Your Daughter Stood There
Translated by Walter May
- 211 Obelisks
Translated by Walter May
- 211 Now the Ploughland Revives
Translated by Walter May

YURI YANOVSKY

- 213 Hail to you, sea!
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 213 Son
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

- 214 In Port
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 215 Dedication
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 216 Ten Years
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

LYUBOMIR DMITERKO

- 217 Arkan
Translated by Walter May
- 218 Dance Above Crossed Swords
Translated by Walter May
- 219 Olvia
Translated by Walter May
- 221 Prelude
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 222 The Singer
Translated by Walter May
- 222 Porik's Grave
Translated by Walter May

SERHIY VOSKREKASENKO

- 224 Double-Faced
Translated by Walter May
- 225 A Thief at Confession
Translated by Walter May

PETRO DOROSHKO

- 226 I drink water from the clear
pure spring
Translated by Walter May
- 227 Way beyond some gay horizon there
Translated by Walter May
- 227 Upon the Kola Peninsula
Translated by Walter May
- 229 Girl From Polissya
Translated by Walter May
- 230 Aerodromes
Translated by Walter May
- 231 Orioles in My Orchard
Translated by Walter May
- 231 'Mid the Pines in the Forest
Dark is the Night
Translated by Walter May

MIKOLA NAHNIBIDA

- 233 Out at Sea
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 234 The Shirt
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 235 Montenegro
Translated by Walter May
- 237 Bonfires
Translated by Walter May
- 239 The Bells of Khatyn
Translated by Walter May
- 242 To Veterans of the War
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 243 To Katerina
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk

KOST HERASIMENKO

- 244 Ditty
Translated by Walter May
- 245 Story About a Song
Translated by Walter May
- 248 Affirmation
Translated by Walter May
- 250 Just a Yarn
Translated by Walter May

MIKOLA SHPAK

- 252 Happiness
Translated by Walter May
- 253 Above the village an aeroplane
Translated by Walter May
- 253 My Native Land
Translated by Walter May
- 254 The Wish
Translated by Walter May

IHOR MURATOV

- 255 Bread
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 256 My Love and My Hate
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 257 Eyes
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 257 Autumn Trumpets
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 258 Orioles
Translated by Gladys Evans

- 258 Have you the knack of reading
people's eyes
Translated by Gladys Evans

IVAN VIRHAN

- 260 Warrior's Glory
Translated by Walter May
- 261 To Olenka
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 262 Girl With a Balloon
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 263 End of Summer
Translated by Walter May
- 264 The Red Guelder-Rose Tree
Translated by Walter May
- 265 Poplar Down
Translated by Walter May
- 266 When yesterday I came to you in darkness
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

ABRAM KATSNELSON

- 267 Confession
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 268 In our villages steep obelisks
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 269 A Ballad About a Globe
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 269 I'm Earth!
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 270 A Maple Leaf on the Asphalt
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

ANDRIY MALISHKO

- 271 Motherland
Translated by Walter May
- 273 The Stork
Translated by Walter May
- 273 Trumpeter
Translated by Walter May
- 274 The Carpenters
Translated by Walter May
- 274 Katya
Translated by Walter May
- 275 The Grey
Translated by Walter May
- 276 The Word
Translated by Walter May

- 277 I lived not those years stuck behind
a stone-deaf solid wall
Translated by Walter May
- 277 Of Desert Heat and Dust I Don't Complain
Translated by Walter May

VALENTINA TKACHENKO

- 279 Forests
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 280 Story of a Dove
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 280 Mountain Profiles
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 281 Autumn's Just Beginning
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 281 Snowfall
Translated by Gladys Evans

OLEXANDR LEVADA

- 283 The Appointed Hour
Translated by Walter May
- 284 Cosmonaut's Monologue
Before Lenin's Mausoleum
Translated by Walter May
- 286 Four Yaroslavnas
Translated by Walter May

PLATON VORONKO

- 289 In the Name of Your Sweet Freedom
Translated by Walter May
- 290 Partisan Ballad
Translated by Walter May
- 291 I Am He Who Burst the Dams
Translated by Walter May
- 292 Rain Has Passed
Translated by Walter May
- 293 Beloved Field
Translated by Walter May
- 293 Sleepless Nights
Translated by Walter May
- 294 Swan-Flight
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 295 Here sat Boyan...
Translated by Walter May

VASIL SHVETS

- 296 The Wind Gone Grey
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 297 A Girl From Moscow
Translated by Walter May
- 297 The immortelle protects the marjoram...
Translated by Walter May
- 298 Snow
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 299 The Moon is Rocking
Translated by Walter May
- 300 Demeter
Translated by Walter May

STEPAN OLIYNIK

- 302 The "Emperor"
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 304 A Bit Too Crafty
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 305 Our Mothers
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk

OLEXANDR PIDUKHA

- 307 Mother Rocked Me in My Cradle
Translated by Walter May
- 308 One in Age
Translated by Walter May
- 308 Blessed is he...
Translated by Walter May
- 309 Specially for me,
and on my birthday too
Translated by Walter May
- 310 Early Spring
Translated by Walter May

YAROSLAV SHPORTA

- 311 Zaporizhya
Translated by Walter May
- 312 Ballad About Light
Translated by Walter May
- 313 Ballad About a Small Seed
Translated by Walter May
- 314 The Book With Steel Pages
Translated by Walter May

ROSTISLAV BRATUN

- 316 Volyn Song to the Accordion
Translated by Walter May
- 317 Remember!
Translated by Walter May
- 317 Should you go out and leave the city
Translated by Walter May
- 318 Lillies-of-the-Valley Make a Landing
Translated by Walter May
- 319 Fairy-Tale About My Town
Translated by Walter May

VIKTOR KOCHEVSKY

- 320 Landing Night
Translated by Walter May
- 321 In Your Name There are Seven Letters
Translated by Walter May
- 322 Conversation With the Sky
Translated by Walter May
- 323 Barev, My Armenia!
Translated by Walter May

ANATOLIY KOSMATENKO

- 325 Philoxenes and Dionysus
Translated by Walter May
- 326 The Golden Gates
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 326 Essence and Effervescence
Translated by Walter May

ZAKHAR HONCHARUK

- 328 Pigeon Dawn
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 329 Zaporizhian Oratorio
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 330 Adriatic Aquarelles
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 331 Pastorale
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 332 Newton's Binomial Equation
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

DMITRO PAVLICHKO

- 335 Mount Ararat
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 337 From what source is this web due
Translated by Gladys Evans

- 337 Nostalgia
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 338 Hands
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 339 Oświęcim
Translated by Walter May
- 339 In Hemingway's House Near Havana
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 340 Lighthouse
Translated by Walter May
- 341 The Heart of the Matter
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 342 Ernesto Che Guevara
Translated by Walter May
- 343 The Sea
Translated by Gladys Evans

VASIL BONDAR

- 344 The First From the Left in the Line
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 345 Oh, how I'd like to have two hearts
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 346 The Italian
Translated by Gladys Evans

MIKHAILO KLIMENKO

- 348 My Orchard
Translated by Walter May
- 349 Awakening
Translated by Walter May
- 350 Polissya
Translated by Walter May

MIKHAILO TKACH

- 352 Son, the Ducks are Flying
Translated by Mary Shrypnyk
- 353 Mirage
Translated by Mary Shrypnyk
- 354 Living Earth
Translated by Walter May
- 355 O Beautiful Ash Trees
Translated by Mary Shrypnyk
- 355 Taras's Dream
Translated by Gladys Evans

TAMARA KOLOMIYETS

- 357 The Cranes' Sorrow
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

- 358 The Girl White-washed the Cottage
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk
- 358 Morning comes on grey steeds prancing
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk
- 359 To a Mother
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk
- 360 On the Hill of Batu Khan
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

VOLODIMIR BROVCHENKO

- 361 The Veterans Were Returning From the War
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk
- 362 Again the steppe arises from the depths
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk
- 363 Beneath the plum-tree "Uhorka"
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk

YEVHEN LETYUK

- 364 Who's Stirring the Stars Around Up There?
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 365 I've seen high wires trailing...
Translated by Gladys Evans

STANISLAV STRIZHENYUK

- 366 The Sunflower
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 367 Odessa
Translated by Walter May
- 368 White Gull, Seagull
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 369 Mamayev Mound
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 369 The Field
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

VOLODIMIR LUCHUK

- 371 Dawn
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 372 Ballad of the Hands Outstretching
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 372 In Sun Encircled
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 373 The Sun
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

VOLODIMIR KOLOMIYETS

- 374 Vernal Dowry
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 375 The Arms of Venus de Milo
Translated by Walter May
- 377 A Soldier's Medals
Translated by Walter May
- 378 The Sun is now my visitor
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 379 Spiky Thoughts or Heart of a Hedgehog
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

MIKOLA SINHAIVSKY

- 380 My Native Land
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 380 Daily Bread
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 381 Underneath the Polissian Sky
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

MIKOLA KARPENKO

- 382 The weight of years upon my back I feel
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 382 Like water, minute after minute
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 383 You remember how we loved to listen
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 383 Once I Dreamed
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 384 While Vesuvius Sleeps
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

VITALIY KOROTICH

- 385 Flight No. S-957. May 26, 1976
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 386 Eternity
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 387 Traces
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 388 Autumn Geese in Koncha Ozerna
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 389 The Old Minstrel
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 390 Summer in Kutaisi
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 390 The Painter Pirosmani's Self-Portrait
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

ROBERT TRETYAKOV

- 392 Pull of the Heart
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 393 Oh no, no infant cradles then
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 394 My father has a wound that's old
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 394 Portraits
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 395 Carpathian beech,
steppeland Lombardy poplar
Translated by Gladys Evans

VASIL SIMONENKO

- 397 Millstones
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 398 Native land of mine! My mind is brighter
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 399 A Mother's Entreaty
Translated by Mary Skrypnyk
- 400 Ever shall I bless despite the sorrow
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 400 Awake you new Magellan, fine Columbus
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

BORIS OLIYNIK

- 401 On jagged rocks they bound him in duress
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 401 Bachelor's Ballad
Translated by Walter May
- 403 From where the ages sleep...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 404 The years no longer speed by...
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 405 Song About Mother
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 406 I'd have always lain peaceful...
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 407 My Debt
Translated by Walter May
- 408 The Lesson
Translated by Walter May

IVAN DRACH

- 414 The Ballad of the Sunflower
Translated by Peter Tempest

- 415 Women and Storks
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 415 The Ballad of Karmelyuk
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 417 The Mystery
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 418 Maria of the Ukraine — No. 62276
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 420 In the Society of the Bumble-Bee
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 421 The Korolis — Welders
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 422 A Girl's Fingers
Translated by Peter Tempest

HANNA SVITLICHNA

- 423 Father
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 424 Joy
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 425 Red Blizzard
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 425 The Colour Print
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

MIKOLA VINHRANOVSKY

- 427 Sistine Madonna
Translated by Walter May
- 428 To My Sea
Translated by Walter May
- 428 On the Golden Table
Translated by Walter May
- 429 The First Lullaby
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 430 Star Prelude
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

ROMAN LUBKIVSKY

- 431 Golden Sowing
Translated by Walter May
- 432 The Sweetbriar
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 433 The Parable of Passing Time
Translated by Michelle MacGrath
- 433 And when in the final attack he fell
Translated by Walter May

VIKTOR KORZH

- 435 Land of My Fathers
Translated by Walter May
- 436 Wild Thyme
Translated by Walter May
- 436 Flowers of Memory
Translated by Walter May
- 437 Faith
Translated by Michelle MacGrath

PETRO SKUNTS

- 438 Birthtime
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 439 A Ballad in a Trench-Coat
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 440 Hoverla
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

IRINA ZHILENKO

- 443 Speak to Me of Fields
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 444 Spring
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 445 Self Portrait
Translated by Gladys Evans

PETRO OSADCHUK

- 446 My Ukraine begins and extends
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 447 I awoke from the nightingales' song...
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

VOLODIMIR ZABASHTANSKY

- 448 Faith in Man
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 449 The Stone-Hewer
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 450 Sonny
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

LEONID TALALAI

- 451 Song
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 452 Girl With Buckets
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 452 Eluard's Word
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

SVITLANA YOVENKO

- 453 On Translating Poetry
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 454 Woman
Translated by Peter Tempest
- 455 In Defence of Goethe's Late Love
Translated by Peter Tempest

PETRO PEREBIYNIS

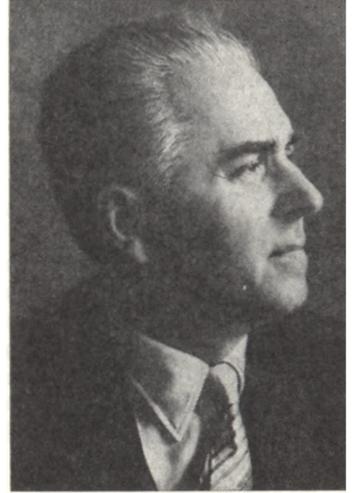
- 457 My Heirlooms
Translated by Gladys Evans
- 458 A Master-Craftsman's Love
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 459 The Earth's Palette
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 460 Glazed Horses
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

VOLODIMIR ZATULIVITER

- 461 Birth-Debt
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 462 A Theory of Wings
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 462 Rodin. A Sonnet
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg
- 463 The Stellar Message
Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

PAVLO TYCHINA

Pavlo Tychina (1891-1967) was born in the village of Pisky, Chernihiv Region, into the family of a deacon. One of the founders of new Soviet literature, he is the author of many books of verse, long poems, and poetry translations which won him nationwide recognition. His poetry is distinguished for its innovation, its wealth of themes, and profound insights into the inner world of Soviet man, the builder of communist society. His works have been translated into many Soviet and foreign languages. He also wrote a number of scholarly works on Slavic, Oriental, and other literatures. Pavlo Tychina was a member of the Ukrainian SSR Academy of Sciences, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of Bulgaria, Hero of Socialist Labour, and a USSR State and Taras Shevchenko prize winner. The best literary



works concerning the friendship of nations are annually awarded the Pavlo Tychina Prize.

HARPS RINGING, HARPS RINGING...

Harps ringing, harps ringing —
golden ringing, loud resounding, through the groves
sing out your strings,
glad news echoing:
The fragrant spring's
on the wing,
Flowering, dew-pearling,
painting every thing.

Thoughts flying, thoughts flying —
like a sea with white sails crowding, brim with
tender tones of blue,
flying thoughts that swirl:
Storms will come,
lightnings run!
Laughter be, weeping be
dews of mother-of-pearl...

I arise, cast my eyes —
rills all round like bells ajingle, larks pour down
 in notes of gold
 waterfalls that sing:
The fragrant spring's
on the wing,
Flowering, dew-pearling,
painting every thing.

Love of mine, heart of mine —
should you wander on the meadows all in sadness caught
or with joy awhirl:
Spare but one
glance, O come!
Laughter be, weeping be
dews of mother-of-pearl.

1914

ENHARMONIQUES

THE SUN

Birds of paradise somewhere feed on
Greens and fruit of vine.
Lakes were vistas of light translucent...!
Vespertine.

Scythemen reap to break of sunrise.
Flower of flame — the sun!
Sigh awakening breasts of maidens:
Son... My son...

WIND

Bird — a river — greening legumes —
Sunflower-turning rhythms.
Day runs by with laughter ringing,
Overjoyed and brimming.

Over ryefields, honey-seekers
Dip their golden beakers.
Day runs by with laughter ringing,
Overjoyed and brimming.

RAIN

The serpents writhe in someone's hand
Within the waters... Dreams. In deeps.
The millet's blown and strewn in heaps —
And sparrows dart in slanting bands.

“Be off!” the river hastens pace.
“Lie down!” cry pinks and yarrow.
And trailing petticoats of lace
A cloud drops on the meadow.

FOG

Over swampland like spun milk fog goes...
Meditative, the raven.
Lost in thought is the jackdaw.
They have plucked out eyes. Whose? God knows.

Eastward, Wrath comes with swords as the sun rose!
Plunges sudden the raven.
Darting up goes the jackdaw.
They have plucked out eyes. Whose? God knows.

1918

PASTELS

I

Runs by a bunny.
Stops to see —
The dawnlight!
And plays gleefully.
The daisies open up their eyes.
Sunrise-perfumes touch the skies.
Cocks embroider the cloak of night
With fiery threads of vocal light.
Sunrise.
Runs by a bunny.

II

It has supped on hearty wine —
The robust day.
“Meadows, strew your flower blooms!”
“Coming,” calls the Day.
“O flocks, feed on pastures!”
“Seek your love,” calls lusty Day.
“Sing your lullabies, wheat-ears!”
calls Day.
It has supped on hearty wine —
The robust day.

III

Trills like flutes rang on horizons
Where the sun had gone to rest.
On tip-toe
Came quiet evening.
Stars came out, twinkling,
The mist crept over the meadows
And, finger on lip, lay down to
Sleep.
Trills like flutes rang on horizons
Where the sun had gone to rest.

IV

Oh, wrap me up well. Oh, wrap me —
I'm old, I'm night.
And ailing fast.
To sleep my black road ran
Since time began.
Make a bed of mint for me;
Let poplars rustle, lull with song.
Oh, wrap me up well. Oh, wrap me —
I'm old, I'm night.
And ailing fast.

1917

THE PLOUGH

Wind.
Not wind — but a storm!
It beats and breaks, from the earth whirls away...
Behind black clouds yonder
(with lightning! with thunder!)
behind black clouds yonder are millions on millions
of muscular hands...

It rolls. It cuts in the clay
(whether city, or highway, or land)
it ploughs earth and sand.
But on earth are people, beasts, and orchards,
but on earth are gods and churches:
"O pass over, pass over us, judges!
Pardon!
And there were those who retired
into caves and lakes and forests.

“What kind of power do you flourish?”
they enquired.
And none of them, no one rejoiced or sang.
(His fiery steed the wind drave,
His fiery steed
in the night —)
And only their dying and wide staring eyes
reflected the beauty of dawning day!
Eyes!

1919

ON THE SQUARE

In front of the church on the square,
The Great Revolution is on.
“Hey, shepherd!” cries shatter the air.
“For leader, you’ve enough brawn.”

“For liberty we will give battle!
Mount up, boys! Up and away!”
All’s clamour and bustle and rattle,
banners sweep out bright and gay...

In front of the church on the square,
sorrowing mothers cry:
“Shine, light the way,” is their prayer,
“silver moon up in the sky!”

The dust settles down on the square,
silence, hushed and tight...
Twilight.
Night.

1918

WIND FROM THE UKRAINE

Nothing do I love so fine
as the wind a-blowing.

Devilish wind! Accurséd wind!

Only let him sweep his arm —
roaring, whistling, skirling!

in the grove the last year's leaves —
devils and imps go swirling...

Or on the clammy earth he leans
and lets his waggons play.
See how they fly along the lines,
while poplars start to sway!

Devilish wind! Accurséd wind!

Rabindranath sits there in old Bengal:
"No rebels here: the people are just clay."
With laughter roars the wind from the Ukraine,
wind from the Ukraine!

Through pince-nez the West peers, as through bars:
"Is that a march of beasts, of beasts or men?"
With laughter roars the wind from the Ukraine,
wind from the Ukraine!

Devilish wind! Accurséd wind!

His tousled head from Dnieper's wave he's tossed.
My lords, expect the worst:
your game is lost!

Ah!
nothing do I love so fine
as the wind a-blowing,
his way, his pain a-gnawing,
and land,
this land of mine.

1923

LA BELLA FORNARINA *

By Tiber's side strolled Rafael
in June, one summer evening.
"Here grief, there dreams I lull to sleep,
a-weeping, love, a-weeping."

His heart beat fast. He stopped to hear:
Oh, how she sang, imploring!
"Loves me, loves not," and wrings her hands,
but in far creeks he's mooring.

* *Fornarina* (It.) — baker of bread, literally "stove-woman"

The song drew near. From behind a tree
there flew a *colombina*.*
“Oh, who are you, dear maiden, say?”
She, shyly: “*Fornarina*.”

And Rafael gently took her hand,
without a word gazed on her.
She wept. He took her in his arms:
“Madonna!”

1921

WE LIVE AND TOIL COMMUNALLY

I

We live and toil communally. Among the hills — a monastery. The forest lies on every hand, the Dnieper flows before our eyes. A wonder not perceived at once. And still it sleeps, still dreams, and yet it cannot dream enough... We live and toil communally.

Scarce dawn — with spades we go to dig the monastery fields.

The monks in silence pass us by, repeatedly cross themselves, spit left and right. For breakfast calls the vociferous gong. To greet the sun their hymn pours forth... We laugh, believe and burn! But Dnieper deeper frowns. Still dreams, and cannot dream enough.

VI

O Dnieper, shall I read to you? Once the Ukraine with anger boiled... From end to end, from Dniester's bank, to Danube's shore, to the very sea, and around the Old Oak region the mob arose, and seized the landlords by their forelocks. (Blood-red — the — sun — on — endless — steppes...) O Dnieper, shall I read to you?

The Polish lords joined up with the priests and kings, the landlords built themselves a state. Oh, how many rose! Oh, how many fell... Once the Ukraine with anger boiled...

The Dnieper laughed: read, or do not read...

Blood-red — the — sun — on — endless — steppes.

X

We live and toil communally. All round lie forests and lonely huts, and people wild as the wild rose. Ah, what great happiness if you love the earth, if you seek harmony in life! Each of us builds humanity a hall, and each is a messenger with a call. Ah, what great happiness if you love

* *Colombina* (It.) — a dove, figuratively, a lovely girl

the earth! In her you'll find no angel choir, no seventh heaven, no God.
She holds but pride and zeal, and communal toil and praise.

And what then, if all the universe flowed with blood? New generations
will arise — in soul and body welded one.

We do the deed we needs must do, and that new world — it will be ours!

1920

Mizhgirya

FROM "IN THE COSMIC ORCHESTRA"

Blessed are:
matter and space, number and measure!
Blessed, too, are colour, timbres and fire,
fire, that gives tone to the whole Universe,
fire and motion, fire and motion!

Spirit, permeating it all,
who are you?

Is your name wind? Or is it calm?
Or are you the power of machines, blind and vast?
Or the hearing of atoms? The play of dust?
Over this music stand of a world, you extend your arms,

and as a background
roar propellers,
chaos dances a waltz rebellious,
and in corridors endless a trombone bellows.

Myriads of bodies, unfused particles, in loneliness ring:
faster, faster
every and all,
smoothly, orbitally we fall!
faster!

Millions of solar systems
vibrate, explode and thunder!
Comets come whinnying, galloping,
Roaring, lie oceans, above and under.
Countless bodies, unfused particles
upwards, downwards, sideways, each its own spiral follows.
Fires!! fires!!
Rays weep, play and sing in chorus,
as if gigantic 'cellos.

Spirit permeating it all,
who are you?

II

I am a spirit, the spirit of eternity, of matter — the muscles
that move the dawn.
The spirit of time, space and measure, the spirit of numbers galore;
Aerolytic rivers flow, born
by each stroke of my single oar.

The spirit of engines, tank tacts, motorcar quires, performing dances;
With motors my garage yard hums.
As meek as children led to the beach, a swarm of titans comes
Led by me into the expanses.

And on the water, tier on tier,
systems I set out,
insert young thought both there and here,
give themes to think about.

And they fly along on their way
on the abysses' brink,
and not until they sink
will I stop, go away.

Fly, fly on, to suns steer straight,
steer to the circular roof!
Call all together, federate,
spread slogans inspired with truth!

Pay no attention to Saturn's rings;
stop living for yourself, as you have through eternity!
to all planets, all suns our chorus sings:
liberty, equality, fraternity!

And they fly along on their way
on the abysses' brink,
and not until they all sink
will I stop, go away!

I am a spirit, the spirit of eternity, matter — the muscles
that move the dawn,
the spirit of time, space and measure, the spirit of numbers galore.
Aerolytic rivers flow, born
by each stroke of my single oar.

III

In the great cosmic orchestra
all things obey a single hand.
No ends, no boundaries are there
to set terms to the suns that spin
the blue and radiant milk within.

The ether flows, the wind-stream flies,
new poems gush in springs,
and constellations, letter-wise,
arise — bright, fiery things.

What is an age, aye, what is time
and notions such as “day” and “dawn”?
Only cries — just blood-red cries,
Protuberances from red suns drawn.

There is no grief, no yoke of woe,
egoism’s alien to systems.
All bodies their fixed orbits know,
socialism’s law controls existence.

All know their ranks and their distinctions:
friend-comrade-brother-satellite.
Each dawn, each minute on their missions
like air-balloons, worlds meet in flight.

One falls — another starts to gleam,
and so with neither end nor bound,
and neither suns nor planets seem
to stop in this merry-go-round.

In the great cosmic orchestra
all things obey a single hand.
No ends, no boundaries are there
to set terms to the suns that spin
the blue and radiant milk within.

V

Along eternity’s steep bank
the sun in harness goes,
and as the cosmic barge it tows
all planets dance in ecstasy.
People, stop sulking under fences;
don’t cry because of small offences;
along eternity’s steep bank
the sun in harness goes.

People, love the earth!
Poets, lead through skies!
When barricades on planets rise
the Universe entire feels pain.
Along eternity’s steep bank
the sun in harness goes.

Each planet’s pregnant from the sun,
each treats the other as an equal one.

From the sun
each on its orbit gets its strength
(the inert fade, the weak go out)
And echoes through the expanses sound,
and like communes, the systems spin around;
The motto of the cosmic federation:
up — down, up — down, in endless circulation...

People, love the earth!
Poets, lead through space!
The road through space
 is life!
Along eternity's steep bank
the sun in harness runs its race.

VI

The earth goes circling round the sun
as if a flying cannon-ball.
The bald moon, trotting round the earth
stares, toothless, through its monocle.

How many toothless souls on earth,
afraid of water and of sun!
O earth, bring forth men young of heart,
O earth, give birth to giant sons!

Waving red flags, the peoples march,
to liberty, to liberty!
They give the earth their blood to drink
And go back to the earth to die.

Yet after them, in pain and gore,
while bullets fly, others arise.
The revolution's wave they force
to new Octobers, new Julys.

Arise, O you with singing hearts!
O new republic, rise in force!
Sea, splash new ranks of fighters out!
O Mother Earth, bring giants forth!

The earth goes flying round the sun
as if a giant cannon-ball.
The bald moon, trotting round the earth,
stares, toothless, through its monocle.

See, poet — nothing can be done —
no way to join the masses now.

Your decades bloomed like flowers once,
till, sorrily, you petered out!

Burn bright, all you with curly hearts!
O new republic, rise in force!
Sea, splash new ranks of fighters out!
O Mother Earth, bring giants forth!

VIII

Humanity proclaims its creed
through three wide-thundering fanfares:
Shevchenko, Whitman and Verhaern.
Like cables drawn from nation unto nation
In mighty voices to the world dictate the creed of revolution
Shevchenko, Whitman and Verhaern!
Switch in, all wires!
Sing, poets' quires!
Speak, conscience of democracy,
speak, message of democracy!
Let blind bards twang their "Judgment Day"
to baggy Cossack pants!

Our Judgment Day has come.
(No shadow this of cherubim —
it is the flight path of a plane —
Oh, what impalpable music!
propellers roar with strain...)
Our Judgment Day has come.
Look, it has left its furrow there,
never to be erased.

Its steps into the Dnieper,
dividing it in two.
(No shadow this of cherubim —
it is the flight path of a plane —
Oh, what impalpable music!
propellers roar with strain...)
Guns fire and echo, North, West, East and South.
Continents split and kingdoms fall,
and storms above the peoples' graveyards like great bugles call.
O whining hoboos, o cave-geniuuses, poets sitting on the fence,
come, join your voices to the voices of the bugles!
Humanity proclaims its creed
through three wide-thundering fanfares:
Shevchenko, Whitman and Verhaern.

1921

TRACTOR GIRL'S SONG

(How Olesya Kulik ran off
to the tractor course in 1930.)

Smoke and dust fly by from machines,
like maiden summers again...
But Mirgorod's not what it was,
Khorol river's not the same.

In summer I worked on the fields,
but as soon as first snowflakes fell,
my companion workers I asked
if I might join the artel.

Oh, my dear artel "The Rose",
silk shawl, and satiny scarf!
I embroidered with free pattern-work,
and a restless thrill, half-and-half.

With a thrill — oh, it's funny to say! —
with a thrill — but so wonderful too!
When I heard a new throbbing outside,
then straight to the window I flew.

But that thrill was in no wise strange,
for among our black stallions too
such horses were starting to work,
about which I already knew.

They don't munch the fragrant hay,
of grass or of oats — not a trace,
but they run, as if they would fly,
then return to the Tractor Base.

Smoke and dust fly by from machines,
like maiden summers again...
But Mirgorod's not what it was,
Khorol river's not the same.

My needle just fell from my hand,
my embroidery patterns undone...
in the lunch-break there I sped —
as fast as my heels would run.

They meet at the Tractor Base,
the machines no praises lack,
the drivers call them their friends,
and give them a pat on the back.

Straight up to a tractor I go —
oh, dear world! oh, sun in the sky!

Oh, how I should love to learn
to drive you myself, by-and-by!

Well, mama, but please let me go!
Why that spiteful look in your eye?
To the tractor drivers' course
in Popivka village nearby.

But mother replies: "Fear the Lord!"
I ask: "Why of God talk so much?
How long will you torture me so
with your churches, priests' robes, and such?"

Smoke and dust fly by from machines,
like maiden summers again...
But Mirgorod's not what it was,
Khorol river's not the same.

But she says: "Give up the ideal!"
I reply: "All the same, I shall go!"
And early one morning I rose,
so that nobody else should know.

With my kerchief round my head,
in my worn-out coat, just so,
I made for Popivka at last
through the merrily falling snow...

Past the Kharkivka, past the old bridge,
in the mist, I ran dreaming along,
and caught up there with a cart,
well, now with a cart — with a song.

That was the fellows who sang,
some high, some gay, some hoarse,—
"Don't you know us, we're on our way
to Popivka tractor course!"

I look, and can't trust me eyes —
all my friends, well-known voices ring:
"Sit with us, *Komsomolka*, come,
let's travel together, and sing..."

Smoke and dust fly by from machines,
like maiden summers again...
But Mirgorod's not what it was,
Khorol river's not the same.

Mirgorod Tractor Base
7 XII 1930

ONE FAMILY FEELING

My soul is deep, resilient, rich,
not like our shallow fording-place,
I'm master of a bow-shaped bridge
thrown o'er to people of many a race.

In me it soars, so powerful,
and stands upon such firm supports!
You shoot like lightning straight in the bull —
hear other's thunder in some far gorge...

And further peals, in farther fields
roll turbulent, jubilant at the fact
that folk are joined by a bridge of steel,
that international friendship acts.

And having thundered forth yourself,
your way stands clear, you forward swing,
as if you'd swallowed sumptuous health
from some refreshing steppeland spring.

And having drunk, wiped lips athirst —
without reserve, conditions none —
within the last you see the first
when you absorb a foreign tongue.

When you make contact with the word,
softer than soft it yields to you.
Though uttered otherwise it's heard,
its essence yet remains ours too.

At first it bends, like a horse-shoe curved,
within your hands unshapely grown,
but later, suddenly,— words! words! words!
the foreign tongue sounds like your own.

For it's not simply words and sounds,
no frigid dictionary phrases, see —
there stand our work, our sweat, our wounds,
the feeling of one family.

There flowers are smelt, and woods are heard,
there people's joys inspire our ways,
and through them runs a common thread
from ancient up to modern days.

And you may take that tongue, as suits,
into your own — a wonderful dower.
And all this finds its firmest roots
deep in the proletariat's power.

1936

SONG OF JOHN BALL

(From the poem)

They may be kings and courtiers,
but which of us goes not bare?
Toot-toodle-do, fa-la-le-ro,
but which of us goes not bare?
Three cheers for bold Wat Tyler-o,
long live John Ball, goodfrere.

The one has land and luxury,
the others may gasp and die:
no bread have we, no water we,
like starving dogs must die:
if only you, O liberty,
would stroke us, and not pass by!

In the forest are fires and revelry,
from the dancing, dust like smoke.
A sullen man is the *otaman* * —
now he's merry, like us poor folk:
in a hempen noose a gentleman
is kicking his heels 'neath the oak!

With revelry, with devilry,
they mock, ahem, at the lord:
enjoy yourself, oppressor, you,
O Holy Mother of God!
Enough of him, let's see things through,—
we'll win the world so broad!

Away they all go galloping...
Each one a lion, it seems.
They fall upon the hated ones,
with cries, with shouts, with screams...
The fire beneath the ill-fated ones
between the tree-trunks gleams...

And that's how they went triumphing,
those tatteredmedallions there:
Toot-toodle-do, fa-la-le-ro,
but which of us goes not bare?
Three cheers for bold Wat Tyler-o,
long live John Ball, goodfrere.

1931

* *Otaman* (Ukr.) — leader

FUNERAL OF A FRIEND

The hues of eve had changed to wistful tones,
from crimson down to violet in the spectrum.
While shovelling snow, blue-shadowed, by my home,
I stopped, for suddenly... A brass band's solemn
and sobbing blues flew heavy on my ear.
Upon the roadside red-tipped firs they lingered,
as if hard frost had caught their choking tears,
and then within my garden intermingled
faint echoes wailing many melodies.
Each echo through the crispen air rebounded:
as if a thousand bands, in different pitch or keys,
were playing different tunes at once and sounded
quite out of harmony....

All ever changes, ever made anew and severed,
blood ever runs from wounds, hearts
beat with pain of dearth,
as ashes unto ashes, dust to dust is rendered,
so always, all committed are to earth.

For whom do all these trumpets weep?
Why do the cymbals clang so bleak?
And drums tattoo like hearts in breast,
when he has well earned lasting rest?

All died away
the crimson hues. A greenish luminescence
lit up the clouds. It seemed as if X-rays
had pierced the world and showed its troubled essence....
I broke away and ran! Two years ago
on such an eve I parted from my dearest,
my closest friend. With fiery eyes aglow,
his steed raced off and disappeared.... The years
passed by and — sudden, war broke out. And all
at once I'd news of him: the entire country
was proud, for like a ploughshare sharp he mauled
and cut the enemy! The blood ran freely
from our foes, up to his knees it rose.

O Yaroslav, my friend, in many a duel
your name was on all lips! When blows
were dealt at K'harkiv — battle cruel —
our troops made circliment, the forces were
unequal. Yaroslav through blazing fires
fought one-to-eight all night, and so deterred
the hanging — fascists in their spiteful ire
were ripe to execute the people. And fame anew
surrounded Yaroslav. The troops recaptured
the village but, before the foe withdrew,
my friend was killed....

And I knew anger, anger
when I heard you were dead! The morning news
by radio mentioned you: thus they paid token
to you, my friend.... Arose in mental view
your coffin slowly swaying.... I, heart-broken,
so wished to see you then — were it only your
dead body in the coffin!

All ever changes, ever made anew and severed.

And the coffin
still swings before my eyes, my dream of you.
I catch up the procession, see the coffin
is closed, would look, though it's in vain
for Yaroslav's not here: I was not there
when he was buried — at the front! And once again,
the military band.

All ever changes, ever made anew and severed,
all in the world are changed, to new forms all are
shapen.

How strange! The trumpets blare,
and soldiers walk in the procession, but I
(I can't get rid of that dual feeling)
keep seeing how a beet-red flooded sky
fades in the west.... No matter. Thoughts come stealing:

For whom do all the trumpets weep?
Why do the cymbals clang so bleak?
And drums tattoo like hearts in breast,
when he has well earned lasting rest?

For whom? What need to ask of any one?
A soldier's coffin — so, he fought for freedom,
defended freedom for his land! Our dawn
had started lighting all the world. And blossoms!
How many bloomed in fields of many climes —
fraternity, friendship.... Slavic dawn already
lit up the Occident.... But came the time
when rose the fascist-offal's howls so deadly.
The beast with pincer-claws struck far and near,
Tore into all of us.... And throbbing
with grief goes the band — I think it sounds like tears
from the Ukraine.... Let trumpets ring with sobbing!
Let widows, mothers, following the hearse
give voice to sorrow, wail their mourning,
and cry aloud and wring their hands! You cursed
thrice over Hitlerites! I give you warning,
you'll never overcome us! Why, oh why,
do you torture innocent people? You gabies
think you're superior? Nobler than us? A lie!

Nobility in dogs saves not from rabies,
Nor yet in wolves.

But in the west with bristling chill,
the storm-clouds, as on wolfish paws, grow bolder.
The twilight fell. The band's sad music stilled,
the silence grew.... A company of soldiers
march past us. Yonder, laundry goes on sleighs
to some near hospital. A group of children
run by, with a dog. A factory whistle brays
hoarse tones, breaks off. The dark begins to deepen.
Before our eyes the city changes. Snow
upon the streets gleams phosphorescent.
Ahead of the procession swiftly goes
a lantern's ray of light. My heart, all woe,
joins in to sing that requiem incessant:

All ever changes, ever made anew and severed,
blood ever runs from wounds, hearts beat with pain
of dearth,
as ashes unto ashes, dust to dust is rendered,
so always, all committed are to earth.

All in the world are changed, to new forms all are shapen,
Sojourn in darkness, then in light — land of the Blest.
Man wanders over all the earth, by tumults shaken,
before he may once more seek out eternal rest.

For every day, and every shining hour,
the earth engulfs and resurrects her prize,
her mills grind man through toil that would devour,
like snake from chaos — victims to surprise.

But no, life strictly keeps her long established sequence;
what seems like chaos moves in subtly tuned accord.
Look deep in history: fighting readiness the essence
of all its mirrored images that pens record.

A readiness to fight for liberty, both yours
and that of peoples still enslaved, for all oppressed:
the fight for justice is the only means, the door
that you must find if you would gain immortal rest.

The earth is your own mother — she is not a snake —
Earth gave you life and cared for you wherever you strayed....
The laws of struggle — no one in this world can break,
the laws of motherhood cannot be changed or stayed.

Those fighting for world peace and overcome reverses —
all tell us:

“Go, keep on! We're sure the cause is just!”
So drink our blood, you Nazi leeches! The worst is
ahead. You'll beg for water when you bite the dust.

You'll die for want of water. Your own people never,
if they're not slaves, will suffer you to live — they'll fight.
All ever changes, all ever made anew, and severed —
all march toward good-neighbour times, a world of light.

For looting, you'll be charged as thief, without blinking.
Oh, you'll be caught and like a fowl plucked one day.
All ever changes, is reshapen, changed in but a twinkling,
as in a sculptor's hands the damp and ductile clay.

The sculptor — the nation that holds its ground unbending —
though you are in great haste its people to enslave.
They all are rising up, stand firm, and laugh unending:
It's not for you, the dead, to kill the quick, the brave.

...The band struck up. Into a little street,
turned all our mournful long procession —
and factory lights were flashing.... In high retreat
skies rose to greater heights: for in ascension
the beams from searchlight-muzzles cut through space
high up, and started crisscross searching splendid....
On each side, all the snowy firs were graced
with needles glowing green, and they were pendant
like banner-tassels....

All ever changes, ever made anew and severed,
blood ever runs from wounds, hearts beat with pain
as ashes unto ashes, dust to dust is rendered,
but afterwards from underground begins a green
rebirth.

Ah, already here.

At the cemetery. The horses stopped. And gently
the coffin was lifted out. (Like pearly tears
the snow sifted from trees, and accidentally
from coffin lid. I lent a shoulder too
to bear the coffin.) We moved off, but slowly,
for we were overtaken (life then knew
only haste) — some carried ropes and some the lowly
spade. They all sank deep within the snow
with every footstep. We did also. Hardened
the frost that night. Past crosses row on row
we made our way, and brought our sacred burden
up to the hole. There laid it down. No word
was said. The clay was cold and wintry
that ridged the edge.

“A flaming sword,”
began the speaker, “is raised throughout the country
against the fascists!” (Hard by a grove of trees

voiced murmur. Then the mother cried out: "Open, the coffin! My son, your hand!" On bended knees: "What have you done to my child? My little one?" The wife joined in — her eyes were dry and hard. Hysterical, she sobbed: "Oh dear Stepan, awaken! Wake up, my darling!" "With this very sword," the speaker said, "let Teuton heads be taken! No mercy! Into battle now are thrown our armoured strength and mighty fighting forces. The partisans in Yugoslavia are sworn to lend a hand! Our comrades are for us in Poland — tocsins ring, appeals to call their consecrated blades to action! Transcarpathia is seething.... The people's anger never palls, and tyrants fly to bits in Czechoslovakia! Czechs won't be silent.... Brothers! Those who die defending home and country live through ages, as long as mankind lives!"

A pause, a sigh, then, pointing at the coffin: "Nought assuages his death by torment, but it was for Ukraine. And here he lies disfigured. Stepan's come home." (Both wife and mother sobbed and cried again on hearing this. And we stood cold and lorn like ghosts in gloom of night. The silent frost burned deep in every heart.) "But heroes never know fear! Their mighty feats by radiance glossed call out to us: To arms! Avenge forever!"

A salvo thundered. Such a clamour broke — as if a storm swept all with rushing wings. A storm of tears and cries. With measured stroke, the coffin sank below, earth swallowing Stepan within his grave. And soil by handfuls fell on coffin lid: the thud on wood a lonely and sad farewell. The weeping seemed to swell the sobbing notes the band gave out. And only one star shone in the sky.

How sadly now the trumpets weep,
and cymbals ring out loud and bleak.
But drums tattoo like hearts in breast:
'You earned a glorious hero's rest!'

Once more I wept!
I know not how, with whom, I went back home.
All earth in phosphorescence slept....
But in my soul the requiem intoned:

All ever changes, ever made anew and severed,
blood ever runs from wounds, hearts beat with pain
of dearth,

as ashes unto ashes, dust to dust is rendered,
but afterwards from underground begins a green
rebirth.

And when I reached my home, I saw outside
my shovel in the snow — I'd left it lying.
So poignant rang
the darkened silence. High up I descried
the greenish gleaming
of the star shining....
Shine on and light our way! We wait the hour
when we will bury in a grave as narrow
all fascist brutes! Oh, we will overpower
them all, for all tomorrows.

We all are rising up, stand firm, and laugh unending.

I say we'll fight so long as we exist!
Upon the enemy will fall our vengeance!
And while one Nazi enemy subsists,
we'll trample him, keep vigilance.
 However hard our lot,
 or great our sacrifices —
 we'll not give in no matter what
 the price is!

Without a word to anyone that night,
I threw myself upon my bed — No sleeping!
The coffin slowly swayed before my sight —
I seemed to hear:

We all are rising up, stand firm, and laugh unending.

I seemed to hear:

All in the world are changed, to new forms all are
shapen.
It's not for you, the dead, to kill the quick, the brave.

I see Stepan arise as if awakened,
And Yaroslav as well. Spring skies. No grave!
The tractors till the fields! Lark song ascending
high in the blue. And youth of a new day
come riding here to meet us, gaily flying
on horseback; and their leader had this to say:
'We have borrowed from you, the dying,
your powers and great skills to beat our foes!
Our people know much suffering and sorrows,
ordeals of fire: but die not under blows.
We'll overcome the fascists, now, tomorrow!'

Stepan and Yaroslav's mothers once again
I see bring water to their sons on leaving
to join the ranks and fight and win much fame
in combat. With them go our squadrons weaving
new glory in air battles, zooming high,
dive bombing.

Suddenly I wake. I wonder
why it's so dark. It's night. And raging night
a blizzard knocks with a rapacious finger
against my home's thin walls. On window-pane
snow rustles. Oh, where am I? Was I dreaming?
Then I remember A L L. Nor close my eyes again.
Our holy cause of justice for the living,
so all know freedom, live in liberty,
I carry also, like a child in arms —
And everything is clear that I did see.
Both you and I shall live and know the charm
of evergreening life like ivy on Life's tree.
Our towns and gardens shall be all restored —
we are convinced of this with growing confidence.
March to your ruin then, vile fascist horde!
And nevermore deface the human conscience!
O cursed by man, what evil roads you tread!
Why lead your people to the arena of Satan?
Just to be jeered at! You're the living dead!
The living dead!

Heart-stopping, through the darkness sped
the howl of storm like air-raid siren....
I briefly listened, then lay down again.
And yearned to see the Dnieper and Ukraine!
Came rustle of snowfall on the window-pane....
I seemed to hear:

How sadly somewhere trumpets weep,
and cymbals ring out loud and bleak,
but drums tattoo like hearts in breast:
'You earned

a glorious
hero's rest....'

1942

I GROW STRONG

I am the folk, the Truth's my crown,
by no-one so far overthrown.
What woes, what plagues have mown me down,
but strength anew has grown.

To live — I ask permission of none.
To live — all bolts and bars I rive.
And I arise, and I grow strong,
for I'm alive.

You Teutons! You consumed my all
when you my sons and daughters hung,
when iron and corn and coal you stole,
O how your fury stung!

You thought to swallow me ere long,
but choking fell in the grass or grove...
But I arise, and I grow strong,
for I'm alive.

I am the folk, the Truth's my crown,
by no one so far overthrown.
What woes, what plagues have mown me down,
but strength anew has grown.

My sons, my brave Ukrainian Reds,
your deeds of valour I shall praise —
go, help your fathers and wives, my lads,
to free your children haste!

On Russian and Ukrainian soil,
on Byelorussian too, I pray,
strike down the foe, the foulest of foul,
strike stern today!

Though wounded — that's no shame, no wrong —
I must kill the pest, so spring-wheat shall thrive,
And I arise, and I grow strong,
for I'm alive.

From wounds springs life in the ear anew,
at which the world will gasp in time:
what soil, what seed, what drenching dew!
Then how can it help but shine?

And I shine too, and stretch each wing,
and call my eagles from above...
And I arise, and I grow strong,
for I'm alive.

And there will be pure skies of blue:
prosperity, mercury-like, will rise,
and combines will gleam in rye-fields too,
and factories hoot likewise...

With untold riches life will throng;
smoke-trails, like brows o'er the sun, I leave...
And I arise, and I grow strong,
for I'm alive.

I am the folk, the Truth's my crown,
by no-one so far overthrown.
What woes, what plagues have mown me down,
but strength anew has grown.

You fascists quake! I stride along
to lay the tombstone on your grave.
And I arise, and I grow strong,
for I'm alive!

1943

SWORD DANCE
(from the Scottish cycle)

We were received in Aberdeen
as envoys of our Soviet land.
...Reception ended... What a scene!
the hall re-echoed on every hand.

Here Scottish lassies stand in fours,
with arms akimbo in the hall...
The swords lie crossed upon the floor'—
the bagpipes wail, their wild notes call.

A leap — and how the ribbons fly!
Retreat — and ribbons on shoulders lie!
The lassies dance upon the boards
the Highland fling, above crossed swords.

They circle round now in the dance,
and mark the time with clapping hands,
then with a stamp, as if by chance,
they circle back, and still they stand.

With arms akimbo placed once more
they dance upon their pointed toes,
and as the bagpipes skirl and soar,
with speeding step the circle goes.

A leap — and how the ribbons fly!
Retreat — and ribbons on shoulders lie!

The lassies dance upon the boards
the Highland fling, above crossed swords.

And like a lake beneath the breeze
there ripple silks and sashes and cords...
The lassies glance down at their feet —
they must not tread upon the swords!

Their step is proud (No! bend not such!)
and sometimes they've a careful air,
the swords they must not brush nor touch —
as if some savage beast lay there.

O, tramp the throat of war's wild beast!
O, call to all with friendship warmed!
In that great meeting called for Peace,
I felt how well they all performed.

I felt how youth calls loud and clear
to free the folk from chains and woes:
this Scottish lass a-dancing here
has every fascist foe exposed.

— So, you would split us, fascist foes?
Our Soviet folk is one wide sea!
With strength it simply overflows,
and stands in powerful unity.

And here in Scotland what I saw;
among her miners what I heard,
in my glad heart I noted all,
and tell in song, with gilded word.

And there I stood, heart full of glee,
for none can conquer such a folk.
The Scottish people were once called free,
and if they wished could break their yoke.

With pain and wounds and death's dark hour
no capitalist such folk can scare.
Their hatred for the tyrant's power
is ancient, menacing, and bare.

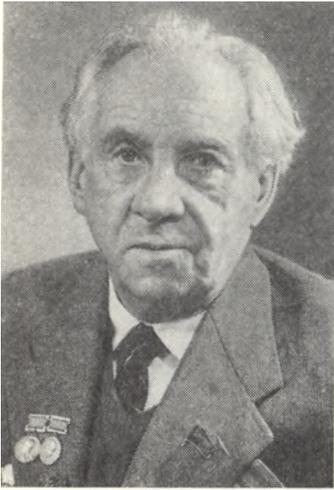
Their hatred's like a sharpened blade!
Their cry of freedom — no weak words.
Then who has this proud people made
to dance upon the two crossed swords?

Perhaps war-mongers raise their riot,
that folk should grow as soft as wax?
Then strike — give them no moment's quiet,
send thunder and lightning on their tracks!

Then, swift as lightning o'er the sea,
a tide swept forward!.. wave on wave!..
...My thread of thought was snapped in me —
a great ovation the whole hall gave...

A leap — and how the ribbons fly!
Retreat — and ribbons on shoulders lie!
The lassies dance upon the boards
the Highland fling, above crossed swords.

1949



MAXIM RYLSKY

Maxim Rylsky (1895-1964), the son of a renowned Ukrainian ethnographer, was born in Kiev. One of the founders of Soviet Ukrainian literature, he is the author of more than one hundred books of verse, criticism, and essays on Ukrainian literature and history. He was a member of the USSR and Ukrainian SSR academies of sciences and a Lenin and State prize winner. He is known for his excellent translations of Russian, French, Polish, and other authors. The Maxim Rylsky Prize is awarded annually in the Ukraine for the best translations into Ukrainian. Maxim Rylsky's works have been published in many editions in the USSR and abroad.

* * *

Swallows now are flying, fly to try their wings,
Hanna's now in love — for her it's time...
Batu Hill is laved in green in early spring —
Like a wave arrested in its climb.

Maples bend like tender knees their branches twined,
Doves across a black cloud draw a silver veil;
One more day — and all of us leave all behind
Faring out beneath a blue-winged sail.

Let old Earth revolve, describe its circled rings
Even round its shining orb betimes...!
Swallows now are flying, fly to try their wings;
Hanna weeps because for love it's time....

1929

* * *

Sign of Libra — sign of the new age,
How The Scales rock in a world gone awry!
Hide quickly! You who only faint hearts carry
And feeble looks. The Zodiac storms presage.

No Donnybrook with bloodshed more or less —
But a dual-force fight for the highest Commandment,
Yet only one will rise in the ascendant,
For every "No" will hear a flaming y e s...

The scale-pan tips, decisive with heavier power,
We're sure the final victory is ours,
The air's electric — lightning's in the van.

Unite, all fighters! Alert, those on sentry!
So over wingless dark will rise in victory —
Man's liberator, the free working man.

1932

THE COMPETITION

In sunny Florence once upon a time,
Leonardo da Vinci joined in competition
with Michelangelo, the younger lion
against the elder lion. Both had power,
they both were bold, and both of them had cunning,
though each was kindled by a different fire.
For both the subject was a scene of battle —
this the assignment. Nothing more. Free choice
in working out the topic as they wished.

The long of beard Maestro Leonardo —
philosopher, maths expert, engineer,
researcher of winged birds and also corpses,
within whose heart there twisted, like a snake,
the passionate icy smile of La Gioconda,
complex eccentric he, ready to dissect
all life around, as he'd dissect a lizard.
This master-wizard, artist with long beard,
applied his brush, so soft and cold and awe-filled,
upon the canvas — blank and obedient —
to draw a battle scene: there maddened steeds
with strong white teeth attacked and bit each other,
there human muscles bulged in upward thrust,
with fury mixed in wild and brutal tangle
of flesh and blood and vital thirst to live;
with standards gripped by clutch of soldiers dying,
by hands thus given strength enough for two.

Impressionable Florentines were startled
and said: In sooth, one should not really look
so deeply in the depths of nature's secrets.

But Michelangelo, that tireless fighter
with marble, with himself, and also people,
creator of the madly daring David,
proud spokesman for great anger and for grief —
quite differently depicted bloody war.
He painted there a sunny joyous shoreline
And shining stream; where swarthy men-of-arms
Were washing off the battle-dust and bloodstains
While bathing in a golden time of rest;
free minutes — fooling round without a worry
Like sparrows in a pool, dolphins at play
out in the ocean; like small careless children
Whom they, the brave, had left secure at home
In the embrace of wives with raven hair.
See, one is diving, pulls his mate down under;
another like a whale spouts from his mouth
a stream of water rising like a fountain;
Still others, laughing, sport in playful fight,
Sending far above them water rainbows,
Like web-foot drakes. No one would recognize
This nude naive amusing group of children
As threatening warriors, hateful predators.
But sudden — rings the bugle, sharp and shrilly:
The call to battle... And all are roused —
Now swimming, running, cutting the broad rollers
to shore, to arms reach out their hurried hands.
They toss their heads to shake off silver droplets,
Their mouths are clamped — all merriment chased away;
They grind their teeth, and every eye is sharpened
To pierce the distance, find the enemy there.
A moment more: then through the dust they're racing,
Like wild black demons. Again the blood
Will run down fresh-washed backs, down shoulders,
And splash, like rivers, out of living chests.

Impressionable Florentines were weeping;
And said: All that is human has found room
Upon this canvas, smoothly painted, even:
He is conqueror of lion, he's a dragon!

But one will come, as yet an unknown painter,
Whose voice will be the working people's voice
And sound as free as swallows skimming ocean,
who will complete the trilogy: he will paint
A tired land and soldiers by a river,
Land where the final battle of all Earth
Has just been won — the soldiers seek the waters
to wash away for good war's dust and blood.
One down into fresh waves is swiftly diving,
Another, hands outstretched, is poised to leap

Into the river from a cliffside boulder,
One more has only reached the sandy shore
And slowly lays aside his chainmail dress,
His heavy helmet, coat of heavy mail,
the long broadsword and pike invincible,
His crossbow, quiver with its silver arrows.

Across the river wait their wives
With babes in arms and children round
Who call: Halloo! Wash up, come ye home!

The fields and workshops wait the hands of workers,
Wait raiders who will not come home again!

But all the workers, in their hearts rejoicing,
Call out aloud: Oh, blessing be on thee
Who conquered both the lion and the dragon!

1932

FRIENDSHIP

He made his scenic exit — mad King Lear...
He made his scenic exit — Ira Aldridge,*
And fell into a chair, exhausted by
His double life — a play, they sometimes call it.
And suddenly, into his dressing-room
Flew Taras Hrihorovich Shevchenko
To clasp in strong embrace the actor Aldridge
And let his ardent tears flow unabated,
His ardent tears flow freely....

Each unable
To speak a word containing any meaning
To one another, they none the less
Both understood the other far far better
Than those whose loud applause had followed
The exit of the king made mad by grief,
Than those who praised the poet-serf whose land
Was even then tilled by the poet's 'brothers'....
— The scene now changes: In a modest studio
The actor poses for the portraitist.
The first is humming his sad native songs
That saw the light in slavery, and were swaddled
In bondage, rocked by grief and rocked by sorrow,
Fed only on the deepest misery.

* Ira Aldridge — 19th-century Black American tragedian,
who toured Russia in 1858-1867

The second recollects his own as well:
Folk songs without a thing in common
It seemed, yet allied by the same great longing,
The same great suffering.

And suddenly,
Still far away — both see a bright horizon,
Where dawns the day when all the slaves on earth —
Both black and brown, both white and yellow peoples —
Will see the walls of slavery crashing down.
And blessed tears will sparkle in their eyes
Lit by the future sun of liberation.

Shevchenko! Aldridge! That happy day has come!
The hand was found that tore the dark wall down,
A voice was found that cried to all the world:
“O Black and White and Brown and Yellow races,
Unite beneath a single glorious banner!”
And from all ends of earth are voices heard
That melt into one voice of mighty power.
To all oppressed, the Land of Soviets
Proffers the hand of warm fraternity.

1936

CHANT OF MY NATIVE LAND

Blest be the wondrous day and time
When this our land like strips of carpet
Was spread, a sweet and sunny clime,
For little Taras * walking barefoot.
And later Taras with sublime
Abundant tears like dew bestrewed it.

Blest be the bitter wounds that bleed
In steppes, as boundless as the ocean,
Whose green waves — fragrant as new mead —
Flow round about our pearl-white Kherson
Who, maiden-slender as a reed,
Lies warmly on the Dnieper's bosom.

Blest be thou, Song, through centuries
Who, like our sun, great weal imparts,
Like white-winged bird makes prophecies!
Our song that valour wakes in hearts,
Defends our joys, our griefs release,
When clouds hang over native parts.

* Taras Shevchenko

Blest be thou, Footprints on life's sands,
That rains cannot erase, enduring...
Skovoroda's! * He walked the land
In search of waters that were curing —
Two dusty bags on shoulder-band —
All churches great or small detouring.

Blest be ye all: the swords as bright
As fire, our homeland vast defending;
The warhorse neighing in the fight;
Sea-raids the salty brine transcending,
Guffaws of Cossack *Aeneid*** knights,
Small Poltava's crown augmenting.

The fervent songs of the *Kobzar****
That won't be turned to ash by flame;
The Paver of the Way's hard hammer,
Lysenko's**** strings that life proclaim;
The glory of a golden star
Surrounding Zankovetska's***** name.

Both sweat and labour blessed be,
The living wealth of muscadine,
The green of roadside maple-tree,
The lamp of wisdom of great minds;
Fraternal flags that wave so free
And round the Kremlin walls entwine.

Blest be the lakes so blue and wide,
The River Psel, mint-scented rue;
People's genius that never died
Nor will die — though guns beat tattoo.
Among fair sisters, there resides
Our Mother***** — blessings on her too!

Blest be ye, my brothers free,
By liberty and friendship fired
To reach one aim that common be,
By waters still, clear dawns inspired —

* Hrihoriy Skovoroda (1722-1794), Ukrainian enlightener, philosopher and poet

** *Aeneid* — burlesque of Virgil's poem. Written by the Ukrainian writer Ivan Kotlyarevsky (1769-1838) in the town of Poltava

*** *Kobzar* (the Bard) — name popularly given to Taras Shevchenko

**** Mikola Lysenko (1842-1912), composer, pianist and choir conductor, founder of the Ukrainian school of music

***** Zankovetska — stage name of Maria Sadovska (1860-1934), Ukrainian actress

***** Our Mother... among fair sisters — Ukraine among her sister Soviet republics

Brave Russian people, blessing thee,
We praise the fame you have acquired.

What powers can drain the Dnieper dry,
Or splash our sea with other prow,
Plough in, with ploughshares forged of lies,
Our land of gold and silver boughs?
What evil could, however sly,
Defeat pure heart and honest brow?

The day shall dawn, the hour dawn
When honey-flow will be restored
To the land a blessing lies upon
From Taras's pain in deed and word —
A land that's winged with powered song
When Taras's thundering voice is heard.

Can she, this land, be really slain,
Be choked in a hot blood-spilling sea,
When call to honest battle reigns
And rings from every forest tree
While she's alive, and in strength gains
In the new family grand and free?

Can her flourishing be congealed,
While dawns still break in rosy carmine,
While countries to amazement yield
At the roar of the sudden wounded lion?
Though foxes yap at the scutcheon-shield *,
And calls the Div ** from the topmost pine!

What power can break the golden string,
When the Boyan *** spirit fills the lyre,
Or crush with evil smouldering
The wormwood's smoky-sweet attire,
Or Kiev and Kaniv's **** beauty fling
Into a coffin black and dire?

No! There's no power on earth, no realm,
Nor will there be — that can conspire
To harness us or overwhelm
And trample us into the mire,

* Though foxes yap at the scutcheon-shield — quotation from *The Lay of Igor's Host*, an epic poem written by an anonymous Kievan Rus author about the campaign of Prince Igor against the nomadic tribe of Polovtsi in 1185

** Div — a mythical personage in *The Lay of Igor's Host*, a creature hostile to the Rus, and whose cry apparently warned the nomads of Igor's attack

*** Boyan — semilegendary minstrel of the Kievan Rus period

**** Kaniv — town on the Dnieper southeast of Kiev, where Taras Shevchenko is buried

While our Party's at the helm,
Free people of — USSR!

The Dnieper roars, the Sula howls,
Carpathian voices echoing throng,
Podillya village's threatening growl
To ancient Putivl * rolls along.
Can Eagle be destroyed by owls?
Can Right be overcome by Wrong?

O native land! You know your way
Through storm and trouble agonizing!
The people arm, like trumpets bray
The bridges, water is thunder-driving....
The foxes at the shield may bay
But in the east the sun is rising!

1941

CUP OF FRIENDSHIP

To arms, Slavs, to arms!

*M. Staritsky ***

Rings through lullabies when dusk has fallen,
Through old tales of marches so enthralling,
Of marches, and of feats-of-arms immortal,
Through the wedding song of nightingale
It often runs in waves that dance and sparkle —
Song of the blue Danube ages old.

Rings through springtime dreams, and swan-call clear,
Through blood-and-gore accounts of olden years,
Through doleful legends of discord and tears,
Through stories of fraternal peace sincere;
Clamours so, young hearts are moved to feel
Charmed by quiet pain and sweet, to hear the
Blue and all-Slav Danube, as of old.

We, all Slavs, are laved by Danube waters,
Rocked upon its waves as by a father,
So, in storms of this great holy war,
As one man, we lift the cup of friendship.
As one man, we lift the cup of fealty,

* Putivl — town in central Ukraine

** Mikhailo Staritsky (1840-1904), writer and one of the founders of the Ukrainian professional theatre

The cup of brotherhood, of freedom, glory —
May our foes forever be destroyed.

Not for wrong — we march for truth and right,
Honest deeds to do with our armed might,
So over golden Prague of epoch olden,
And that proud stronghold simply called the Kremlin,
Over gloomy Wawel Fortress * silent,
Over Minsk in forests round reflective,
Winds of freedom will forever blow.

When on Moscow ever kept advancing
Hostile forces like black clouds menacing,
Brother-peoples all of our great Union
As one man arose and took to arms,
Staunchly fought breast-on, saved it from harm...
Brothers mine, was that not an example
Of the highest valour, an example
Of fraternal unity, symbolic?
So lift up the cup of friendship higher,
So lift up the cup of fealty higher —
Death, damnation, to the treacherous foe!
May they fuse in one united clamour:
The blue Dnieper, Vistula of silver,
The free Volga with its broad expanses,
And the world of Slavs — the Danube blue.

April 2, 1942

FIDELITY

You will find another lassie
With dark brows like mine;
But the true love of our fashion,
Nowhere will you find.

Folk Song

All was reflected in the placid stream —
A manly face that wore the shade of autumn,
Whose sleepless eyes gazed long; and then upon
His brow severe, a mournful quiet dreamed.

* Wawel Fortress. Wawel is the name of a hill in Cracow on the west bank of the Vistula River. The place is known for architectural monuments of the 10th-17th centuries including a castle of the Polish kings

From far away is heard the splash of oars,
While red and yellow leaves fall willy-nilly
And on the stream's cold lap drift onward stilly
Where first youth long ago had gone before.

He found himself a dark-browed lovely lassie,
And with her found a new and smiling spring —
Then vanished for all time o'er hill and valley....

The green shoots faded, love has had its fling....
Whose oars then cut the blue of former days?
Came back? But no, he never went away.

2

Shoo-oo, shoo-oo, goose and gander,
On the path and waterway....
Cossack lad, please cool your rancour,
You should really change your ways.
Folk Song

She touched with soft and gentle hand, so pleading,
Her Cossack laddie's flying windblown sleeve....
She would have spoken — what could words achieve
'Gainst this daredevil headstrong but endearing!

As restless, he as wild wind chanticleering,
He rides to break his heart without reprieve;
A hothead, leaps an abyss unperceived —
His steed's gold snaffle-bars still brightly gleaming.

"This kerchief's for your brow, in toil or fray;
This ring's to keep all evil harm away;
These tears are mine alone — and in my keeping."

He spoke not. Lost in thought. His horse he stops
And reaching down he swung her lightly up;
Then whispered: "I will change my ways, my darling."

3

I'll have brushwood never,
So — I'll kick it ever;
Such as you, my sugar,
I will love forever,
I will love forever!
Folk Song

The joys of eventide are faint bells ringing,
Or sweet response, or echo, memories....
Eyes drown in glance of eyes, as in deep seas,
When to your window weary, joys come singing.

See how we travelled where life's long roads winded:
We had our share — of poison and of wine
Within that cup of bottomless design.
Till your blood grows cold for good, you are enshrined.

Place hand in mine. How workworn, thin is thine!
Oh, let me kiss, my love, your graying hair —
Such young and lovely hair, like silvered vine.

Love, wife, mother, fidelity with care —
As one! See? Past the window goes our son.
I love you! I'll not stop, though life is run.

*Belgrade,
October 15, 1945*

PIGEONS OVER MOSCOW

The growth of Moscow gladdens the eye.
I rise. From window-view, I'd say:
This early silence prophesies
The city wakes to a brand new day.

Work-buildings rise with cheeriness,
Through predawn haze break through —
The workforce knows no weariness
And floods of people stream anew.

And over rooftops, coloured gay,
Above the gardens, rainbow laved,
In flying flocks that lightly play
Like kerchiefs, the white pigeons wave,

They circle, flash and disappear,
And swirl again like flakes of snow:
To children's eyes they are so dear —
Winged favourites they love and know.

The blue sky calls out one desire —
That stirs this flock of shining wings —
To catch the plane that's zooming higher,
Yet cannot overtake the thing.

1948

LATE NIGHTINGALES

The spring has finished its wassailing
For cherry-blossom wedding time,
The fruitful earth's already sailing
In summer's harbour, moored its line.

Already ripe the barley-ears,
It seems the time has come to leave
Behind the wild songs of young years —
So sages would have us believe.

The young soon grow and wish to rove,
The coming spring to them belongs —
And then throughout the wooded grove
They too will love and sing their song.

But in the silver pussy-willow,
I have a secret company
Whose hearts defy time's prose — still mellow,
Late nightingales sing there for me.

1951

WILD CARNATIONS IN THE WOOD

...All they dreamt of, spoke of...
Taras Shevchenko

In the wood near wild carnations —
Freshly washed, red-blushing visions —
First their fingers linked sensations,
Meeting palms were fields Elysian.

They started life already welded
Right from school with sweet emotion,
Two pure hearts in love that melted
Deep in joy — a depthless ocean.

Orioles flute from horn-beam tree,
Doves in maples bill and coo...
Carpet round — green as could be,
Eyes of brown, and eyes of blue.

“But, for always?” “Yes, for always!”
“Dearest, honey!” “Sweetheart mine!”

Red carnations bow, adazed,
Trust and honour thus opine.

Work before them, rich in yield,
Was spread out beyond embraces;
Bright the future seen revealed —
Views of overstream expanses.

All they dreamt of, spoke of, never
Disappeared as time went by....
That moment lips first kissed so tender
And when loving eye met eye.

1953

GRAPES AND ROSES

A tired girl came home from fieldwork: then with hoe —
Though mother called her vainly in to rest and dine —
To work the flower garden went, where roses grow
And also lovage and green mint their verdure twine.

An engineer, back from a distant railway run,
His smoke-filled clothes and face all grime despite —
Goes to the vineyard. Maybe mildew has begun
To spoil the leaves? Now then, start in to spray the blight.

Inquisitive, a youth observes the orchard round
The farm-collective, pollination laws his aim...
Enjoying, too, the sight of black luxuriant ground
Where scarlet poppies wave like colourful flames!

We so love work we make it a creative thing,
Love music, too, that moves our very hearts.
Man's happiness is formed of two equated wings:
The grapes and roses, use and beauty — both are arts.

September 6, 1955
Kiev

THE BELLS OF AVIGNON

Chimes rise and fall in Avignon,
From world affairs so far away....
Your name — The Town of Carillon,
Rabelais gave you in his day.

The bells call for all heads to bow,
For those devout up to our day —
No wonder there's a museum now
For special bells that once held sway.

You hear in their bronze choral ring
The legends of a patient land —
'Twas here that some French royal kings
Held Popes as captives in their hand.

I love your bells in my own way,
Although religion I'm above.
While on the Rhone, I'd like to say:
"My greetings to you, Avignon!
I may be old, but young in love...."

July 29, 1957
Moscow

RIO DE JANEIRO

(from the cycle of poems)

In late July — early August of 1958, the author took part in the 47th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Rio de Janeiro. This cycle of poems appeared as a result of his stay in Brazil.

I

The screech of yellow birds, long-beaked —
Their name? I have no notion —
All seems fantastic, strangely freak:
The screech, and strut, wing-motion.

Instead of crows, there's urubus,
Scavengers of the coastlands;
Both night and day have pure hues,
The streets are winding ribbands.

The lightning flash of ads in lights,
The maelstrom flow of traffic,
And ladies' faces black as night,
Gas fumes, smoke, sun — hot lyric —

The tropic winter's warmth, the mass
Of palms, lianas, aloe,
The granite, sand, concrete and glass,
And Christ, and cassock's shadow,

The dreadful rags of poverty
Whose pungence catches throat —
Silence louder than words could be
When coffee ends the table d'hôte....

Trust youth — have faith that does not cease,
As they earn trust all over
When they wear pins that call "For Peace"
Upon lapel or sweater.

July 27, 1958

II

Mulatto! Dressed in rags and tatters,
Skin dark as earth and running sweat,
You smile at strangers — it's no matter
From where they come — whom you've not met.

You came to Rio de Janeiro,
Fled from the land in famine years
To get with each hard-earned cruzeiro
A living somewhat less severe.

What is he thinking, that mulatto,
Who leans on spade so tiredly?
Beneath his straw hat, eyes in shadow,
I know my brother watches me.

July 23, 1958

THIRST

From the poem *A Vision*
(excerpt)

Dedicated to the 25th Anni-
versary of Soviet power in our
wonderful Ukraine

(We thirst...)
For you from tender dawn of birthlight
Unto our last, our dying days —
Not as we do for child or love-light,
Not even as for mother — Nay!

But as the wind does if imprisoned,
As those in graves thirst for the sun,

As I — in joy and in affliction,
'Ere youth and its distress are done.

Thirst like the heart does, during parting;
Thirst like the tired feet that roam,
Which after exile long and smarting
Again find their paternal home.

As ailing child does in his raving,
As sheen of blue needs distant aim,
Like a shadow beyond catching,
You can't escape its stubborn claim.

As for a light, when night is blackness;
As for the quiver of joy in spring,
As for a woman's tears so joyous
Where a blissful silence rings —

I carry you in my heart's secreteness,
In my subconscious sleepless mind,
In thoughts more fair than nobleness —
My thirst and love are passions blind!

You always were, and are, and will be
The iron thunder, caressing skies,
My native land, to thee, to thee
The voices of my heart arise:

FIRST VOICE

Majestic water bright and clear —
That freshens, juvenates and quenches thirst,
That cools us after fieldwork hard and drear,
That calms when battles fierce our foes disperse.

That to the weary, dreams reward;
And Youth to do great deeds entices.
Let then my purest-hearted words
Be my soul's honest sacrifices:

Whoever knows great pangs of thirst
Will surely my words truly value,
As when July heat bakes the earth
That suffers from a lack of shadow,

And as each stem in anguish prays,
And every grass-blade loudly cries:
"Oh! wing of raincloud, drop your sprays —
On you our happiness relies."

"Oh rain! Oh rain!" Beneath sunfire
The oak grove whispers, sadly dying —

Then far away the thunder's ire
Discharges rain as if complying!

"The rain! A moment of life prolonged!"
The dying sigh in the feather grass....
Earth charms and chirps and bursts with song.
And all is clamour, breezes pass.

Again spring comes, so soon beguiled,
The stallions neigh, on black earth scrap —
The world, just like a new-washed child,
Laughs upon maternal lap.

Whoever knows those hard campaigns —
Stone, thorn, and dust the goad,
The bloody feet that knawed with pain,
The heat of endless roads;

The burn of wounds 'neath dusty apparel,
The breath that catches in the throat,
The sky like an upturned dry rain-barrel,
When Earth to embrous ash is smote —

Who marched unwearied when in need,
Or crawled like shadow, scout unseen,
Felt battle-drunk as if from mead
And seen mirage of blue cool sheen:

That man knows what a river means —
A magic drink framed in green fleece,
A spring that spurts from ground to stream,
Whose breath is cold but brings us peace.

O water! Happiest boon I see!
What joy in this ale to carouse —
Fall then, O rain, wash even me,
Fall on the rye, the bloom, the boughs.

O rivers, you're my sisters — kin!
You orbit, too, with Earth along,
Her joy and bounty bringing in —
So now you have become my song!

SECOND VOICE

"Don't throw bread out, for it is holy,"
Strictly, sweetly, full of thought,
An old man said, mayhap in story,
To some curly-headed tots.

"Don't play with bread, for that's a sin,"
To her breast-fed babe-in-arms,
A mother once tried discipline,
Restraining laughter's saving balm.

But youngsters grow from little babes
Into women, into men;
What they heard in their young decades
Is forgotten later on.

Now in the archives that word "sin"
Gathers dust, perhaps some grime.
For all of us as small children
Learn the new words of our time.

But somewhere deep there lies, unrecked,
Feelings — flawless and inbred:
An everlasting true respect —
Yes! For holy 'daily bread!'

For honest work, though rich with sweat,
For honey-smelling dark rye bread;
When Life these into man's world let —
Man gave birth to speech, 'tis said.

THIRD VOICE

The wet wild cherry tree is rocked
By the queenly hand of spring,
A duel's called for by the heart —
'Gainst the nightingale to sing.

My life, my song, my blood has flumed
Like ebullient jetting wine
Through every fragrant lovely bloom,
Through each cluster on the vine.

Together all the field-paths grow,
Passion, meeting at your feet;
Wild cherry blooms like dazzling snow
Waltz their white-gowned pleats.

Dear spring, snow-winged, in pale array,
You flew in, you have arrived —
You spread your wings far and away,
To toss the silk from brow connived.

As if in great surprise, your eyes
Opened widely, as at night;
A dream through time continuing flies,
Rolls down cliffs of green in sight.

The fragrant flowers melted on
Sweet lips in kiss forlorn,
In amber necklace, night now shone —
Guarding my door till morn.

FAIRY TALE

A kindly fairy threw a golden ball
Of thread which through the world a child went after;
Along the way the views she saw enthralled,
Far vistas shook like swan-wings on the water.

Her mother had not wanted her to go —
So long confined to bed and greatly ailing —
But one night through the window on tiptoe,
The girl went seeking medicine for healing.

She passed through groves and deep ravines,
And where the road forked into two, sought after
The yarn of gold that was her guiding means
And faithful friend in search for Living Water.

Foretold the fairy: only one such spring
In all the world, so cold, rings like a bell;
On guard your bridegroom stands, with wedding ring,
No braver man than he on earth does dwell.

His brow is proud — round like the moon,
His eyes shine like two stars of bluest azure;
'Twas he who fought to strike, so opportune,
The rock, and freed the font from its confined enclosure.

The child continued on her tortuous way —
Which never led to dark groves or wild mazes
Where hisses snake and roars the beast of prey,
Or dragons wait whose breath with fire blazes.

The child grew older right before one's eyes,
She fought down fears that e'er beset the heart.
And the Good Fairy, when she thought it wise,
Placed in her hands a Damascus two-edged sword.

She walked and walked, not days but many years,
And grew in beauty like the ripened wheat-ear,
Became a maid whose sword dispelled all fears,
A gracious maiden — nowhere was there sweeter.

Oh, more than one dead beast fell down ravine,
And more than one snake, diamond-skinned, all danger,
Died midst the hills and primal woods of pine —
Our Beauty passed, sword raised in white-armed anger.

The hour came at last. In bowl of blue,
The morning's fingers rippled pearly skeins —
On abyss brink, by Living Waters, TWO
Loves met — October with his fair Ukraine.



Vasil Chumak (1901-1919), a poet “made by the Revolution,” was born in the village of Ichnya, Chernihiv Region, into a poor peasant family. His deeply lyrical poetry is rooted in Ukrainian country life of the early 20th century. Vasil Chumak had a great impact on nascent Soviet Ukrainian poetry. His poems have been translated into many languages.

SPRING HUBBUB

Little lily-cups clinked, dashed with rain,
To them silver birch whispered deep:
“Those mad nightingales once again
didn’t give me a wink of sleep!”

Weeping willow in gully-side shade,
to the slender alder in bud
said: “How can escape be made
from the grief, sister, here in my blood?”

“When your heart starts to tremble and fail,”
the stern oak-tree, rustling, remarked,
“tell your grandsons a fairy tale
of a beauty who... oh, silver-barked!”

Blue harebells in long grasses hide,
with the lilies have lovingly lain.
The birch-tree has seen it, and sighed:
“Those mad nightingales once again!..”

MAY

Keep silent. Just stroll. Why the path? Take the gully.

The thicket.

Stand and listen: the drunken grove mutters first.

You too become drunk — not with words, with movement this is,
to speak of the green, no boundary, no boundary...

But buds — will they burst?

Songs drown,

songs drown in rustling, among the leaves...

To speak with persuasion, a flourish, that someone perceives,
that someone believes. That means: to take wing like a bird,
like a bird to fly, to ring out, to cast a spell:

are you still content with your hut, with your clod of earth?

One can even better and freer

live as well!

Then: quieter... quieter... quieter...

Peace: nothing heard!

Only rustling. Only the leaves. And the buds a-burst.

THE CALL

Wake, no grouses!

Quit your houses:

all around us bright day gleams.

In the dreaming

distance teeming

waves of singing,

answers ringing,

waves on fields and streams.

Wake, no grouses!

Quit your houses —

hey, young ploughman, push ahead!

In the meadow

sun and shadow,

free-born flowers

velvet bowers,

see, the warmth has spread.

Wake, no grouses!

Quit your houses —

work is waiting — where are we?

Hey! no shirking.

Time for working,
First the testing,
then for resting
time, yes time there'll be!

1918

BOUNDARY

Daybreak. Dewdrops. Dreaming. Silence.
Wheat-ears. Rustling. Cornflowers. Cornflowers again.
Daybreak. Dewdrops. Dreaming. Silence.
Marjoram. Clover. A slight sad pain...

ASTERS

What faded splendour!
Red asters linger —
the last of the flowers
where the fierce flames play.
In an azure chamber
a misty languor.
“We still love living!”
“Why hasten away?”

“We still love living!”
“We still love laughter!”
“We still love tumult
and the Marseillaise!..”
The last of the flowers...
To console them after,
quietly moaning,
the birch-tree sways...

CORNFLOWERS

Yesterday for amusement
round the fields I wandered,
with the wind a-racing
ran, not knowing where.

Silver and translucence.
Gilded stood the poplars.
Far-off clouds went chasing.
Stubble, here and there,

cornflowers in the stubble,
deep blue, deep blue starlets,
very small and tender,
tears of dewdrops gleam.

There I picked a couple.
Stars! My cornflower darlings!
Thread-like stems so slender,—
springtime's gentle dreams.

True — you find life pleasant?
Very! Very! Very!
Happiness like an ocean,
and the way is wide.

O my stars florescent!
O, my sisters merry,—
there speak with emotion
souls where powers abide.

TEMPERED POETRY

Hammer
on anvils a million-fold din —
in flaming-zealous manner
a cast-iron hymn:
smoke — and lathes — and pulleys — and cranes —
rainbows on high — black earth — our soil —
the field with its golden foaming manes:
the work-team welded one in toil —
hammer and plough. With unity
in brotherly cast-iron rhythm
let us forge the last of dawns to be:
Socialism.

Vasil Ellan-Blakitny (1894-1925), a poet, journalist, and public figure, was born in the village of Kozli, Chernihiv Region, into the family of a priest. He is the author of a large number of collections of poetry, pamphlets, essays, and journalism about revolutionary changes in the Ukraine. His poetry is distinguished for its civic themes and oratorical tone. Translations of his poems have been published in other Soviet republics and abroad.



FORWARD

Not a word that we're tired! Not a word about rest!
Let march songs resound bold and loud through our lines...
Though night lies around, still in deep darkness dressed,
Already day's dawning, the morning light shines...

Tovarishi! Friends! Bold and lively today,
Stood shoulder to shoulder we'll fight undismayed!
Hey, who will dare to deny us the way?
Our eyes are aflame, like a sharp-edged blade.

We've long to the foreknown road turned our breast,
Though enemy bullets towards us may fly.
Not a word that we're tired! Not a word about rest!
We'll win to the keys of new life,— or we'll die!

Kiev, 1917

HAMMER BLOWS

Beating hammers, beating hearts —
Irregular beats... then not again...
But flooding free once more there starts
The tempered in the fire refrain:

The horizon's barred, as by a wall.
Strike in measured time: one, two...
We're only the first brave souls who fall,
Millions will see our venture through.

A milliard "we" will raise proud heads,
We only strike the initial spark.
Well-forged blades will slash to shreds
The ancient curtain-shrouds of dark.

1920

LETTER

I have come to say to you goodbye...
So farewell. Forget the singing wind.
And the tender, quiet and gentle voices
In the bushes, in the shady depths
Of that ancient park, which once we loved.
 And forget your rather taciturn partner
 Who so stubbornly always strolled beside,
 Like your shadow (or you yourself his shade?)
 On one path, and over all the crossings,
 Who so stubbornly caught your eyes with his,
 Thirstily reading there the secret writings,
 Then, breaking off, went separate from you,
 Merging, on his burning, fiery quest,
 With the whole collective sea of movement.
Only this I know: you won't forget
(You will live, will live our past young days!)
Do not hide: I know, I feel your care —
Heavy layers — submissions and despair.
Yes, I know, I know, I see so clear
The yearning for spring blossoms to appear,
Only — look — how life here seethes and calls.
 Not just in the quiet of heavy tomes,
 Nor in star-set scientific space.
 But in the thick, in factories, in the regions,
 But in the milling crowds, some friends, some foes.
Go forward, strong and stubborn into action,
All will yet be, as it indeed must be,
All will be fine, be fine, be fine, it will...
But life here seethes and boils and gleams.

Therein go I,— your uninvited partner.
I shall live a thousand years, no less.
I shall call you with my very self.
 So farewell!
 Or, maybe, yet we'll meet?..

1922

FORGIVE ME...

Forgive me love, little girl, I ask your grace —
With you I'm changeable, never balanced aright.
It's all because I always think of the fight,
It's all because I'm like a mad storm in the night,
That you possess such a nervous, tender face.

1923

VOLODIMIR SOSYURA



Volodimir Sosyura (1898-1965), a classic Soviet Ukrainian writer, was born in the town of Debaltseve in Donetsk Region to working-class parents. His poetry, imbued with the theme of socialist transformations in towns and in the countryside, won him the USSR State and Taras Shevchenko prizes, and continues to be popular with Soviet and foreign readers.

OH NO, 'T WAS NOT IN VAIN!..

'Twas not in vain, oh no, the steppe with gunfire shuddered,
Our brothers fought and fell, the soil was soaked with blood...
'Twas not in vain, oh no, my old and toil-worn mother
Removed the ducat-coins * and crosses from her brood!..

The stamp of marching feet... A lull came in the fighting,
The squadron chieftains greet the thronging boys...
'Twas like a wondrous dream in mine-face murky lighting
I once envisioned to our picks' staccato noise...

In neat-formed ranks advance the grannies, women, lassies,
The children run 'longside, with rapture in their eyes...
The black night whines and whimpers, frozen through and messy,
Already quartered long ago by solar knives...

'Twas not in vain, oh no, the steppe with gunfire shuddered,
Our brothers fought and fell, the soil was soaked with blood...
'Twas not in vain, oh no, my old and toil-worn mother
Removed the ducat-coins and crosses from her brood!..

1921

* Ducat-coins were worn on a string from the neck as a decoration or luck charm

THE RED WINTER

O Lisichansk! Donetsk! My smoky factory!
The music in the park, the early morning train!
How, how forget you all, and my Third Company!
I'll tell the world of you again and yet again.

To Sushchenko, to break the gravel we would go.
A quarter on some days, it happened, we would earn.
And in the park at night the girls would love us so...
O fragrance of the steppe! O kisses, how they'd burn!

How simple was our life in home parts, where the dawns
glowed over pitheads, while the hooters yelled aloud.
We learned to write, of course, upon a random fence
and fought for girls with neighbours in a crowd.

How, how can I forget White Hill against the sky,
the dew-soaked grass, the eyes that were untrue to me.
There, on my trusty horse, fast as the wind I'd fly
across the clear expanse in night's transparency.

The waves keep babbling, cold as they once used to be,
the factory tells tales of all that happened then;
the well-shaft also creaks about the past to me
when we arose and went to fight Petlura's men.

O Lisichansk! Donetsk! My smoky factory!
The music in the park, the early morning train...
How, how forget you all, and my Third Company!
I'll tell the world of you again and yet again!

2

Winter. Off to the front! The platform breathes unrest.
We start to sing "Chumak" beside the railway line.
Freedom and happiness expand our youthful breasts.
The struggle's welded us together for all time.

Straight rows of shaggy hats; bayonets, bristling, shine...
My sister at the station sadly stands apart...
You have not come to see me off, O mother mine,
and that is why such pain and sorrow fills my heart.

It passes like a dream, that time, before my eyes.
The foe beyond the river greets us with his guns.
And boldly we march forth to fight those we despise;
we've sent them down to die beneath the ice not once.

Winter... Off to the front! The platform breathes unrest.
We start to sing "Chumak" beside the railway line.
Freedom and happiness expand our youthful breasts.
The struggle's welded us together for all time.

Again the knock of wheels. At rail-joints they change time.
 The bridge on the Donets is long since quiet, old thing.
 I stand beside the door. The distance smells of pine.
 The sharp wind sings to me about my long past spring.

Rubezhnoye... Volodino... Kabaneye then.
 And then it's Svatovo... The engine whistles "Halt!"
 We go to market, then walk to the baths again.
 I sit down to write verse. The sunset shines, all gold.

I wrote of blood and snow... As if I knew — that night
 Once more would bullets trace their path, dot after dot.
 Again for our own class of workers we would fight.
 That blood-red winter — could it ever be forgot?

The country's length and breadth with battles we went through.
 The red snow melted in the fire of barricades.
 By distance multiplied a hundred times anew,
 "For Soviet Power!" — the call rolled loud above our heads.

They greeted us with joy no matter where we came.
 No evil wind blocked our roads with tall snow banks.
 The girls sewed to our coats bands coloured like live flame.
 The lads took rifles up, and joined our grim-faced ranks.

Again Donetsland spreads... Bent willows, windy fields...
 I still can not believe I'll see my village soon;
 abandoned long ago, what love for it I feel!
 How many won't return, engulfed in fatal gloom!

The snow crunches so soft... I walk on anxiously.
 The road I know from childhood lies before my eyes.
 I plucked red berries here, beside this road... ah me!
 and plucked love's flowers, too, beneath the autumn skies.

The station shows... The factory... Then rails gleam bright
 with thousands of small lights... The workers club... Sky-high
 the calm rows of dark stacks send smoke-trails through the night.

The play is over. From the club the people throng.
 How many, many faces that I know so well!
 Why does my bosom hurt, for what does my heart long,
 why do I feel so sad, can anybody tell?

Oh, where are you, dear brother? For a while at least
 Do come to me — you waited, but I'd never known
 while wandering and roaming without rest or peace —
 you'd long exchanged your cottage for a graveyard stone...

You waited for me so, kept saying "Soon, oh, soon
 Volodya'll bring me army breeches from the front."
 We won't go any more to White Hill after noon —
 You won't need breeches either, for your life is spent...

Again the knock of wheels — at rail-joints they change time.
 The bridge on the Donets is long since quiet, old thing.
 I stand beside the door. The distance smells of pine.
 The sharp wind sings to me about my long-past spring.

The town still doesn't sleep, the town keeps up its din.
 The wind brings us the breath of seawaves, warm and salt.
 Not long ago the nights were given here to love,
 nights dotted with bright lights as if with beads of gold.

We walk on through the town — on both sides chestnuts grow.
 The buildings weigh on us, but we go onward fast.
 Greeks and Zouaves were here not very long ago.
 Here Capital held sway in the none-too-distant past.

With a firm stride we go, with palpitating hearts
 along the streets; I'm full of wonderful new power.
 I am and I am not — my destiny's joined close
 With the collective "we" — from this delightful hour.

With a firm stride we go, in broad and mighty rows,
 We march ahead to where the clang of steel is heard,
 and like a crimson star each heart blossoms and glows,
 and like red flowers wave our banners golden-starred.

The road goes steeper up. In valleys concrete hums.
 Our hearts are all alight with dreams happy and gay.
 Hailed by the silver song of deep-beginning springs,
 Into the golden distance looks the new young day.

For us, for us alone the world's in springtime bloom,
the earth has taken off its gloomy winter garb...
For us alone these gloried years spin on their loom
Bridges towards the future glittering afar.

1921

* * *

No one loved so before. In a thousand years once
such a love may revisit the world.
Then a flower that promises spring to earth's sons
on a forest glade, lovely, unfurls.

And the earth breathes so quiet. To the blue stars its hands,
hot and tender, it seems to stretch forth;
then the spring starts to bloom through the length of our land
and with bliss and torment fills the earth.

From your eyes that look up at me, happy and bright,
with sweet anguish my heart overflows,
and the sharp scent of goosefoot spreads far through the night,
and the blood in my veins never slows.

Stars in myriads above, and a gentle moon near...
Love, you fill me with sweetness and pain!
I could tear down the Orion for her, my dear,
I, a poet of working Ukraine.

No one loved so before. In a thousand years once
such a love may revisit the earth.
Then a flower that promises spring to earth's sons
on a forest glade, lovely, unfurls.

And the earth breathes so quiet; to the blue stars its hands,
hot and tender, it seems to stretch forth.
Then the spring starts to bloom through the length of our land
and with bliss and torment fills the earth.

1922

As a night train goes rumbling afar,
it reminds me beyond my own will
of those midnights, the moon, the guitar
and the dahlias, sleepy and still.

Near the township acacias grow.
Up the hill we go, over the dam.
Railway waggons fly by down below
with the thunder of iron: slap-bang!

Stars look down at two lovers' dim eyes,
lowered eyes full of love, full of soul.
Light and shadow-born patterns arise
on the road, on your blue cotton shawl.

Ah, those nights! O Donets, how you shone!
Years of parting, how bitter you are!
Like the voices of birds flying off,
melancholy, you now seem so far!

I remember the villages roused,
slag-heaps, black on a background of flame.
In my greatcoat I stood near the house
and you, seeing me off, wept with pain.

I remember our parting that day,
and my belt with hard cartridges packed,
and your look... "Don't be sad!" I would say
and I promised you soon to be back.

The alarm and the sorrow are past,
but a scar still remains on my heart:
you're another's... The days have flown fast;
I'm poet, not last in my art.

Like a dream... Through the blizzard and mist
fortune's light has illumined my way,
yet for her whom another has kissed
I'd exchange all my laurels today.

I'd forget all the tears, all the hurts
just to walk on that dam once again,
just to hear once again your sweet words
and to kiss your soft plaits in the rain.

And perhaps, too, those nights, that guitar
you'll remember beside your new love.
It is dark eyes I gaze into now.
Yours were blue as these heavens above.

I recall the cherries ripening, swinging
in the garden, reddening in the sun.
With your farewell, you said as I was leaving:
"I'll find you, never mind how far you've gone."

In this dark, from tiredness and pain the while,
Love and spite is drunk down to the dregs.
Oft I see your so familiar profile
Framed in light above your window-ledge.

All I dream of is that long past time....
Drowning in the song of battle gore,
thinking of your voice that seems to chime
and merge with heavy guns that roar....

Now, as once before, the cherries snare
Warmth of garden sunshine, turning red.
I keep searching for you everywhere.
How I wish you'd find me, like you said.

1924

TO MARIA

If all the loves on earth were blended into one,
the present, past and those in anticipation —
it still would be as night... But my love's like the sun...
Nobody heretofore has ever known such passion...

If gathered were all stars that shine at night
and suns from all the planets in the spaces —
my love would gleam with yet more lustrous light
than all the suns through myriads of ages...

If from all globes collected were the blooms
that 'neath the stars in zephyrs sway and tremble —
my love would still emit a sweeter far perfume
than flowers from all centuries assembled...

If beauties were forgathered of all times
and past me they defiled in endless series —
the charm of my Maria all outshines,
no other would I choose, my song is Mary's.

If all those lovely eyes merged in one glance
towards the cockles of my heart directed —

to cast a spell o'er me they have no chance,
no equal to your eyes are there detected.

From what far stars did you to earth descend,
my comrade and my friend and spouse together?..
So, brightly shine for me without an end,
dimming all other stars, my only star forever!

1931

CORNFLOWERS

All over the field, you see blue cornflowers growing,
and cornflowers lie in my love's eyes, it seems.
Along a field pathway we two go a-courting,
far away we can see a blue stretch of the stream.

The years will fly past like the clouds on high sailing,
and others will pick cornflowers blue as the sky —
but we'll not be here. By some law prevailing,
we might be cornflowers, perhaps, you and I.

A girl and a boy might walk down a furrow;
in clouds drifting, birds sing of happiness new:
he'll compare then the eyes of his blithesome charmer
with us, with the colour of cornflower blue.

1938

A LETTER TO MY FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN

In our cities and villages, forests and valleys, where once
on our native Donets we were born and grew up and matured,
day and night, never laying down arms, our Ukraine's brave sons
fight the enemy horde.

I appeal to you, countrymen, brothers and comrades of mine,
through the rampage of fires, through the cannonade's terrible boom,
to convey my great love in these brief and yet passionate lines
to all those who defend in fierce battle our garden in bloom.

I appeal to you all, still alive on this stubborn black sod,
all who struggle in snows, in the grim alternation of days:
beat the foe everywhere, let him drown in his bestial blood,
let the predators die in the thunder and fire of the fray.

They have come to our native Donets land to capture our coal,
bursting into the homes of our fathers to plunder and sack.
I appeal to you all through the fog, through the blizzard's harsh cold —
beat the foe everywhere, let the wind sweep away his foul tracks.

Beat the foe everywhere — ruthless death hovers over his head
on the dark, distant roads, on the bloody and blizzard-swept snows.
In your strong, supple hands lies assurance that they will fall dead.
See — already the sun on your weapons, victorious, glows.

Far away to the west army regiments struggle along;
in unflinching steel rows ever forward they stream.
Through the forests and towns, through Ukraine's broad steppes they
move on,
as they did long ago in the fiery year 1918.

Let it fly side-by-side with your bullets, my word full of flame,
for it burns with my love for you, burns with my hate for the foe.
O my brothers, to you in the thunder and fire of the fray
let it fly; with the thirst of revenge in your hearts let it glow!

We grew up here together, together we built here and sang.
How it rustled and shone, our fair garden, in rapturous bloom!
But the foe planned to break our wide-fluttering wings,
planned to trample our fields, to drive us into slavery's doom.

Clad in armour, they tore in to us in a savage wild horde,
in a black band of robbers, depriving our cities of light.
Shedding oceans of blood, sowing ruin and death with the sword,
they intended to plunge us in endless depression and night.

At the Party's appeal all our country rose, mighty and vast,
and our death-dealing steel let out torrents of serpentine gore.
Our firm will is alive; through the ages our glory will last.
Our sun will soon rise. Spring will shine on the ruins of war.

Fellow-countrymen, friends! Ever with you my song will remain,
like my heart, which is joined to your hearts by unbreakable ties.
Fired with friendship and love, over native Ukrainian plains,
over native Donets, over city and village it flies.

Never silenced, it soars, over every cottage it flies,
and it singles out one, at the foot of the quiet Kirov Hill,
where my mother for news of her soldier-son waits, while her eyes
follow miners that pass her with iron-firm will.

Westward-bound, they keep fighting, while cannonfire rages in spate
for their sacrosanct homeland, their children, their mothers and wives,
Glory to them forever! Our people will never forget
Their compatriots, who in fierce battle are giving their lives.

Kremlin's stars sparkle into their eagle-eyes, fearless and hard,
woods and fields listen, tense, to their resolute stride; at their back
the Donets, in a thrill, from its ice sends them heartfelt regards,
men who march in the fire of unheard-of, relentless attacks.

But the thunder will cease, and the bright glow of lightning will fade,
and the gardens will blossom, and nightingales sing once again.
To your fathers' glad homes, crowned with heroes' unfading green bays,
you will come back, my friends, fellow-countrymen, covered with fame.

Where the ashes now lie, where the ruins loom black 'neath the sky,
villages will arise, shining cities again will appear.
Our Ukraine will be fairer, with steppes green and wide.
From her glorious path every barrier to progress we'll clear.

Friends and countrymen! Though our expanses be covered with snow,
my word flies by your side, marching on with your battle-steeled rows.
With your miners it lies in the trenches, in cannonade glow,
and at bivouacs guards you, when battle-tired eyelids you close.

Ah, how much still remains in my heart that I long to convey!
How I wish you could feel all the warmth of my brotherly love,
and that guns should not stifle my word as it flies
through beloved Ukraine, over ruins and graves, like a dove.

Let my song march with you in a greatcoat of soldierly grey,
for my song is my heart — it was nurtured on dark, sleepless nights
in a town on Donets where my young days had fluttered away,
where each home has been smashed in incessant and terrible fights.

Let its blue wings wipe off all the tears from my dear mother's eyes,
from the eyes of all mothers, whose sons day and night bear the fire.
Let the Spring come and rustle again as a joyful surprise
in our sunshine-filled country which all of us love and admire.

Brothers! Children of sunshine and masters of tireless work —
not in vain were you reared in tornadoes and fire by Donbas.
Full of fervour, you fight in the trenches and toil in the rear.
All my heart's in this song, all my love that won't falter or pass.

Through the tempest that roars o'er the country enveloped in gloom,
through the mist, through the gale, through hot battles unheard-of before,
Volodimir Sosyura sends greetings to miners, his countrymen. Soon
we will meet, I am sure. All success to your righteous cause in this war!

1941

Joy of victory and making a right-about
turn to broad steppeland, to the bright fields,
Where a rainbow arch drinks water through its spout,
Where around my home place, brooklets splash and reel...

Where the tawny lads go, and the dark-eyed lassies,
Where the middle-aged men have goldy straw-hats,
Where along the highway walks my song so saucy
In an overcoat of gray — a brave soldier that...!

Lark up in the sky there, rye-fields rock like waves here,
Villages and orchards in shimmering haze are lain...
Love's first timid sunbeams in the world appear,
Then the bridges, railroads come, with a lonely train...

But my thoughts and songs go, wandering near and far,
Where I know each pathway, every grass-blade frail...
Mother, mother mine-O, the Ukraine's a star,
Moon above a river, even, nightingales.

A guitar rang softly, warm clouds sailed the sky —
that is far away now, like an old refrain...
I shall come to you, Mom, through all fires fly,
And I'll knock so gently, on your windowpane.

"Who's there?" sweet as music, I shall hear her say.
"Me, dear Mummy!" Radiant light will fall on snow.
You will open wide the door — on wings and gay —
Come to meet your son, and tears and smiles bestow.

Flowers will give fragrance, sleepy leaves unfurl,
ring of song will hover, drifting till it dies...
Silence suddenly will fall, as if it wrapped the world,
Hushed will be the earth, and hushed will be the sky.

After storms of bloodshed, after roads of flame,
I at last her dear and happy eyes will meet...
"You've come home? For good? Oh, sonny!" she will exclaim.
I shall burst out weeping, I'll fall at her feet.

1941-1958

LOVE YOUR UKRAINE

As you love the bright sun, Ukraine you must love.
As the waves, and the fields, and the wind.
Love her in good days, when the sky's glad above,
And love her when the fates are unkind.

Oh, cherish Ukraine in the night, in the morn,
Her cherry-orchard beauty hold dear,
The charm that is ageless, yet ever new-born,
And the song of her speech in your ear.

Without her we're nothing at all, only dust
Swept about by the winds o'er the earth.
With all of your being adore her you must,
And with all of your deeds her must serve.

She's our very own, she's the light of our lives,
Of all that we are she is a part:
She shines in our stars, in our willows she sighs,
And she beats with each pulse of our heart.

Ukraine's in each songbird, each rose that grows wild,
In each song ever sung in our land,
In each maiden's eyes, every smile of a child,
And each fold of the flag in our hand...

She glows in each meadow, each highway, each glade,
In each rose-tinted cloud in our sky.
In each fact'ry whistle, the Dnieper's each wave —
There she lives and she never will die.

Through the crucible — war, our cannon aroar,
We are driving out the invaders:
That enemy boots should tread here nevermore,
That spring should again serenade us.

Young man! Take the pledge that your joys are for her,
And your tears, and your sighs, and your pain...
For how can you love other nations on earth
If you first do not love your Ukraine!

Maiden! As you love the blue heavens above,
Love your country with ardour aflame.
For how can your lover give you his full love
Unless faithfully you love Ukraine!

As you toil, as you love, in peace and in strife,
Your Ukraine you must ever adore
From the depths of your heart — then deathless your life
For through her we shall live evermore.

MY DONBAS

The long night's done, my Donbas... Love is in its heyday
all barriers down, for spring is coming on apace,
again the flying wind has caught the breath of May Day,
the fragrance of the grass and flowers touch my face.

The bloody fighting and the countless days have gone forever.
O Donbas, you are free to rise again up to the stars;
the willows and the ash-trees rustle o'er the Donets River,
the same as those my eyes held mirrored from afar.

Those trees wear scars of war like black death crepe of sorrow —
they witnessed all that happened, saw the bombs that fell
upon the factory I first worked at; and tomorrow
the story pictured in the waters calm, they'll tell.

And yet they bear those scars like starry-eyed reflection
of gladness shown by your beloved at your return,
because they also saw the hour of resurrection:
the liberating armies with brass bands that burned,

Our banners and starred helmets, flight of the invaders —
the butchers whine, for Death beside them always strode.
The scarred trees heard us sing — victorious serenaders —
when marching home from storming through that endless road...

The clouds form dahlia blooms that float above blue waters,
the working hands of millions are busy day and night
in deeps of earth, the mines; above, build high-rise towers,
in our land freed for all and happy Age of Light.

Do you hear it move and thunder way down under?
And thunder overground? That's Labour Over All!
That's Labour, free for the ages, like a flag of wonder,
the Party, the Donbas ash-trees, the ores and coal.

My Donbas, filled with fragrant breath of the First of May,
I send you greetings from free Dnieper's shipping lanes,
I send a song that tells of you, my love in its heyday,
and heralding a brand new spring in our Ukraine.

1949

* * *

Sunflower past the fence there, heavy head drooped long,
from across the river flies a maiden's song.
Hearing that song distant, makes me start to pine —
Oh, I know what wanders — there goes youth of mine!

Song that my heart clutches, heats my blood to move,
all my hopes are in it, even all my love.
Whither do you wander, long-lost youth of mine,
in a shirt embroidered, with dark eyes that shine?

Sit here right beside me, once I so loved you —
sweet as earth all greening, as the sky of blue!
My youth cannot hear me... Yet I flame the more —
Only laughter's flying from the farther shore.

Farther, farther, dying — voice once young and fine,
only wind comes ruffling this silver hair of mine.
Silver hair... voice so fair.... Aspen. Vesper. Song.
Sunflower past the fence there, heavy head drooped long.

1955

* * *

Hear the nightingale — it's my land of nightingales...!
Through my fair Ukraine, a Spring Day has painted trails.
Changing puffs of snow for blossoms: what a lovely throng!
Once again my heart can beat with joy and ringing song.

I go walking in the woods... Oh, my land so dear,
there's no beauty in the world like what I find right here!
Nothing could be better, Open Spaces wide and blue,
than to meet the spring in our Ukraine along with you.

Violets sleep amid the dews, across the river — mist...
In my heart are shining eyes, so young, made to be kissed...
Everything around has woken to the birds' refrain,
Even my lost youth today came back to me again.

I go walking in the woods... To the open spaces
bounds my youthful heart, sings like a lark in sky-embraces:
Through our fair Ukraine, a Spring Day has painted trails...
Hear the nightingale — it's my land of nightingales!

1956

* * *

I love the ancient world of trees;
they send us life from everywhere —
By sway of bough, by shake of leaves.
For trees are people green and fair.

Their leafy breasts breathe just as we,
Like us, they see and hear, get talking;
in much, our true facsimile —
except they lack the gift of walking.

Mayhap they walk... This world's allure
from childhood seemed a magic blessing —
just as the sun makes fruits mature,
and violet wakes with beams caressing.

And flowers, flowers! With an aim
sing nightingales to full-blown roses.
My soul, just like a sunny flame,
would drown in blooms if fate disposes.

The earth, the trees, the vaulting blue,
the grass by bare feet trodden:
this is life. What joy to sing anew
this happy life to every man and woman.

1960

* * *

What are trees whispering of within the evening darkness?
I watch them through a fog, I watch through curtained rain;
From leafy lips of green, the tales keep falling endless —
Just audible they sound mysterious and strange.

My soul can hear them speak... But human speech lacks power
To translate into words the voiceless tongue of leaves,
But running through my veins goes vaguely sounding clamour —
It has no meaning, form, that my brain can receive.

In vain the barrier round, my mind its way goes winging —
It is not meant at all to pierce this solid pane.
One fleeting moment then, the window's set wide-flinging:
Before me vistas shine in panoramic vein.

Then nature's voices all, such moments grow so clear —
I hear the leaflet's cry when torn off in a trice,

I hear the rivulet complain with many a tear
That early morning frost is turning it to ice.

I hear pale asters tell — that autumn rains cause pining,
And call with saddened plaint: let warm days come again.
I hear the stars on high, mysteriously shining,
Speak with each other where deep space is suzeraine.

Then I am open wide to breath of all the ages.
In my soul's tiny world, the countless worlds come through —
Like music at sundown and music at day-break
Upon the carpet-grass shakes notes of diamond dew.

The rustling rain was still... The leaves were silent masses,
The raindrops hung in globes, observing silently,
as if a thousand lenses of miniscule field-glasses,
Like eyes were aimed at me.

1960

DMITRO ZAHUL



Dmitro Zahul (1890-1938) was born in the Bukovinian village of Miliyiv into a peasant family. He is the author of several collections of poetry and many essays on literature. He also translated from Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and other poets. His poems reflect social changes in the Ukrainian countryside of the 1920s-1930s.

I GAZE AFAR...

I gaze afar on stormy seas
where one white gull wingtips the waves,
and, on the wind to infinities,
my thoughts race — like young pilot brave.
Oh, many a venture gay secretes
my heart, and for the doing craves.

The elements ring as if alive,
and thunder claps beyond the mountain —
a storm of passion it revives:
pours in my heart a cloudburst fountain...
Leap up, winged words, with power drive
like airplane from a runway mounting.

Where storm and terrors rage at sea,
where winds on brow blow icily —
like bison mad, rush angrily
at elemental mysteries...
Success falls to the brave and free —
so doth the screaming gull decree.

Unwavering to far unknowns,
launch forth your poem-boats, no complaints;
open your heart without constraint
but stir no slime whose lure intones —

let feelings be metal and run unrestrained
though arteries give and be broken.

When melancholy — that green-eyed spleen —
like Moloch gapes its greedy maw,
the mind like an iron bell rings keen,
in your heart the tocsin bespeaks the law:
That death inescapable waits unseen
all submitting to hypochondria.

Start up and shake your motor, Heart,
win the right to happiness the while.
Roads call you on to worlds apart
like the tender lure of a woman's smile...
Burst forth like lava, Stormy Bard,
from volcanoes of grief and lone exile.

Let your head reel round from the sparkling wine
of whirlwind storm and ring of thunder.
Let passions live once more, define
the breach in the struggle and break it asunder...!
Fly on, fly on, O songs of mine,
you are planes from my Port roaming younder.

Higher and higher in stormy flight!
Past blue horizons your vanes will wave,
young pilot brave, in dreams of light...
Oh, many a venture comes in sight
that my heart so for the doing craves.

I gaze on an ocean of stormy seas,
with ventures gay my coteries
where the elements revel on musical staves.

CHANGING MOTIFS

Motto: Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,
Sich ein Charakter in dem Sturm der Welt.
Goethe

No poet is formed where rules tranquillity,
Nor in monastic cell in lone seclusion.
Where crowds with gusto swirl in gay profusion —
It's there he spreads his colourful marquee.

His life's spent on cobbled streets, not parquetry;
His palette's the busy square and flying banner —

Where he can catch life's high notes from the clamour
Of crowds that move toward ends none can foresee.

No sonnet, triolet, no ultra key
In verse the poet strikes — no affectation.
No aesthete, classic he! The world's reflection
In song he paints as stern reality!
To know life — that's the poet's offering votive,
To show how like the sea its changing motifs.

1926

THE TRUMPETER

It's not the archangel's Last Trump blasting
(I don't believe in Judgment Day) —
It's the people's demonstration passing,
Red Flag aloft this First of May.

But isn't that colour sacrificial?
It took its hue from blood and flame —
But not from Christ! (Such hope is futile!)
What ringing Easter bells proclaim!

Invincible the power that functions
From working districts breaking through —
Destroying the old without compunction,
For a brighter world they'll build anew.

Now over smoke-stacks, lights are rising —
Mahomet, Moses, Jesus despite —
All kings and czars alike apprising
Comes a shout that grows in might:

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation!
Break loose from your age-rotten chains!
Ahead lies boundless expectation,
Behind us wrath avenged in flames.

Arise and summon all to battle!
Let weapons ring and smoke rise grim.
The trumpet from your masters wrestle —
Let earthly be that cherubim

Who a magic elixir possesses
Against all wail, who doth inter
The past — its memory disperses...
Reveille calls this trumpeter.

1919

THE SUN AND THE HEART

O Sun on high! Such golden flaming light
You sow eternally on worlds ice-riven.
The heat from your hands takes every satellite
Like beggars do — in rags and hunger-driven.

Like beggars do in rags and hunger-driven,
Life from your hands takes every satellite,
Though they give back no thing for what is given:
Your precious gift of living flaming light.

But in you lies, O depthless living fount,
A heat that's measureless as spatial heaven.
How many times you've poured it — none may count —
Among forsaken hearts which cold has riven.

However much you share without account
Or pour your heart on worlds or empty heaven,
Eternally your brow the flames do mount,
And to this day your inner heat's like leaven.

My love I also gave — my heart became
Forsaken too, my heart with cold was riven.
I've waited long — will love come back again?
A drop at least of that bright flame once given.

1926



Valerian Polishchuk (1897-1942), the son of a farmer, was born in Volyn. He wrote numerous collections of verse and long poems about Vladimir Lenin and the simple people of the land. His works have been translated into many languages of the USSR.

FIRST SNOW

A yellow leaf on the ground,
Snowflakes rustling around...
 Snow...
 Snow...
The first of the snow...
Leaves and the snow rustling round...

It whirls and blows in the cracks...
Like dust rises up in its tracks...
 Snow...
 Snow...
Leaves and the snow rustling round.

Snow in the wind's embrace,
In the hut a hare's found a place...
 Snow...
 Snow...
The first of the snow...
In the poor man's hut found a place.

It whirls and blows in the cracks...
Like dust rises up in its tracks...
 Snow...
 Snow...
Pallid snow...
It whirls and blows in the cracks...

A yellow leaf on the ground,
Snowflakes rustling round...
 Snow...
 Snow...
The first of the snow...
Leaves, and the snow rustling round.

1918

THE COLOSSUS OF MEMNON

Strabo recounted...

When the sun emerged and bounded
Up from out the Libyan desert,
Then the voice of Memnon sounded,
Met the sun's rays warm and pleasant,
And re-echoed o'er the Nile...
Now the sun his hot sword wields,
Burns the Powers to the ground,
Cuts through hazy clouds around
Over boundless, boundless fields.
Trombones in my heart, go I,
In my breast the fresh air drawing,
Now with Memnon's voice I cry:
"Greet the sun, good folk, it's morning!"
Proletariat, chains are past!
You can boldly breathe at last!
Go out on the wide expanses,
Greet the sun and your rebirth.
There a wave of crimson dances,
Rolling over all the earth.
Greet the sunshine, freedom's mother,
Hey there, out you go, my brother!

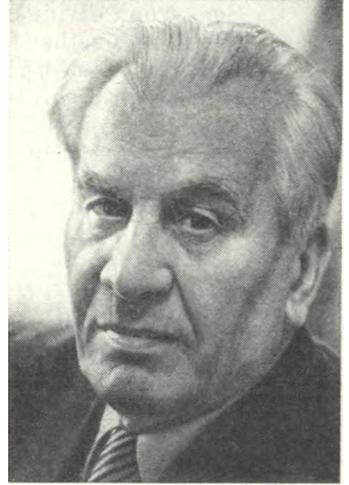
1918

TO MY FATHER

“For glory and freedom and honour we die,
To win them our dear native land, for you...”
What power and truth in those words there lie,
What pure and sacred love in them too!
We die, although to live we desire...
For freedom, equality, brotherhood fall.
Though discord may flare up a moment like fire,
Yet lasting happiness we bring to all:
So may our sacrifice prove no crime.
Forgive us our ardour, for love’s good name.
We thirst, that justice on all should shine,
That true ideals in your hearts should flame.
And so, for our native land we die —
The heart in our breast her happiness craves.
Let us drink the cup of suffering dry.
No, we no longer can live as slaves.

1920

MIKOLA TARNOWSKY



*Mikola Tarnowsky (b. 1895) was born in the village of Kotsyubintsi in Ternopil Region into a poor farmer's family. In search of work he left for America in 1910, but returned to the Ukraine in 1958. He is the author of several collections of verse, a book of short stories, and the long narrative poem *The Immigrants*. His poems have been translated into Russian and other languages.*

TO OUR BROTHERS OVERSEAS

The woes of the Rus have their banks overflowed,
They flooded all Europe and overseas rolled!

Ivan Franko

As spilled our people's woes across the planet,
Peeping from clouds the sun was cold as granite;
Suffering's cup had filled to overflowing,
Mountain-high waves on the seas began rolling!

How many people the ocean has carried,
How many people misfortune has buried,
How many perished o'ercome by distress,
Far over the ocean in some wilderness!

You did not give up! You reiterated
Songs to your native good word dedicated!..
Songs that you sang not only for pleasure:
Strength of Shevchenko in those songs were treasured,
Lofty ideals your native songs nurtured,
Belief in tomorrow, in a better future...
Your very survival those words guaranteed,
Calling you ever to strive and to succeed!

Let us clasp hands, our dear sisters and brothers,
We'll make our lot happy helping each other;
Open your hearts with sincerity glowing,
Brimful with gladness, with joy overflowing!

Seas won't divide us, nor mountains, nor rivers,
We'll be together for ever and ever;
Never will storm-ridden oceans divide us,
Never will hateful distress override us:
Faithful to justice, to peace, and to friendship,
Sharing our fortunes we'll all live in kinship!

1961

MY BEAUTIFUL TERNOPIIL

Ternopil! City of militant glory!
There were no ordeals spared you in the past!
Here often the blood in rivers ran gory,
Here war horses' hooves oft trampled the grass.

Your soil was raked up by tempests tremendous,
Dust o'er the country wind-blown;
The hideous birthmark of ages horrendous,
Your fields were with weeds overgrown.

Unknown to the plow, Thorn-Field * designated,
Freezing winds harrowed your ground.
The sun behind mountains somewhere was located,
Sending no warming rays down.

How much land was trampled, people's work shattered,
How many woes were with bitter tears watered,
How much heart-breaking sorrows,
Suffering, pain and horrors!..

The city's now smiling, with gladness abounding,
The sun and the earth are embracing most fondly.
Gone are the traces of former-times woe:
The future's before you, go Ternopil, go!

There it now stands, gazing into the water
Which seems to reflect it as though in a glass;
The sun rises red, presaging good weather,
The marvellous skies are blue super class!

Ternopil! City of militant glory!
There were no ordeals spared you in the past!
Today it's transformed as though in a story,
Majestic, beautiful, growing apace!

1966

* Ternopil — lit. "thorny field"

LET SEED BE SOWN!..

“Let seed be sown and grain be grown!” we say today
Ancient New Year’s well-wishes voicing...
Let people be happy, good fortune their fate,
In a world of good cheer rejoicing!

May wheat and all grain in the fields grow and ripen,
Bread enough for all folks to assure;
May people all bask in the sun shining brightly,
May their joys and contentment endure!

There’s another wish, my dear brothers and sisters,
Though the last in this verse, not the least:
Vigour and energy, zealous persistence
To assure that our earth lives in peace!

1963

UNDER MY COUNTRY’S SKIES

Land of my birth, Ukraine, my motherland,
You radiate such warmth and good and worth,
Such heaps of happiness do you command
To share with all the folk upon earth!
Now new roads are stretching to the skyline,
Highways broad and boundless, bright and clear,
Welcome home, the thresholds greet us smiling,
The sound of merry songs comes to our ears.

Girls to springtime-come are singing praises,
Market square with chatter is a-hum,
With the dawn to our labours we hasten,
In each droplet of dew shines the sun.
Spring has smiled on the quail in the heather,
Tractors rumble at work in the fields,
To the tune of his flute steps the shepherd
As his flock to the pasture he leads.

Children hasten to school — faster, faster —
There are songs waiting there which they’ll sing...
Winter’s snowdrifts have been overmastered,
All are glad of the coming of spring.
Friendly guests in their classrooms are welcomed,
Beloved Lésya, Frankó and Tarás,
There Tychína, Sosyúra * transplendent,
Maxim Rylsky oft visits those halls.

* Lesya Ukrainka, Ivan Franko, Taras Shevchenko, Pavlo Tychina,
Volodimir Sosyura

Children list to their sage inspiration
And they take them to heart, they are theirs.
Heads are bowed in deep contemplation
Of the beauty to which they're the heirs.

Power-driven, the workshops start buzzing,
Workers march to the mine and the mill,
Lofty skyscrapers seem to be puzzled
To see structures arise higher still!
Far away on the seas and the oceans
Our good ships at all times are in line,
They're commanded by bold doughty captains
Bringing fame to this country of mine.

Cosmonauts through the spaces are winging
With the luminous stars as their guides,
Without bounds is the life that's beginning,
Songs of triumph resound on all sides!
The whole country is nightingale-trilling,
Saplings sprout, blossoms scatter their scent...
O Ukraine, my heart you are thrilling
With your beauty, which never will end!

1970



Ivan Kulik (1897-1941) was born in the town of Shpola in Cherkasy Region into the family of a teacher. He wrote several books of verse, long poems, and essays and did translations from a variety of authors, many of them American. His poetry has a distinctly civic flavour. A large number of Kulik's poems have been translated into Russian and other languages.

SOWING

Eyes flashing lightning we'll sow the horizon with stars,
Thirsting and yearningful earth we shall harrow with scars.
(Water her then with refreshing sweet moisture, oh rain!)
Envious furrows with patterns we'll scatter again,
All of gold stars — like bright comet-showers falling below.
Toil we'll thrice multiply, ill-fortune stultify so!
Seed-grains of stars, through the starkness of darkness obscure
Everywhere peep, break through deep-sleeping soil-crust once more,
Burst through the earth with your new shoots of light,
Gilding the field with a grain-carpet bright!

Kharkiv, 1921

FIFTH LETTER

“When forty winters shall besiege thy brow...”
“Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest...”
William Shakespeare. Sonnets II and III.

My son said yesterday: “You’re old now, daddy,
Look in the glass — you’re aging very much.”
...But only thirty-six times with its rotator
Has the cylinder turned to the symbol of the crutch...

But thirty-six times in all — soon will be forty,
They decide themselves, the wrinkles, the greying head,
And still more deeply will advance the darkness
“Within thine own deep-sunken eyes”, Will said.

“When forty winters shall besiege thy brow”...
No, nevertheless I’m ready to be besieged,
Though in my face bite deeper the furrows now,
And in my beard the shoots of grey are seen.

No, I am young, though not so young in summers,
Though with alarm, thoughts in my temples beat —
Are these not words still forged in my word-foundry?
Does that same flame not harden them with its heat?

Although still deeper I plunge in the recesses
Of prophet-memories, lines refashioned so;
Say, did not Moscow really become much younger
When she, inspired, plunged into her Metró?

But then did Moscow for one single moment
Slow down her flight, when she dived underground?
No, I’ve not ceased to bloom here as her poet,
And among the calendar blocks my way I found.

No, I’m still young, and all the time grow younger,
As everything grows young in this land,
Which conquered time, increasing time for action,
For youth of ages as her helmsman stands:

That youth of ages and that youth of ideas,
That is the helmsman for our youthful folk,
Which goes enriched with long years of experience,
And leads the restored and healed into battle-smoke.

And I, grown bolder in trade-winds and north-easters,
In a tide of youth that spreads beyond the seas,
With skill gained in the battle rejuvenated,
Tear pages from the calendar quite at ease.

*Moscow — Kharkiv
January-March, 1933*

SIXTH LETTER

Well no, from ancient Balaklava *
But few of her old lines remain...
A cypress stands, pyramidical rather,
Where two roads cross, not to meet again,
The silent witness of my love then,
Of my courageous springtime years...
He only, with his shaggy mantle,
Has stayed unchanged, so it appears;
Old Uncle Yuri's ceased his labours,
And, as if yearning for bygone days,
The Genoese walls, with effort straining,
Having opened wide their eye-embrasures,
On new Crimea look round amazed.
They're shaken by a sudden explosion:
All their old centuries, like some ghost,
Go flying, it seems, like clods in motion,
Which have by ammonal been burst.
And clearing the mountains' flux of shadows,
The fair-haired sun pours forth its rays:
A flux of light from heaven's top-gallants
Lies like a tablecloth on the bay,
Which clearly thus enriched with favours
Receives, with the radiant sun when set,
Its guests, whom the local school for divers
Lets down upon its conquered bed.
Amid the sunlight, sea, and mountains,
This ore, this mix of elements great,
War-hardened fighters are now founding
My country's firm agglomerate.
At night the sea-breeze, warmly sweeping
Into the bay, the cloud-banks drubs,
The moon pours forth, all silver-greenish,
Like grain fermented into tubs.
And then this master grain-fermenter,
Who overcomes the heated breeze,
From living silver a ribbon tender
Right up to old Cape Violent weaves.
And once that woven-patterned measure,
(That path which to our happiness led)
We loved to toss in the air together,
As silvery spray from the oar-blade sped,
And through the slushy sleet we slithered,
Our skiff-prow heading into night,
While in my heart the pulses hammered
Like some mad metronome, with delight.

* Balaklava — ancient town in the Crimea; now a district of Sevastopol

Nearby another heart was yearning
In constant unison with mine...
And now again I've lived, a-burning,
That dream already lived that time.
We sailed on joy's bright path of water
Together to Shaitan-Dere!..
Like the Kalevala and Hiawatha —
Undying our happy past today —
The past which like a lump of lava
Preserved within the newest spark,
The past which nurtured then the pasture
Like sap, in every blade of grass,
The past of our new Balaklava.
For time has not tramped nor wiped away
That name, with love lit ever after,
Like that cypress, pyramidal rather,
Which wears the same rough cloak today;
The past which will be ever present,
And interwoven on new looms,
And mingling in the cauldron echoes
Of our two hearts, and high-grown meadows,
And ammonal's dense drifting fumes.

1933

MIKOLA TERESHCHENKO

Mikola Tereshchenko (1908-1966) was born in the village of Shcherbinivka in Cherkasy Region into the family of a farmer. He is the author of numerous books of verse and translations, mostly from Russian and French. His poems have been translated into many languages both in the USSR and abroad.



LIGHT FROM THE EAST

Dawn from beyond the meadows
always brings light from the east.
Songs to the sun sings the streamlet,
rejoicing at Nature's spring feast.

Hope from the east comes to people —
from our red banner on high!
Glory to people-creators,
glory forever and aye!

Joy in our merry eyes glitters,
pride glows on dreamers' brows.
Skyward we raise our winecups;
light from the earth's east flows!

1919

A GIRL FROM THE UKRAINE

I met a girl from the Ukraine
all fragrant with the smell of grass.
She only squeezed her kerchief's hem
When I came up to her and asked
about her brother, father, mother,
about my woeful native land.

Her soft white face became still paler,
Her sorrow she could not withstand.

“My father died while being tortured,
my mother has grown pale and grey.
My brother’s army shirt I put on:
He died a hero’s death one day.
The Nazis torture our Ukraine
yet clamours for revenge our land!”
She wiped a teardrop from her lashes
With a sweet-smelling girlish hand,

“I joined a partisan detachment.
Now in your regiment I fight...”
And so we jumped upon our horses
and rode across the river wide.
She smelled of grass; the smell of childhood
came from her hair, her face, her hands.
We will not leave you in your sorrow,
We’re coming to your aid, dear land!

1942

HARVEST

Clouds vanish beyond the horizon
Like smoke from hot ash far and near.
For native fields verdant and fertile
A squadron fought valiantly here.

With blood hot and crimson was sprinkled
Each clod by Ukraine’s dear sons.
Such might, such triumphant valour
These fields had seen never once.

They never yet bore such a harvest,
These mine-pitted, bomb-rutted fields.
Today they will gladden our soldiers
With wonderful, bounteous yields.

Storms vanish beyond the horizon
Like traces of grief and turmoil.
The wheat lies cut down on the furrows —
The harvest of valiant toil.

1945

KIBALCHICH'S * TESTAMENT

“This night will be my last. Will I have time
to pass my calculations on to men,
these urges and these winged dreams of mine
about a flight to far-off stars, beyond men’s ken?

“I’m not afraid of death. Let men but shed
the age-old chains of earthly gravitation.
Let men but break the fetters that they wear
since time immemorable — ever since creation.”

But hark — the padlock clanks, the door-hinge creaks.
They lead him towards the dawning firmament.
He smiles at Venus; aye, with the stars he speaks,
leaving us his proud will and testament.

1961

* Nikolai Kibalchich (1853-1881) — activist of the People’s Will revolutionary organization and an inventor. Was executed for participation in the assassination of Alexander II. While in prison, he designed a jet-propelled flying apparatus



PAVLO USENKO

Pavlo Usenko (1902-1975) was born in the village of Zaochipske in Dnipropetrovsk Region into a poor peasant family. Closely linked to Ukrainian folklore, his writings reflect the beginning and development of the Soviet way of life in the Ukraine. He was awarded the Nikolai Ostrovsky Prize. The Ukrainian Molod (Youth) Publishers award the Pavlo Usenko Prize for the best beginning writers. His poems have been published in other republics of the USSR and abroad.

SPRING SONG

And today it is spring, just as then,
In that past year of nineteen-eighteen...
I remember the village and glen,
Flowers in bloom, shots, and cries in between.

German columns were breaking through then,
From beyond the woods thundering hard —
Fifteen Poloveshchina * men
By Slavuta-Dnieper on guard.

Fifteen in the waves, every one,
Only seven climbed out on the bank;
We were sprayed by a black maxim-gun,
On the sunlit spit where we sank.

Ah, you merry Dnieper-side sand!
All seven of us left our tracks,
When through the alarmed huts we ran,
Under blackening, blazing thatch.

From joy, or from pain, who's to ken,
The sunshine my heart has burned clean.
And today it is spring, just as then,
In that past year of nineteen-eighteen.

1923

* Poloveshchina — village in Poltava Region

LETTER

Our dear secretary-girl,
How we loved you, every one!
Now where snow-flakes are a-whirl,
Through the snow-drifts you have gone.

School. And two acacias speak —
Tell of spring, and youth in flower.
You worked every day of the week,
Came to talk in the evening hour.

Say, why did you have to go?
Did the lathes too loudly scream?
Whirlwinds, blizzards, snow on snow,
In the mutinous ravine.

There you've no electric power,
From the fields cold winds blow down;
You're the only lecturer
From the factory, from the town.

You are gone — a tragedy —
At our meetings we recall
You in our tube factory,
In the rolling shop and all.

Our dear secretary-girl,
How we loved you, every one!
Now where snow-flakes are a-whirl,
Through the snow-drifts you have gone.

1926

FOR OUR UKRAINE

Our flasks of water
 of cherries taste.
On roads we tread
 many signs we trace.
With lips a-thirsting
 I drink, and drink,
With eyes enchanted
 I gaze and think.
The guelder roses
 bend to the dew,

I drink unending
 your beauty too.
 Land of my fathers,
 I did not grow
 That my native hut
 should be outraged so.
 That my land, my glory,
 black crows should peck,
 While on the stove-bench
 I dream on my back!
 Motherland, mother,
 I drink, and drink,
 With eyes enchanted
 I gaze and think.
 Your ways go winding,
 your woodland roads,
 Along the rapids,
 and through your groves.
 In depths of waters,
 in light you shine,
 You thunder in factories,
 you toil in the mine.
 Is it wind a-blowing
 on the steppes at morn,
 Or combines reaping
 among the corn?
 Are bullets flying
 among the ears?
 Are cuckoos calling
 the future years?
 The pure spring water
 is sweet to taste,
 On roads we tread
 many signs we trace.
 Just here to a girl once
 I gave my hand,
 Just here the dahlias
 for two bloomed grand.
 Here Shchors' * detachments
 to battle went,
 We drank from our flasks here
 when strength was spent.
 We drank, and kept moving
 alone on our legs,
 We drank, but sparing,
 and not to the dregs.
 The last drops we left
 for another day,

* Mikola Shchors — hero of the Civil War of 1918-1920 in the Ukraine

They would soothe our wounds
 in the deadly fray.
 Our flasks of water
 of cherries taste.
 On the roads we tread
 many signs we trace.
 Along bright highways
 together we'll go —
 They'll not be trampled
 by foreign foe.
 They were illumined
 by truth ahead,
 By the Party's power,
 by glory's tread.
 The sun shines upon us,
 the thunder roars,
 We'll carry the torch
 for this land of ours.
 Our fathers' fire
 in us has not died,
 Our youthful powers
 are deep and wide.
 For our Ukraine,
 for her starry light,
 For our land
 and Soviet kin we fight!

1941

I'LL BIND, EMBRACE,
 AND CLOSE ENTWINE

I'll bind, embrace, and close entwine
 With cordial love, with warmth of heart,
 This father-and-motherland of mine,
 Which rocked my cradle at the start,

And nursed me, such a tiny mite,
 (Long, long ago already, it seems!)
 When unborn worlds, and hope's new light
 Lay under my mother's heart in dreams.

I'll bind, embrace, and close entwine
 With filial love, when battle's done,
 With arms like boughs in blossom-time,
 With May, when songs of spring are sung.

What I in August reaped in rows,
What ripened there before my eyes,
A palette of most amazing hues,
Which day or night-time never dies.

Above the ripening ears of grain
The sun burns down, the clouds roll by,
And somewhere flails are heard again...
I'll bind, embrace, and close entwine

This father-and-motherland of mine,
Which took my hand, that festive day,
And led me to my lesson-time,
And gave me its whole soul that way.

O, lasting warmth of the Komsomol,
The heat of the day I endured with you!
In deadly battle, when storm-clouds roll,
Beneath the thunderous thrust of the foe

Then burn and blaze like bonfire flames,
With your own mother's spirit blaze!
Then light up, by the Party trained,
Your native country's farthest ways.

Then give the full strength of your soul
To pastures, gardens, meadow-land,
To wise old books your impulse whole,
And to the sturdy oaks which stand

Upon the steppeland spaces wide,
To good rich ores, their smelting flame,
To bridges built from side to side,
And may your hands raise crowns of fame,
Be worthy of a worker's name!

There'll be full praise... in toil strength lies!
And little glories

we

don't need!

May our dear land, beneath blue skies
Still bloom in starry wreathes indeed!

The beauty of law's excelling height
No dust of ages lies beneath —
The eternal bird of hope and flight
Is love alone, and love till death.

1948

* * *

Snowdrops all are gone,
Poppy-flames are done,
Not a letter dear,
Not a single one.

Come, or let me hear
Just one word of cheer,
And remember then
How we were so near.

How we were so near —
Did we live, my dear?..
And all round, all round,
Did our flowers appear?

Now the rains are grey,
Nor a word today;
Well, the road is long,
Full of twists the way.

Perhaps they went astray,
On the mountains lay —
That was all a dream,
So I say, I say...

What once was has passed,
Borne off by the blast,
Like the apple-boughs —
Arms apart are cast.

Snowdrops all are gone,
Poppy-flames are done,
Not a letter dear,
Not a single one...

1956

MY SPRING

My own perennial enchantress,
The power of nature ever young,
My springtime, with your bird's heart beating,
From southern borders, back you come.

My years of youth, so little trodden,
But gone already — well, that then?

From this earth I'll not be parted —
How much strength in her I found!
How many orbs in heaven starlit,
How much grass, what rustling sound!..
How many secret movements wondrous,
How many minutes when heart-blood whirls,
How many lustrous, and not so lustrous
Diamonds, emeralds and pearls!

From this earth I'll not be parted —
In her waving spaces she
Here is dark, ere dawn has started,
There in the sun smiles charmingly;
In misfortune and in sorrow,
Facing the storm which ruin brings —
But those storms, and peals which follow,
Are the beating of my wings.

From this earth I'll not be parted —
No, not till the end of time,
Whatsoe'er for me is fated,
Even if to nought I'm melted
On the spring's green hills sublime,
Or on chimney-bricks a-thawing,
That would please me, even so,
Like a rosy dream at dawning —
We shall not be parted, no!

1955

MIKHAILO YOHANSEN



Mikhailo Yohansen (1895-1937) was born in Kharkiv into the family of a teacher. He wrote many books of verse, fiction, and literary criticism. His poetry is marked by a laconic style and revolutionary romanticism.

* * *

A new Atlantis arose from blue abyss,
Arising in fiery cascades...
The winter we turned into summer,
And tossed up the earth to the sun...
From comets we braided our wreaths,
On Mars summoned all to a meeting.
March on, march on,
Dynamic youth of the Commune...!

Kharkiv, 1921

THE COMMUNE

Do you really think that's a Commune:
A market once, barracks-to-be?
Oh no, friend: a Commune's a city, like mountain or ocean,
Just as white, just as high, even wider.
You fear that a Commune will be somewhat gloomy,
On Sabbaths no church-bells will be set a-ringing?
Oh no, man! Then Communards wind their way home after labour
To ringing of peonies crimson.
While girls on the benches crack seeds of sunflowers,
And people are like song-fields and wheat-fields;

Above them white-winged and heavenly buildings,
A sight like a dream... flight of birds... or of seconds.
Oh miners and poets, and sailors — men of sea-lyrics,
In just this way will your eyes go seeking the Commune,
Your heart will fly down like a star — like a falling bird,
Amid hundreds and thousands of blindmen; for you
Then will be faced with — delights of terror;
Beneath the grandeur of skies at evening
Will each discover just what he hopes for so jealously
And, strange enough, even in a straw-thatched lonely cot,
Someone might even read these old-writ lines of mine.

1921
Kharkiv

THE RED ARMY

No White-Guard heroism here,
No drunken valour of gentle-born bandits,
But only a job to do, plain and simple:
To use their teeth opening gates of granite.
At Perekop where the fighting was deadly,
The sick, the hungry, the almost naked,
With bare hands captured the trenches.
With a grip of iron they wrested their freedom,
Not a bugle sounded their victory hour,
No tally of loved ones kept or kinfolk dead,
Infantry all were footsore,
Cavalry horses broke down.
At Perekop where the fighting was deadly,
The sick, the hungry, the almost naked,
With bare hands captured the trenches,
With grip of iron they wrested their freedom,
No names remembered in sad requiems —
The priests were silent, dead the bells of churches.
Toll them with tears in bronze and in iron,
They never will die in the hearts of the workers —
Those dead who fell at Perekop,
Those, the sick, the hungry, the almost naked,
Whose bare hands captured the trenches,
And with grip of iron wrested their freedom.

SPRING

On a winter poem where no word was seen,
There fell and there vanished a gleam of the spring —
This very first theme
On the last white page came wandering.

I walk so gravely and frown, for I dream
Of something... of renting land for to plough —
But round me like imps play Spring's golden gleams:
They're laughing, laughing at me, a highbrow.

Ah, sweet the smell that comes from cigar smoke,
Smoke older workers puff right in my face —
As if winter and Kharkiv but dream-invoked,
And steppe-wormwood grew and my senses dazed.

I stand here, my thoughts running thus, more or less:
“*We* make our spring in this world — or we might!”
Then someone comes near, asks with subtle finesse:
“Say mate! Would you mind giving me a light.”

SEPTEMBER

A September day is like a sword
As yet unsharpened by the autumn sun.
September winds that run so free —
The warp upon October's looms have strung.

The rows of trees, those weaving looms,
All seem to melt in oceanic autumn.
The hazel bushes, leaves and woods
All seem imbued with Soviet power.

And, drunken with real crimson wine,
The maples dance along the hills —
While Lenin's lines of burning lights
Run on their way, no end in sight.

1924

Now you are their avengers,
And will always be avengers
Of your tormented brothers
And your violated sisters.

Show respect, show respect, render honours
To the names of the famous Red Guards,
Guard and honour your regiment's colours —
For the way of a hero is hard.

When you hear but one shot of the foe,
Grab your gun, to horse and mount!
And the moment your enemies show,
Ride them down!

Spurring madly his mount,
A trooper rides in pursuit —
His rounds he won't count,
Nor for wounds care a hoot.

Let the roads not deter,
Though you die, to boot —
Put heart in your spurs
And be ready to shoot!

Let the wind lash your face,
And die, but don't stop!
Hell for leather we race
And fight till we drop.

Don't wait for orders:
Who wavers, death finds!
Hundreds of sabres
Cut through the wind.

We would twice over die the death,
For the rich black coal, for dark rye bread;
For workers' black hands, gladly risk our heads —
And would twice over die the death.

1925

HOFFMANN'S NIGHT

Into a dark abyss, down steps worn-down, rough-carven.
Down slippery inclines, down heavy, risky stairs,
Down rough-hewn steps, into the filthiest of lairs,
A fat-paunched basement, a most dingy tavern,

A den without a signboard or a name,
 Refuge of crazy burghers, hungry tramps,
 Of dreamers, cabmen, dames of evil fame,
 Pursuing sinful inspiration, in he stamps...
 Half-buried in the earth, its entrance gapes beneath —
 A drunkard's sour-breathed mouth, where, like bad teeth,
 Stick candles pouring yellow grease from every wick
 Upon the tables set with mugs heavy and thick
 As if great fists, round, swollen, far from feeble,
 Like hefty apples — fruit of good and evil,
 They stand upon the tables, bulging, knotted,
 Tin mugs with liquor, smeared with dirt and spotted.
 The tables creak and sway and dully shine,
 Fingered and fouled and stained with fat and wine
 By animals befuddled and besotted.
 Foul-smelling tallow hisses on the handles
 And necks of candlesticks with melting candles.
 The secret rites of thoughtful drinking bouts
 And pompous banquets here are carried out,
 Each drunkard a philosopher, fanatic —
 Serapio's brother — lunatic, frenetic.
 Drinking and laughing, Amadeus spends
 Here countless nights among his bosom friends,
 Poet of caustic words and crazy escapades
 King of these solemnly insane assemblies
 Which somewhat to a funeral bear resemblance,
 And before which, indeed, description fades.
 Here now he sits, a Mephistopheles half-sized,
 And over dark, ungodly feasts presides,
 Oblivious, not caring in the least
 About his wife's shoes, or official ranks and orders,
 Swallowing rancid smoke, wine and saliva, wordless,
 Arching his eyebrow, sharp as a bare nerve,
 Bending in wicked silence, full of verve,
 Like a predacious cat, his lean, lascivious spine.
 And so he sits — a giant cat, insidious and sly,
 A fancy-tortured maniac escorted
 By poets, roisterers, with grimaces contorted,
 Both sanctimonious and devilish at once,
 A sage and wizard, harlequin and dunce;
 It's he — the huge cat, kindest Pussy Murr,
 Arching his back, showing his claws — for sure! —
 Here, in this tavern blind where smoke-wreathes drift,
 At home, at magistrates, at the dull *Kammergericht*.
 A theatre of monstrosities, drunk cripples
 Here opens for the dreamer while he tipples
 And in contempt the dented eyebrow bends,
 And through his gums, unleashed, his sharp tongue sends:
 "No, I'm not drunk — I'm generous as one doomed.
 Hey, bring us candles! Light the fire! Away with gloom!

Wine! Bring us sugar, spirit, lemon-peel,
And here's to poetry! Let's drink until we reel.
Come, light the spirit in a grand auto-da-fé —
Let it flare up — in lieu of Christian souls.
Scream, crazy oracles, between the walls
Of Berlin's barmy, blasphemous café!"

Hot foams the sparkling punch, and blue flames quiver, gay.
Like living tongues, they leap into the air,
Above the gleaming cauldron's mouth they play.
"Punch for our Theodore, gentlemen!" declare
His tipsy colleagues. "Truth and inspiration
Are to be found in wine alone, sirs, since creation!"
And like the fires lit by the Holy Inquisition
Glow the cold sheen of wine, hot, fiery, scalding;
"Now, colleagues, let's drink from this buxom cauldron
The infernal fluid, though it bring us to perdition!"

The poison-cups boil hot, the liquor steams,
Like poking fingers rise the bright blue flames,
And over them, besotted, drunk to madness,
Whirl spectres in the darkness — smoky shadows,
Blurred images arise in his sick fancy,
Like red lamps — wine-flushed faces, reeling, dancing;
The noble rapiers of blue candleflames point up:
A carnival of ghosts born from the midnight cup!
In awful silence words like lightning flash
From caved-in mouths: like blades the lips they slash.
And words roll off the cliffs of phrases into madness
Like chunks of rock into a precipice;
Flames rise in pillars and like serpents hiss,
The tables shake and groan as if in sadness.
"Ha, cunning soul, once more I've snatched from death
A stormy night lit up by wine and inspiration.
I heave it on my back, catching my breath —
A cross of shame, a black sign of damnation,
And mercilessly, till the break of day,
My own dead corpse, my own poor lifeless clay
Necrophilewise, I maim and torture, full of evil,
In shame, disgust, insanity and fever.
And now I order to the ghosts of words:
From the abyss of consciousness in herds,
From the black pits of human minds crawl out
Like spiders, in a slimy, hairy crowd,
Bearing within your bodies' poison dread,
Through cracks of crippled thought out of my head,
That, poet, hypocrite, blasphemmer, leper,
Your corpses I might put on frightened paper
And that my wizened skull might swell and split
And stick vile fancy-tentacles from its black pit,
And then, gripped in my fingers, with a shriek,

My pen should pounce upon the glossy, tear-damped sheet
And in the creaky manuscript entomb
Heinous visions born of inner gloom.
Wine, brothers! Pour me out a glass of wine!
Let foaming cauldrons boil again and gleam!
Let wine-springs gush, and let their amber stream
Thick, crystal-clear, pour forth in sprays sublime!
Come, Inspiration, visit me this night,
I yearn for your seductive, foul delight!"

His angry heart tosses upon its chain,
Accursed roamer, tearing forth again.
And from an old friend's hands a glass he takes
And with the foaming wine his thirst he slakes.
His partners shout, and he stands listening,
Mad Amadeus, with his wine-glass glistening.
But, crab-like, with its poisoned stranglehold,
Weariness grabs the drinkers' bare, sore throats.
Exhausted with the wine and words, he now makes bold
To finish the satanic feast with one last toast.
The tar-soaked shag he crumples in his cold
Damp palm with concentration. While still fumes
The fiery liquor in the cauldrons seething hot,
And round the table settles silent gloom,
A sleepy servant-girl in careless hands has brought
New pouchfuls of tobacco, greasy, curly.
From porcelain pipes tobacco-wreaths come whirling;
Long pipe-stems growl in mouths already hoarse.
O best-beloved time when without words
Float drowsy dreams and thoughts dim, jumbled, glide!
With pipes pressed in their lips like clarinets,
Sucking the luscious juice in viscous jets,
The poets sit there, thoughtful, pacified.
O music of long pipes, tobacco-melodies,
Blue pirouettes of upward-flying wreaths!
Now, inspiration, thoughts, death, chatter — disappear!
Kind German devil — he won't make them quake with fear!
Where are the notes, Herr Hoffmann? Where are Haydn's concertos?
Maestro, to the clavicorn!"

For certain

He'll play them something perfect.

His pale fingers long to grip
The melody, to give it warmth, to shake alive the old musician!
And he stands up, and smoke — a flag-like strip
Spread by the faithful wind, curls at the feet of the magician.
He puts his hairy right hand on the white
Jaws of the keyboard, tamed to do his will.
The clock strikes twelve, though. Closer, closer still
Its two black fingers press as if a rite
Of swearing-in they were to carry out this night
For a new member of Serapio's fraternity,

Those fingers dipped in sacred Time 'neath Silence's dark hood.
And then says he:
"Gentlemen, time to leave! Ho, there! Where are our cloaks?
Friends, let us not be overly romantic!
It's raining in the street!"

Again the shower soaks
And scrapes like pens on paper, grim, pedantic;
The rain is decorating old Berlin
In gothic letters, in a cassock of black rain.
Who is it tearing through the prickly drops down the dark lane,
Through bushes thick, to fear not giving in?
'Tis Chancellor Hoffmann hopping over puddles
In a delirious half-sleep, with wine and shag befuddled.
The street behind him like a gamut, long and even
Floats, whirls and fades away, no traces leaving
In Amadeus' confused, besotted brain
The flat squares are all overgrown with rain,
Mobile yet immobile, bush after soaking bush
Over the drunkard, artiste, madman — goes Swoosh-Swoosh!
Ah, colonnades of thin-stemmed, streaking rain,
Ah, rain, chimeric all in slots and arrows!
Swing and splash up again, swing and play havoc
On that triangular old housefront so well known,
That house with his true wife and his hot-water-bottle,
His nightcap and his cotton dressing gown,
The big stove and the smell, so pleasant, floating
Over the copper censer with half-sour incense;
"Amalia! Are you sleeping? Come, have sense!
Open the door! Did you not hear the triple knock?"
"Off with these shoes, now! Don't bring any mud in!"
The door is opened and upstairs he clambers, thudding.
She puts his shoes beside the stove to dry
While Amadeus, musing, chuckles on the sly,
And from the stove's glazed tiles smile, rosy-faced
Young knights and maidens, chubby, azure-laced
And a fat swain coloured in cinnabar and white,
(Glazed tiles — the Dutch stonemason's sole delight!)
Clasping his worthy sweetheart tight
Also smiles courteously; dreamy, quiet,
The hot dutch stove with flowers, birds and bows
Like a well fed young wench, stands, never cooling.
The oily glaze melts, the fat satellites in rows
Shine bright with cochineal, lapis-lazuli.
The floors creak stolidly, and doors squeal everywhere.
Hoffmann takes refuge in his room — his old abode
Where on an old pot-bellied secretaire
Wait his winged pen, his inkwell, deep and broad.

THE WIND FROM THE EAST

(From *A Stalingrad Notebook*)

O turbulent east wind, you breathe and you smell
Of dust and of iron, of blood and of smoke.
Fly, witness of battle, o'er war-blackened steppes
To my own native parts, to my own native folk.

Sing over the Dnieper, the Sula arouse,
Fly over the distant Carpathians vast
And be for my people a herald of war,
Of valour and vengeance, as you flutter past.

With a thirst for revenge that will torture and scorch
Fill each breast — to each heart let it find a sure path,
So their breath might come heavy and fiery and hot
With the fire of your death-dealing, sacred wrath.

Time of merciless nights, time of bloody red dawns!
The earth roars in flames, iron screams night and day.
Fire clings to the armour of blazing hot tanks,
To their grim German steel coloured deathly-grey.

O steely, intrepid wind from the East,
Of those flames, smoke and stench your fiery breath smells.
You are soaking with sweat, you are choking with dust,
You are drunken with fire, you are scorched through with shells.

Like the folds of our free-flying Soviet flag
The sky and the valleys and foothills glow red.
'Tis the gold and the purple of Victory's stars;
Clear and bright, on the steel and the blood beams they shed.

We can see them so well, those prophetic red stars,
Those heralds of coming freedom and peace.
They illumine the eyes of our glorious dead,
Living hearts they inspire to fight on without cease.

Our men see them over the sand-banked Kubán *,
O'er the white-foaming Don, o'er the Caucasus grand.
On their well-sharpened bayonet points bear our names
Those stars, to illumine their way through the land.

They are seen by the cautious-eyed partisans, too,
In the dark of Bryansk woods, in Poltava's green vales,
In the long tails of mist which Polissya sweep through,
And on Kiev's scorched stone which for vengeance appeals.

* Kuban — river flowing north of the Caucasus

And our sister — mid terrible ashes she stands
And with thirsting and longing and languishing gaze
She looks to the heavens extending her hands,
At those stars' morning brilliance, the morning's first rays.

At their warm light rejoice the dry, wide-open eyes
Of the men never broken by torture and pain
On that blood-smeared, that battle-scorched, boot-trampled land,
On the black, barren soil of my native Ukraine,

Where her people, invincible, proud and austere,
The sons of a race loving freedom and peace,
Peer up at those stars and feel Victory near
And feel your hot breath, mighty wind from the East!

1942

THE BREAK-THROUGH

(From *A Stalingrad Notebook*)

In houses knocked askew, shot through, bashed in,
Mid smoking ashes, fire-sites and malodorous dumps,
Upon the blood-soaked patches left after clay huts,
On trees, on their black branches, on black stumps,
On twisted rails, posts, cables and steel pipes,
On the contorted city-squares whose cobble-stones
Were splotted with smear-like pools of viscous oil
And clotted blood, in sparks that swarmed like drones,
In the grey ash of farmsteads, dead and still,
While shooting guns and battle-echoes beat,
They had been lying there for many days,
With their own bodies shutting off retreat —
Crawled into basements, sprawled in muddy ditches,
Locked up in flats by bullets whistled through,
Lying in wait, with automatic rifles
Ripping in half the Nazi tunics blue.
Or they would set a mine-thrower's ribbed plate
Upon the ash of houses, warm and raw,
And gently lower the small body of a mine
Into the lethal tube's sure-shooting maw.
Or dragging down a long-necked slender cannon
Into a basement blitzed, half-dark and dank,
They struck out with their cannonfire like daggers
And crushed the humpbacked armour of a tank.
And men grew cunning, and got lean and thin,
Became sharp-sighted, grim and coolly stubborn,

Black with fatigue, till death not giving in
And furious in deadly martial labour.
Night thundered by. Day flashed in hell-bound frenzy
And hurtled down, fast as a bursting shell.
Their bodies withered, yet they were supported
By great pride, and by wrath too great to tell.
Their throats got parched, their lips were dry and cracked;
From blackened mouths their breath came fast and hot,
And yet their thirst for struggle, for revenge
Prevailed, and so all hardships were forgot.
They had experienced and had surmounted all,
Both thirst and hunger, fear and heat, steel-willed.
When wounded, they would croak: "I — die? No, by my soul!
No! I'll survive. Stand till the end. And kill."
They'd crawl at night to the commander's post,
Having disposed of the last bread and meat,
And there would ask: "Are there munitions left?"
But never "Is there anything to eat?"

So night went by, so stifling day would pass.
Grey-coated Germans pushed from every side.
And yet between the black walls of burned homes
The steadfast men held on and, fighting, died.
Here you must stand! No way back, no retreat!
No sleep, no bread; mines, shells — they must be had
For soldiers of your sacred bastions,
Your fiery, smoke-filled ruins, Stalingrad!
And they did stand. The faith in stony hearts
Would never bend, as firm as bayonets.
Meanwhile, fire, smoke and thunder far away
Came from the North, from the expanse of steppes.
There battle raged. From broken attic holes,
From roofs of houses, and from the tops of trees,
They watched the flashes, nearer every hour,
Heard thunder-claps that made men's life-blood freeze.
Along the Volga moved loose yellow ice.
The snow grew russet with the blasts of mines.
The earth was sodden. Blizzards followed thaws.
Fog and wet slush together were combined.
Then one day, in the sleezy haze of dawn,
When soldiers, cross and taciturn, had crawled
Under the hulk of a disabled tank,
High in the sky sudden steel echoes rolled.
And then they heard, quite near from where they were
How thundering, on a bare orchard fell
Right into the warm, cozy German lair
A mighty, joyous, whistling Russian shell.

The enemy howled, leaping from his den
And seized with mortal panic, rushed around.

The shells beat down on them, again, again;
Well-aimed, unerring, each its target found.
Like heralds of all-powerful assistance
These messengers from northern batteries
Came, and the men redoubled their resistance,
Regaining their exhausted energies.

They pushed through howling shells and roaring fire,
And then the genuine holocaust began.
Knocked over by the blows dealt from two sides,
The German regiments, uprooted, headlong ran.
He vanquished death, soldier of Stalingrad.
Emerging out of ruins, chaos, hell,
From fissures in the earth, from what remained
Of balconies, roofs, walls, all mixed pell-mell,

From attics filled with smoke and sparks of fire,
From basements, cellars, split and scattered bricks,
Unconquerable, ruthless, rousing fear,
Grim bearer of revenge, black, lean as a stick.
He went on through the settlement and ran
Out to the wastelands by the Volga, trampled hard,
Into the war-ploughed steppe. Upon a hill
Like an explosion, he stood still, red-starred.

Against the background of red flashes in the height,
Along the slopes, all tangled with barbed wire,
Marched over hillocks curling with thick smoke
Our Army from the north, never to stop or tire.
He rushed towards them, while the regiment
Trampled on German corpses. Their *Hooray*
Along the mighty river's winding banks
Flew, warlike, on, victorious and gay.

The battle quietened. Then together joined
Divisions from the north and from the south.
The soldiers met, like titans tall and proud,
Like humans pale and tired, with thirst-torn mouths.
They hollered something, with their hardened hands
Hugging their friends, and with a salty word
Amusing them, and sharing all they had —
Friendship, shag, bandages, the news they'd heard.
And their forgotten hearts again they felt,
And tears, black, thick as tar, rolled down unstopped
Down cheeks unshaven, soldiers' tears, so rare,
Live, born of strength, they dropped and dropped.
Seized with such joy, nobody felt ashamed
On that great day, their souls with war inflamed.

And it became so joyful, quiet and warm.
It seemed, the flight of far birds could be heard.

And then the colonel stepped out to the fore,
His own excitement by his will firm-curbed.
He wanted to say something, but could not.
No common words at such a time would do.
He hugged the new arrivals one by one
And kissed their prickly faces, all smoked through.
And they lined up before him in long rows,
And there, behind them, towering, arose
The fiery, awesome walls of Stalingrad,
Like knights of war, triumphant, ironclad.

1942

THE CLIFFS OF DOVER

(From *English Impressions*)

So here it is, that chalk so widely famous
Which seems to creep down from the seaside hills
Into the noise of Dover's silty searoads,
Into the straits so turbulent and chill.

So here they are, the cliffs of Albion,
A shield of limestone, snowy-white and low
Which Britons proud in would-be self-defence
Held at their breasts since centuries ago.

So here they are, those gate-posts of white chalk
Through which the English Channel, narrow, swift,
Hemmed in between its closely lying shores,
Drives waves on which dark stains of oil-slime drift.

The war here had entrenched itself for long
On Dover's chalk, on the sand of Calais.
Over the Channel's stream its awesome song
Had thundered through long years three times a day.

Above the sea, through tempest, snowstorm, fog,
Into the blacked-out, muted cities reached
Like towering arches of a lethal bridge,
Parabolas of shells that howled and screeched.

And suddenly the hoary wave turned red
When in among the hills, in fire and smoke,
Heavily leaping, thundered German steel,
Each shell-blast growing up like a black oak.

War nowadays has long, far-reaching hands.
Those hands have left their marks on Dover, too:

Scorched earth, blown up and broken viaducts,
The teeth of ruined homes still cutting through.

But it was neither low-browed concrete bunkers
Nor steel tank-barrages, as some would have us think,
Nor even the black-uniformed, stiff Bobby,
That stopped the war upon the Channel's brink.

In other lands the fate was to be settled
Of these close-running waves, these pallid hills;
Mid steppeland wormwood, mid the Don's green grave-mounds,
And on the Volga, whose voice none can still.

Oh yes, the foreign horde's demented swimmer
To cross the English Channel lacked the grit
Because he could not overstep the Volga.
Great Britain! Do you still remember it?

1948-1949

BEFORE MICHELANGELO'S STATUES

(From *Italian Encounters*)

The rabid boiling of magma, eruptions of ore primeval,
The white heat and glow of marble, the roar of falling wild stone,
The heavy breath of volcanoes, the birth-throes of flesh almighty —
The sculptor with his steel chisel made the boulder split with a groan.

Thus in their ageless vortex atoms and forms and projects
Whirled and tossed and exploded, craved for measure and flesh,
Foamed over dark abysses, beat against sheer obstructions,
Stabbed out like protuberances, plunging down with a crash.

Thus, in truth's revelations, in premonitions of essence,
He pounded the will-less rock, the wordless stone blocks he crushed,
And tearing chaos asunder, arms rose, unchained, unfettered,
Out of the bowels of volcanoes from which molten lava gushed.

The titan's torso then straightened, his roar broke out of the silence,
His muscular spine unbending, lordly, he then stepped forth.
Greedily the Maestro out of the deep black chasm
Extracted this knot of will-power, this issue of stubborn force.

And loud through eternity echoed out of the marble canyon
A cry, just like life audacious, the birthcry of humans loud,
The spirit's battlecry fearless, the howl of creative torture,
The cry by which life is distinguished from non-existence's shroud,

Which brings worlds clashing together, atomic nuclei crushing,
Growing with thirst for research, with the longing to find and invent,
All boundaries overstepping, struggling, fighting, creating,
Silent, then once more vocal, fall followed by new ascent.

2

On great blocks of marble he chiselled the features
Of titans, who tore out of nothingness then,
Awakening, thirsting, unkind, angry creatures,
Rebellious, yet worthy of being called men.
With brows taut as bows, with triangular cheekbones,
With noses squashed, crooked, with twisted-up backbones —
That stonehewer, sculptor, if not so humane,
Could act as a deity, well worth the name —
He'd sounded the depths of humanity's soul,
He'd felt all the torture and joy of creation,
The great thirst for knowledge, for witnessing all,
The lure of far targets, search without cessation.

3

PIETA

All's alien here to me: these towering vaults,
Their haughty gilt — they look like copper bowls —
The organ-storms with heavy thunder-bolts,
The pompous masses deaf to human souls,
The crisscrossed light-beams breaking through the haze,
The incense that smells of sin and of temptation,
Mosaics staring with hypnotic gaze,
The floor and wall-stones, red, in stiff formation,
The fussy flock of nuns that flit about
Like busy blackbirds soon to fly off south.

All's alien here to me, unravelled and known well,
And underneath the gilded dome for me
There's no deceit, no gift, no mystery,
Just would-be secrets, words that nothing tell.
Yet here, abruptly, in a niche half-dark
Scarce lit by candles softly glimmering,
We saw a miracle that stole our hearts,
A sight that set us quietly pondering.
It seemed like an abandoned child, alone
In this great pompous, soulless wilderness,
Inspiring thoughts profound in all alive,
Its meaning unconcealed, easy to guess.
Palmbbranch-like, limp and brittle, lies a body
Across her knees. It is her only son.

All's over. He lies stretched out, weak and broken,
And never will get up again. He's gone.
The mother looks into his empty eyes,
At the mute lips, the arms submissive, thin.
She knows all, and she will accept no lies —
No consolations — she will not be taken in.
Not pompous words that do nobody good,
Not mercy's lukewarm myrrh with scented breath —
The valour, pain and pride of motherhood
Have fought off, held at bay the power of death.
So for five centuries she sits with her dead son,
This woman mourning for all Italy.
Yet after all that time she's not become
Cold dust or a cold marble effigy.
Yes, maybe only yesterday she'd brought
Him here through heavy doors armoured with brass;
From bullets of carabinieri nought
Could save her first-born, soon from life to pass.
In an unequal, fierce and fast-fought skirmish
Again his blood was shed on Roman soil,
His blood, the blood of Gramsci and Togliatti
Italian communists — known or perhaps unknown.
They know well what it is to die for others,
They know, if anyone, what noble targets are,
Dying in the embraces of their mother —
Italy — Immortality — Pietá.

1961-1962

ON SARDINIA

(From *Italian Encounters*)

Where heat-waves choke, where rusty grassblades poke
From slag-heaps bluish-grey, from dung, from tatters,
Where hunger's come to stay, hanging above the folk,
Jobless and silent, while the rich grow fatter,
Where winds in empty yards drive dust about,
Where staring into the hot sky, gray miners sit,
Where kids don't laugh and women do not shout,
As quiet as in a hungry fainting fit,
Where stoves no longer smell of bitter smoke
And where habitually old men sit listening
To hunger's scarce-heard plaintive whimpering,
I went. I saw it all. Black hands I shook
And in their boundless suffering partook.
Above the luckless, foodless, jobless valley
I raised a miner's baby in my arms —
Its hunger-riven, tiny little body,

Lean hands not for a moment staying calm,
 Stretched out like little beams of light aflutter,
 Its head too heavy for it, hanging low,
 Its eyes like little honey-bees aglow,
 Burning like sparks, like twinkling stars aglitter.
 As if my grandson, that Sardinian boy
 I held up in my arms, then felt — this land,
 This folk so poor, these miners with black hands
 Were part of me — I shared their grief and joy,
 Their conscience I shared, their aspirations;
 I had the right to call them comrades in ideas,
 In dreams, in suffering and exaltation,
 In all that in my consciousness appears:
 Truth, honour — all that from life's deepest deeps
 I brought out, as a wealth till death to keep...
 With confidence I raise towards the skies
 This human bud, this child with beaming eyes
 Above the mournful yellow cliffs that rise
 To face the ruthless lash of rockets whining.
 Not in my hands alone does it ascend
 Towards songs and love, towards a future shining,
 This tender burden which I cherish without end,
 This child, warm, soft and smiling with sheer joy;
 Not only the strong hands of miners there —
 The hands of thousands of Sardinian unemployed
 Uphold him o'er this barren wasteland where
 Red rust covers the hatches of closed mines,
 Where cactuses alone stand green in fields,
 Where in the bare sky rocket after rocket whines.
 No — millions of hands, strong and gentle, shield
 And hold up Hope, the world's beloved child.
 You hear that noise, like thunder rolling wild
 Across the sky? Yet not one eyebrow flinches,
 No fear shows in Sardinians' rugged features.
 Such is this island of whose heart I'm sure,
 Proud, valiant, hard-working, poor yet pure.

2

Peopleless wastes without end,
 Fields on which nothing grows,
 Roadways smoky as ash,
 Endless, sticky as tar...
 Tin-clad, the spire of a church
 Among the low hillocks shows.
 People mid tumbledown huts
 Stir in the streets afar.
 Women in worn black clothes;
 Features noble and fine

Where poverty, grief and toil
 Left their indelible mark.
 Leaning forward, they peer
 Into these eyes of mine,
 Old men, heavy and dark,
 Wrinkled, time-burdened, wise.
 The coal-blackened miners' crowd
 Surrounds me just as before.
 From under their eyebrows thick
 Shine their curious eyes.
 Into their faces' skin
 Coal-dust has eaten deep;
 Like olive-branches, blue veins
 On their big hands appear.
 Men of the Carbon mines,
 Stern, kindly traditions they keep,
 Hardened by ceaseless toil,
 By struggle year after year.
 Here they have come today,
 Filling the spacious hall;
 Blocking the doors they stand
 Stretching their hands to me,
 Hundreds of brotherly hands —
 In steel solidarity.
 Attentive, I read the tale
 Written in toil-tired eyes,
 The age-old story inscribed
 On faces furrowed and tanned.
 Only in books in my time
 Had I read such a tale, old and wise;
 Here it is written in blood,
 Its call comes to me from all hands.
 Here in the flutter of hearts
 Its mournful chapters pulsate.
 In ruthlessly ruined lives
 Its conflicts stand out in relief.
 No silence here, and no peace —
 For work they have long had to wait.
 No bread and nothing to eat:
 Only, struggle, poverty, grief.
 Children without ABC's,
 Women without decorations.
 Hands without pickaxes.
 Mines standing idle and quiet.
 No future to look forward to —
 No work and no expectations.
 The fires in their homes have gone out,
 No more do their eyes beam light,
 No dawns illumine their windows,
 No songs sound on holidays.

Only hope still glows in their bosoms,
 A longing for happiness;
Holy as daily bread,
 Enduring as steel it stays;
Now suddenly it breaks forth
 From the abyss of distress,
From the depths of the working folk,
 Out of their very souls
In the anthem of hope,
 “The *Internationale*.”
Fumbling with their fingers
 The ends of their black, patched shawls,
Pressing to weary bosoms
 Their little ones, one and all.
With the melody grow and straighten
 These women, sorrowful, tired,
As if in front of an altar
 Standing there in a row.
A boy’s pure and vibrant discant
 Dove-like, ascends to the spire,
Bearing the words that thunder
 Heavy, with wrath aglow;
In the Sardinian dialect
 In chorus the miners sing.
Let my own fathers’ language
 Into their singing weave.
Together in time and rhythm
 Together in expectations and woe
Never have I had such feelings!
 How vibrant the voices ring!
Could any other emotion
 So high my spirit upheave?
I feel I am growing stronger,
 With power my bosom expands.
Hundreds of millions of shoulders
 Press to my shoulders tight.
Close to the miners’ dwellings
 A whole great universe stands.
With my voice, with my thoughts commingling,
 The world’s voice soars to the heights.
I stand with my time together,
 With my class in a sacred tryst:
In this lies my life’s true meaning,
 Its genuine, deepest gist!
Get up on your feet, not seeking
 For phrases — no time to be missed!
Simply say to these people:
 I’m with you, a Communist!

Sticky colourful mixtures in exchange for all that I see —
 I put them all on the cartons of pictures drawn artlessly
 To entertain noisy carousers, to lure the drunkard and bum —
 As signboards hung over the entrance of wine-cellars where they come
 Or in motley shreds upon walls green with moss and slimy with mould
 To soak in the rain, discoloured, decaying from damp and cold.
 Bears illumined by moonlight, yellow and big-eyed deer,
 Crimson meat upon skewers, wine in kegs with black coal-tar smeared,
 And also in wineskins — nude, shameless as fat old men;
 My homeless, shelterless paintings bleaching in dive and den,
 They rot and they get disfigured, swollen, broken and slumped,
 Piled in a heap in a parlour, or into a cellar dumped.
 Only those that a purchaser's fancy finds pretty and most attractive
 Are grabbed and carried off home by inn-keepers, my benefactors.
 I'll put up before my eyes in a corner that lighter seems
 My sad-eyed, sorrowful visions, unfinished, bodiless dreams:
 The proud looks of Queen Tamara *, an eagle's unblinking gaze,
 The farewell glance of a soldier, a mourner's eyes in a haze;
 Eyes — two holes in the cranium drilled to study the world,
 Two beams, two bright shafts of lightning at another's eyes point-blank
hurled.

Bringing new hope to people in whom all hope has long ceased
 But it's wasted, my message painted in the eyes of man and of beast,
 Stifled under thick market-dust, in dim taverns where loafers feast.
 In a cubbyhole near the kitchen like a homeless mongrel I mope,
 Gone is my wondrous vision on which I had laid such hope,
 My oil-paint is steadily dying, my oilskin is colourless, dull —
 My deathly and senseless palette — irretrievably void and null!
 How to surmount these misfortunes? Scrape off, smear, tear with pain?
 Spit at the dreary rectangle, like a castrate's face flat and plain?
 I stand before it — my doom, my dust, my coffin, my grave,
 Hollow — a hole without bottom — a pit from which nothing can save.
 On it, as if on a cross, hope languishes, crucified, numb,
 Dried like a wilted fruit, like a scarified ulcer become.
 What will I gaze at while dying, with eyes both empty and sore?
 What tint will appear before me, by nobody seen before?
 This crazy bazaar of a world, like a jester in make-up and paint,
 Will trample upon my pictures, dance past them, useless and quaint.
 Fruitless as yellow leaves and yellow as rust on green,
 On a damp strawbed I'll die, will-less, unheard, unseen.
 Soft as an angel will fly the evening beam on the ceiling;
 Its message I will not hear, in this desert, noisy, unfeeling.
 And God will refuse to have with my poor, lost soul any dealings
 By no one will I be remembered, for no one serve as a warning.
 Perhaps only tramps will convene and drink from a horn in mourning;
 With the clumsy crate bearing my dust on its final way they will toil,
 And on my coffin will knock clods of generous Georgian soil,

* Tamara (Tamar), Queen of Georgia (1184-1207)

Wishing an idler rest, though really he never earned it:
Knock-knock, knock-knock, knock-knock, like someone knocking in
earnest:
"If you're alive, o man, open to me for a minute!"

An old man's motionless eyes from beneath knitted eyebrows gaze,
Looking at death and want and other cruel things all his days.
Shoulders strong, but helplessly drooping, head upon bosom dropped,
Accustomed to push among crowds in a hubbub that never stopped,
The janitor of the tavern, a hoarse-voiced, rude-spoken old man,
Stands in the doorway, blocking the way with his form, heavy, tan,
And a tray loaded up with viands — all sorts of fruit, chunks of meat,
He carries, slow, in his hands, as at funeral wakes is meet.
The food, like a holy mount, is enveloped with odours sweet,
Herb-roots, flowers and stalks around its edges piled neat.
Every shapely apple gilded by the sun's heat,
Every firm-bodied berry with juice, thick and pure, replete;
The wine in the jug smells of honey, of summer's delight and warmth,
The fragrance of faded roses and bitter pips it sends forth.
The drink in the clay jug splashes as if in farewell to this world,
Alien, unwelcoming, grey-hued, by February rainshowers blurred.
The green shoots of springtime grasses, sparkling red pepper pods
Of every tint and colour — sweet, bitter, salt — food of the gods!
Prancing, dancing like horses in an impulsive race
On this square out of beaten copper — this gay-patterned tray's
fecund space.

Ah, gorgeous Georgian fig-tree! I recognize its sweet breath,
The walls disappear abruptly, and the kitchen stench dies at length;
The warm wind of green Tbilisi tears into the stinking hole;
Who sent you to me, dear fellow? You are just in time, 'pon my soul!
Who laid out those lovely tidbits so skillfully on the tray?
Who could dispense with pity and reproofs to a vagabond, say?
Who was it spent so much effort, inventive, industrious, kind,
For me not to die here forgotten, in dirty barracks confined?
"You think I brought this because in your life you've not guzzled enough?
You think it's just heaps of roast meat, onions, pepper and other such stuff?
You think that I've come here because I'm drunk as a lord, probably?"
"No, I think it's an omen of joy — it is my immortality —
These fruits will forever retain my colours' bright interplay,
These apples will keep my old gilt — forever and ever and aye.
I haven't ever served guzzlers — beauty and youth served my art.
No, I will not die completely — there's no fear of death in my heart.
And so you will not deceive me, although you have come disguised
As the janitor of a tavern — I can still trust my sharp old eyes,
Your all-seeing eye looks sternly yet kindly, with love at me,
God's true herald, you bring me assurance of my immortality!"

THE GODS OF GREECE

(From *Memories of Uman* *)

Clashing, sparkling, glistening,
Rearing, prancing, whistling,
Long-shanked trombones shining bright,
Band-drums booming, fat and tight,
French horns shrilly, loudly blaring,
Trumpets debonnaire and daring,
Mouth-pieces on pouted lips,
Tearing the silence into strips,
With its usual pomp and noise,
With its solemnness and poise,
The dare-devil eighth regiment
Entered the old settlement.
In front the band came playing loud,
Behind it horsemen in a crowd,
Noisy, dusty, cantered through;
In the wind their forelocks flew.
Under riders horses shivered,
Snorting, neighing, rumps aquiver.
Horsehoofs clopped along the road,
Clouds of dust rose thick and broad,
Flew from under feet and hoofs,
Reaching to the very roofs,
And menacingly through the dust
Furtive looks the horses cast
With their crimson, bloodshot eyes,
Crazy with the heat and cries.

So gloriously into town rode the red cavalry,
Pushed through the marketplace toward the station,
Led by the music roaring savagely,
Trilling and tootling, wild with animation
And in the front row, moving on,
Ribald, hoarse with effort gone,
Blaring in tune or out of tune,
Wriggler, juggler, joker, loon —
The ringing, singing
Cornet-a-piston,
The golden, sparkling
Cornet-a-piston.
Whining, moaning with tearful groan,
Cajoling, sang the cornet-a-piston
Of white acacia-sprays, days long-gone —
Sang the heart-rending, soulful cornet-a-piston,
The swordsmen, boisterers regimental
All listening to the tune sentimental.

* Uman — town in Cherkasy Region

What they wish is to gallop over the range,
But no — their manners have had to change.
Canter. Pull up. No swearing, no cursing!
Who's lagging there? —
Over his trusty horse
Ominously the commissar rose
And, stern, looked back at the motley rows.
Scarred and pocked with black coal and grime
By a whole lifetime spent in a mine
Firm and powerful, never idle,
His hands grip tight his horse's bridle.
His old eyes burn with hate for the foes,
His gunholster in the sunshine glows.

The noise seems to choke; it gulps and dies.
Clanking, in rhythm, the regiment rides,
Obviously ignorant of the fact
That Uman will be their last bivouac;
In the commissar's field-case strict orders lie
From H. Q., to be carried out by-and-by:
Some to be sent off to the reserve,
Some — in attack brigades to serve;
Squabblers and brawlers — the ruffianly batch
Disarmed, to the army tribunal dispatched.
On to their fate they gallop ahead,
Auburn, brunet, blond and red-head,
Soldierly stature, forelocks dashing,
Stubborn foreheads, bristling moustaches;
Roisterer, yokel, hobo, tramp,
Brought by wind or verdict to the regiment camp.
One shaved pate showed a spot like a penny
Where the Cossack had grown a horsetail-like pennant;
From under another's cap-peak stuck
Like a gorgeous nosegay, a riotous lock,
Curled and petted, with a fragrant smell,
In the band of Makhno anointed well;
In Krasnov's white troops another had doffed
A British-made tunic, swanky and soft,
With shoulderstraps, though, no longer in view,
Torn off while scampering from pursuit.
A bewildering mix of features and origins,
Riff-raff that joined the victorious force,
Able to shoot, chop — maraude, forage,
But unfit to enter the future, of course.

A crazy tangle of faces and fortunes,
The leavings of battle, the shreds of frays —
A bewildering, war-scorched picture
Motley in uniform, ammunition and face
In well-worn, sun-bleached ex-hussar tunics,

Capes from officers claimed by death,
 Grey coats seized from yellow-blue units *,
 Army breeches of mammoth breadth:
 Pants like meadows, all flowers and garlands
 On carpet plush of fantastic hues
 Sewn in the days when they'd swaggered as bandits
 More for devilry than for use.
 One unit commander was the swankiest ever —
 His company envied the pants he'd got on,
 Their seat portraying the Queen of Sheba
 Together with wise king Solomon.
 When his stallion galloped, like two broad wings
 Over its rump the pictures spread:
 The Queen in her rosy, silky things
 And the king robed in blue from foot to head.
 The commissar's civilian pants and jacket
 Aroused the brawlers disapproval and despair,
 Confined, though, to sneers; words weren't risked to back it;
 Bah! Let them smirk — the old man didn't care.
 Plain shoes he thrust into stirrups undeterred
 And as he rode he never even spurred
 His trusty mount, a frisky bay mare.
 The two of them, they made a perfect pair;
 Yet he, too, could fight and knew his men,
 The first to canter into attack;
 Among his lusty-mouthed regiment
 Authority the old man didn't lack.
 Now, withdrawn and silent, with knitted brows
 He rode behind the regimental standard.
 Broad waves of music above him rose,
 So, thunderous, in ceremonial formation
 As bugles blared, drums beat and horses neighed
 They entered Uman in a noisy cavalcade
 And pitched their camp beside the railway station.
 Now all, it seemed, would be restored to order;
 The commissar could doze an hour or so
 If close beside the station border
 A sharp train whistle didn't blow.
 Wherefrom? Why? Mid sleepers long decayed
 Wormwood had long been bristling dense;
 Whistles had not been heard for a decade,
 The rails on the tracks gone rusty long since.
 But now among the plane-trees, willows and acacias
 Out crawled a squat, strange little locomotive,
 Pushed to the ramp, and slow and cautious,
 Near the burned packhouse, hissing, halted.
 With a deafening squeal of brakes on wheels
 The serpentine string of freightwaggons stills.

* Yellow-blue — colours of the nationalist army of Petlura

Up to the engine, puffing at leisure,
 With a machine-gun ran soldier-lads.
 The station-master, with footsteps measured,
 Paced up and down, in a red cap clad.
 "Who's in Khristinivka?" "Reds — our mates.
 A trainload of firewood's been sent to Uman.
 In the mail-coach there's salt and newspapers comin'.
 From Odessa they've brought us a waggon of crates."
 "You hear, boys? Surprise gifts from Mother Odessa!"
 "Hey, stand back, you bastards, let sailors pass!"
 "Sailors? You? Raggamuffins, yessir!"
 "Raggamuffin yourself! Makhnovite, I guess?"
 "It's government property! Don't come near!"
 "You want to taste this?" "Touch me, just try!"
 "Enough, you louse!" "Leave my blouse, you hear?"
 "Damn! Cut it out, boys, the commissar's near!"
 He walked from the platform, official and dry,
 And stopped. "Who's in charge? This instant, come here!
 Where's your mandate? Got none, I fear.
 Except for railwaymen, all stand by!"

The crowd, a sudden miracle expecting:
 Crates of wine, shag, canned food or boots,
 Before the waggon kept milling, hectic,
 Chattering, shoving, with shouts and hoots.
 Like the heaviest avalanche, sunshine-fed,
 Excitement tossed them from end to end.
 Over the station a hot haze stood still —
 Over the water-tower, fire-blackened, old,
 Arousing sharp thirst and a somnolence sunborn.
 The steppe lay mute, only dust rustled, stubborn.
 Quickly they opened the dark square hole.
 People swarmed in, fussed about inside.
 Out on the platform great boxes were hauled
 Words in black paint were clearly inscribed
 On the planed dealboard, soiled and grey;
 Shavings, rags, rubbish littered the way.
 The men, breathing heavily, worked away.

The boxes broke into pieces, the sun burst in with mad force —
 The sun, enormous, and naked, the sun, cruel as slashing swords.
 It hurtled down on the marble, splashed in a vortex of sparks,
 And all of a sudden appeared, blinding the people's eyes,
 The beautiful stone, like live flesh, glaring, golden with sunshine,
 Brought from Ligurian seashores, from the quarries of far-off Carrara,
 Selected by human art for depicting beauty and joy,
 The dazzling marble of Italy lay there, pierced through by sunshine,
 Glittering, brilliant, dreamlike, before the people astonished.
 Dumbfound, the crowd fell silent; the beams struck their eyes, aquiver;
 Out of the waggon's darkness emerged ancient gods full of beauty

And where could I have met them in my time
In their eternal loveliness and grace,
I, who have sweated all my livelong days
Deep down beneath the earth in a dark mine,
And now go marching over wartime ways...
So best of all," he thought, "let people see
How beautiful can men and women be,
And know that for us too the time is near
When everyone will like a god appear.
Yes, let them get a glimpse of future times
When grace and beauty will be all mankind's!
Let lofty feelings in their hearts awake.
These statues to Sofiyivka I'll take;
Of course, it has to be arranged beforehand
With the Povitkom *
To be employed
For concrete purposes of politpropaganda
Among the soldiers
And the Uman working masses."
Deciding so,
The commissar turned back
And walked away toward the railway station.
Meanwhile, the company commander,
Who had only ironically sneered,
Stepped out of the crowd, moved it asunder,
Giving all a sense of disaster and fear
By the way he strode over the platform, dressed
In his breeches which made him look
Like the Cyrillic letter Φ which is
Haughty as a real grand duke.
And, just to accentuate the hell of it,
Striking awe into heart and mind,
Boldly outlined in swanky velvet,
Moved his powerful behind.
All worked up with indignation,
In a temper towering hot,
"Gods be damned!" he yelled, impatient,
"Time we bust the bloody lot!"
Seething, the man shook all over with rancour.
Something inside him, he felt, was burning,
Boiling over with bestial anger
For blood and destruction blindly yearning.
The devil inside him strove to burst out:
Too much to bear, to suppress, to keep mute.
Silence gripped the suspense-held crowd.
There now,
Shoot!

* Povitkom — Party Committee of a *povit* administrative unit in the first years of Soviet power

Let the bullet fly on unhindered,
Whistle and pierce and maim and smash.
Let the solid marble be splintered,
Into fine powder let it be dashed.
The mauser — click! —
On his forearm fell.
The butt gave a kick,
Bucked like hell.
Upholding the stump of an elbow,
Stands the bullet-hit god.
He sways, as if uncertain,
“To escape? But where? On what?”
Again the blue-black mauser
Sticks from a scarlet fist.
Closer, the target, closer
To the gunsight seen in a mist.
Whack it. Wallop it. Bash it.
Smash it to smithereens.
Now then, He can't miss, dash it,
He's shot since his early teens.
That shameless goddess with a tempting shoulder!
One... Two... Three...
Now, let the bullet scald 'er!
But then, suddenly...
Suddenly earthward the mauser flops.
Who dared?
He's as good as a goner.
“Bury you ten yards deep in slops,”
Curses the fuming gunner.
The crowd hold their breath.
The commissar stands
Coldly looking into his eyes.
Will he strike, set his boot to his pants?..
Knock his block off? — the crowd surmise.
“Here, that pistol,” the commissar stretched
A hand to the other's fingers clenched.
The mauser jerked in his fist like a cur
With rabid fury, thirst, mad desire,
And suddenly dropped its sad face, as it were,
Its fine-moulded body slumping aside.
And the commissar took it out of his hand
And, mute and wilted, the man, all lonely,
In his queer dress on the platform stands
As if thunder-struck, amazed and stony.
His hussar tunic suddenly bleached,
His gorgeous breeches suddenly faded,
Lost and friendless, shrunk to a midge,
Escorted, he plodded stationward.

In the morning all the townfolk once again were in a hubbub,
So that cottage-windows jangled with their last unbroken glass.
In the square beside the station, covered thick with dust and sunburn,
Bandmen marched along with music and a blinding gleam of brass.
Once again the bugles blather and the drums like thunder rattle,
Once again clop-clop! go horseshoes while machine-gun carts fly by.
In the carts as if in chariots prepared for mortal battle,
Stuffed with hay and lined with carpets, gods and goddesses tower high.
All around, reduced to silence, stood a crowd of men and women,
Staring at the train of guncarts trundling on through muted Uman.
Many guests had local people met with everlasting patience;
During half a year they'd seen a dozen new administrations...
But such visitors from heaven, wonders out of ancient lore,
Uman folk had never witnessed, never marvelled at before.

See there, a haughty goddess towers on a carpet-lined guncart,
Peering with eyes of marble at the streets of dust-veiled Uman,
Over the heads of people, meagre and sorry creatures!
Miserable and gloomy, yet they will not start jeering
At her beautiful body, her fertile, life-giving lap.
After her follows a god, his splintered arm forward pointing,
As if to ask the way from Uman to Eternal Light,
The Ukraine's radiant future, new faith to fight for and cherish.
Next, on a third cart, a giant, massive and bushy-bearded,
His torso draped in a robe, towards the people inclines,
As if with generous hand to deliver his scroll to the public.
After these two thousand years, who will accept it by right,
Enscrolled by the mighty chronicler, telling of faith and sorrow?
You there, winged messengerboy, what are the tidings you carry
To the town's sorry huts, to the park with its rustling chestnuts?
What do you bring man?

Joy?

The Light of the heavens?

New hope?

Come, quench our spirits' thirst, bring joy to our eyes worn with sorrow;
We humans are gods as well, though moulded from suffering clay.
Here we await a future worthy of our great exploits,
And we welcome you, dwellers of radiant mountain heights,
Not as aliens and strangers, but as our friends and fellows,
Welcome, welcome to us, into our land and hearts!

Thus the commissar mused
As he followed the guncarts, directing
With a wand of fresh willow his trusty, obedient bay.
That year abounded in rainshowers. Morning clouds were collecting.
The gods of Greece would drink deep of a steppe-storm's nectar that day.

SHOSTAKOVICH: SEVENTH SYMPHONY

Ashes lay red. Ruins remained of homes,
Slit open, slashed into small splinters, burned.
Where coal on coal in pits like smithies glowed,
Rust turned to blood, blood into red rust turned,
Among the ruins, over burdock and bent steel,
Shying away when walls above me rocked,
Stepping over the pools and rubble-heaps,
Not by myself, with a whole crowd I walked.
Thunder had ceased already overhead.
September showed us its transparent blue.
Only the houses and our souls groaned, causing dread,
And black-armed trees writhed, by hot steel shot through.
This ash-strewn playground of the winds and Death
Had not yet burned down to the very end.
Grief-wounded hearts were not yet healed — our breath
Still jerky — woe still gnawed, burned, rent.
But thoughts already showed a different trend
And efforts were directed otherwise,
Though from Lviv hills loud thunderpeals still went,
The Vistula still uttered doleful cries.
Yes, we had won. We, victors, marched on, brave,
Winged, skilled in many battles, iron-willed,
Beyond the river Niemen's blood-stained wave
And the Carpathian smoke-wreathed, steep-flanked hills.
Along the mournful Kiev highway slogging
In sweat-soaked shirts still without shoulderstraps,
Our jackboots worn and battered, smeared and soggy,
We trudged together toughened by mishaps,
And entered the white-columned, spacious hall,
There to give up to beauty and our thoughts.
Fun, inspiration — what needed each soul?
Oblivion, dreams or sleep — was that we sought?
What had we come for, tireless toilers, soldiers,
From all those ruins into music's realm?
It's hard to drag us from the ashes that still smoulder,
From monstrous toil, from our undying hell,
From grief unquieted, unabated fear,
From the nightmarish ash of Babin Yar *,
From fresh graves on the Dnieper's sand-cliffs sheer.
And yet not only pain and ash are there,
But growing confidence in new, unheard-of might,
The rows of bricks laid out in flawless order,
The bluish steel of newly-welded girders
And fearless souls striving towards vistas bright.

* Babin Yar (Rus. Babiy Yar) — place near Kiev where over 100,000 Soviet civilians and POWs were executed by the Nazis in 1941-1943

And so we come into that hall with columns white
 Although not knowing what to seek from it:
 Fitting ourselves into the seats like boulders,
 Exchanging shards of rough-hewn words, we sit,
 Shaking the load of cares from weary shoulders,
 We, people, both alike and multifacial
 With different destinies and souls and speech.
 It isn't time yet, o musicians,
 For you to play, for us to hear the touche.
 We still lack time to analyze ourselves
 And look ahead without anxiety.
 With thirst and pain each bosom here still swells,
 In each his skeleton still bares death-threatening teeth.
 We do not know yet why, what for we enter
 This hall lit with convulsive chandeliers,
 Chockful of people — grey-faced, deathly weary
 Whose parched lips softly whispering one hears.
 But now all quietens down, and all turn speechless.
 The violinists, trumpeters all freeze
 As an unusually pale conductor
 Staggeres across the stage as in disease.
 Then the conductor's passion bursts with force
 Through the blue twilight that has lulled each sense.
 Abruptly open wide, stand radiant doors
 For us into the dawn of three years since;
 Up the harmonious steps of the Propylaea
 And through the colonnades, among loud chords,
 The dawn is entered by men handsome, proud and virile
 With which the name of Man indeed accords.
 The early sky blooms pink. Then golden midday.
 Mauve twilight. Bodies filled with sweet fatigue,
 Like gladiolus sprays, blue dusk falls on the meadow.
 Lakes evening-green, discoloured streak by streak.
 Thin clouds play overhead. Delight and inspiration
 Luxuriant, the sunset skyline glows,
 And on the peaceful and serene horizon
 The farewell shade of dreamy evening shows,
 Borne on the waves of flute-notes far away.
 Slowly. So very slowly rock and sway
 Gentle and thoughtful waters fathoms deep,
 Spreading soft silence, lulling us to sleep.
 Abruptly, though, beyond the skyline drums tattoo.
 The thoughtless roar mounts in audacity and fury.
 Tattoos. Again. They drum! They shriek anew.
 They crave for room. For space. Then, weird and eerie,
 A hoarse, hard snarl: *Vorwärts!* Coarse throats yell *Sieg!*
Erste Kolonne... Zweite... Dritte... Big
 Monsters come charging. Murderers march. The tramp of boots
 Approaches, growing bolder, deeper, weightier...
 Shots at the world, the steppes. At the blue skies they shoot.

Move on. Roar, mouth agape, with crazy hatred.
Blows. Thunder. Tongues of fire, unbridled, leap.
Noise. Hammering. Hullabaloo and shouts.
And rhomboids of armoured monsters creep.
Bombs screwing through the sky all silence oust.
Death and destruction spread league after league.
Sieg? Sieg? Sieg?
Panting, I stood over the yellow foaming Don,
Over the chaos and the noise of river crossings.
Like bitter clots of gall my breath came from
My throat that had grown hoarse with hate and cursing.
I walked along Fate's knife-edge, tortured so,
Such unendurable power surging in my breast,
That to crawl out with a grenade and throw
Myself beneath a tank would have been best.
To take a last look at the sky sublime,
Then — crunching bone, torn flesh, the end of Time...
I didn't fall, though — on I plodded by the Volga
And suffered when steel gales whipped Stalingrad.
I thought, a minute, and I'd drop down in the roadway
Not even noticing the shell that struck me dead.
I didn't look for death, nor run from it. Though inches
Away from me, it always followed by my side,
Though to the sand-bottom of quaking trenches
I'd squeezed, sprawled, frozen to the spot from death to hide.
The bleeding Volga's crater-pitted sandbanks.
Doomsday incarnate. Point of no return.
Stand, Stalingrad, keep standing, firm and stern!
Battery, fire! Fire from your piled-up sandbags.
Blow follows blow, their frenzied force increasing.
Triumphant Future isn't near at all.
Millions will die yet. Groans will sound unceasing.
To storm and death the bugler yet will call.
But it is dawning. It will soon be dawn.
Blessed be the rose-tinged light before the morn!
Many will be the pain-wracked roads that lead
To the Triumphal Gate on Victory Day.
But omens of its coming he could read,
This artiste, stern, with pain wasting away.
Houses of Leningrad! The night-long vigils
At never-sleeping anti-aircraft posts
With toothy tongs incendiaries catching,
To bury them — a job of which none boasts.
Heart-rending screeches. Hammering and thunder.
The distance criss-crossed by the blinding beams.
Then that October day. O'er notes he'd ponder...
A grand piano. Empty classrooms. Dreams.
And he, he — boylike, screwing up his eyes,
Nervously twiddling his glasses,
Peers into what still far before us lies:

Tomorrow's victories, tomorrow's dire disasters.
 He sees it clearly, hears it loudly thunder,
 The great, grand dawn that splits the gloom asunder.
 To work now — to foretell it. Not to tarry.
 It's in his heart already, in his chords,
 Among the people. On the march. A warrior,
 Joyous, invincible, its beauty beyond words.
 It's here, above us, above all who've gathered,
 Kiev's sad women. Kiev's men in gloom.
 And like a miracle wrought by us all, above us
 It rises, as mankind's great dawn, to bloom.
 Though still the dark of ruins curls around us,
 Though on our faces still lies dust and blood,
 Yet we believe, know — it was not for nothing
 We struggled, fought, shed blood, lay in the mud.
 Our tortured Kiev will erase all trace
 Of what the raging deluge left on all.
 You, Comrade Dmitry *, said it to our face,
 What each of us is saying in his soul:
 That grief is transient, that life will win at last!
 The woeful pathos of the Seventh Symphony,
 The fire of this composer's music-blast,
 This thunder-wielder, small, lean, weary, that we see
 Joins each with each, welds hearts in one grand union.
 O music, blessed be your sublime communion!

1977

LEONTOVICH'S WELL

He stopped short in the steppe and he listened, intent, to the groan
and the moan
 With which his time echoed, with which on all sides he was penned.
 They came from all over the land, all that murmur and hum, all that drone;
 No silence is there for the heart, for its songs, nay, no limit nor end,
 No end to the steppe's vibrant music, the wheatears' low, resonant tone,
 To the chords of the sky and the clear-voiced, fierce song of the wind.
They transcend
 All habitual canons established a long time ago, long since known,
 And the artiste's small heart with their power, with their tuneful
abundance they rend.

Calm down, grey-eyed seeker of musical joys,
 Give ear to your radiant soul's restless voice.
 Nature's whisper will tell you which way you must go
 To find out the source from which music may flow.

* Dmitry Shostakovich

There, near you, go down to that grassy green dell
 Where shines the bright eye of a plain village well
 Made up of great logs — row on row, seasoned oak,
 Getting harder, the longer in water they soak.
 Bend the rushes and rue,
 Part the grass with sweet smell:
 Live, transparent, there stands
 A forgotten old well,
 Built upon the moist ground
 By one ever so kind
 With a sensitive heart;
 That old well you must find.
 With your lips grey as dust
 Drink its water with joy
 And while slaking your thirst
 Its sweet music enjoy.
 One drop of music, and, revived, your lips will throb.
 One drop of music, of unfathomed depth.
 One drop of music. Sacred as earth's sob.
 Musical well. Enough to last till death,
 And neither genius, nor wind, nor years
 Can ever drain it to the end. And there
 The wayfarer will drink with greed, till tears,
 Its living water, ageless, sweet as air
 And will bring up in reverent cupped palms
 All that is best in his own soul, that deep
 In him struck root — his innate, ingrown charm,
 His countless roots that countless voices keep.
 Streamlets of music. They will grow, expand,
 Unlimited in number and in time.
 In tides of dewdrops, teardrops, raindrops through the land
 They flow, never to stop, those streams sublime,
 Flooding the length and breadth of trampled meads,
 Breaking their banks turned stale and old and dry.
 And yet, though filled with force, men's boundless needs
 Those flowing streams can never satisfy;
 Man's spiritual thirst — a thirst that will exceed
 All gained by man's ambitious might, all genius has wrought,
 Insatiable, stubborn human greed
 For greater showers, for deeper thought
 And waters.
 Here,
 Here, brothers, are the deep clear waters which
 As told us by ancestral carols, with each drop,
 Each streamlet, wavelet, year by year enrich
 Our music's treasury, resounding without stop,
 Music which bears both joy and melancholy.
 So it was ever since the world began;
 Like gossamer, songs twine in patterns holy
 With winds and flowers: fly on, give joy to man!

Fly over steppes and over hearts, high overhead,
Caress us, gladden us, gossamer threads,
And then we will entwine the world with you
So men may drink their fill of joy, like dew.
Go forth then, sower of music's pure beauty,
Carry into the world your precious booty,
Strewing, like grains of kindness, from your hand
Voices of joy and grief through every land.
The thunder's bass, the fields' green canticles,
Rivers' smooth passages and silver dewdrops' trills.
And let the voice of Earth and Time and men
Pour forth in a majestic cantilene.
Rise, wayfarer, look at the beauty all around:
A vivifying spring beats from the ground!
And like an eagle soars towards the skies
The hand of Leontovich, the musician.
Out of the well, deep down, out of his mind
He calls forth spirits, charmer and magician,
And out of songs and turmoil, echoes, beams
He rears above the earth an arch that shines and streams —
Translucent, with divinest hues aglow —
A magic rainbow's seven-coloured bow.
Its pillars spanning the horizon's breadth
Are radiant supports for the moist skies.
They separate the world from gloom and death;
A gateway to new life and music, they arise.
Under that rainbow's joyous benediction
He stands, a grey-eyed man. With what shall it repay
Him — what will be his gains, his life-toil's trophies?
Music and life. Music and life for aye.

...Whistles prove his memory is eternal
With a clearness yet unrealized.

Storm-like decade after decade passes,
Years of wars and blood, of struggle, pain.
But, a living truth among the masses —
Lenin will remain.

* * *

I know that
Ploughshares are beaten out of swords.
No soil becomes fertile because of
This art.
Some keys there be that will afford
Entrance into the entire heart.

I perceive
How things are based:
Through all the wheat, blood is wove —
Only thus people learn the taste
Of love,

I believe.

* * *

To learn wisdom — others don't employ:
All mistakes must be your very own.
Works that have come down to us from Troy
Borrowed were, for odes of ancient Rome.

Study well, even commas, by the way —
And from each line a lesson you'll partake:
Better make your own mistakes than, say,
Try to learn from errors others make.

* * *

Night world in beauty wrought.
No symmetry. No utterance. Death inclined.
Speak not, then; speak not!
Who or what throws words to the wind?

All the futility of a world beyond,
And endless making of little worlds;
Has not their meaning long been conned
In textbooks for the boys and girls!

Yet truly wrought in beauty — the night world!

* * *

Oh, when September-golden comes to pass
And, like a laggard wandering,
Caresses the silky fleece of autumn grass
And cranes are gathered round a water-spring,

At night, I love to watch the deeper blue
Of autumn's vaults of heaven draw
The raining stars, as carpenter would strew
The silvery shavings from his moving saw...

What fiery light! For nature can afford
From weariness to rest in beauty now released —
Which is perhaps in truth a high award
For summer's passion — grant of quiet peace.

* * *

Just a small town. But climb up the bell-tower —
Vista of rye fields and neighbouring farms,
Town hall, houses, offices, drug-store —
All so familiar, all full of charm.

I shall live quietly. Like when Fall is fair...
And sit by my gate in the evenin'...
Opposite lies the market square —
There play the dogs and the children.

Folk don't need much, I know, to get by —
Just a few memories, a room, some baccy —
And sometimes a bit of blue sky.
Or the Ninth symphony...

* * *

Night... a boat — like a silver bird!
(What are words when the heart is too full!)
Do not hasten or fly through shining worlds,
Little boat of mine, not very hopeful.

Above us, beneath us, shine worlds or stars...
Below and above such deeps are sighted...
Oh, what a beautiful world you are,
World now united!

* * *

Blue madness yonder! With the sea beneath me
And the sky wherever falls the eye!
Your heart no longer wants to be just earthly,
For you're in love with ineffable reaches of sky!

Fly on, heart! Like a new orb of heaven
Shed radiance on all depths and space.
Among them wander, we manikin,
With guidebook, just in case.

* * *

Evenfall. And seaward fog is rising...
Lapping wave the shoreline seems to brush...
Sounds grow faint. Through their non-synchronizing
Choir, all round you sense a deeper hush.

Oh, precursor of this night of silence,
Appearing in the half-light gloaming!
Don't all the living wait you in suspense,
Sensing the eternal in your breathing?

Fly now, sounds of evening, fading, stilling,
To the hushed-to-quiet earth, from where
In eternal depths a great world-building
Crashes through the silence ruling there.

Olexa Vlizko (1908-1934) was born in the village of Korosten in Novgorod Region, the Russian Federation, into the family of a clerk. He is the author of several books of verse about the new Soviet man. His style is distinguished for its revolutionary romanticism, innovation, and dynamism. Many of his poems have been translated into languages of the Soviet Union.



* * *

Rich red blood, and my strength, open-handed
Like Svyatogor *, I would bring to the mass!..
And if hearts could but be expanded,
I'd expand them a thousand times thus.

And would scatter, would scatter, would scatter
My energy, like the bright sun's rays,
So the world should catch fire, and batter
And break down the bounds of ancient days!

1927

NINTH SYMPHONY

Monologue

Fire! Fire of superhuman love!
In youthful breasts let seethe the blood!
I take you, oh my thorny world
In the sun's embrace!

Like some warm bird
My fire-bird heart will fly around
All worlds. I'll stretch o'er mankind's bounds

* A legendary knight

Wide wings. Let fate be made beneath
Their shade. If men no heaven find,
They'll find the hell-fire of young love,
All-human, strong, in which all wrong
Will burn to ash — and that fierce heart
Bare-fanged, which drinks its brother's gore
Will fall, and never flourish more:
There'll be no resurrecting it,
Just as he'll never rise, who falls
Into those fierce and fiery jaws —
The human heart's volcanic pit!..

Fire! Fire of superhuman storm!
Of new love, wordless from the lips
Of broken eunuchs, from the tongues
Of hearts in gloves, that none, perhaps,
Should see the skinny poisonous corpse
Where maggots breed — that noble dirt
Which rickety heirs have long preserved.
Degenerates of the "true blue blood"
With blazoned arms of ancient homes.
And suppuration 'neath golden cloaks!..

Fire! Fire of superhuman love!
Alive for the strong, and dead for the dust.
Of love impulsive and burning bright
For all things. Captivating might
Of love for people, earth and beasts
As one. To live, to live like a sun!
By one's own sweat true joy achieve
For one's own sons, grandsons and heirs
Of distant days!..

Fire! Fire of love!
In youthful breasts let seethe the blood!

I take you, oh my thorny world
In the sun's embrace! And in my love
As in fire, I place! Then burn with light
And give to the poor blind wretch his sight,
And blind the one, who the dark prefers,
Himself inters in the graveyard mire!..
More sun, more light!! More love, more fire!!!

1927

I SPEAK FOR ALL

I

From towers tall we view the world —
And distant stars catch in our hand!..
The squirrels laugh, in branches curled,
Full-petalled blooms in sunshine stand...

We'll grow! From beds of days and years
We'll send fine shoots up to skies,
Till just a myth become our tears,
And grief, like smoke, just fades and dies.

II

We shall not cry! To no pot-house fly!
We titan-poets, who worlds have made!
Though satraps mocked us in years gone by,
We lived — no tears — and patient stayed!

And while you sat in Babylon's lands,
Your harps on the riverside willows cast,
O, then we knew that in our hands —
One flash — we'd crush the whole world to dust!

III

Oh yes! We'll grow! We'll grow and grow!
In this land all are poets today!
And therefore soon the fuse we'll blow,
And all the planets revolt will sway!

New songs we'll pour in flooding streams,
Fireworks of burning words will play!..
Here we've no end of daring themes!
Here all, yes all — are poets today!

1927

IRONIC OVERTURE

With the stiff north wind from the mountains
both hearts
 and yard-arms tremble,
and the stern and lordly Viking
his vessel steers away.

He steers her through the sea-mist,
and keeps well clear of Odessa,
where lively ordinary people
attack the mackerel by day.
Now don't give way to smirking.
I don't believe in legends
The grey-haired Viking's

a folk-song

on the lips of the fisherman.
Hérédia sang his sonnets
of an ideal Breton woman,
and I —

an Odessan woman,
the northern wind
and songs!

And, believe me,
it's so much easier
to sing the blue bays of Brittany,
than to capture the varied colouring
of Odessan women,

and talks
which deal with the old love question,
and, by the way, of the breakers
above which

the north wind's flying,
below which the mackerel's swimming!
Good people!

Show some pity —
on such delightful subjects
one may all the time be dreaming,
no beginning,

and no end!
Above the Black Sea beating
are trembling hearts

and yard-arms,
and the stern and lordly Viking
his vessel steers away.
He steers her through the sea-mist,
and keeps well clear of Odessa,
where ordinary people are living,
and the loveliest women of all!

1930

ROADSTEAD

Beyond the silo — the lighthouse tower
at the cross-roads
of mists and storm's wild power,
in snowy foam,
like chalk, is seen —
below the cliff
in the roadstead green,
cutting the dark with its yellow light,
like Prometheus, straining his chain-links tight,
it yearns
for the distant thunderstorm,
and the chaos
of elemental form,
like those Titans, who in ancient days
among the stars raised barricades
of ponderous clouds,
of thunderous waves,
who clave the depths 'neath the drunken staves,
who clave the depths, and sank therein,
following light's reflection
dim.

Beyond the silo — the lighthouse tower
at the cross-road of mists and storm's wild power,
like Prometheus chained, where storm-clouds lour.
While there, where black horizons loom,
made deaf by the crazy orchestra's boom,
in holds, where pumps lick streaming wounds,
Leviathans fly 'neath watery mounds.

And the crowds on board are lost,
and the yard-arms make a cross
(a blow on the bowsprit falling west!)
to the moans of prayer, and tormented despair...
The north-eastern laughs, like to burst.
"Tonight comes your final hour...
your final trip —
and death...

...Four bells... the last-drawn breath...

...Then comes the dawn...
Beyond the elevator — the lighthouse tower
at the cross-roads of mists and storm's wild power,
grieves dumbly, where the storm-clouds lour.

1930

BALLAD OF
"THE FLYING DUTCHMAN"

The heavy
cruiser
goes out
on her course.
Like a rusty roof,
the land slowly goes.
The bridge.
The Captain.
The Devil's own curse
on his evil lips,
the Zeiss
on his nose.

In his fury
he wrinkles
his frowning brow...
Above the horizon
the sun
and blue haze;
like toad's eyes
peer the gun-barrels now,
their steel beaks
skyward
they raise.
There's distant thunder.
A choppy sea.
The warm foam
chatters
and spatters the deck.
The anchor rings.
In the foc'sle lee
the trap-ladder
grates
with a quiet squeak...

The ocean lies dumb
in the azure haze...
A sudden
order:
"Change course!
Due west!"
Above the horizon
a mast
and cross-stays,
with a flag
blood-red
'gainst the blue impressed...

And sharp
as a jack-knife
that terse quick glance —
and lieutenants
dash up,
their grins can't withhold.
upon that ship,
on the tattered yards
are strung up
corpses...
B-r-r-r
How cold!

Still nearer...
Still nearer...
The horror grows...
And the stench
floats over
the cruiser's course...
On a light breeze
sprung up
it flows...
"Reverse!
About ship!"
the Captain roars.
The ship disappeared...
A chill
shook their bones...
and as soon
as night
on the foc's'le
fell,
a shivering sailor,
in lowered tones
of the "Flying Dutchman"
began
to tell...
On the waves
the wind
his bellows blew...
And, bent o'er the bridge,
and peering beneath,
the Captain listened.
His laughter flew
like a devil,
in spasms,
between his teeth:

"The Flying Dutchman"?!
Ha-ha-ha!

They were Communards
hung on that brig!
he cried.
And suddenly,
losing his legs
with a jar,
in his twisted guts
the laughter
died...

In his fury
he wrinkles
his frowning brow...
Above the horizon
the gold,
and blue haze;
and like toad's eyes
peer the gun-barrels now,
their steel beaks
skyward
they gaping raise.
There's distant thunder.
A choppy sea.
The fine rain
chatters
and spatters the deck.
The anchor rings.
In the foc's'le lee
the trap-ladder
mockingly grates
with a squeak.

1930



Teren Masenko (1903-1970) was born in the village of Hlodosi, Kirovograd Region, into a farming family. He wrote many books of verse and songs and translated the poetry of various Soviet authors. His poems have been translated into many languages of the USSR.

TO MY MOTHER'S MEMORY

Where the boundless Black Sea lies
In white gold of autumn
Head up but with sorrowful eyes,
Mother, you are walking.

Barefoot through the dew you'd pass,
Carefree was your visage.
You lie silent in the grass
Just beyond the village.

Many fields you've sown to rye,
Tied sheaves by the hundred!
In the silent steppe you lie
By chill heaven covered.

Here in lands a long way off
When the moon is gleaming
Of your toil-worn hands, your soft
Sad blue eyes I'm dreaming.

And my tears the hot sheaves wet,
Loud sing larks above us...
Softly goes through Kherson * steppes
My Ukrainian mother.

1932

* Kherson — regional centre at the mouth of the Dnieper River

PREMONITION

I dreamt there was a heavy shower.
From every quarter stormclouds massed
And plum-sized drops for half an hour
Pelted the valley hard and fast.

Refreshing rain each leaf was bathing
And violet-coloured fruit gleamed bright.
As lightning flashed, the soaking valley
Was truly choking with delight...

I thought the old folk saying of ours
Its weight in gold is clearly worth:
On scorching days look out for showers
And love the gaily blossoming earth!

1946

MEDITATION

I've lived half a century now —
Not sadly, obscurely or lazily,
Seen stars through the darkest of clouds,
I've loved and I've laboured not vainly.

Where are you, dear skies of Kherson,
My humble thatched home in the village?
My life half a century gone!
I'd like once again to begin it!

My heart some experience has gained,
My shoulders are stronger, though weary.
But never once have I complained,
Lost courage or fallen to jeering.

I dreamt not of laurels or fame,
From childhood I've known sweet and bitter,
But with a sincere heart remain...
To lose that were truly a pity!

Because it's my wish that my life
And labours be wholly devoted
To mankind's fond dream that shone bright
As the sun on that day in October.

My half century was in sight
When joyfully all of a sudden
I knew heartfelt friendship's delight
And into my life sun came flooding.

Like the flow never-ending of spring,
Greatest glory of all, never fading,
Your tenderness to my heart you bring,
My fair-headed song, my fair maiden!

Half a century is a long way
And my road was sunny, not mirthless.
But had I not met you I'd say
My whole life was utterly worthless.

1953

VASIL MISIK



Vasil Misik (b. 1907) was born in the village of Novopavlivka, Dnipropetrovsk Region, into a peasant family. His lyrical poetry is centered on topical social and philosophical issues. He has also written short stories, translated English and Oriental poets, and is a Maxim Rylsky prize winner. Many of his poems have been published in other republics of the Soviet Union and abroad.

THE SPIRIT OF TODAY

Thus in Boyan's * age too, no doubt,
With flowers was the spring decked out,
Beyond the Dnieper stormclouds massed
And mountain torrents foamed and flashed,
Hawks vanished over the horizon
And dulcimers were melodizing,
In virgin forests lakes were blue
And gazed on crystal skies sublime.
Then where's the spirit of our time?
It's here in what most matters — you.

1964

WORMWOOD

Wormwood, I'm longing to know
Why of all herbs you alone
Were born so bitter?
Have you not drunk in sweet showers,
Been dew-bathed in the small hours
When the fields glitter?

* Boyan — semi legendary minstrel of the Kievan Rus period

Or from the bitter years past
Have you drop by drop amassed
Sweat and blood of your forefathers
Which to this day you are guarding?

You came to love our steep slopes,
Rocky ravines and cool valleys.
Your bitter taste every day
Milch cows would bring from their pastures.
Into the ryefield you crept,
Around the stalks pressing,
So age-old gall may be sensed
In the bread of the steppelands...

1926

CRANES OF HIROSHIMA

If you yourself were a physician
Could even you have calmly gazed
Upon this little girl, a cripple
And doomed to be so all her days?
A girl for whom in sad grey autumn
The seasons of the year had stopped
Ever since over Hiroshima
The first atomic bomb was dropped.

How frightening, how long in passing
Were nights with or without a moon!
"Shall I get well?" she kept on asking
And people said to her: "Quite soon —
As soon as you have cut from paper
Five thousand little birds... These cranes
Shall fly high and prevent the raven
From coming with that bomb again."

They gave the girl a pair of scissors,
White sheets of paper too they brought.
A sudden smile her face transfigured,
She was no longer so distraught.
She wished her hands were not so feeble
And that her eyes could better see.
But, hearing of her problem, people
Came to assist her readily.

And waking in the morning early
The little patient was surprised:

Where yesterday there had been merely
A few birds, hundreds met her eyes!
And every day in growing numbers
Birds came to her from far and near...
But day by day her forces crumbled,
Of no avail the cranes were here.

Now there was nobody to see them.
They had not rid her of her pains.
And what indeed could the physician
Do now with all these paper cranes,
With these white flocks, her consolation,
That lightly fluttered as they went,
Relentlessly incriminating
All murderers impenitent?

1960

THE PATH

Who was the first with wary gait
To venture into these green pastures?
A Cossack hunter lying in wait
For prey? A fisherman with tackle?

Did warriors of the Golden Horde
Along this path attack in secret
Free peaceful hamlets and withdraw
With women they had found here reaping?

Oh no, not so was this path charted!
A path like this
Could not be made by crime or avarice
That rob bees of their hard-won harvest,

Nor trodden by an idle tramp
In love with ever new horizons!
No, down this track
Went
Homeward striding
A lonely tiller of the soil
At chilly dewfall,
A spade
Or scythe
Upon his back,
As home the sun goes to the sea,
So strode he,
Choosing not the ground

Because his feet unaided
Found which way would be
Least painful to each weary limb
And thus most suitable for him
Whose strength had to be guarded for
His daily
Labours,
For work such as we too perform
And live by
As shall future generations.

The path here could have gone straight on
But, look, it went round for some reason.
The ground seems flat..
But what of that?
The man's feet sensed it was uneven.

And in his steps all others walk
Through mist at dawn, through dew at evening,
Their strength for morning labours keeping,
Not trampling any flower or stalk.

Dear earth of ours, how wonderful it is
Not robbers, night-time prowling thieves
These lasting traces have been leaving
But men who plough and sow the fields
With feet that sense which way to go
To guard
The green wealth you bestow.

1962

THE PLANET

Our planet we must care for, doing
What any gardener does who hoes
And waters vegetable rows,
Lest nothing go to rack and ruin.

Clean as a parlour must we keep it
And sweep away all strife and trouble
So, as at Easter, bright sunbeams
May into a glad room come leaping,

So there be fine fare on the table,
The spoons laid in their proper place,

So everyone recall with grace
The worthy deeds of all our neighbours.

Our planet should...

But look — they're digging
The fertile earth with army spades.
Here shells, there bombs and hand-grenades
Are death and desolation bringing.

The earth with corpses they're manuring
And not green shoots they're planting out
But atom bombs... for war to sprout,
The hope of gamblers crazed with fury.

Above the earth the sun glows dimly,
All joy forgetting, it would seem,
In lands where Hunger reigns supreme
(The white man rules the black man's village).

A bony finger Hunger waggles
At trenches scarring nearby fields
That could grow food, return rich yields
And clothe the earth in rich apparel.

And come to think — so little is needed:
Just to recall with half-closed eyes
Your mother bowing beneath blue skies
As vegetable rows she weeded.

1963

* * *

The twenties... Long those autumns were,
With nothing stirring, deathly white.
The paths bare feet had kneaded swerved
Through mist to pastures out of sight.

And in the commune all was still
Beneath damp bark, as if spellbound,
And when a woman loudly shrilled
The men looked hesitantly round.

Discussions in the club went on
Till late at night on farm affairs
And, if a lamp blew, everyone
Jumped — could it be a bandit there?

Outside in darkness lay the street
Where private profit stalked, and none
Could tell who might behind that tree
Be lurking with a sawn-off gun,

Seeking, by firing shots unseen,
To rouse again the storms of hell
That had by such hard fighting been
At Perekop and Warsaw quelled.

1962

THE HEART OF BURNS

To singing his beloved's praises
No poet averse is.
Burns too his many loves portrayed in
Immortal verses.

Were they divine in mind and body,
Those country lasses?
In each one he perceived a goddess...
That's all that matters.

But his grand music and fine phrases
Drive to a cholera
The ever-soberly appraising
Pedantic scholar.

"They were quite plain girls," he discloses
After long labours.
"The sole fact making them of note is
He won their favours."

You have no heart, you ignoramus!
The poet spoke truly.
Not his attentions made them famous
But their real beauty.

How well he knew and praised those lasses!
How well he loved them!
Of sun-bright Burns, his heart and passion,
You moles know nothing.

CHORNOTROP *

A rare good fortune is yours —
To have come through realms man abhors,
The first black, the second prickly,
The third just as tricky —
Ever so drowsy, ever so sleepy,
You broke four hundred needles,
Propping your yellow lids open,
Swimming along,
You crossed over
Rivers of snakes and green tresses
And came to a maiden's caresses.

The princess found you attractive,
Fell in love with you, heavens knows why,
Rescued you when about to die,
Freed you
From a prison of stone,
Led you to your parents' home:
"Go greet your father and mother,
Ask them
If they will accept me?
I'll go meanwhile to the well
And wait there to hear what they'll say.
Mind you do not forget me!"

How the whole household rejoiced!
Folk hugged him, led him indoors,
Laid out a table of yew,
Guests were invited there too,
A match found...
The fairest bride ever,
And now they were holding a wedding...
A wedding?

Out
By the willow
The poor princess came
And the wedding feast
Met her sad gaze.

He'd tricked her, he'd tricked the princess!
Rise from the richly laid tables,
Leave there the very best wine,
Hasten to catch the princess!

* Chornotrop (Ukr.) — late autumn prior to first snowfall, lit. "black path"

Don't wait for the white
Snow to alight,
For the dew
To freeze on the branch,
For the beauty
To go back to fairyland!
Go mid the cabbage and fennel,
Young *chornotrop* fellow!
If you let the princess slip away,
Then what can I say?
There once was
A falconer in love
Who became
A dull-eyed good-for-nothing.

1964

THE DROP

It's dark in the room here from shelves overburdened,
From melodies unheard
And from springs that have been
And from faces unseen,
From time that flows ever untameable,
From trying to embrace the unembraceable.

Out of doors there, so calm and unshakeable,
A drop with one second to live
Swells on a wire — till incapable
Of holding on. Earthward it flies
And grasps the whole world in a trice.

1965

CONSCIENCE

A man came along who said
(And thoughtless folk believed him):
“Go grab other nation's wealth,
Grow fierce as a beast is!
Clear the land for yourself
With the mattock of war and starvation!
Do not fear sin: on my head
I shall bear your damnation!”

And off they went, starting fires,
Throttling, trampling and hanging,
Boasting of fresh victories,
Each one bigger than the last one.
Soundly they slept on the warm
Soft beds of the conquered.
To just one man they had all
Passed the keys of their conscience.

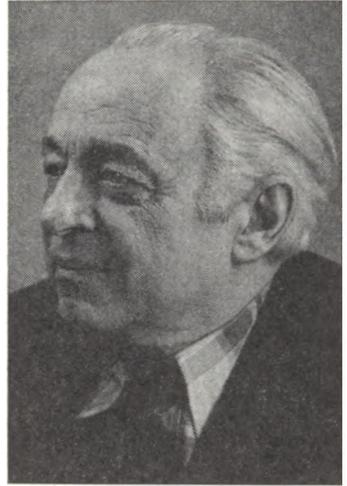
The summer passed and autumn came.
Cloud hid the horizon.
In those who had laughed yesterday
A wild dread was rising.
Now they were called to account
For all their villainies.
Where was the man who should bear
Responsibility?

No one had thought that his power
Might soon be waning.
Now the return of their consciences'
Keys they were claiming.
Now they must live with the children
Of the murdered and tortured,
Get along with the sons of the burned
And study their language.

Where was the man who had said:
"All blame I'll shoulder?"
Shot himself straight through the heart.
What can you claim from his body?
Petrol-soaked up he went in flames
To heaven escaping,
Just like a scoundrel who steals
Other folk's savings.

SAVA HOLOVANIVSKY

Sava Holovanivsky (b. 1910), the son of a windmill operator, was born in the village of Yelizavetgradka, Kirovograd Region. He is the author of many collections of verse portraying the heroism of the Soviet people in the Second World War and its labour accomplishments. He has also written fiction, plays, and journalistic articles. Many of his books have been published in other republics of the USSR and abroad.



MAPLES

I would like to turn into a roadside maple,
Merry leaves arustling, fresh and green in April,

Right up to the clouds my branches I would raise,
Making friends with breezes, rustling all my days.

So that men who pass me on their distant way
In my branches' shadow for a rest should stay,

So that, green and merry, all the while I live
Cool and fragrant shelter to them I should give,

So that they should wake up full of strength and will,
And follow the fieldpaths, lying blue and still,

So that life and work be light and gay to all,
Who recall the hillside with the maple tall.

1934

MEETING SUNRISE ON CHERNECHA HILL

To the memory of Mate Zalka *

For a while on the hilltop we stood without whisper or murmur;
Like a well-loaded steamer, the night, putting off, bade farewell,
And it seemed that the minutes and ages stood still for a spell
When dawn's curtain arose, driving night's shadows westward still further.

There, beneath us, far down, where mists swam in the lightening distance
Kindling, smouldered the morning. A poplar, as if a young widow,
Stretching, opened its eyes by soft eyelids half-hidden;
"Look, it's morning!" it whispered, while dew on its foliage glistened.

'Twas a signal, that whisper — it floated, it flew far and wide
Through the tops of the aspens that over the Dnieper's bank stood.
In a moment the grass on the fringes and glades of the wood
Stirred, abruptly awakened; Chernecha Hill woke up and sighed.

And I said to my friend, "Do you see — in the East the horizon
Fills with amber and burns, driving off the night's gloom.
Like a flying wild fire-bird that fixes its wondering eyes on
The dawn's beauty, the sun now unfolds into bloom.

"Just a minute ago far beyond the awakening river
Orchards, sleepy and hushed, started sparkling with dew,
And, half-audible, whispered the foliage, starting to quiver,
Lifting up on long branches their ripe fruit of radiant hue.

"Here, wherever I glance, lie familiar, wonderful landscapes.
Here my father grew up, and myself I became a grown man.
Here I learned to sing songs in the house of my birth; here in childhood
More than once had I laughed and shed tears as time ran.

"There is no better place in the whole of the Universe for me
Than these fields, with those poplars, my age-old, beloved green kin;
From a boy I'm in love with their beauty, so subtle and charming,
Yet in vain have I sought fitting words their divine charm to sing."

There we stood all alone on the tapering hilltop that morning,
And those words, only felt in our hearts but not uttered aloud,
Were repeated, it seemed, by both waters and hills, and were warmly
Acquiesced to by trees standing silent and friendly around.

And my friend then replied to me, "Yes, I can well understand you.
I have walked through the length and the breadth of your beautiful land;
For these skies, for your dreams, for your homeland in many a battle
Have I fought, shedding blood for this land on whose sacred soil both
of us stand.

* Mate Zalka (1896-1937) — Hungarian writer and communist, fought in the civil wars in Russia and Spain

“Many songs have I sung as we plodded along on far marches
Through this wonderful land, though in other, far parts I was born.
To its truth I ascended as if by steep steps that led upward
To the crests of tall summits from which one can see the world’s dawn.

“Yet, in love with your land, my own motherland I had loved also
And I fought for its freedom, too, here on your own native soil,
And wherever I go, my thoughts fly in unquenchable sadness
To Hungarian cities and fields where Hungarians toil.

“There I grew to a man, on the banks of the tranquil blue Danube,
There on Budapest bridges the sunrise not once had I met.
Ah, my friend, when my people will join you beneath your red banners
It will be like a holiday no one has witnessed as yet.

“All I lived for and fought for — though dreams don’t come true
very often —
Yet this dream will come true as a glorious sequel of strife.
Like a herald of dawn, I will enter my city one morning
And its ancient stone walls will be lit by the radiant dawn of new life.”

I could hear him, it seemed to me, speaking there, loudly and clearly,
Yet my friend, very quiet, simply looked at the Dnieper’s left bank with
its woods
And said nothing, for fear of upsetting the silence
And belittling by words this great beauty.— so, wordless, he stood.

And he gazed towards the East, at the lakes and the wood and the valleys
As if charmed by the beating of his own unquenchable heart.
It was then I believed that there really can happen such moments
When no words, even friendly, are needed the feelings of men to impart.

1940

A SONG ABOUT MY UKRAINE

Where wide-spreading poplars bow low in a wind-storm,
And waves on the Dnieper arise,
Your son, O Ukraine, lies still in a meadow
And looks at your beautiful skies.
And stopping above him, as if his own mother,
You tenderly whisper: “My child!”
My woeful Ukraine,
Beloved Ukraine,
All burning, with smoke curling wild!

A drink of cool water to ease him in thralldom,
Cool water to wash wound and sore —

And he would forget all his pain, thirst and tiredness,
And dash into battle once more.
But smoke like a mist over ruins arises,
The Dnieper flows darker than night.

My living Ukraine,
Beloved Ukraine,
My rainbow, my hope, my delight!

He feels how the roots in the damp soil are moving,
And with calls for vengeance, not sobs,
Each stone of your ruins, like clamouring buglers,
About your calamity throbs.

Incessantly, daily your strength is increasing;
Be sure — not alone do you stand,
My new, young Ukraine,
Beloved Ukraine,
A part of one great Soviet land.

Like heralds of freedom, each night red-starred airplanes
Land in your dense woods, on their glades.
The workers of Moscow send guns and munitions —
Your partisan-heroes get aid.

The moment of triumph already approaches,
Your children arise in full might,
My living Ukraine,
Beloved Ukraine,
For you, for your freedom they'll fight.

I knew that the foeman could not overcome you,
And certainly he did not.
He'll have yet to pay for your bitter misfortunes
In black blood for blood pure and hot.
My glorious land will recover for certain,
For ever and ever to thrive,

My lovely Ukraine,
Beloved Ukraine,
For ever and ever alive!

1942

HARKUSHA

That selfsame Harkusha who just came from battle back home
Again down the hillside treads steadily over the loam;
Again he will measure the measureless fields of his land,
Again he grips the plough-handle cooled his experienced hand.

He follows the plough, bending earthward as if for a charge,
As if any moment expecting the signal to run or to march.
No signal is heard, though, no rocket is seen in the sky;
Most likely, not soon will the captain again let it fly.

He walks through the furrows, that selfsame Harkusha — the same
Whom heavens and ocean and dry land as victor proclaim,
Who did not bend down during moments of hardship and strife,
Who gave back to countries and nations their freedom and life.

He walks through the furrows, the same who right up to his goal
Bore Victory on, like the pledge in a Communist's soul.
He follows the plough, so experienced, certain and thorough;
As if he were digging a trench there, he draws the long furrow.

He'll sow in it life everlasting, not sorrow and death,
To sprout and to thrive through great Russia's whole length and
whole breadth,
Through all the Ukraine, through all Byelorussia to whisper —
Gold wheat will grow up in it, millet and barley long-whiskered.

And, touching each other, his medals keep quietly singing,
And, silvery, brass upon blackened enamel keeps ringing.
And, calling him softly, creep memories into his soul:
The fields near the Volga to Harkusha's mind they recall.

Back home he will take his old army coat off with a sigh
And over the stove on a string he will hang it to dry,
And pick up a medal and, questioning, look in its face;
A green forest clearing his medal's green field will replace;

The helmeted man standing there to Harkusha will cry:
"The peace of your home and your motherland do you prize high?"
And from it old Stalingrad soldiers will call in a throng:
"Lie down for a spell, but you won't have to rest very long;

"At the happiest time of the year from the front you came home:
In your steppes the May sunshine already has warmed up the loam.
The tractors and reapers will hum in your fields once again,
And horsecarts will drive off from harvesters, filled up with grain."

And with passion he'll look into eyes that are harder than steel;
As if it were he cast in bronze there himself, he will feel,
As if he himself, standing there in his old uniform
Were calling himself new heroic feats to perform.

LADY GODIVA

I have travelled a lot and seen many a wonder
In all parts of the world — my own land, too, of course,
But I always remember the Lady Godiva
Sitting nude in a Coventry square, on a horse.

There, besieged by clipped bushes, the monument shines
With its bronze polished bright to a luminous glare,
As if, just emerging from Tennyson's pen,
It had ridden out into the city's wide square.

The weather out there can be foggy and slushy,
So that ladies in raincoats their minifrocks hide.
But she — not because it was just then the fashion —
Stark naked in fogs and in rainshowers rides.

Her husband, a bully and double-dyed tippler,
Had drunk like a duck, though an earl, as we know.
The lady politely once tried to persuade him
Not to take the last crumbs from the poor and the low.

But the earl burst out laughing and yelled as if crazy:
"You're taking their side? What — you say, the last crumbs?
So, take off your gown, dear, to give to the bastards;
Go naked, that hobos may cover their bums!"

And half-mad with anger, Godiva tore off
Her silks and her velvets and mounted a horse,
And rode through the city streets, happy and proud,
Stark-nude, in broad daylight, past taverns and stores.

But respecting the virtuous name of the lady,
Men went in and remained in their houses confined.
If anyone just dared to look at her boldly
Immediately, the man was struck blind.

...I'd set up a statue not just to the valour
Of her who came out in defence of the poor,
But to the humaneness of those who, though hungry
And thirsty, respected her innocence pure.

They'd stand side by side as posterity's tribute
To those who, unflinching, their courage displayed
And those who, a good woman's chastity sparing,
Showed gratitude for her protection and aid.

Yevhen Fomin (1910-1942) was born in the town of Kakhovka in Kherson Region, and was tortured to death by the Nazis during the Second World War. He was the author of several collections of short and long poems. His style is marked by simplicity and expressiveness. Many of his poems have been translated in other republics of the Soviet Union.



SHCHORS

I see bold Shchors upon his horse,
Hard-riden, spattered with specks of spume.
Already they've raised the banner of war,
And the wide steppe gleams with fires in the gloom.

The dust seems to cover the whole wide world,
The moon in the sky can scarce be seen.
The sharp-set sabres of the Bohuns *
On Kiev with their curved blades gleam.

The jangle of bridles, the thunder of hooves,
Ah! But for a while? Or for ever so?
And the vault of heaven from horror turns pale,
The wide-eyed sun has hid long ago.

The battle blazes, the battle roars...
And somewhere on the side goes past
The youthful twilight, already dim,
And merged with the trampled blood-soaked grass.

And there, amid the fire and smoke,
Feeling the fear and shame of defeat,
The enemy standards have fallen low,
Their bearers slain, or in retreat.

* Men of Shchors' Bohun Regiment, named after a hero of the War of Liberation in the Ukraine in 1648-1654

Hurrah, Bohuns! With shouts and songs
Dear Kiev greets them, glad and free...
I see bold Shchors upon his horse,
In all the glory of victory.

1944

OCEAN ETUDE

Ocean,
 for long you've not gladdened my vision,
Ocean,
 for long I've not heard your inferno,
Ocean,
 more fearful than blood-letting Vandals —
Rumbling Vesuvius, menace eternal.
Now once again I see sails which are swelling,
Winds madly drive them
 to distant horizons.
Maybe, on some of those stormy-winged vessels
Travel afar
 some romantic-eyed Byrons,
Maybe, for many who have quitted their homelands,
Better things call them,
 and hated things hunt them,
Maybe, like Byron,
 another composes
Hymns of farewell to his far-distant country.
Maybe, those few
 for a good life are thirsting,
Quitting their cellars
 for morning's auroras.
Maybe, Childe Harolds
 to find love are sailing
To that charmed land
 of fair señoritas.
Endless, O endless — romantics, and ocean,
Songs of them endless... — Magnificent poet!
With your great hymns to the world you are showing
High inspiration — how few there are know it!
Maybe, I also,
 my dearest one loving,
Burn in my heart for the bright-skied expanses,
And, as in boyhood,
 so happy and timid,
Love, with perception, that infinite feeling.

1934

LANDSCAPES

I

There's a landscape — a slender pine
In the heavenly vaults a-ringing fine,

Widely spread, and lofty soar
Branching arms... And all around
Noisily, as ne'er before,
Streams of clear bright water bound.

There's the pond... One moment. Stop!
We have sung our song in vain...
There would be no pine's green top,
And the pond would be dry again,

If some maiden, in mid-May
Had not set the sapling here,
Nor three channels cleared that day
For the streamlets young and clear.

Every time, whene'er I look
There, beside the slender pine
Stands that maiden, whom I took
Long ago to heart, as mine.

II

Above the cliff stand oaks, their heads like clouds,
Scarce wavering, though attacked by the headlong breeze.
First left it runs, then right it strikes and pounds,
And rustling in the boughs, then powerless flees,

Breaks off, and speeds like a gleaming shaft away,
And whistling, disappears. Without a trace,
The lion-hearted oaks greet breaking day,
All three grow young from drinking heady rays.

Ah, if we too could stand as firm withal!..
Beside the oaks a trodden path runs through.
When I pass by, van Gogh I must recall,
Fate's step-son who created them anew!

O Slavic soul, achieve once more
Full stature in joy and liberty.
Arise, as earlier, welded one,
And smash the foe, his hordes erase,
So that the storm-cloud swift may run,
So that we see the lovelier days.
So that your foe should fail and fall
And should not maim your sacred land,
And with false words should not befoul
Your golden beauty on every hand.
So they like darkness disappear,
Those filthy, swinish fascist hordes.
So that you bloom afresh and clear
In Glinka's and in Chopin's chords!

1941

LEONID PERVOMAISKY



Leonid Pervomaisky (1908-1973), a poet and prose writer, was born in the town of Krasnograd, Kharkiv Region, into the family of a bookbinder. The chief subject of his poetry is the inner evolution of Soviet man as he fought for the Revolution, built socialism, and defended his homeland against the nazis in the Second World War. He was a USSR State prize winner and a translator from German, Hungarian, and Slavic languages. His books have been published in many republics of the Soviet Union and abroad.

* * *

Ah, for a taste of bitter apples,
Those green ones from your orchards blest,
Chervonogradland, where I rambled
And by a roadside used to rest...

Two banks, both overgrown with orchards,
Washed by a river day and night...
No, not for any other country
Would I give up that lovely sight!

Dawn softly moves amid the grasses
And stops to watch the river roll;
At dusk the copses burn like bonfires
In their attire of autumn gold.

The night-mist roams through new-mown meadows,
The chill wind whispers in the vines,
And Autumn's fresh and bitter fragrance
Makes me as drunk as in old times.

And whether happy or unhappy
The roads which in my life I'll tread,
Let trees keep rustling, rain keep tapping
Upon my way, above my head.

And let those orchards store up honey
And spread their perfume through your vales,

And let my songs forever echo
Their gentle rustling without fail.

Ah, for a taste of bitter apples,
Those green ones in your orchards blest,
Chervonogradland, where I rambled
And by a roadside used to rest...

1922

EARTH

An autumn road... A muddy autumn road.
Sheathes lie like corpses on the wheatfields broad,
While in the wind a lonely bush goes bare,
And wires complain about the cruel sky.
A sense of loneliness and deep anxiety
Grows in me into anguish and despair.
How gloomy sounds the music of the wires,
While gusts of wind bring bitter cold again.
Beyond the steppes the setting sun expires —
Beyond your boundaries, O my Ukraine!

Not for the first time lorries enter night,
Not for the first time dark blots out my sight,
Not once have fires illumined with their light
The sombre, mystery-enveloped sky,
And death on leaden wings not once did fly
In circles narrowing above me in its flight.
Yet never did my heart beat with such pain,
Never yet with such anguish had it leaped
As at that fatal moment when we stepped
Across your boundaries, O, my Ukraine!

It was in other days your roads I'd roved
And rested in the shadow of your groves.
Day passed, and night went by, and it would dawn.
The pathway wove through fields of rye and took
Us to a hollow with a steppeland brook
Which babbled — noisy, playful as a fawn;
Above the brooklet in the morning glow
An ancient willow bowed toward the plain;
Up to the sky the smoke would quietly go
From homes that welcomed me, O my Ukraine!

Those far-off times, those times of happy songs
That cloudy day flowed through my mind in throngs...

Despite the wind and bitter cold and muck,
The images of long-forgotten dreams
Arose; dear, distant eyes sent me their beams.
Meanwhile the lorry roared, in puddles stuck.
I got out and I pushed — again, again —
The lorry's back, up to my knees in clay.
The lorry roared; so, in the fields, in rain,
I took my leave of you, O my Ukraine.

Across the ploughland now the lorries crawled.
Up from the road I took an earth-clod cold
Washed over daily by the autumn rain;
Dark, heavy, it grew colder in my grasp,
Like a poor heart whose life was ebbing fast.
The gloom behind flared up with sudden flame;
Our hooter blew. Away the lorry rode.
We moved on, stubborn, slow, across the plain,
But I could never throw down on the road
That piece of your dear soil, O my Ukraine!

And that was all that till my death would stay
With me in memory of youthful days,
Those parts where I grew up, matured in mind,
My native steppe, the river and the mound,
The grey old willow bending to the ground,
Mourning the past, that I had left behind.
That piece of earth, so homely and so plain,
Upon my heart forever will remain,
Into one stream joining my wrath and pain
With yours, O my long-suffering Ukraine!

I'll carry it through every battlefield,
For all my thoughts and everything I feel,
Each urge of mine, my whole life from the start —
Are fused forever in that piece of earth,
Like Klaas' ashes pounding at my heart,
Arousing thoughts which bring forth hate and wrath.
And it will guide me on my battle track,
And when the sun of liberty again
Shines over you, then I will give it back
To you forever, O my sweet Ukraine!

And if some day in battle I should stop
And lifeless on a frozen ploughfield drop
Arms spread for an embrace unconsciously,
If on some hillside looming far away
The humid soil should swallow me for aye,
In token of my love and loyalty
In my last sleep, my last prophetic dream,

Upon my heart, untouched by battleflame,
It will repose, immortal, pure and clean,
That sacred piece of earth, O my Ukraine!

October 1941

SONG

From the Syan * to the banks of the Don the road lies,
A horse with no saddle along the road flies,
 The hooves loudly thudding
 Are worn, torn and bloody —
But do not, O do not heave sorrowful sighs!

The mane of the night horse is borne on the breeze
And no one the halter to halt it can seize,
 There's just a girl crying:
 “My Cossack is dying...” —
But do not, O do not heave sorrowful sighs!

All day bitter fighting, at night-time no rest!
His Cossack brow's bloody and bloody — his chest,
 The morning sun rises
 From scarlet horizons —
But do not, O do not heave sorrowful sighs!

His Cossack brow's bloody and bloody — his chest,
His limbs to the shore grass have long, long been pressed
 With only the starlight
 And moonbeams to guard him —
But do not, O do not heave sorrowful sighs!

O do not, O do not heave sorrowful sighs!
There still is the girl whose true love he did prize,
 A road that is endless,
 A heart that remembers,
A glistening tear as in silence she cries...

1946

* Syan — river in Lviv Region, tributary of the Vistula

MASTER

Rules may forbid it, but look — he's taking
The lift from the fifth floor down to the ground.
Not made for him was that regulation:
He is the master of all around.

The doors are now flung wide open. He never
Pauses, not even a glance to cast
Where at the entrance tall proud chestnuts
Hoist white candles as he goes past.

The street has an air of gay festivity,
Clouds fly swiftly, herald a storm
And, like a horseshoe wrought of silver,
The river down there round the bend is borne.

Vainly. Not even out of the corner
Of his eye does this master care
Even to glance at his vast possessions
Bathed in warm sunlight everywhere.

The blue unshakeable vault of heaven,
The skyline featuring cloud and haze,
Park, garden, street and factory — everything's
His in the city that meets our gaze.

Sunlight with orange lacquer is flooding
The tree-lined avenue near the square.
Nothing he says. A jet plane scurries
On his behalf through the crystal air.

The chemist patiently delving into
The secrets of all material things
Wonders as daylight peers through the window:
Will this discovery appeal to him?

On the horizon a rainbow arches,
Down to the coalface the pit cage speeds.
Ploughing the fertile earth goes the farmer
Growing fine wheat for the master's needs.

The helmsman crossing the far equator
His journey around the world to make,
The silent poet at his writing table
Greeting the sunrise, still awake,

Through blue goggles the grey-haired foreman
Watching the hot steel bubble and hiss —
All these people strive in order
That a glorious prospect may be his.

The prospect of a close world of feeling
Where flowers you've not seen are in bloom
And all is in golden sunlight gleaming —
He has come to take charge of it soon.

The master? Is he aware of his greatness,
That it is for him all this is done?
He sleeps in his pram, going round the city
And flickering drowsy eyes in the sun.

1954

THE TWO GIANTS

They are coming back from a walk, both in the prime of their might,
Each of the two with majestic dignity brimming over,
Two geniuses, two luminaries enriching the world with their light:
Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Ludwig van Beethoven.

In the enchanted silence, in scent-laden solitude
Around them, as if they were dumbstruck, stand well-trimmed bushes
and trees.
For this is Schoenbrunn park — no savage copse or wild wood.
Where aspens, birches and oaks poke out of the earth as they please.

“The royal clan is all-powerful — enough to mould counsellors, courtiers
Out of their own plain lackeys, like statues are moulded from clay.
And yet — let it be remembered — no ruler on earth is so potent
As to transform nonentity into greatness, whatever you say.”

Beethoven raises his fists, as if that nonentity sighting,
Though here such pathetic gestures are certainly out of place.
But counsellor Goethe's just yawning into his fist politely.
It's hard for him to agree — but he's silent — won't argue, his grace.

Flowerbed after flowerbed,
Rose beside gorgeous rose...
Into the park towards evening the royal family goes.
Slowly they walk towards the two, while underfoot they trample
The sand, so fine, shining golden under the setting sun.
Prince Rudolph courteously listens to Her Majesty the queen-mother;
Behind them — a sparkling brood of talkative daughters and sons.
Fountain by fountain gushes,
The breeze blows, fragrant and luscious.
Over the arbours and bushes
Ivy tentacles twine.

Out of the way steps Goethe. Beethoven — hat down on eyebrows;
By leonine furrows his crimson features are slashed across.
With his breast, like a ship's prow, dissecting the heavy air of the evening,
He feels on his back Herr Goethe's glance, disapprovingly cross.

In front all have fallen silent. How long the minute is dragging!
The blood in him — not tepid water — keeps boiling rebelliously.
Forward! One step more! One effort! The royal family, parting,
Gives way to genius, bowing. Don't stop now. Hail, victory!

And counsellor Goethe, inclining his wig, well-powdered and curled.
Stands with arm bent on his bosom, his hat off — a man of the world.

Two geniuses, two luminaries — each with his own power unending,
The souls in them both are bleeding, each crucified in its own way.
Over both Eternity's magic wings are already extending,
Doctor Faustus undying, the Ninth forever to play.

1974

* * *

When a fir tree falls in the forest
With a roar the mountains respond
And the deep ravines acknowledge it
And the green fields far beyond.

When the hunter kills a reindeer
Its last cry before it dies
A response awakens in nature
Where the woodland silent lies.

And know, when alone at midnight
You feel verse throbbing in your heart,
You shall hear the whole world echo
That song, yes, in every part.

1954

THE TREE OF LIFE

Beaten by thunderstorms unbending tree;
Up on a glade in autumn woods you stand.
And lift up to the sky's cold misery
Your knotted and magnificent old hands.

You lift your blackened hands into the air,
As if the firmament you wished to prop.
The wind with groans of mourning and despair
Makes rusty leaves from dusty branches drop.

Say, why are you so sorrowful, my dear?
Your roots have not yet dried nor lost their worth.
For just one instant, oak-tree without peer,
Your live flame has been burning on this earth.

There is some strength yet lurking in your depth,
Although that flame, perhaps, has seared your bark.
No anguish, nor complaint, nor weak reproach
Comes out of your still powerful old heart.

Surmounting winter's fatal stranglehold,
Spring will not once to new green life arouse
Your mighty, naked, lightning-blackened boughs
Which Autumn clothes in tatters brown or gold.

Again the showers of Spring will wash you down.
Around you once again you will see flowers.
Again a happy dove in your green crown
Will break out cooing in the morning hours.

So, oak, embrace the gloomy sky again
And clasp the whole great earth in your strong arms.
You struck root and you lived here not in vain,
Withstanding cold and lightning as if charmed.

No death for you and no oblivion.
The magic power in you does not expire.
For from your memory never has gone
The lightning that once scorched you with its fire.

1971

FRANÇOIS VILLON

Dig into rags, curl up and close your eyes
Against the snowstorm, hiding in your ditch.
The arms of a bare hawthorn bush arise
And, bony, terrible, towards you stretch.

In your harsh plight you are its equal now.
It also calls for help, by all forgot.

The wind tore off its tatters long ago,
And threw them down upon the road to rot.

Beneath the moon upon a nearby mound
Some disbeliever's dangling betwixt
Two pillars; the prévôt of Paris found
Your guilt the same — your sentence was like his.

But you escaped disaster once again.
Will it not be your last, are more in store?
Wretch, worthy more of exile than of death,
Have you not drunk your fill of gaol before?

Ah well, you said yourself once: all your days
You had to wade up to your waist in mud.
For all that, though, you've learned life's tricky lore
Better than Averroes ever could.

The end. Now — to the devil, or to hell —
From this mad world of bigots and castrates.
You had foreseen it, wished for it yourself.
Now, have you lost your sense tonight, so late?

All robbers, usurers and prostitutes,
Monks swollen up with wine and lechery
Down here on earth and in the clouds above
In a monstrous miracle-play vent lust and blasphemy.

And there goes twisting in the devil's hands
The rope that cried for you throughout your life.
To flee — for god's sake! But by what roads, to what lands?
By what shame to escape, by what new strife?

To flee! Farther and farther through the night,
Away from cold, from fear and from pursuit.
Already torches flicker on the road.
Horses and witches dance. Dead corpses hoot.

To gather one's last strength, to reach at last
The cozy tavern hearth out of the night!
The hawthorn leaps towards the gloomy height,
Disintegrates and blackens out his sight.

"Get out, you beggar!" Curses. Stamping. Cries.
The January blizzard whipped the road.
And — just like offal — jackboots hit his side;
"The brute — he's stiff already!" someone growled.

* * *

The past brooks no denial.
Things recent or long gone
Lie not behind or by you:
Within you they live on.

A false step you'll remember
For all your days, as if
But yesterday that lesson
Life gave you, sharp and stiff.

If only you were able
Now at a single stroke
As from a board to erase them —
Your faults of long ago,

Defeats, pain, hardships, errors
Of which you did not dream,
Yet on your neck how heavy
A burden they now seem!

You honestly are seeking
That purity of yore,
But you into the future
Must take what's gone before.

Late judgement of your conscience
Will give you no release
From anguish in that moment
Preceding your decease.

1971

LESSONS OF POETRY

For drinking and eating I've lost the knack.
As if I never lived I am way off track.
A failure, or maybe my time's overdue.
My lines
Are like those
Kids at school
Write askew.

Yes, I've lost the knack — but I'll learn once more
As a ship learns the rudder's decisiveness,
As the ocean deep heeds the power of the storm

And the night-time earth
Learns quietness.

The growth of the soul of man
Has marks —
As in tree rings
Time you'll discern...
...Young poets,
You'll teach me again the art,
But you I'll teach in my turn:

Let your love for heaven and earth know no bounds,
Fear not joy, nor calamity shun,
And yesterday's outworn self
Renounce,
Tomorrow's
Self
To become.

1968



Vasil Bobinsky (1898-1938), the son of a railroader, was born in the town of Kristinopil in Lviv Region. He is the author of several books of verse, long poems, pamphlets, and literary criticism directed against fascism and bourgeois nationalism. His poetry is marked by revolutionary romanticism and civic overtones. His works have been translated into many languages of the USSR.

SONG OF THE WINGED CENTAURS

We break into gallop with a song.
The vine — our gay spirits inspire.
For we are young winged horses we —
when racing, our hoofs strike fire.

Our muscles, too, are rippling song.
Our hearts give wing to paeans.
There's secret orders sent to us
By Life in the tippy oceans.

What care we for the scoffing eye?
What care we for the snake fang?
And breaking loose from fetters strong —
Shod with steel, our scorn we sang.

Like ghosts amid the blind-dark night,
We left our hobbles far behind.
Within the body of a horse,
Quivered the light of human mind.

Ah, long the saddle galled our backs
While masters rode us round and round.
Our masters' thoughts fixed all our tracks,
And meekly then we trod the ground.

But one day flames insurgent blazed,
One holy thought began to grow —

And we no longer would obey,
But answered blow for blow.

We threw our sorry peers away,
And thundered out our freedom song —
Through steppeland rolled the angry tune:
“We’ll cut you down, lords, for our wrongs!”

Our age-long and eternal powers
Swept forward with creative swing;
We mounted up like stormy petrels
On magic and mysterious wing.

We nurtured in our body forms
The noblest features, face and brow.
While snowy breasts and snowy arms
Enhanced our fair maternal bough.

Like ghosts amid the blind-dark night,
We left our hobbles far behind.
Within the body of a horse,
Quivered the light of human mind.

Who now can turn us into slaves?
Who now can bar our chosen road?
Who now can stop our freedom flight?
Which people urge such a brainless code?

Not one! Not one! Free horses we!
Free birds are we, a freeborn nation!
We break into gallop with a song!
No hobbles, bridles, assignation!

A clan of the wingéd centaurs —
Greatest in spirit, beast avatars —
And crowned with wreaths of laurel,
We blaze the road to the stars!

1924

BLACK-EARTH

I

You are brimful of sweat poured off hands of the farmer;
You, black-earth, lie there dumb, without tongue — reconciled.
You’ve forgotten the fire that burnt you from heaven,
And forgot you were fruitful and wild.

You forgot you were stunned by the magic swift run
Of intoxicant sap, absinth greening.
You forgot and are silent. While troop after troop
Vanish deep in shroud mists all enscreening.

Pass on troop after troop marking measureless skies,
Pewter gray, alien host, hostile seeming.
Just the wind in the night, like a homeless mad dog,
Lifts a howl that disturbs your long dreaming.

II

Hey, black-earth there! Hey, black-earth there!
Don't you know what's in your care?
This soil is fertile and hungry for good seed —
Must it lie fallow and grow only weed?

Hey black-earth there! Hey, black-earth there!
No strength left to do your share?
Must you bow down to coercion or death,
Or give birth to life till your dying breath?

Hey, black-earth there! Hey, black-earth there!
Haven't you urgent desire to spare
To be wild once again and to fructify,
Shake your wheatears in the free steppe with impetuous cry?

III

Black of night, you go into the steppe lone and bare:
Your heart beats more alarmed than before.
The wind howls like a poor beast in haunted despair,
That foretells conflagrations and wars.

You lie close to the earth, seeking solace and rest,
And in nature's green lap place your hand:
Hear it? Rise and the fall of her eternal breast.
Is it clear? Crimson blood running red through the land.

You lie close. Listening. The black-earth's never still,
It whispers a strange song of green birth.
Wild wind! Wild wind! Why howl like a wolf in deep pain?
For you are my own brother — black-earth!

1925

SUNLIGHT AGAINST SHOW-WINDOWS

Sunlight crackles to splinters against the show-windows,
Sidewalks gleam like parquet squares in palatial room.
Ladies' waists are as slender as stalks of spurge-laurel,
Swinging hips look like snakes twisting charmed by a tune.
Slender ankles, smooth legs and chic shoes — highest fashion,
Silken stockings, and flesh gleaming rose — like faience.
Singing walk, flashing legs, lips releasing coarse laughter,
Under lashes dart arrows of passionate glance.
Scent intoxicant, laughter that tinkles like sleigh-bells.
Wanton play and smoke fumes, wanton play and sheer lust.
All are swaying: they tremble with hidden desire.
Deepens night. Blood on fire. Secret night. Love's a must.

Sudden through all the glitter, the fumes and the clamour,
Past the silks and the gold and the lust-rising wail,
Goes a worker — all dirty, clothes spotted and greasy:
Mute reproach to the conscience, with face worn and pale.

Without hurry he strode, and around him fell silence.
With his hands deep in pockets, he strode so free
That the elegant company parted before him
As if seeing a water-spout giant at sea.

He went quietly by. And his blue eyes were kindly,
His forehead well-shaped that bespoke clever mind.
Though his eyes wandered far beyond unseen horizons —
Through the crowd ran a tremor — fear-loathing combined.

Past the wealthy clean-shaven and sated, he sauntered
And enjoyed what he ate — just a piece of dark rye.
Yet like bullets some flew to their stained-window churches
As if mirrors at midnight showed coffins were nigh.

1928

TO FAR LANDS

O remote distant seas where the billows are tossed green and silver,
Where the clouds float above beyond reach, and are shattered like dreams;
Where the great streamlined ships catch the wind in their outstretched
white aprons,
Hoping faster than arrow to fly where the surfing waves cream.

O remote distant seas where my happiness lies somewhere hidden —
On a flowering atoll, or country where Spring burns like flame,
or where the elements moan full of thundering torrents of madness
In a terrible land far away where the surf rolls untamed.

I'd like to weave someone a tale, with embroidery in detail,
Of a land evernew whose young beauty all others outstrips —
About surf on its rocky shores, golden and mother-of-pearl,
About fairy-winged sails full of joy-winds that carry a ship
To far lands whose expanses allure, to far lands never roamed...

Any haven's the same to the men who will never see home.

1926



Ivan Honcharenko (b. 1908) was born in the village of Yabluneve, Poltava Region, into a poor peasant family. He is the author of numerous books of poems about the military and labour exploits of the Soviet people. His poems have been translated into many languages of the USSR.

THAT WAS NOT YOUR
DAUGHTER STOOD THERE

Once a mother was conversing
With her daughter in the fall,
By the wooden railing palings,
By the whitewashed cottage wall.

She was asking, and demanding
of her daughter, young and fair,
whom she walked with, whom she talked with
in the cherry-orchard square.

“Near the creep-hole through the fencing
in the orchard, I declare,
I have never once stood talking,
and have never once been there.”

“That’s a falsehood, oh my daughter,
and your eyes give you away!
Who then stood there in the orchard
in a fresh white dress in May?”

“I avow, and honestly now,”
and her eyes fell lower, lower,
“That was not your daughter stood there,
that was a cherry-tree in flower!”

1937

OBELISKS

On all roads from the Volga to Elbe,
passing by you will see, and not seldom,
in the field, or in the forest, or clearing,
in the blue sky the obelisks rearing...

By the road, in the pasture's calm haven,
at the factory or railway station,
among hooters or signals a-shining,
there are obelisks, obelisks rising...

The Baltic and Black Sea, both roaring,
beat their waves on the stern-browed shoreline...
On the cliffs, where the spring goes flying
there are obelisks, obelisks rising...

In the village, in squares 'neath town windows,
among willows,— the weeping widows,
and where silver birch-maidens are crying
there are obelisks rising...

Beneath them, eternally sleeping,
lie warriors, their calm ever keeping.
Tell the children in cradles curling,
that these obelisks life were preserving,
that these obelisks guard peace unswerving!

NOW THE PLOUGHLAND REVIVES

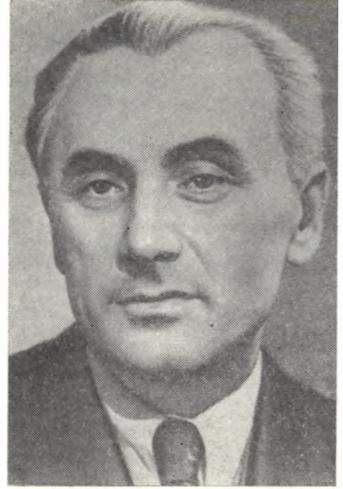
Now the ploughland revives.
The dark soil in the sun's oven bakes.
On the warmed-through fields clouds of haze
from the furrows arise.

The roots have found juices,
each sleeping sown field soon awakes...
Now the ploughland revives.

Now the ploughland revives.
And the soul of the sower is glad;
my soul too rejoices,
for I am a sower at heart,
for from boyhood

such dreams
 and such hopes,
 with the earth I had,
for the rich black soil once
my shares, too, have shorn apart.

Now the ploughland revives.
And above it go flying the cranes,
and the trumpet summons of spring
send down from the sky...
In the soil falls the seed,
And the tractors hum out on the plains,
Now the ploughland revives.



Yuri Yanovsky (1902-1954) was born in the town of Yelizavetgrad (now Dnipropetrovsk) into the family of a civil servant. He began his writing career as a poet but later turned to prose and drama. Romantically poetic, his novels and short stories enjoy wide popularity with Soviet and foreign readers. His works, which won him the USSR State prize, have been translated into many languages both in the USSR and abroad.

* * *

Hail to you, sea! A steamer's course
 Across the planet lies:
 All o'er the earth its way it plies
From Marseilles to Singapore.
Ships cross the sea from shore to shore,
 All o'er the earth they sail.
Land of free toil, Ukraine, hail!
 Blue waves and forests, roar!
Wind, fill our sail high overhead!
Seaway, speed on ahead!

1924

SON

“What’s a sail like — a big wide shawl?
Tell me, dear Mother, do!
And the winds that whisper and howl,
Are they blue-coloured too?”

“I think the sea’s like the steppe
And even and smooth as well
And the boat’s like a hawk that flaps
Its wings that flutter and swell.

“And the sail’s like a cottage white,
And the wind’s like our pussycat Mime!”
Beetles crawl on the wall at night,
Whom the cat tries to catch all the time.

“What roads can there be on the sea?
Aren’t they too hard to find?
And the gold-horned moon we see —
Can it both sleep and shine?”

1927

IN PORT

Let happy day sleep sound and fast
When it has spun its tow at last.
Let all the sunbeams — golden bands —
Lie down to rest upon the sands.
Then I will step into my Spring —
The port where wedding bells would ring —
And at far countries I will gaze —
Still-lives in a mysterious haze.
A soft beam shows the waves among,
Aflutter like a husband young.
I’ll stand there and the night will fall
Upon the world like a great shawl
And casting in the stars’ warm net
Will sew the sky’s lace ornament.
Down there a ship sleeps like a sheath
Afield, the summer sky beneath,
When no wind has been blowing yet,
When dawn is far, the sun just set.
I’ll stand there like a shadow, quiet
And whistle twice into the night:
“O you, my witless youthful day,
O you, my lifelong anguish — stay
Until I let you drink your fill
And steer my schooner on until
It passes rocks and reefs between
To shores where tranquil waters gleam,
Where old age’s low hut appears
With years like days and days like years,
Where silver on me will alight
And make my hair all snowy-white.”
Into the sea my call will sink
And like an anchor-chain will clink
Under the owl-like lighthouse stone,
Under its eye so green and lone!

A sailboat's heavy silhouette
Will sway, and through the parapet
In port, the sun's hot ball will rise,
Fog, rust-like, setting on its sides.

Again I'll whistle all alone:
"O you, my bed, you're hard as stone,
My room is lonesome as a jail,
No halyard over me, no sail!
O take me, comrade, on your ship,
For bread — just take me on your trip.
Here is my pack with hops and earth —
The salty earth which gave me birth;
Just let the sails above me fly
With two gull fledglings perched on high!

1927

DEDICATION

High in the sky swift falcons veered,
Far out to sea bold merchants steered,
And skimming sails each other neared.

Tall frigates ran, white chests wind-filled,
The moon rose soldier-like and stilled,
Guarding the seaways like a shield.

O merry days of nomad love!
Wine poured, swords clashed on deck above
And horse-like, waves would neigh and shove.

Tall frigates ran, white chests wind-filled,
The moon rose soldier-like and stilled,
Guarding the seaways like a shield.

Love reigned upon the swaying deck.
The ship was like a ghostly speck;
A star shone on its mast's long neck.

Tall frigates ran, white chests wind-filled,
The moon rose soldier-like and stilled,
Guarding the seaways like a shield.

1928

Lyubomir Dmiterko (b. 1911), a poet, dramatist, and prose writer, was born in the village of Vinniki, Lviv Region, into a teacher's family. Expressive and rich in civic themes, his poetry won him the Taras Shevchenko Prize. Many of his books have been published in other republics of the Soviet Union and abroad.



ARKAN *

Like the Prut cascading free,
Like the Cheremosh flowing by,
Like a song's free harmony,
Like a wind which blows on high,
Like a stream in spring perchance,
Which in Horhan peaks began,
Well, such then is our dance,
Well, such is our arkan.
Like the thunder from a cloud,
Like the quiet-rustling pine,
Like an axe-blow clear and loud,
Like an echo answering fine.
Like a whirlwind's swift advance,
Which the hurricane bears to man,
Well, such then is our dance,
Well, such is our arkan.
Like a fount of pure delight,
Like a storm of joy in truth,
Like magic woven tight,
Like laughter in our youth,
And like a Hutzul a-prance,
And full of grace and élan,
Well, such then is our dance,
Well, such is our arkan.

1940

* Arkan — Hutzul dance

DANCE ABOVE CROSSED SWORDS

The lassies dance upon the boards,
the Highland fling, above crossed swords.

Pavlo Tychina

Not on crossed swords, but on a deadly mine-field,
The medic Lena danced and died.
...We waded in the marshes to our knee-caps,
Came nearer to the Vistula every stride.

We needed to cut straight through to the river,
Break through the enemy's line, and reach his rear,
But he had covered our exit from the swamp-land,
Entrenched upon a burnt-out farmstead near.

That farmstead was for us just like a lighthouse,
And in the dark it blazed with sparks of fire.
If unexpectedly we strike — the fascists
Will never gain the bank where the ground is higher.

But with each step the marsh grew ever deeper,
Up to our waists the clinging mire and clay,
What's more, the dawn behind the grove was breaking.
Just like an opening window on the day.

(And if we don't get drowned in bottomless marshes,
Then an aerial scout will spot us anyway.
No one will bear us out on beating pinions
Into the long-desired post-war day!)

There's no way forward. And there's no way backward.
Fate counts each minute, as it were, of strife,
And measures off unhastingly and slowly,
Your little lump of concentrated life.

Then someone shouts out: "Look, a little island!"
And really — it's a wonder, swathed in dew,
And you may name it islet, or a pathway —
It stretched for us a possible way through.

And everyone then scrambled for a foothold,
Then came a voice, alarmed, with gasping breath:
"Comrades, get back! Get back! Here is a minefield!"
A minefield stands one hundred per cent for death.

What do you choose, when there's no means of choosing?
We stood there numb, despair struck dumb and stark,
And overhead the clouds with dawn were flaming,
Like red blood flowing from the nocturnal dark.

Upon the horizon slowly day ascended,
The motherland gave birth to a rosy son.
Behind us slept the swamps and bottomless marshes,
Above a "Fokker-Wulf" began to hum!

A senseless death. So purposeless and stupid.
To drown in marshes, hands raised in dismay,
Or in despair to dash upon the minefield,
That's what the war holds in store for you today!

And see, a girl crawls out upon the island,
Casts off her mire-bespattered great-coat then.
That's health-instructor Lena... Moving forward!..
Behind, her shadow wavers, long and thin.

The shadow swings. The girl goes, as if dancing,
Floats lightly o'er the minefield, o'er the grass,
With fascinating, captivating beauty —
Such beauty very rarely you see pass!..

From the explosion all the meadow trembled,
The echoes round the Vistula region flew.
A crimson flame in one great arch extended
And after... all around was quiet anew.

I don't remember who yelled out "Hoorah!"
We rose, united by that burst of flame,
As if some kind of miracle had happened,
And we no longer feared the deadly game.

"Hoorah!" Straight on ahead we all surged forward,
Through bursting mines — "For the Fatherland!" rent the air
And summoned to fight and struggle on till victory.
We shan't be stopped by fire, nor minefield snare!

And so we won the battle for the Vistula...
And when the sappers cleared the mines away,
All that remained of Lena on that day —
That was a skylark in the boundless heavens —
And a memory which in people's mind will stay.

1976

OLVIA

Most ancient city, thrusting from the earth,
With hills, ravines and stones, and broken shreds,
And scattered by the centuries and the winds,
Or great, or small, humanity's deeds and words.

And till today we visualize in the dark
Upon the earthly firmament marble shrines,
Well-furnished with their heavy iron gates,
The first shoots in the first field's furrowed lines.
The priests, the rich slave-owners, and poor slaves,
Philosophers and tradesmen, poets of old,
Brocade and finery of the festive crowds,
The tempting ring of minted coins of gold.
The dust of centuries, and the faded grass,
Theatre and market, street and public square,
And government plots concealed in the mesh of dark,
And merchant caravans in the harbours there...

All that has passed. The greying steppe remains,
The tireless sun, the wind with breath relaxed,
And items in the world's museums on show,
And the dense network of our living tracks.
Those living paths to Olvia still lead
The hero-grandads, grandson pioneers...
Despite the fact that this our restless age
The route to distant galaxies now clears,
Despite the fact that scientists name the time,
And further flights on unknown routes set forth,
We're masters here, and evermore must be,
Of this great planet which has given us birth,
And generously has fed us at her breast,
And we have burned and yearned for her as, cast
Upon hot coals, till tempered, and in despair,
Her real true people we became at last.

Dear native land! In bold and fearless flight,
Not only the desire to drink and eat
We take with us to strange and distant stars,
But take the thirst to sing, and to create.
And speeding off with us to heavenly worlds
Each dream which we have nursed on earth here goes —
Sofia's beauty, Olvia's mystery,
The magical aroma of the rose.

And meanwhile burns the sun's exhausting heat,
And meanwhile dust in layer on layer steals,
Here where the Romans and the Greeks have stood,
And the Sarmatians' armed invading heels.
And Olvia in imagination shines
Throughout the mirage of thunderous thousand-years,
In joy and pain, in glory, and disgrace,
In all that constitutes this world of ours.

PRELUDE

In the nighttime of March
 my life took its beginning.
From its deep winter sleep then
 the earth bright awoke.
And as stars grouped together
 in patterns of prophets,
From embrace of the planets
 a child's cry loud broke.
And this cry shrill and piercing
 woke rolling expanses,
Springtime orchards stripped bare
 and the voiceless oak grove.
Thus my road here began,
 and my fate was clear lying,
As in the veins of mankind
 my blood steady flowed.
At one dawning transparent
 of March's dark nighttime,
From the earth I full welcomed
 the warmth and strength flow,
So that life's long hard path
 to its end I might follow,
Through the heat of July
 and the deep winter snow.
Thus you go through the years
 with belief, ever hopeful,
Understanding much more
 all the more felt and seen.
Yet the tape's stretched out taut
 clearly marking the finish.
And the knowledge of this
 stabs us all deep and clean.
But small children cry loud
 from embrace of the planets.
And young people grow up
 as the years patience lend.
And all fighters gain courage
 as all poets grow greyer.
And the river of life
 will flow on without end.

1977

THE SINGER

Upon the Vosges Square there lies
A medieval quietude.
What kind of poems do you desire?..
All is exhausted, last drops screwed...

The burning feeling, passion's kiss,
The sense of events, life's living core,
And only on noisy boulevards
The carriages drive, return no more —

To the age of wiped-out dynasties,
Of frenzied raging kinds and lords...
The revolution has its mood,
Its lexicon of pitiless words.

Accept therefore your bitter fate,
Or fame's intriguing laurel wreath,
And laughter, tears, free-will and yoke,
Your irredeemable hour of death.

Though thoughts be sharp as the razor's edge,
And dreams be burning hot as fire,
In this small corner of Vosges
In torment live Hugo and his lyre.

Here is the stairway leading up
To gained Olympian heights it seems.
In the dark jaws of the corridor,
A lantern, like an aureole gleams.

And from this nest the books flew out
V. Hugo, V. Hugo. Victor's word.
But now, as silent as in a vault
His humane voice no more is heard.

But only with unquenchable thirst
This dwelling place is breathing hard —
The thirst for the savage deadly duel
Of the prophet. Sinner. Sinner-bard.

PORIK'S * GRAVE

A stone is not unfeeling rock.
A stone is able to groan and cry.

* Porik, Vasil (1920-1944) — Soviet Army officer,
hero of French Resistance

A stone which has been thus bedewed
With burning tears from a mother's eye.

A slab of Zhitomir * labrador
Is standing here in Pas-de-Calais.
The nature of the North is severe
As it was then, in that past day,

When he was still in the living flesh,
And battled among these pit-heads still.
The legend then was later born
In the district where French miners dwell.

These pit-heads, just like in Donbas...
Like near Vinnitsya * with its groves...
And in the neighbouring Arras town
Your murderers sprang up in droves.

Arras — the cradle of Robespierre,
The Bourbon Square, with trees and all.
What days are these? What era's this?
Gates rust, there's ivy on the wall...

No grief, nor pain, nor tiredness in
That fatal moment did he know.
He wanted in his own brigade
To still wreak vengeance on the foe.

And his beloved one's blazing eyes
Were in Hénin-Liétard, nearby...
But that's no stream, it's death which seethes
There in the gulley, beneath the sky.

That's all. The end. A stone remains.
A deathless sign. The seal of woe.
And tears, a mother's eternal tears,
Which from the stone still cry and flow.

1974

* Zhitomir, Vinnitsya — regional centres in the Ukraine



Serhiy Voskrekasenko (1906-1979) was born in the village of Lazirtsi in Cherkasy Region into a peasant family. He wrote numerous collections of humorous and satirical stories which enjoy wide popularity in the Soviet Union.

DOUBLE-FACED

We hear him speaking very often,
And from his speeches fires blaze.
With logic, pathos and rhetoric
He ably speaks in all these ways.

He favours nothing that's dishonest,
And nothing bearing falsehood's name...
And he is no respecter of persons,
Pulls everyone to bits the same.

The lady-cleaner, and the postman,
The night-watch too. And next will come
The turn of Luxemburg's Prime Minister,
And even the Holy Pope of Rome.

And his own master, frank and fearless
He pulls down in the dirt and dust,
When he's aware that that poor failure
Was yesterday dismissed from his post.

1953

A THIEF AT CONFESSION

(from the past)

The priest said strictly to the thief:
"You rob your nearest kith and kin,
But go to church, in God believe.
Though God said thieving is a sin..."

The religious thief, when the sermon ceased,
Replied in this wise to the priest
"Well, I have read in the Holy Word,
Which all may have full confidence in,
'He who sincerely prays,
Then God
Will pardon him the wickedest sin'.

And you yourself at Epiphany
That very lesson preached to me..."

The priest absolved the thief on this
And let him go his way in peace.

1962

Way beyond some gay horizon there,
On the Dnieper, or the Desna's shore,
We recall, in some more fortunate hour,
Those with whom we foot-slogged in the war.

Those with whom, somewhere, one step from death,
We left marching tracks upon the grass.
We recall fine lads, and catch our breath,
Those with whom we shared a meal, a glass.

Into distant hills, a mountainous wall,
Thousand roads run on and disappear.
Who among us, comrade-soldiers all,
Does not hold them in his memory dear?

Who upon those roadways did not find
People good and bad, and false and true?
Fighting friends we never left behind,
Four long summers, and three winters through.

Some were of a witty, yes, stubborn cast,
Gaily looked upon this world of ours,
Till a minute or two before their last
Were prepared to live a hundred years.

How they joked: "No, no, we shall not die,
Hardened as we are in such a fire!"
Now beyond which bright and distant sky
Do we call to mind our friends so dear?

Beyond the Desna, and the Dnieper blue,
Where white sea-gulls fly, and rushes ring?..
Those left living may recall us too —
Maybe so — the war's still in full swing.

1944

UPON THE KOLA PENINSULA

The strung-out track runs on unspanned,
Where pines with pointed needles are.
Lost in the distance lies that land
Upon the Kola Peninsula.

The mountains echo on either hand
With hunstmen's dry shots ringing far.
Lost in the distance lies that land
Upon the Kola Peninsula.

The river's small — it's not Trubizh,
And not Supjy, with waters wide.
Not here I ran behind the sledge,
Barefoot behind the horses hied.
Not here the patient cows and lambs
I drove along the rutted track,
Not here made bonfires, warmed my hands,
Nor baked potatoes in the ash.
Not here I played upon the leas,
As daring as the most daring ones.
Not here, when first snow cloaked the trees,
I walked to school with all my chums.
Not here in childhood long ago,
When we ran barefoot down the lane,
Our fine old apple-tree in blow
Its rosy branch tapped on the pane.
Not here the clouds their carpets wove,
When snow-fields gleamed with sparkling stars,
I heard my mother's song of love
First time above my cradle bars.
Not here, in the oak-trees' shady grove,
I arranged for my first rendezvous,
Not here I grew, not here knew love —
But that
 means nothing, it is true.

It may be past the last confines,
Where pines with pointed needles are,
But those tall pines, they are my pines,
Upon the Kola Peninsula.

Although from here I may fare forth,
From soil unploughed beneath the snow,
Still this cold earth — it is my earth,
And spreads itself for me, I know!

The Kola's not like our Desna,
Nor mountains like the Carpathians there,
And not from here I went to war
With my good friends, all soldiers rare.
But if the thunder again we hear
With blows severe, then for Ural,
For the Caucasus, for our Crimea,
For the North, with forests and hills as well,

I'll boldly go to fight again,
As for my golden land Ukraine,
As for dear Moscow, for Leningrad,
As for Sevastopol, Stalingrad.
As for my boyhood home and grove,
Where nought the southern sunshine mars,
Where I heard mother sing of love,
First time above my cradle bars.
Where every path to every gate
With dew is covered, near and far,
Which are three times nine wide lands away
Far off from the Kola Peninsula.

1949

GIRL FROM POLISSYA

Maiden, o maiden,
A sunlit creation,
Your plait a corona
In olden-time fashion.

Dressed in pure daylight,
Dawn-fresh, endearing,
Say, where did you spring from,
From whence are appearing?

Perhaps from some story?
Perhaps from some ditty?
Your brows almost meeting,
Your snub nose so pretty!

Not once plucked those eye-brows,
So coal-black and even.
Those blue eyes are beaming,
As soothing as heaven.

By such blue eyes shining,
At morning, especially,
All recognize, surely,
A girl from Polissya?

For light that caresses
Unceasing, unfading,
O, who would not love you,
Ukrainian maiden?

At some heart you're aiming
With excellent sighting.
Whose soul are you warming?
Whose path are you lighting?

From whence are you coming,
From whence, pretty sweeting?
Why didn't you earlier
Grant me a meeting?

"Oh dear, but I couldn't
Meet you, or another.
I still was too little,
And always with mother.

I grew like a birch-tree,
A white forest-maiden,
I'd like to have spoken,
But I had to hasten.

So many jobs waiting,
High noon, and I'm shirking!
Today is not Sunday,
It's Tuesday — I'm working!"

"Oh, that's not the reason —
Not Sunday, as you're saying.
It's the fact that my temples
Are already greying.

Not that it's high noon-tide,
And Tuesday, my sporty,
It's because I'm not twenty,
But already
forty!"

1956

AERODROMES

The aerodromes are just like nervous centres
Of earth's top-crust, in rhythm day and night.
And having swallowed countless kilometres
Of contradictions, friction, and stormy flight.
And human restlessness, across the distance
Maintaining accurately their arduous course,
Upon them find brief refuge and assistance,
And have their quickened pulses checked at source,

These birds, with hearts exhausted in the thunder,
Each bearing its own powerful government's emblem.
The aerodromes...

On the aerodromes waiting under —
A moment's rest. The bird again starts trembling,
And haste again, in the engine's hurly-burly,
Explodes in the turbine's howl, its whining drive —
The birds sweep off. They make the furthest journey
As short and swiftly sped
as human life.

1966

ORIOLES IN MY ORCHARD

Orioles in my orchard here,
Orioles, cuckoos fluting,
Waken for our pleasure dear,
Boughs with green leaves shooting.

Why then, my bright rainbow-love,
Don't you rise more timely,
See the whole gay world, my dove,
Dressed in pale-blue finery,

With its tireless nightingales,
With each dewdrop's rainbow,
Which no words, no magic tales,
None can tell, or say so?

Probably all the words in the world
At this hour are stinted,
Cannot speak what orioles
In the branches hint at?

1968

'MID THE PINES IN THE FOREST DARK IS THE NIGHT

'Mid the pines in the forest dark is the night,
Heavy banks of dark clouds to the ground incline,
Only in pointed gable
My window bright
Holds the reflection of one evergreen pine.

A sheaf of light-rays pierce the rough damp of the gloom,
Aiming up at the pine-tree's crown rising steep.
Toward the night, my window has started to roam.
It does not sleep. And the evergreen pine does not sleep.

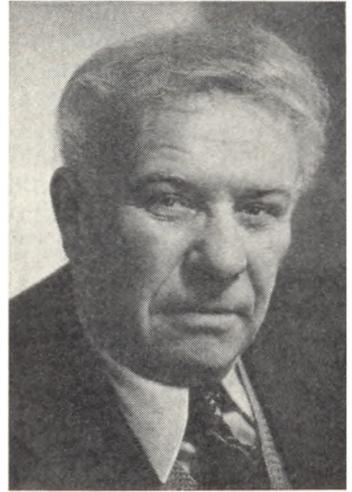
Dark is the night. Let it be so. I go on my quest.
On the pathway the flickering light-shaft pales.
Something I'll find: a bunch of cornflowers — the last,
Or, in the grove, the first of the autumn's tales.

Or, like an archeologist, — some time-worn coin,
On it, the traces of powers and centuries gone...
Oh, how rough is the road on this journey of mine!
Let it be so. Do not end. Go ahead. Lead me on.

1969

MIKOLA NAHNIBIDA

Mikola Nahnbida (b. 1911) was born in the village of Smirnovka, Zaporizhya Region, into the family of the village doctor. He is the author of numerous ballads and narrative poems about the labour exploits of the Soviet people and the friendship of Soviet nations. His poems have been translated into many languages. He is a USSR State and Taras Shevchenko prize winner.



OUT AT SEA

By my hand my Grandad led me
One fine morning to the bay.
“Buddies, show my little grandson
How the perch are caught today.”

Fishermen with bronze-brown faces
On their boat took little me,
And the oars like lightning-flashes
Struck the water merrily.

As they struck the rolling whitecaps,
From the foam towards the skies
Multicoloured drops went flying,
Light of wing, like butterflies.
There they flew and fluttered gaily,
Till a rainbow set off sailing.

Oh, how wonderful it looked there
Up above the wide blue sea!
“Why,” I thought, “those oars are magic,
Catching fairy-tales for me!”

Leaning overboard, I marvelled
At the whitecaps as they rolled.
“Hey, be careful there, Mikola!”
From behind me Grandad called.

And the people moved away then
From the softly creaking mast,
And the sail began to flutter,
Breathing with full breast at last.

Over shining silver whitecaps
Swifter than the wind we sailed.
Seagulls tried to overtake us,
But, of course, they always failed.

And I thought, what wondrous secrets
Fishermen at sea must know!
In their sails the wind they capture
And with songs they make it blow.

All my life I will remember
As a dream from fairy tales
How at high tide nets were gathered
Full of fish with shining scales.

How the fishing-boat bent over
When the nets were gathered in,
How the fish beat at the bottom,
Golden, silver, coral-finned!

To my grandfather I swore
I would never go on shore,
All my life I'd live at sea
Where the wind flies, full of glee.

1946

THE SHIRT

My mother once sewed me a shirt
 Out of sails from the sea,
Which my sisters embroidered with silk
 In a pattern of crosses.
To this day it has not been worn out by me
And it's splendid to feel it still there, on my bosom.

Ah, how fine is that shirt
 Which was sewn from good cloth,
Which was bleached by the sunshine
 Pure-white.
How it breathes on my breast with the wind, white as froth,
Singing songs of Azov full of joy and delight.

There are times I feel sad —
 When the weather is bad —
But that shirt starts to flutter,
 And, heartened and glad,
With my soul like a sail, then I turn right about
And towards the grey waves, full of courage, set out.

I have never asked Fate,
 In no matter what state,
For a minute of calm
 For my trouble-torn heart,
For that shirt which to me more than money is worth,
For that shirt made for me by my dear mother's art,
Longs for wind, open spaces and silver-capped surf.

MONTENEGRO

This took place in far Montenegro
Where the hill-folk are eagles bold,
Where the foot-paths,
 and where the highways
Cross the passes, a hundred all told.
There I travelled those highland roadways,
Fell in love with stern beauty there.
Black stone cliffs, and thundering waters
Till today in my heart I bear.
I rejoiced when I heard in those motifs,
The soul of the ancient Slavonic lays,
And I grieved in the heated wheatfields
Which the sun burns in summer days.

Said hello to the hill-side children,
Going with exercise-books to school,
I was happy to hear the hill-folk
Friend and brother our Russia call.
There a loving mother embraced me,
Mourning still her son, so fine...
But not that did I wish to tell you
In this ballad of mine.

This took place in far Montenegro.
Half of the world was still at war,
Partisans looked on in sorrow
As the flames through their village roared.
Fascists left only whitening ashes,
Shot the old and the young as well.

Partisans one small girl discovered
In the ruins where she used to dwell.
Having survived the flames and torment,
Dumb with the horror she'd seen that night,
She held out burnt arms and fingers
To the partisans, weak with fright.

They wrapped up her wounds with kerchiefs,
By the ruins, each bowed his head.
Then they travelled off through the mountains,
Paths which to Staff-Headquarters led.

On the way the small girl lay sleeping
In the Montenegrin warrior's arms.
Thus he came to the Staff-Headquarters,
Stern and silent, in deep alarm.

There he laid his sacred burden
On old grey-haired Raina's lap.
Told the soldiers:

 "The child is sleeping."
All fell quiet in the mountain camp.
Radio-men rushed out from a cavern:
"Vyazma! Vyazma!" their happy cry.
Ah, how glad they were, how noisy!
Let the sleeping child still lie...

"Russian troops have taken Vyazma,
Fascists have been backward hurled!"
"Vyazma" then the partisans christened
Their unknown little orphan girl.

And old Raina became her mother,
Nursed her through the war's hard times...
But not that did I wish to tell you
In this ballad of mine...

This took place in far Montenegro
Recently we went there as guests
Welcoming songs for us resounded,
Round the tables at friendly feasts.

In that village, in place of the ruins,
Graceful gardens were well-installed.
There we asked what became of the orphan
Who in Russian Vyazma was called,
"Our dear Vyazma is seventeen nearly,"
One of the Montenegrins replied.
"Haven't you heard how wonderfully sweetly
Russian songs she sings with pride?"

Vyazma is studying.

 Soon she'll return here,
She'll be a teacher up here, in the wild.
Grey-haired Raina sees her already —
Her darling Vyazma, her dearest child."

Peace and joy to both daughter and mother,
Grown together in war's dread time...
That is what I just wished to tell you
In this ballad of mine.

Yugoslavia, 1966

BONFIRES

The bonfires smoke above the water
The maple trees in their green clouds there...
A quiet song behind the scythe-blades
The mowers along the meadows bear.

And in that song's grass track I follow —
The flying scythes go zing, zing, zing,
And fascinated in my spirit
I whisper the words of the song they sing.

Not whisper —
 but live through and through them,
Again and again through my lot I go,
And for the first time love a lassie,
And for the first time friendship know.

The scythes go zing —
 The song still farther
To long past years has let me roll,
When we built Zaporizhya Steel Works,
And in so doing I saw my goal,

When first I felt the inner power
Of craftsmen deep in love with life,
And their bright-pinioned working spirit
Where inspiration and light were rife.

O song, and what have you been doing?
You've led me back to youth, like a bird,
You've filled again the sea-sail's canvas,
And on my shoulder the ribbon stirred.

THE BELLS OF KHATYN

(Excerpt)

The singing rain,
The springtime rain
Falls on a grievous wonder,
On grass-green carpets it falls amain,
And happily sinks under.
And to the flashing lightning's call
It sends its dew-drops pearly,
And from the streams already full
Speeds couriers down the valley.

The singing rain,
Merry-andrew rain,
It dances as if it's Christmas...
But here I see the sad ash again
In its mackintosh stands listless,
And stretches branchy arms to all,
Above the world,
Above me...
The drops
Upon the granite fall,
Like tears of those that love me,
The rain down grievous letters drains,
Inscribed upon the column,
On people's names, on districts' names
It flows sedate and solemn.
The marble weeps
And sadly speaks
Their unforgotten story.
Beneath the roses villages sleep:
Khatyn,
Rudni,
Lyaori.
Thousands of them in Byelorussia
The fascists burnt to a cinder.
The stars they weep, the stones cry thus:
Zagorye!
Lyadi!
Svidno!
And through the years, the fire and smoke,
At the popular assembly
Speak living witnesses from the stone:
Bobruisk,
Lagoisk,
Polissya.
This is no shower...
All Byelorussia
Weeps tears upon the granite...

In sorrow and anger this I swear,
I swear to all this planet,
To children, to my native land,
By all my heart holds sacred,
May I moulder in the grass and sand
If I forget these places:
Khatyn,
Barishki,
Lisové,—
Or forgive their execution!
Besyadi,
Nivki,
Ternové,
And demand no retribution.

My sorrow,
My unending grief,
Don't bar the path to anger!
And you, May shower, fall beneath
Upon our meadow's languor.
Beyond Khatyn, where they went to sow,
The soil for seed still hungers,
But it can not forget till now
The cries of Khatyn's poor youngsters,
And sorrow's sharp
And bitter tang
In our daily bread remaining,
Reminds us:
Do not forget the wrong
Of our deep and soul-felt mourning.
Do not forgive,
Do not forget,
Nor lighten reparations
For those who here like wild beasts went,
And raised those conflagrations.
The rain pours down...
The alarm-bells toll
O'er the ashes, from chimney-belfries: *
Ding-dong!..
Ding-dong!..
Someone they call,
And then fall silent with memories.
A half-minute silence,
Again the bell
Which grieves about the burning,
And farther and farther the bronze bells toll
O'er forest dales a-yearning.

* On the chimney-stacks, all that remained of Khatyn, bells, which continuously toll, have been installed

A burst of grief
 To those alive
 About the burned ones' torment...
 Remember, people, while you live
 They loved the living moment!
 Ding-dong!..
 Ding-dong!..
 At the village bound
 The last stove-chimney's tolling,
 And the first hut awakes to sound:
 Ding-dong!..
 In memory knelling...
 So, day and night,
 Both wrath and woe
 Adown the dale go roaming.
 No other voice, no other sight,
 Except the cranes a-homing...
 Kurli-kurli...
 Kurli-kurli...
 Floats o'er the forest's hollows,
 And on the hill-side greenery:
 Ding-dong!..
 The cranes' cry follows.
 Ding-dong!..
 Kurli-kurli... once more
 Then fades upon the horizon.
 And maybe cranes past Oradour
 And Lidice are flying.
 And maybe see from the 'neath the clouds,
 Upon the Ukraine's fair bosom,
 My village in its smoking shroud,
 Kortelisi's scorched blossom.
 And maybe o'er the distant seas
 They now have heard our sorrow —
 Kurli-kurli —
 Above the trees,
 Ding-dong!..
 Ding-dong!..
 In the hollow.
 The stones they cry,
 The stones they cry,
 The world, and the skies that span it,
 With trembling hand someone will lay
 Their violets on the granite.
 And one, like a soldier,
 On his knees,
 Struck dumb with bitter rancour,
 Or on Khatyn's rough stone's unease
 Whets sharp his righteous anger —
 Do not forgive,

Do not forget,
Nor lighten reparations
For those who here like wild beasts went,
And raised these conflagrations.

1973

TO VETERANS OF THE WAR

Tell all the truth about it to your sons,
To both your sons and grandsons, veterans,
About the roads you had to cover once
From the Volga to the Balkans with your guns.

Tell all the truth!
Let anybody dare
To meet it with a sneer of disbelief,
Your tale of how you suffered pain and grief
To save your native planet from despair.

Tell all the truth
And never be ashamed
To talk about your daring feats with pride.
All will confirm your heroism world-famed —
Brest, Moscow, Kiev — cities far and wide.

Speak up and tell the truth to all mankind —
Let men forever keep it well in mind —
Of sacrifices made by those whom steel
And thunder could not crush on battlefields.

Tell all the truth, tell all the truth of those
Who perished and as legends were revived,
And so returned to live in the desires
And cherished hopes and Springs of all alive.

Tell all the truth about it to your sons
And grandsons — let them listen, rapt and still,
You will be aided in your story by
Mamayev * and Malakhov ** burial-hills.

1975

* Mamayev Mound — a hill near Volgograd (Stalingrad)
** Malakhov Mound — an elevation near Sevastopol, in the Crimea —
scenes of fierce battles against the Nazis during World War II

TO KATERINA

Don't lose yourself within the human sea,
Don't petrify in lonely pride,
On reaching any crossroad in your life,
Let your conscience be your guide.

Don't blind yourself if you should win success,
Capitulate when trouble's there,
And don't in days when ripe the harvest blooms,
Sleep through them, blindly unaware.

Do not avoid the wrongs that come your way,
Trample, censure, judge, point and blame,
As for the poison of servility,
Evade the path that leads this way.

Do not betray your friends for speaking words
Of bitter truth, reality,
And fearful be, more than of death itself,
At no response to misery.

1975



KOST HERASIMENKO

Kost Herasimenko (1907-1942) was born in the village of Prikhidki, Poltava Region, into the family of a teacher. He was killed during the Second World War. His poems portray life of the intelligentsia of the 1930s and the heroism of the Soviet people during the Second World War. He is the author of several plays, and his works have been translated into many languages of the USSR.

DITTY

Ah, I've tramped the pathway
Coming through the rye,
In a pale-blue kerchief
A simple girl go I.

Gently a breeze was blowing
And embraced me free,
My long-awaited laddie
Didn't recognize me.

Either you've got married,
Or forgotten me,
Or my song in the rye-field
Didn't hear, maybe?

No, I haven't married,
Nor forgotten you,
Only another pleasure
I have taken to.

Hey, through fields and meadows
Other winds now blow,
Prancing on the bridle
Cavalry horses go.

Over the blue horizon
Carrion crows now flap,

Young Budyonny * troops ride —
Buckle, belt and strap.

'Gainst the butcher-foeman
In the front ranks go I.
Early at dawn tomorrow
Down the road shall fly.

Lightly a little pathway
To the battle swings,
It's not worthwhile worrying
Over trifling things...

Then a breeze so gentle,
Trembling quietly blew...
No farewell on parting,
Off to the fight he flew.

For that lad I've waited
As long years went by,
In a pale-blue kerchief
A simple girl go I.

1940

STORY ABOUT A SONG

All flooded in springtime sunshine,
In a simple soldier's great-coat,
With a kit-bag and anti-gas-mask,
A song marched along the street.
In its tracks the windows opened,
And the girls all stood there gazing,
But the song marched on and thundered
About youthful life, and the fight,
About rye-ears by horse-hooves trampled,
About some far-distant well-spring,
About steppe-land, and love and parting,
About spring and returning cranes...
In the song was something familiar,
Something great, and something joyful,
In its discipline, in its tension,
In the steel-shod stride of the squad.

* Semyon Budyonny (1883-1973) — Soviet military leader, hero of the Civil War

And later, when all the regiment
In the gloom of the side-streets melted,
When beyond the unknown turning
The words of the song died away —
An architect meditated,
Returned to his plan from the window,
Enveloped in blue-grey smoke,
And thoughtfully murmured: “M-m-yes...”
And it seemed to that silent dreamer
That in the sombre black lines there,
In precise and sleepless lines there
From cement and malachite,
There grew, and began lightly breathing
Spring grasses, inebriated,
And a girl hurried off to her meeting,
And the word arose — “My love!”

And later, when all the regiment,
In the gloom of the side-streets melted,
When beyond the unknown turning
The words of the song died away:
Broad-shouldered, and wearing glasses,
A surgeon returned to his patient,
And lightly, it seemed, started thinking,
And warmly then took his pulse.
And felt that life was unconquered,
That in it the rye was rustling,
That in it the spring was rippling,
And a ringing dream arose.
And when, by chance, of a sudden,
Their glances were somehow meeting,
Both firmly had the feeling:
There it is! Not escaped yet. Life!

And later, when all the regiment
In the gloom of the side-streets melted,
When beyond the unknown turning
The words of the song died away:
From the noisy street, from the sunshine,
From his widely-opened windows,
To his clean and solid volumes
A poet went into his room.
He wanted then to say something,
He, it seemed, was heavily breathing,
The moment of inspiration
He suddenly wanted to stop.

But the song, all flooded in sunshine,
With kit-bag and anti-gas-mask,
With gleaming and ringing bayonets,
Simply, as usual, marched.

And the song became lost in the distance,
Unheard, unseen, and unnoticed,
In the warmth of the April twilight
It dwindled and melted away.
And somewhere the lovers went hasting,
Over something commissions were sitting,
In a nervous and dreamy alto
In the darkness Lincoln cried.

And only at night, behind mist-clouds,
Beyond window-panes covered with curtains,
On tip-toe
Through sleep, and through childhood
The song returned once again —
To the architect planning, exhausted,
To the surgeon, as well as his patient,
To the celebrated poet,
And, it seems, to someone besides.

And the glorious sun was shining,
And the well-spring of something murmured,
And fish, in that song, went swimming,
And winds, in that song, still roamed,
And the singing steely bayonets
In the sun were burning and blazing,
In a simple soldier's great-coat
Marched the fighting, invincible song.

I rose from my bed, still sleepless,
I, nobody special, not famous,
Just one of the usual inhabitants
Of the streets of the township X.
And I understood that this song now
Will fill my whole future always,
That it's near, and here inside me
With the burning breath of its words.

Let them sleep behind wall and partition,
Let them dream of their youth, my neighbours,
Of April streams, and of snow-drops,
Of flood-waters, and of doves.
Arise, full of fight and sunshine,
Arise, full of fields and fancy,
I hear on the building project
How the malachite slabs arise.
I hear how the heart of the patient
Begins to beat warmly and strongly,
I hear how now, to the poet
A masterpiece is born!

Arise, restrained, but a challenge,
Arise, with your disciplined lines here!
From the city to distant blue ocean
The fighters will carry you, song!

.
Behind windows town-dwellers were sleeping,
With this song were warmly breathing,
The architect and the surgeon,
And the poet, known by all.
Somewhere, probably, guards were changing,
Somewhere, probably, new-born were crying,
Somewhere out in the street, in the darkness,
Song rang like a rippling stream.

1938

AFFIRMATION

To M. Rylsky.

Already the roads are drying,
And the nests are rocking on branches,
Already the floods are rising
Like the notes of a simple song.
Already the green young grass-blades
From the pale-blue thaw-holes are sprouting,
Already with sap are swelling
The birches' maidenly forms.
Arise, Eulenspiegel!
Like storm-wind
Through transparent unknown go raving,
And in window-panes blue go glancing,
And read, and laugh, and see dreams.
Come, travel around my country,
Like a happy warm sunbeam passing,
And in the mad bustle of April
Melt away beneath my sun.
Arise, all you simple heroes
Of song, of fact, and of legends!
It's such a time in the courtyards,
Such a noisy, youthful choir...
Already have drowned in the heavens
The wedges of cranes flying carefree.
I affirm:
This day will be proven
A rich and regular day!
And there's no more to say about it...

The tall young poplars are standing,
 The military roads go rambling
 Through the ultramarine of the woods...
 How many just ordinary people,
 And each of you like a melody,
 In the mines, and on building projects,
 In the trenches, and manning your posts!
 The earth will dry out,
 And falling
 On her bosom,
 Each one will utter:
 "How gaily the grass is breathing!
 How sweetly the nightingales ring!..
 And I — I just feel now really,
 Through my veins, with my blood, goes flowing
 And rustling the calm affirmation
 Of all that both was and is.
 I affirm:
 With earth-sap arising,
 The rarest of shoots are sprouting,
 For all our forebears' past torments,
 For all the grief we've not known,
 The young lucerne stands a-swaying,
 Of their joys the continuation,
 Of their scanty love among briars,
 Among the thistles and weeds.
 I affirm:
 Our youth was spent standing
 On watchful guard in the forests.
 I affirm:
 In Baikal's expanses our song re-echoing goes,
 It raises on high its banner,
 It is all astir with bayonets,
 It rides upon tanks all-powerful,
 And crackles through twigs on the track.
 I affirm:
 Our warriors' glory arises on falcon's pinions,
 It soars o'er the springtime ocean,
 It soars o'er the seething wave,
 And the ocean is roaring and moaning:
 "A song to the madness of heroes
 Let us sing,
 So that they live for ever,
 In the light of capital deeds!"
 And tranquilly breathe the grasses,
 Like harp-strings the tall trees are standing...
 And in the brake, like a serpent,
 Steals
 Into our country a spy...
 And the carefree oriole is laughing...

And along the ravines bare and scraggy,
Right up to our borders the enemy
Leads on his taciturn troops.
I affirm: there will be shooting.
I affirm: there will be battle.
I affirm:
Once again the foeman
Will fall into our firm hands.
And for blood
Shed on fields and meadows,
For the torments of many peoples
There will be one simple payment —
The usual portion of lead.
We'll go through, far and wide we'll carry
A song, our youth,
And our passion,
So that later, from clustering grasses
The legends should sprout about us!
Where rattling tanks went attacking,
There freely the mint has sprouted;
Where the swift-footed horse went flying,
There has risen the lover-grass.
Arise, then, you simple heroes!
Arise, all the romance of sunshine!
Already with sap are swelling
The birches' maidenly forms.
Above the wide world already
The songs of victory are sounding.
I affirm:
That's our immortality.
I affirm:
I am alive!

1938

JUST A YARN

...I don't know: the truth, or a tale invented?
Was it someone else, or maybe, I
Somewhere in the wood, in the distant twenties,
Cut your name upon a birch-tree high?

Afterwards I drank the birch sap-water,
Going to fight, among the greenwood haze,
So that in the years victorious later,
I should not forget it all my days!

...Just a forester's hut, with straw for sleeping,
And transparent air of midnight gloom...
You, then, like an unknown melody sweeping,
Came to me at night beneath the moon.

Scarcely felt, again my wounds you bandaged,
So as not to waken sleeping pain;
Young, and absolutely not imagined,
Gave me cold spring water once again.

I recall the mint-smell, inebriating,
How, unpausing, I drank that water so,
And to tell you something I was so waiting —
What to say — myself I did not know.

You stood by, so bright, and quite mysterious,
Just a simple girl, completely real.
And I had a longing then, so serious,
Once at least those untouched lips to feel.

But you went. It seemed while meditating.
Years will melt, the smoke will drift away...
Then it seemed you did not go, stood waiting,
In my fighting heart would ever stay.

I survived. Through many days I languished...
Why did I not take care of you before?
Why had you, just like a melody, vanished
Among our many lengthy roads of war?

Springtime goes, the summer sun grows bolder,
The flowers have grown, and now are standing fine.
And we should live, and we should not grow older,
Polissya girl, or just a yarn of mine!

I'll go to the forest, pluck a shoot, and linger...
I'll grow from it a birch-tree on my plot,
And sometimes think, my darling girl Yarinka,
Shall I ever find you, or shall I not?

MIKOLA SHPAK



Mikola Shpak (1909-1942), the son of a farmer, was born in the village of Lipki in Zhitomir Region. His lyrical poetry of the prewar period concerns the Soviet Ukrainian countryside. During the Second World War he fought in the underground and wrote sharp satirical poems directed against the nazi aggressors. He was captured and tortured to death by the Gestapo in the summer of 1942.

HAPPINESS

Daughter on one arm,
Son by the hand,
Off you go, sister,
The meadow is grand!

Off you go, Katya,
Along the far shore,
Where o'er the pastures
Day breaks once more.

Where by the river
Cherries and grass,
Green breezes gently
Sway as they pass...

Daylight is blazing,
Daylight or flowers...
Can't help love, sister,
This world of ours!

Off through the meadow,
Happy at heart.
Gently the rainbow
A shower will start.

Bowed o'er the river
The willow-tree's shade...

But where you're walking,
Happy the glade.

Hey! mow the rye, then
Bring to the rick.
Bold is the barley,
Sharp whiskers prick.

Clouds smoothly floating
O'er field and sky,
Blue poplars caught them
In branches high.

Over us, star-like,
Happiness flowers.
Can't help love, sister,
This world of ours!..

1938

* * *

Above the village an aeroplane,
Above the village an aeroplane
And autumn cobwebs on the air;
Time silvers earth's fair brow again,
And silvers, too, my chestnut hair.

In wide expanses — joy and warmth,
And in my heart are joy and warmth —
Embraced by sunlight, all a-strain
I stride. The golden road runs forth,
Straight through the steppe, all washed by rain.

1939

MY NATIVE LAND

The whole earth steams,
The air with pale-blue vapours rife.
Spring boldly dreams,
Foretelling lovely, youthful life.
Broad daylight laughs
In sunlit steppe's unbound arc;

Flooding our hearts —
The inspired cantata of the lark.
And freedom's song
Now soars full height up in the blue,
Through furrows long
The tractor-driver sings it too.
In flowering bough,
And in the circling of the cranes,
What ardour now
In happy earth's elate refrains!
And May brings forth
One happy-hearted toiling band.
There's nought on earth
More fair than you, my native land!

1941

THE WISH

You so desired a son,
That he should look like me,
That he, my dearest one,
Should say to you: "Mum-ee".

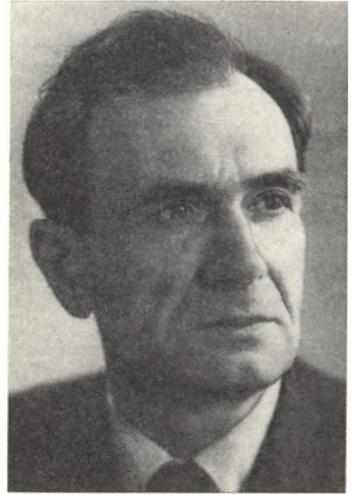
You yearned for a son to love,
Yet you were fearful too,
Therefore, my grey-winged dove,
That wish did not come true.

He would have grown, roamed free,
Your heart made alarmed and glad,
One, taking after me,
Named after me, my lad.

To school he would have gone,
Sang songs of liberty,
Which his soldier-dad set down
In the field or forest maybe.

In a common grave, dear one,
I shall lie, 'neath a maple tree...
You so desired a son,
That he should look like me.

1942



Ihor Muratov (1912-1973), a poet, prose writer, and playwright, was born in Kharkiv into the family of a civil servant. His talent came to the fore after World War Two and he later won the USSR State Prize. His works have been translated into many languages in and outside the USSR.

BREAD

A captive wounded soldier lay
Behind barbed wire, left to rot.
His torturer would toss him stray
Stale crumbs of bread — in German, *brot*.
For he'd not join the slavish crowd:
His heart, from birth so free, would not.
The water given, stank. Uncowed —
Though guards applied the rifle-butt.
Unconscious, then, like nightmare vision
Arose before him eyes of blue:
These brutes, once, in Poltava Region
Had burnt alive his children too.
He lay there, bathed in ice-cold sweat,
And lived a hundred years in one,
Unbroken despite all: he set
To work and tunnelled — freedom won.
The Baltic winds blew in his face —
All wry that hunger spasms wrought;
While painful thoughts of bread kept pace,
Each step he cursed the prison-*brot*.
.....
IL-bombers shrieked through hostile skies,
Explosions tore apart Berlin —
When strong, bemedalled, in the guise
Of victor, he went marching in.
And there, mid fires and ruins piled
And smoke from heavy artillery shot,

He saw a thin and hungry child
Who, scarcely audible, said "*Brot...*"
(Look, comrades, such a little tot!!)
He broke his soldier's bread apart,
Which he called *khlib* * instead of *brot*,
And gave it the orphan with open heart.

1953

MY LOVE AND MY HATE

Oh, nothing could make me deviate,
When once I chose the road to go:
No fanciful honours that toadies create
Nor wrongs of old that pain me so.

Praise insincere — like smoke will pass away,
The wrongs I'll void or make abate,
But nought will change and nought defray
My love and, even more, my hate.

For want of faith like semi-treason,
Or standing aside when things get tough —
I'll not give hostile crowds a reason
For gladness or to raise a laugh.

Oh; I have learned to hold them in distrust,
However sly they were or be —
For widows and orphans whom they did thrust
To death have taught it unto me.

I learned it from their hellish death-camps,
Those barbed-wire circled walls of fear,
From brothers and sisters kept in torment...
O Poet! Gather their burning tears,

And smelt them down a million times
To form a soldier's fighting heart,
To fill in shell-holes on steepest climbs,
Then on smooth roads, your poems start.

1956

* *Khlib* — Ukrainian for bread

EYES

Peoples' eyes may differ — dark or blue,
But they may differ other-
wise than just in hue.

How differ?

How they look at
the world and why.

What makes them happy,
And what makes them cry.

Some find the world is ugly,
dark and terrible,

Another —

lovely and ineffable.

Still others

don't care from beginning to end.

And those are the eyes

to beware of, my friend.

1961

AUTUMN TRUMPETS

The blazing leaf-fall lifts its voice
Throughout November's stilly air.
The forest with inspired choice
Blends paints upon its palette there.

O linear riot!

Chaos of hues!

And rage of tints!

I pale with vexity

That in my verse iamb won't do

For this beyond-belief reality.

The crimson I sip from pine-tip gleam
And use it on old wounds for healing...
Perhaps this autumn's but a dream
And May once more comes softly stealing?

The summer's blazoned by poppy-red sun
O'er mountain gorges where death is passing;
The oak woods, with trumpets raised for blasting,
At sunset wear copper caparison —

How bright the sun! But in her eyes there lingers
Fresh grief unhealed and echoed by a tear —
Read those dumb eyes, that on confession fringes.

Take that young father. Every moment he
In silence vigil keeps o'er baby's dreaming,
So rosy in the cradle: Those who see
Distinctly find the father's eyes hold gleaming
A hundred thousand suns. Soft to your heart
Embrace them. Enlightened wonder will be yours...
Books on philosophy could scarce impart
To you a thing — if your eyes can explore
And understand an old man or a maid.
To know young lovers and their inspiration,
Their daily lives blessed by their exaltation,
Their secret world and treasured aspirations —
That in their eyes you silently surveyed.

IVAN VIRHAN



Ivan Virhan (1908-1975) was born in the village of Klishchentsi, Poltava Region, into a peasant family. His lyrical poetry portrays the Soviet Ukrainian countryside before and after the Second World War. He also worked a great deal on Ukrainian lexicography. His works have been published in many Soviet republics.

WARRIOR'S GLORY

A mortal wound beneath his breast —
The comrade I love best.

He fell, in attack, 'neath the willow tree,
Upon the flowering lea.

The fire and the fury faded away,
The thunderous roar of day.

But he remained, and could not pass
On the fragrant Maytime grass.

Above him there the blue sky spanned
His heavenly native land,

Like soldiers' postcards which homeward fly,
The clouds went hastening by.

But he no more a card could send,
In his own hand rough-penned,

To his mother's hut, where he used to dwell,
To say his last "Farewell!"

The stream runs murmuring by his bed,
And hurries on ahead,

But he can't move from his grassy place,
A finger cannot raise...

His hands hold warm the gun he bore,
And still the cannons roar,

His eyes still shine with day's bright light,
But lack all sight...

How can I help him anyway,
And now what can I say?

In head-on attack he head-long fell,
For the land he loved so well.

All that he had, sincere and brave,
For truth and justice gave.

But in this human life we bear
What higher honour is there?

Somewhere, dried-up, the willow will die,
And yellow the grass will lie,

And clouds no more will cross the sun,
And streams no longer run,

But an honest warrior's glory, friend,
It knows no bound nor end!

1946

TO OLENKA

Walking again through fields rolling
To your village true.
Through the ripe rye swaying wildly
My path lies to you.

One path through the rye, and a second
In my heart deep lies.
And the wheel of childhood memories
Spins along and sighs.

Here, a child, I watched sheep grazing
On pastures above.
Here in wonderland pale yellow
Wandered long my love.

Where are you, Olenka darling,
Golden dream so dear?
Over rye fields at least send me
Your voice crystal clear.

And I see change in a second
Rye fields and my way,
Knifelike, asphalt brutal cutting
Steals the blue away.

Swiftly cars go swishing, flying
On and never stay.
Winds through telegraph poles singing
On the wires loud play.

By the roadside blaze like standards
Feast of cherries ripe,
Through them scarves go flashing, dancing,
Coloured patch and stripe.

Right before me in the sun's rays
Rollers brightly shine,
Crowd of girls — one, two, three, skipping...
Pass in endless line.

Crowd of girls called working unit —
Named quite rightly so!
Sugar beet tops thickly feather
Over rye field low...

You perhaps in flowing meadow
Midst them stand and sway!..
As the wind sends rye wild bending
Over asphalt way...

1949

GIRL WITH A BALLOON

Through pale blue streets amidst the crowd thick milling,
A little girl walks on with golden head,
A large balloon above her lightly dancing
She draws along held firm on unseen thread.

And on its sphere the large balloon is bearing
The world so wide: an elm fine stretches high,
And people wander by as tramways run,
As aeroplanes soar far and years fast fly.

Oh, little girl, look round for a brief second!
Are you the sun that far above us speeds,
And earth by unseen cobweb ever floating
Through pale blue universe with firm hand leads?..

END OF SUMMER

No longer combines rumble on the steppe-lands,
And threshing machines no longer noisily beat,
No longer roar ZIL lorries, nor rumble waggons,
And in each home
The new bread now smells sweet.

The summer storms have gone, the hues have faded
From brilliant rainbows
Gracing the Dnieper fine,
And every day more deeply
The sun's old bucket
Dips in the well beyond the horizon line.

The crested hoopoe at the ragged scarecrows
In quiet secluded spots already peep,
And swallows have glued themselves to telegraph-wires
Like bits of iron
Held in a magnet's grip.

It's cooler now at morning and at evening,
The cattle without a herdsman the meadows graze.
The fields are empty.
Only with early ploughshares
The tireless tractors chug their furrowed ways.

And there go Dnieper-side's well sun-tanned youngsters
With shoulders wide
And flexible figures too.
Those who the girls and glory always favoured,
Those who the difficult days of war, all through,
With eager tanks attacked
The fiendish fascists,
Invading hordes, steel-clad, and iron-heeled,
And then, returning to their native regions,
Went battling on with tractors in the field.

And virgin lands down to their depths they stirred,
New ploughshares strata on strata overturned,
A-creaking and screeching like old rooks and crows,
Sent clods a-flying along the opened rows.

Toward the evening,
Rounding the grassland slowly,
Up to the far horizon the soil is raised,
And stern earth-graders on the ploughed-up pastures
In arrowing lines,
Gleam white on their distant ways.

And on the lorries, upon the homeward journey,
Returning with the beet, the young girls sang...
And for the tractor-drivers they raised their voices,
And on the further fields
Their laughter rang.

Near by the village,
Beyond old mills, all floury,
New fields of golden rye and wheat were sown,
And cutting into the ploughed black earth, like wedges
Of green into a field of tar, have grown.

And there, among the steppes,
Like some new symbol
Of the kolkhoz's fresh and fertile lands,
As a yellow-burning obelisk to summer,
Above the pastures, the elevator stands.

1947

THE RED GUELDER-ROSE TREE

How fine here for me, the red guelder-rose tree,
Near this wide-spreading valley growing so free!

On the right, 'neath the willows, the river streams,
On the left, o'er the bushes, the white dam gleams.

On the hill — a village, with hump-backed gables,
Above the roadway — the green birds of maples.

In the field lies a lake, as blue as the sky...
How fine here for me, with this valley nearby!

All day here the sun shines so clear and bright,
The electric torch of the moon all night.

The field-lorries pass me, rolling along,
And the lassies about me strike up a song.

May my fate ever be, a red guelder-rose tree,
Near this wide-spreading valley to grow so free!

1950

POPLAR DOWN

One white ball of poplar down
Through the window to me has flown,
Bumped upon the shelf and door,
Rolled down the wall toward the floor,
And on my table, before my eyes,
Upon my writing paper lies.

Lies there, straightening out its fleece,
Just as though a place to please
It had chosen, then slowly sighs,
And its tiny sleeping seed
In its downy cradle lies.

Herald of summer, welcome guest!
I am glad to greet you, dear.
Only one thing — you can't rest
Very long on my table here.
On this paper letters are found,
And for words its wonderful ground,
But not meant for you, I fear...

Fly somewhere o'er earth abroad,
Settle upon some steep incline,
Or some endless steppe-land road —
Grow into a poplar fine.
Past you then, in the heat of day,
Travellers on their road will go.
They'll admire you in every way,
Rest in your shade an hour or so.
Maybe a poet will sing your praise
Somewhere. So fly to happy days!

I blew, and that white poplar down
Flew through the window, and o'er the town,
Rising above the neighbouring clock,
And the administrative block,
Drowned itself in the sunny blue...
And I... and I in that moment too
Felt so pleased with myself again,
In my breast my glad heart beat,
Feeling I'd done so not in vain,
But had performed a great good deed.

1953

* * *

When yesterday I came to you in darkness —
In undergrowth the snow-lined boughs hung bent.
From shining hooves of metal steady drumming,
Sharp frozen swallow cries were upwards sent...

And as I then returned at daybreak dawning —
In undergrowth the valley lilies caught,
The swallows flew in silence deep inspired
Firm building nests upon my shoulders taut.

Abram Katsnelson (b. 1914) was born in the town of Horodnya, Chernihiv Region, into the family of a teacher. He is the author of many books of poems, literary criticism, and essays. His poetry is marked by a laconic and expressive manner. His books have been published in translation in many languages of the USSR and foreign countries.



CONFESSION

I'm getting greedier and greedier for beauty.
For hours and hours on end I can admire
The evening clouds, like birds in sunset fire,
Mirrored in dewdrops, seized by them for booty...

Nothing of this will ever be repeated
In my life's short-lived, soon-ending tale.
A feeling that all's frail, of no avail
More and more often comes, and I can't beat it.

This feeling isn't brought to me, however,
By modern volumes on philosophy
Or by the nuclear catastrophe
Which must, they say, destroy our world forever.

No — it is born from love of life infinite,
From some astounding, unaccounted stinginess
That comes before old age: when less and less
Is left, one fears to lose even a minute.

You try to take in everything around
With avid eyes, so unrepeatable and dear:
The movement with which bough to bough bends near,
The gentle movement of the wind above the ground.

Movement I've loved since childhood, swift and sweet.
Myself, too, I would hate to freeze stone-still,

And so I hurry and I hurry while there's still
Time, drinking it like water during heat.

No, it is not a sense of doom, which I would hate,
But. I would say, a special kind of hunger
Which we, unfortunately, do not know when younger,
Regretting it when it is far too late.

The greatest wisdom's when one understands:
The biggest wonder that the world affords us is
Life; and one's eyes look, look and look in bliss,
And no amount of work can satiate one's hands.

1970

* * *

In our villages steep obelisks
Can be seen upon squares, score on score,
And cut out on their panels are lists
Of the villagers killed in the war.
And far louder than any brass bands
In the stillness of gaunt granite banners
Carved upon them by true, loving hands,
Sacred names to the whole planet clamour.
Here a father was lain with his son,
There — two brothers were lain together.
Into battle they went all as one;
Now death joins them in graveyards forever.
Beardless, round-faced, still children are they.
And so somebody put on the stone
Rows of flowers that will wither away,
Plucked from stems in their blossom fast-flown.
Near another, brought there by some tots,
In a tumbler of water appears
A nosegay of forget-me-nots —
The sky's blue and transparent tears.
Silence reigns all around. Only birds
With their whistling attention claim,
While aloud, like the first of his words,
A young grandson reads grandfather's name.

A BALLAD ABOUT A GLOBE

The school was closed. In classrooms horses whinnied.
A boy went by, his heart with sorrow aching.
As if alive, a globe upon the window
Begged him: "Take me away from here, do take me!"

Then, one week later, on a cloudy dawn
Upon a garbage heap with broken glass
And rusty cans and papers soiled and torn
That well-known cardboard globe lay on the grass.

But what a sight: its head was broken in.
It seemed all crumpled up with suffering.
Perhaps it had been kicked at by a hoof
Or Nazi boots, unfortunate old thing.

The boy caught up and to his bosom pressed
The globe, and ran off with his precious pelf.
With care he bore it, like a child at breast,
And reaching home, he hid it on a shelf.

Years passed... Beneath his spaceship in the sky
There, through the window looking down, he noted:
In bluish mist, so tiny from on high,
Round as that globe, our little planet floated.

Ah, how he longed to take it in his arms
And shield it from calamity and strife!
...He lay down on the grass, where horses grazed,
And grasshoppers sang hymns to love and life.

1963

I'M EARTH!

Fair curls peeped from beneath the saucy beret.
A dugout. Night. Dark forests like a wall.
"I'm Earth! I'm Earth!" the wireless operator
Into the troubled ether sent her call.

Small, squeezed into her waist-belt's tight embraces,
Caught up in the calamities of war,
She couldn't feel the grandeur and the greatness
Which, then so common, her call-signal bore.

Now only, when our triumph shines forever,
After our wartime suffering and woe,

I understand — she had the right and reason
In the Earth's name to speak and act just so.

Not in a dug-out — in my silent study
When through the world resounds the fight for peace,
I seem to hear "I'm Earth!" — her signal, flooding
The troubled ether, by her hand released.

1978

A MAPLE LEAF ON THE ASPHALT

A fancy-shaped, five-fingered maple leaf
Dropped off and sadly lay upon the road.
I hadn't noticed it when hidden deep beneath
The tree crown which had stood so thick and broad.

I hadn't seen it spattered with the dew,
Striving towards the sun, the heavens blue.
Now only, when its kin the asphalt strew
With its belated charm it comes to view.

1978

ANDRIY MALISHKO

Andriy Malishko (1912-1970) was born in the village of Obukhiv, Kiev Region, into the family of a tailor. He is the author of numerous collections of poems which are popular with the reading public in the Soviet Union and abroad. His poetry is a chronicle of Soviet Ukrainian history and is marked by folk inspiration. He also wrote songs, criticism, and journalism. Malishko's poetry won him three USSR State prizes and the Taras Shevchenko prize. His works have been widely published in the USSR and abroad.



MOTHERLAND

You have raised me up since childhood's day,
Gave me bread and songs of nightingales;
Many roads have led me far away,
O my native red-star-bearing dales!

Heated dusty roadways of the steppe,
Heavy copper of taiga forest-green,
Dnieper hydro-station, wave-beset,
Thundering crests on Baltic shoreline seen.

On each road, the rye on either hand —
Light and shade, half-half, in cheerful sun.
My dear, my kind, my native blood-washed land,
I'll not give you up to anyone!

When you roar, as Black Sea breakers fall,
Or as jet-planes fly to a foreign strand,
When the thunder peals beyond Baikal —
Immediately I recognize my land.

When you rise again with youthful day,
Where the engines' whistles call at night,
Where your sun-tanned fellows mow the hay,
Where your sowers and tractor-drivers ride —

How should I not recognize your voice?
My heart, my life, my very flesh and blood,
Holiest word which makes our hearts rejoice —
Motherland — our hope, and truth and love!

You brought us up as youngsters, gave us care,
Gave full vision to our once half-blind eyes,
Strength to hearts, and falcon's wings to soar,
So that we should always seek the skies.

On our wings with pride we sweep on high,
See the world and youthful sky around.
He whom you but once have taught to fly
Never falls from heaven to the ground!

On our wings o'er waters broad we've flown,
Seen the flattened dust which roadways paves,
Where campaigns and battles have died down
In the thoughtful quiet of the graves.

'Neath us thousand-voiced wheat-fields thrive,
In the twilight rivers gleam with blue,
There my brothers have laid down their lives —
Sailors, smiths, and stubborn miners too.

Steel-men from beyond the Urals blue,
Shepherd-lads from many a Black Sea range...
It was they who found your basis true,
Tried and tested sons in stern campaigns.

They accepted death with steady gaze,
Blackest, direst, unrepented woe,
So that blooms should cover your steppeland space,
So that maples high their heads should raise,
And that fruit in orchards full should blow.

From a foreign bullet, 'neath blood-shot sky,
Maybe in some battle I shall fall...
But for quiet grasses, and harvest high,
But for people hardened in fight I die,
For my Motherland — my youth, my all.

But we all should live, and should not die,
But sow the grain, and roam the blossoming grove.
Only happiness here around us lies,
That great happiness, so rich and high —
Motherland, our hope and truth and love!

THE STORK

He comes here flying from a distant strand,
Untiring, onward just still flies and flies.
It seems there's nothing dearer in this land
Than our old plane-tree, and our yard besides.

Our plane-tree stands long since, so rich in leaves,
Sometimes they rustle, sometimes silent seem.
And so the stork seeks for our tree, our eaves.
And all the lived-through past, like a wondrous dream.

He rests at evening, on dark meadows goes,
Where in blue pools the gulls are crying late,
And after that he bathes himself in the boughs,
Constructs his nest, and calls his waiting mate.

They long ago paired off, as storks should do,
They gather feathers, which in the twigs they plait.
And boys already have heard (maybe untrue)
How they began about baby storks to chat.

That's as I know him. And I love him so
For his firm wings, and for his sharp-set eye.
(He kills a serpent with one sudden blow,
And after circles round, high in the sky.)

And maybe, too, that in the brooding time
He flies untiring to and fro, to the nest.
Do not deride. I'm like that stork of mine,
And love my native home by far the best.

1940

TRUMPETER

A cherry-red glow foretells a fine dawn of day.
Perhaps you've forgotten me, many long years away?

Not few were our battles: to shreds rusty jack-boots we've worn,
And if I remember the dead — for them I must mourn.

And if I remember the quick — let my grief become dumb,
For my friends go in troops, and their trumpeter I've become.

I blow, that our breasts should shield the green earth from dismay,
That a cherry-red dawn foretells a gay dawn of day.

1943

THE CARPENTERS

The carpenters spanned with their bridges the Dnieper,
The Donets, the Zbruch, with its calm-flowing line,
And those bridges were able to stand stormy weather —
With unbending oak, and their maple and pine.

The tanks wormed across them, and centipede waggons,
Artillerymen with “Katyushas” * would crawl,
Day and night they vibrated, their beams never sagging,
As if, so to speak, out of love for them all.

The carpenter there on the bank-side is sitting,
He smokes black tobacco, his thoughts run away,
On how he will fell the great oak-tree that’s waiting
By the Oder, or maybe the Danube, one day.

For three lengthy years, as through a life-span then,
The maple-wood roads stand stretching ahead.
The general said yesterday: “There’s a real man, then!
And see now, another new medal he’ll get!”

The war will be ending before he’s much older,
The earth will be thirsting for summer-storm rain,
And he will just take up his axe on his shoulder,
And over his bridges will walk home again.

And what if they say that he missed the hard fighting —
He wasted no efforts from morning till night,
If people from sixteen republics went striding
Across his stout bridges, which always stood tight!

1946

KATYA

She went out quite early, before the sun-rising,
Unending the rumbling flow of machines,
They’d managed again to make many crossings —
German, and Polish, and native streams.

To Oberwald yesterday came our young tank-men,
And there she stood weeping her free, happy tears.
“Here, Katya,” they said, “take this bag, off you go, then,
Along all the roads you’ll find friends now, my dear!”

* “Katyusha” — nickname of a Soviet multirail rocket launcher of WWII

“Take this bread, then,” they said, “and this home-salted bacon —
It is you who deserve it, not they, it is you.
It is you who lay sleepless at night in the open
All winter and summer and autumn-time through!”

Now see how she crosses the Oder and Vistula,
Where hotly reverberate echoes of war,
Where the oaks have received caps of snow from the winter,
And it already seems she is back home once more.

And each little pathway, and each wooden dwelling
Appear to be hers, by her own courtyard rail.
The soldiers are singing, and in her ears ringing,
The ducks quack at dawn in the Dnieper-side dale.

The traffic-controllers stand guard at the crossing,
The roads from the wheels are quite smooth, shining clear.
They recognise Katya, run up to her, fussing,
“She’s ours!”
“Well, how are you?”
“What then?”
“Sit down here!”

She trudges the fields, and the hard highway cobbles,
Past craters, and trenches, with heaps of red clay.
See, mother is waiting, to welcome her hobbles,
And calls, cries, and hugs her, and can’t break away.

Along scores of roads, and through grief and exhaustion,
Through the fires, and the fields where the lightning gleams,
Trudge on, my dear Katya, back home, out of prison,
To that dear Ukraine, which you saw in your dreams!

1946

THE GREY

A horse, called “The Grey”, an old battery nag,
With shaggy-haired fetlocks, and nostrils warm,
Hauled the guns, never letting the breech-strap go slack,
In the good-weather days, and the nights of storm.

He plodded the fields, and the stone roads of war,
To the creak of gun-tracks, and squeaking of carts,
And twice after battle the vet’s tweezers tore
The shrapnel scraps from his hinder parts.

And when the gun-layer, in heated attack,
Fell silent beneath the cold blizzard's blast,
Then nobody heard how "The Grey" whinnied back,
Nor witnessed his heavy horse-tears at the last.

He'd stall, of the service-man's dug-out sort,
His food-ration — hay and straw, when they come,
And had he had children, till dawn he'd have thought
What and how he could send to them waiting at home.

The sergeant at night from his flask took a swig,
And, wiping his forehead, went into the stall,
And said to him straight, man to man, "Thanks, old nag,
For your friendship, attention, and good work, and all!"

And such oats, seen in dreams, then he started to pour —
Crisp and rustling, and gold from the pollened plain,
And "The Grey" started thinking: "This means no more war,
And tomorrow my gunner will plait up my mane!"

1946

THE WORD

At times above the crowd it sounded out.
They scared it off with prison and the knout,
Because it rang like truth, like keys gold-bright.
They tortured it, and circled it about,
Arrested it, and shot it in the night.

The lovely word with dying dark brown eyes
Fell in the dust. And from the furious flame
Not as a flower nor mist did it arise,

But as a heart reborn
Which mine became!

9/V/1967

I lived not those years stuck behind a stone-deaf solid wall,
I shall speak what I wrote in my heart then about it all.

I heard there the voice of the meadows on Dnieper's wide plain,
I heard there new grass-shoots with honey-dew filling again,
I saw, too, the flight of the bird-clouds in spring's heady air,
In thought with them flew, with them lived, as if one of a pair.
I heard the great boughs of the oaks with the storm-winds fight,
I saw lightning flashes which lit up the cloud-shrouded night.
Now say, did I live then behind a stone-deaf solid wall?
I shall speak what I wrote in my heart then about it all.

I knew trusty friends, who disliked all display and deceit,
For bragging is rot, and deception can never be sweet.
I lived by their thoughts, and my thoughts they loved too, I could see.
From them I took strength, and they too gathered strength from me.
I entered their homes, just as if I were entering my own,
And they trod the path to my door, which to them was well-known.
Our meetings were rich with hospitable bread and with salt,
And we stood close as brothers, our friendship was never at fault.
Now say, did I live then behind a stone-deaf solid wall?
I shall speak what I wrote in my heart then about it all.

On the dew-sprinkled pathway, I loved the bright eyes of my love.
And they lighted my way, as at midnight the clear stars above.
And her kisses were faithful, her love was sincere, and till death,
Like the sweet mother earth, and like the Ukraine's burning breath.
And perhaps in those years, my dear brothers and friends, it was true,
I was able to help some poor soul with my small songs too.
And what then if I, in reply, but a small echo get —
All the same, friends, I just have not written everything yet!

1956

OF DESERT HEAT AND DUST I DON'T COMPLAIN

Of desert heat and dust I don't complain,
Of swamps and jungle, storm, misfortune's blight,
Of tired-out feet in cruel freezing night,
Of pallid gleams of light from homes unseen.

I just have not lived much. I'm but a branch
Of human questing, of harvest and fine day's chance,
I'm only a spark from a youthful bonfire blown,

A trumpet call in a blizzard of blinding snow,
A cell in the swelling, as centuries new advance.

My greedy gaze is scorched by my burning dream —
Where to send the shade to the sand, and marshy stream,
Where to sow my songs, where the ice underfoot to break,
Where with generous well-filled ears a book to make.
I just have not lived much. The years were mean...

One must light fires from the sparks for all to see,
One must wipe the ashes from nights and days away,
One must learn to converse with saplings newly-grown,
And invite the wisdom of others into one's home.
I just have not lived much. Believe in me.

I need hundreds of hands — to free from grief all lands,
And hundreds of eyes — to pierce the darkling skies!
Though my heart be one, it burns now, as it began,
It is not an orphan — because it lives in a man.

1961



Valentina Tkachenko (1920-1970) was born in the village of Koryukivka, Chernihiv Region, to working-class parents. She is the author of numerous collections of poems and poetic translations. Highly spontaneous and lyrical, her poetry has been translated into many languages.

FORESTS

A pine drips needles on the trail,
A birch-tree creaks before the wind,
And rainbow-sunbeams race to scale
Each tree-trunk that their rays can find.

The forests, always growing, sings
With voices in a hundred keys.
A bird trills over forest kings,
Through groves its song goes echoing.

Blackberry juice and caraway wild,
Aromas blend with alder boughs.
I feel here careless as a child,
Or bird in flight where winds carouse.

And all my way I'm gazing ever
At beauty grand of woodland-lane.
For all these forests join forever
Dear Byelorussia with Ukraine.

1940

STORY OF A DOVE

When parting from you hurt in painful measure
And you were just a dream to me once more,
A dove by chance strayed near my lonely dwelling —
Or maybe flew from somewhere by intent?
It nested on a ledge outside my window,
Began to watch me often through the panes —
The window where I daily waited for you,
Through which I'm doomed to see you nevermore.
The stray dove's flashing wings made autumn silver.
It anxiously spun circles in the sky
And brought me in its beak a spray of sunbeams,
And pecked at grain upon my windowsill
Which I had put there for him, out of pity.
But then, on Kiev, the snow fell thick and deep,
And on my much-loved Dnieper and Paton Bridge.
Jack Frost went crunching all along the roadways.
And I became so cold without you near,
Such cold I never felt before in winter....
The dove lived all alone upon the ledge
But did not feel its loneliness the slightest.
Its day began with daring steepest flight;
Dark clouds and snowdrifts, life — all meant enjoyment,
The dove removed the sadness from my eyes
And taught me parting needs to be forgotten.
That it's no human creature, I regret —
For if it were I'd open up the window
And let the dove come in to live for good.
Right now, as I recount this little story,
How distant and remote you've grown to me —
Yet still my dove keeps watching through the window.

MOUNTAIN PROFILES

These mountains
 pictures call to mind
To those who stop and stare:
Some see a rush
 of waters wind
And roe-deer drinking there;
While others
 see profiles of sails
That over waves went flying,
Till sudden lull did once prevail
And turned them stone, winds dying;
To me — they look like girl and boy
Who sit beside a river,

Her hand in his, expressing joy
Both faces close together.
I wish I could more sweethearts meet
Like happy gushing fountains,
For summer riots tints replete,
Makes magic in the mountains.
That's why the earth has burst in bloom
Ignoring that July is here,
That's why my thoughts in circles loom
Their webbing net around you, dear.

1968

AUTUMN'S JUST BEGINNING
(A Song)

From the clouds with rich donations
For big Earth the Sun comes smiling.
Gardens flower with carnations —
Autumn's just begun beginning.

Though the yellowed leaves are fading,
Many warm days will come spinning,
Leaves hold on, not yet cascading —
Autumn's just begun beginning.

By the roadside, not for malice,
Maple leans towards alder bending.
They but seek both joy and solace...
Autumn's just begun beginning.

In your light brown hair aflowing,
The first silver threads are winning:
Don't let on you know they're showing,
Dear, for autumn's just beginning.

1955

SNOWFALL

Heavy the snowfall last night that came falling —
Snowdrifts so high you can scarce make your way.
Girls go to work in the steppe loudly calling,
They'll make snow-fences from brushwood today.

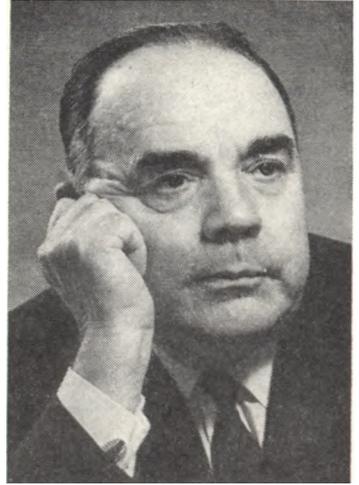
In hilly snowdrifts the branches are planted.
Snowy-white winters — what joy to behold!
On winter wheat falls the snow all enchanted,
Soil underneath gathers strength manifold.

Strength that will send the sap running and shaking
Up through the trees to the tender leaf-case —
Let but the spring come and set sunbeams waking.
In a pure stream will the sun see its face.

Forested windbreaks have new growth adorning,
Winter crops up through the black earth will climb,
Field teams will work from the dawn of the morning,
Spring song will herald the new seeding time.

All will start working, and bask in the sunshine;
New life will come and new song will know birth;
Snow falls to guarantee flowers and grapevine,
Snow falls so beauty rejuvenates earth.

Olexandr Levada (b. 1909), a poet and playwright, was born in the village of Krivchunka, Cherkasy Region, into the family of a teacher. He has written many books of poetry, plays, fiction, and literary criticism and film scenarios. His works are both lyrical and epic, dynamic and philosophic, and he was awarded the Taras Shevchenko Prize. His books have been published in many Soviet republics and abroad.



THE APPOINTED HOUR

The appointed hour strikes plain,
in the darkness the rockets glow,
to the sacred fight, my Ukraine,
in your defence we all go!

To the thunderous roar of the guns,
we swear to the cities we know:
no mercy, no mercy, not once,
for the bloody fascist foe!

Still foaming with venom and hate
is the cursed fascist snake...
.To the fight, to the fight, to the fight!
Awake, my Ukraine, awake!

Let the cannons now thunder forth,
let the fascists tremble in shame!
With the fires, with the fires of wrath
the banks of the Dnieper flame!

Ahead, brothers, no longer stand!
Ahead in the merciless fray,
for our beloved Motherland,
for honour and freedom today!

3rd Ukrainian Front, 1943

COSMONAUT'S MONOLOGUE
BEFORE LENIN'S MAUSOLEUM

(from the tragedy *Faust and Death*)

Again
dawn calls, with impetuous pitch,
rings from Moscow
around my native land...
Vladimir Ilyich!
Vladimir Ilyich!
With my heart
open wide to all centuries rich,
here in homage before you I stand.
My soul now
is like to a brimming cup,
like a blossom
opened for all to see...
Tovarishch Lenin!
your name which we love,
a pass to the stars
has awarded me.
This minute
so simple, no words can frame,
it has no name,
and its depths can't be guessed...
It was brought to birth
by a sacred dream,
by the Party of Lenin's high will expressed,
by the depths
of the people's hopes sublime.
The count of the hours
for me is changed
in the pealing
of the Kremlin's chime.
I've grown older
by a year,
by an age,
I've grown younger
by a year,
by an age,
and powerful as the earth at times.
Long since
I learned where the planets wheel,
the language of instruments
subtle and smooth,
but not all at once
was I able to feel
the basic depths
of another truth.

It's little to learn
 that photons in swarms
 leap forth from the sun
 and everywhere fly...
 Of human hopes
 and desires
 and thoughts
 are woven the light-rays
 of stars on high!
 There's no place
 for constant starry dreams,
 nor in ciphers wise,
 no phenomenal setting.
 The first to blaze trails
 in the cosmic extremes
 were the people who raised
 like a banner which gleams
 that star-like name:
 Comrade Lenin!
 In that name
 a myriad voiced sound,
 the core and base
 of the future days,
 in that name
 the ties of the times are found,
 united again
 in strength always.
 The happy date
 of the cosmic start
 was noted by you
 on the calendar sheet,
 on that day
 when with your winged words at heart
 my people went forth
 their freedom
 to greet,
 in October's glowing
 Aurora dawn!
 Over Moscow
 the winds of the century swish,
 in my native land
 dawn grows wide, I see...
 Vladimir Ilyich!
 Vladimir Ilyich!
 accept
 as my heart's deep-felt cry, I beseech,
 my oath
 of unbreakable loyalty!

Kiev, 1961

FOUR YAROSLAVNAS

Out of the trembling darkness,
As in a blue dream all,
Look down four Yaroslavnas
From the old cathedral wall.

Unheard, in silence stepping,
Through the centuries they tread,
Like a flock of swans so stately
From beyond Swan-river mead.

The first of the Yaroslavnas
Lived out her springtime days
In the gloominess of Europe,
In remote Parisian ways.

And as a precious dowry
She proudly there unrolled
Imperishable legends
On yellow parchment scrolls.

Of bright-skied dawns in Kiev
A hundred times she'd dream,
That young Kievan maiden
Who became France's queen.

The second Yaroslavna
Through the darkness sent her call,
From glorious Putivl,
Upon the sorrowing wall.

Above the Siver country
Two hundred years ago,
Like a song she went a-soaring,
In her immortal woe.

Above the banks of Kayala,
To the broadsword's clashing sound,
Like a complaining seagull
She circled round and round.

O'er the Polovtsian meadow,
O'er the dust from the battle's blows,
From the Don and to the Dnieper
Like a rainbow she arose.

So that the hostile storm-clouds
Far off from there should stand,

And should not spread their sorrow
Throughout her native land...

The third of the Yaroslavnas
Did a thorny path betide,
In the howling shaggy blizzard,
In the snow-swept countryside.

With her little rag-wrapped bundle,
With life-long sneers defiled,
With the bitterest of reproaches —
That of a fatherless child.

And she met upon the journey
(The time came, though 'twas hard)
Kobzar, from beyond the Dnieper,
A wise prophetic bard.

And even in poor tatters,
And through the blizzard's wrath,
A princess he discerned there,
Upon her thorny path.

And to the purest martyr
On that undying day
The Ukraine bowed down in reverence
With a solemn sweet-sounding lay.

And in that song were illumined
The whole earth and the sky,
By a simple serf madonna's
Unfading beauty high...

The fourth of the Yaroslavnas
Along Khreshchatik * flies,
A merry Kievan maiden
With clear and sparkling eyes.

To the routine work of weekdays,
To the banners rustling like flames,
She goes on a hundred journeys,
And known by a thousand names.

In the stills of the latest newsreels,
And as lively as the spring,
On the dam across the Dnieper
She smiles and starts to sing.

* Khreshchatik — the main street of modern Kiev

In Mirgorod the famous,
When snows of winter fell,
To the course for tractor-drivers
She secretly ran as well.

And they called Yaroslavna
A most resourceful scout,
When from partisan detachment
Reports were coded out.

But yesterday at the Institute
She presented actually
Her student candidate thesis
On Kiev's history.

In Saint Sophia's Cathedral,
Across the flight of years,
Yaroslavna easily recognized
Her portrait, it appears.

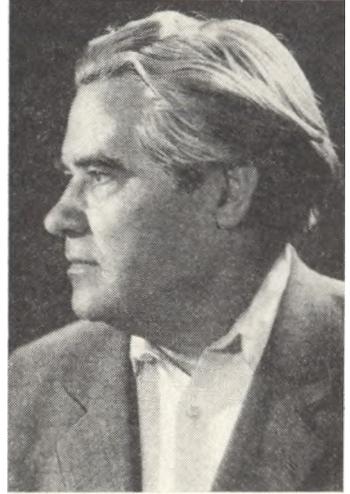
She looked — and stood there gaping —
Was it her or not? Who'd guess?
A simple Ukrainian student —
Yet a Kievan princess.

And out of the trembling darkness,
As in a blue dream all,
They smiled at her, their sister,
From the old cathedral wall.

Kiev, 1972

PLATON VORONKO

Platon Voronko (b. 1913) was born in the village of Chernechina, Sumy Region, into the family of a blacksmith. The Second World War and struggle of the Soviet people for peace and friendship among nations are dominant themes in his work. His poetry is rich in traditional forms and motifs, and he has also written for children. His poems have been published in other Soviet republics and abroad. He is a recipient of the USSR State, Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, and Nikolai Ostrovsky prizes.



IN THE NAME OF YOUR SWEET FREEDOM...

In the name of your sweet freedom,
Your life, and your good as well,
From his horse on the field of battle
Kachura, the war-scout fell.

He fell, caught up by a bullet,
On the golden stubble-field —
The cuckoo's call of his life-span
Across the centuries pealed.

The breeze caressed the auburn
Upon his brow as he lay...
His mother waited and waited
In her village far away.

And someone later told her
How that son of hers, Ivan,
Smashed a hostile horde of fascists
In the field, as a partisan.

And how for his native country,
That his village might flourish as well,
And for the Ukraine's sweet freedom,
In the fight from the saddle he fell...

1943

PARTISAN BALLAD

“Devilish night...
Head screwed on tight?
Wind cuts you dead.”
“Well, what’s a head?
Mind the toluene!
Rifle breach clean?..”
Soon comes the bridge,
Trudge through the sludge.
Piles underneath,
Fuse in your teeth.
“In your cap, too, you said?..”
“Well, what’s a head?!”
“Storm-clouds. Pitch dark.
No path. Not a spark.
Keep left, out of sight.
Six in one lot.
Who knows this spot?
Lead the group straight
To the water, mate.
Down to the edge. Will you lead?”
“I will lead.”
“Cover your tracks!”
“And you, too, chaps.”
Devilish night.
Can’t get a sight —
The enemy’s men...
“Take cover, then!
Who was that groaned?”
“I got a wound.
Right in the neck.
Burning like heck!”
“Devilish night...”
“What’s that? All right.
Water round the pier.”
“Nothing to fear!”
“But I can’t swim —
Up to my chin!”
“Learn, then, old chump —
Grab hold of that stump!”
“Well, you’re a brick.
’Neath the bridge, quick!”
“Water whirls black,
Pushes me back —
Now the foam clears —”
“What’s there?”
“The piers.”
“Charges between all the piles in row.
Fuse in the tube, tube in charges, so.

Quickly, make use of the thunder's din.
Ease the bars back if the tube won't go in."

"Devilish night...

Wind like a knife.

No pitch to use..."

"Light up the fuse!"

"I'll be blown up!"

"Listen, old chap —

Give the match here,

Get away from the pier!"

"Not on your life!

You've got a wife!

No time to lose —

I'll light the fuse.

Let my parents know.

Farewell! Better so!"..

Seven friends lay in the bushes unseen.
The eighth put a match to the toluene...

1944

I AM HE WHO BURST THE DAMS

"He who bursts the dams."

Lesya Ukrainka, Forest Song

I am he who burst the dams.
I didn't sit on the rocks aside,
When ancient oaks were blasted down.
In the partisan forest-dwelling wide,
On the trampled grass, all yellowy-brown,
Beneath the purpling leaves I lay,
While through the bandages oozed the blood.
Old Forester, with his brow turned grey,
Asked "Did you blow all the bridges up?" —
"All, all!.."
Then, bending over me,
The whole night gentle Mavka * sat,
Wrapped round in a cloak of mist was she,
And across her shoulder, her rifle-strap.
She sighed, and then began to sing:
"Why can't one ask about such a thing?"
The wild rose there enquires, you see:
"Am I beautiful?" And the tall ash-tree
Nods its leafy crown, sways back and forth:

* Mavka — a forest-sprite; main character of Lesya Ukrainka's *Forest Song*

“Most beautiful rose upon this earth.”—
“Restore me,
For still on the blue-waved Prut
Stand bridges which are yet unblown.
Across them crawl in search of loot
Green, greedy snakes, for evil known.”—
“Well, I can bring one herb alone,
The Herb of Life, which will death defy.”
She brought it, found in the meadows deep,
Then the girders and trusses went flying high
On the Carpathian river banks steep,
And the thunder’s laughter re-echoed wide.

I am he who burst the dams.
I did not sit on the rocks aside.

1946

RAIN HAS PASSED

Rain has passed
And now in brilliant streams
Into oceans blue the waters ripple.
Maybe so these songs of mine, my dreams,
To the depths of our melodious people
So will flow, just like the brilliant streams.
Though my streams that sea’s depth will not alter,
Neither bring me glory when I’m gone,
Like a cloud, I must pour forth my water,
That’s my nature — all my soul’s in song.
Then, when rye-fields and the vineyards moistening,
Maytime splashes scoopfuls over all,
And the people raise a song, rejoicing —
In that song will live my very soul.

1949

Quiver in the target bull's-eye proud.
But I have no strength to raise the bow...

Then one slowly lights a cigarette,
Goes out on the veranda in the night,
Sees in Irpin Park two birches set,
Two tall slender candles burning bright.

The moon had lit them, since it could not come
Down and force its way to grass entwined,
And so that the pathway from my home
To these sorrowful birches I should find.

I approached them, stroked their silvery bark,
Felt them trembling.
Summer night again
To that distant time conveyed me back,
Where the trembling of young arms remains.

There the dawn shakes wings above the grass,
Over dewy pathway it has kissed,
There draws near so sweetly to one's heart
"That for which no human words exist."

1975

SWAN-FLIGHT

I know not if a swan sings, as they say,
Waiting death.
I only know it sings...
Stand somewhere unmoving by the way,
When above your head a white swan wings.
Creak on creak, by leathery squeak proclaimed,
Those white pinions wave, and wave once more,
And the hunters — "evil savages" named —
Then become different people than before.
Creak on creak...
Their squeaking goes to ground.
O'er the river in the reeds rough strings
Wind strikes up,
And violins start to sound,
And Tchaikovsky fills one's soul with wings.
In our mind appears the young quartette —
Cygnet, lovely as a tale come true,
And our youth, it seems, arises yet
On that hill in brilliant sparkling dew.

Or that first soft kiss we feel at heart,
Which oblivion never never knows,
Or an echo of great inspired art,
As a lengthy life draws to its close.
Lift your eyes, and there the wide wings beat,
Like the pure white banner of chastity
Creak on creak they beat...
How painfully sweet
Is that song where new worlds come to be.
It alone remains so long, so long,
Lesser passions cede to the sublime,
In our heart will stay.
The swan-flight song —
Happy dream upon the wings of time.

1962

* * *

Here sat Boyan. He must have sat just here
Upon the hill 'neath which the Dnieper lay...
And where the fine-stringed copper maples play
Until today his psaltery rings clear.

Here sat Boyan, enormous as a hill,
And from his silvery beard swarmed songs amain,
To Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine:
Time sends his great refrains, undying still.

Perhaps he sits where once he sat before,
His fingers on the trembling strings of yore,
And sings about the present excellent day.

And all with which our souls breathe proud and warm.
Through centuries long the bard Boyan has borne,
Thus ancient genius breathes on our modern way.

1974



Vasil Shvets (b. 1918) was born in the village of Ivankiv, Kiev Region, into the family of a farmer. He has written many collections of lyrical poetry and long poems. He also writes prose which is distinguished for its rich, idiomatic language. Many of his works have been published in other Soviet republics and abroad.

THE WIND GONE GREY

And there is silence, soundless still,
No cry, no bullet whining.
The grass says nothing, and you too,
Midst stillness dumbly shining.

A raven swoops and tears a breast,
O'er dust there wheeling, turning.
And metal burns upon the hills,
In metal men are burning.

It's neither hot, nor very cold,
The first blue's sparkling brightly.
And from his bloodstained cigarette
The smoke is swirling lightly.

And so it seems he had no chance
To finish then his smoking.
The stones and metal melting hot
Close by him through smoke choking.

The Indian summer from the fields
Like storm cloud's gently lifting.
No, it's the wind that's grown full grey,
Its thinning locks soft drifting.

1945

A GIRL FROM MOSCOW

The girl from Moscow sleeps — my darling Lida.
How I wished that dreaming she should see
pleasant sunny days of golden summer
before into the fight she goes with me!

Before that fight the minutes now are counted.
It is not a rustling summer day.
Light's not visible. From the gloomy valley
whistles and howls a blizzard on its way...

On the Moscow streets stand piled-up snow-heaps.
Lida's dreaming extraordinary dreams:
Rockets blaze out in the sky above her.
Her battalion into the battle streams.

Deadly bullets in the air went whistling
cutting down the human heart in flight.
And the girl from Moscow boldly covered
Lieutenant Vasil Shvets in that hard fight.

On the high hill slopes the battle thickens,
Where are you, my interceder, say?
...Peace is drawing nearer to you, nearer,
I am carried farther still away.

Sleep, my lovely, I shall go to battle.
If it gets too hard — I'll call you there.
And if we would chance to die together —
It will be for Moscow, as a pair.

1943

* * *

The immortelle protects the marjoram
from spiders and perhaps, disease and death,
once here, I wished for quietude and leisure,
but now the quietness chokes my very breath.

When in the heavens burnt out the aviator
they did not curse the skies nor raise a groan,
those brave immortals, who defended mother,
there once were twelve, but now just I alone.

Above the banks of white, the wall stood whitened,
there now a propeller stands whitened too, and mute,
and even the bees and grasshoppers there are sleepy
from the narcotic quiet of ripened fruit.

Now I am sure: I sleep — and shall awaken,
As I was sure then: I shall sleep — and die.
Caressing sounds of somebody's long kisses
Went running, running through the bushes high.

But not one witch was hiding in the bushes —
I went and looked — they'd vanished in the air.
I was embarrassed, thinking I heard kisses.
But only bees were gathering nectar there.

My late-blown flower — don't dim with smoke the seasons.
The bees will go, the rider gallop away.
In that far distance, which is now so intimate,
someone unseen is guarding me today.

I did not want to bend the branch and break it,
I only wished across the fence to peer.
There mother, crossing herself, by the wall was standing:
Of twelve of us, just I alone come here.

And now that rider's horse they do not hobble.
Its requiem the propeller has buzzed right through.
And therefore the unmown hay-fields stand silent...
Sons of the fallen, raise more sons anew!

SNOW

Over fields midst the wheat of cold winter,
Snowflakes heavy slow falling.
Flood down flakes is my plea, it's your brother
Here calling!

Snow falls thick round about
As the heavens ring out.

Then my plea to the winds finds beginning
As first spring in the earth is awaking:
Make more green than the forests the steppe land,
And its paths gently snaking.
Snow falls thick round about
As the heavens ring out.

And I ask too of father the sunshine
To send rays warm in flowers full flowing,
And to swaddle the wheat shoots most tender
As though frost, in a halo soft glowing.

Snow falls thick round about
As the heavens ring out.

Now no peace from this thought so disturbing
O'er the hearts now of many ascending:
Is it true everywhere on this planet
That all seeds become suns, heavenward bending?

Snow falls thick round about
As the heavens ring out.

1965

THE MOON IS ROCKING

To you in legend or tale I am calling,
to the motor's roar, and the metal's boom.
As the sun was rising we two at Lake Crescent
were standing — and there swam the Moon.
She was swimming not like a sieve nor a barrel,
she was swimming not like a disc nor a swan,
she was swimming warmed by a smile that was human,
to the joy of the flowers and birds every one.
I still did not know that in memory would linger
that very second, that minute, that hour
when you said to me: "Look, the Moon is rocking.
On the Moon a man's walking there!"
It was very deep blue in the lake and the heavens,
and so as the cosmonaut not to scare,
the bulldozers up on the dam fell silent,
for the Moon truly rocked, I swear.
But he did not see, who with sharp quick thinking
to heaven or hell blazed a way of his own.
But cosmonaut: through what a revolution
From era to era you've flown!..
No the Moon's not a swan, nor a sieve, nor a barrel,
Life's flowing over upon your page,
if you so surely were able to follow
the birth of a new cosmic age.

Today or tomorrow, it soon will be written
for ever that second, that minute, that hour.
But the Moon is rocking. The Moon is rocking:
On the Moon a man's walking there.

1971

DEMETER

In its own time the cruel course of seasons
takes from us kilometres, hours, and all.
I saw myself how on the hill, in brick-dust,
from Demeter all her primal beauty fell.

Born of a myth, and living in a legend,
she crumbled when by frost she was embraced.
Upon black soil her bosom dripped with balsam,
her shoulders on the golden sands she grazed.

At times a skylark, from those oval shoulders
soared up and sowed, and sowed his ringing song.
And so, in sunny spots, she sowed her bounty
with layers of fertile soil, millennia-long.

The crown upon her brow, all golden wheat-ears,
drops every century in the ground one grain.
Born of a myth, and living in a legend,
from whence has she appeared upon this plain?

I've heard about her from old Herodotus,
when and who commanded that she be sent
to a Scythian, as a bride from Hellas,
to make the earth a source of full content.

But maybe that took place while I was dreaming,
and that it was not Herodotus' voice?
The tales and legends and dreams away went streaming
when you appeared and made my heart rejoice.

And really, did you not come from the mountains?
And really did not balsam therefrom flow,
that very same old sweet and bitter balsam,
ordained to guard our immortality so?

Do not demand that I should tremble, pallid,
become more easily frightened than a hare,
From the hills you came! You cannot now deny it!
Whose feet were they which left their traces here?

For no one else such lovely feet possesses,
which print their gleaming beauty on the dew,
and in their track leave such a heavy sweetness,
that, having sipped it, I am drunken too!

Perhaps you will insist 'twas not your hand, then,
which sowed the meadows round with richest boon,
and brought to them the showers and stormy down-pours
each month upon the eve of the new moon?

This really and in dozing dreams has happened;
To Hellas' sons I'll ever grateful be,
who had the God-inspired idea to send you
across the distant Scythian lands to me.



Stepan Oliynik (1903-1982) was born in the village of Posisela, Odessa Region, into a farming family. He is the author of numerous collections of humour and satire as well as a book of short stories, noted for their sensitivity and convincing characterization. His works have been translated into many Soviet and foreign languages.

THE "EMPEROR"
(A tractor driver's tale)

"Last autumn, so well my old tractor I'd driven,
The title of 'emperor' I was given.
From birth, though, they've called me Olexa Bida."
"So that's how you came to be 'emperor'?"

"Yes!

It happened like this. On my good old machine
I've worked tver since I came back from the war.
From April right up to October I'd been
Upturning the loam-clods. One autumn, though, for
Our labour achievements, from round the Black Sea
We were called to a conference held in Odessa.

I switched off the engine so faithful to me
And set off by train to Odessa,
Yessir!

You ought to have looked at the posh limousine
That drove me, a ploughman, along from the station!
On a boulevard stood the hotel. Dressed in green,
A man let me in with all due salutations.
I walked in; my raincoat, my stylish top hat
All proved much too much for the old grisly-beard.
Most likely, he took me for some diplomat,
So very important to him I appeared.

'What country,' he asked, 'do you come from, Monsieur?'
'From the country,' I told him, 'that common folk call
Collective-farm-land, which you too ought to know!'"
"But what of your emperor's title, dear soul?"

"Well, it was like this, friends. That evening I'd gone
 To the conference held at a world-famous theatre
 Where music was playing and chandeliers shone.
 I smoothed down my hair so's to make it look neater,
 Then walked in sedately, sat down in my place —
 Not down in the pit, though, but the very best —
 On the balcony — gilded, of dust not a trace;
 An old man led me in, and I sat down to rest.
 There were handshakes and greetings all round. Minutes passed.
 Wherever I looked there were buddies and chums.
 I wished my dear wifey could just have a glance
 At me — to what honour her husband had come.
 The session began, and the speaker — not bad —
 Spoke at length of our Party, the power of labour.
 'Now look, on that balcony emperors sat.
 And now — there's Olexa, my old friend and neighbour.'
 Here all the great hall started slapping with gusto,
 And I should have bowed, maybe, but I'm no actor —
 Like the rest in the hall — yet, now I was its master,
 A lad from the Black Sea steppes driving a tractor.
 I drive my old tractor from snow until snow;
 Its engine and all of its insides I know,
 And if once an emperor used to sit here,
 He won't any more, 'cause I'm sitting here. So!
 They say he'd appeared unannounced here, afraid to
 Be noticed by people. Some emperor! Bah!
 While I sit here freely, without any secret
 And everyone sees it's Olexa Bida.
 That night, when the classic performance was over,
 The singers came up to the edge of the stage.
 Madame Butterfly made a bow to me, smiling,
 As graceful and sweet as they are at young age.
 Since then it all started. Whoever would meet me
 Took hold of my hand and then said for a joke:
 'Hello, Mister emperor! Howdee, Olexa?
 Come out, now, Your Majesty, let's have a smoke!
 To sit on such balconies ain't no distress!
 Yes, yes!'

And so it went spreading across the whole region,
 The nickname they gave me that day as a joke.
 Back home to my village I came from Odessa
 And listen now how I was met by my folks.

I opened the door and just entered the cottage,
 When lo — with our son my dear wifey appeared.
 'Oh, here's our dear Daddy, our emperor coming!
 The radio's told us about it all here.'
 Next morning again I was out in the ploughfield.
 I started the engine and blazed off — track-track!
 Enough of admiring my own past successes,

Or colleagues and neighbours will leave me far back!
The soil may be wet, and the ploughshares all muddy,
I'll turn over mountains of earth, have no doubt!
Because I'm the boss here, the emperor, that is,
Of all the fine land you see spreading about.
To work, now, old fellow! I'll triple my efforts
To lift up still higher my working-man's fame,
That in the gilt balcony should sit forever
The 'emperor' Olexa Bida by name."

1947

A BIT TOO CRAFTY

(On Ukrainian folk motifs)

Late one night a puffing train
To the town Popelnya came.
From the platform, dimly lit,
An old geezer boarded it.

"Though the train is pretty full,
All the lot of them I'll fool.
I'll get fixed up, I'm no dope
Nor some helpless sissy! Nope!"

Thinking up a crafty plan,
In his suitcase peered the man.
"Oh," the old smartaleck bawled,
And beneath the bench he crawled.

Soon the car was full of noise.
"What's he looking for there, bovs?"
"Looking for? No — catching, dash it!
There'll be hell if I don't stash it!"

"Kitten, or some pet like that?"
"It's a snake — no bloomin' cat!
From the suitcase it came squirming,
And it's somewhere here, the vermin!"

After such horrendous news
Pandemonium broke loose.
In a trice the car was free
And the bloke laughed roguishly,
Chose the best bunk at the top,
And went snoring there non-stop.

Waking up, he asked at dawn
Through the window with a yawn:
“Will it soon be Stanislav?
Or perhaps I’ve missed it, love?”

Standing lamp in hand below,
The conductor answered so:
“Soon? Sleep, mister, and don’t worry:
We won’t get there in a hurry.

“Yesterday some fool let out
A live viper, damn the lout!
As a consequence of which
From the train we were unhitched.
Ever since we’ve sat, me hearty,
At the station where we started!”

1961

OUR MOTHERS

Let’s remember, dearest children,
And remind ourselves together,
That the most beloved person,
In the world is our mother.

For us — be we small or grown-up —
Mothers give of love unsparing,
Tender hearts and loving wisdom,
Of their strength forever sharing.

The first word we ever uttered,
In our life was the word ma-ma!
And through life though we grow older,
There are none whose love is warmer.

When to walk we first attempted,
It was she our footsteps guided,
Through our joys and through our sorrows,
Her heart remains undivided.

Wherever her sons or daughters —
In her thoughts she follows after,
Mama’s the first word we scribble,
In the schoolroom on the blackboard.

Dearest to a mother — children,
To the children — it’s their mother,

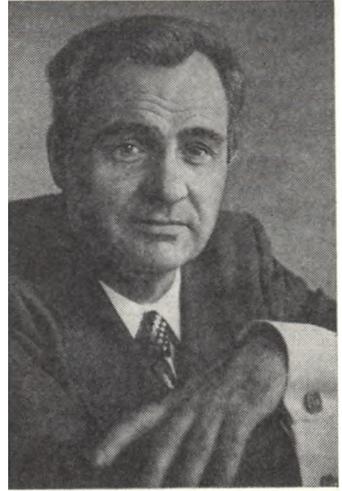
We must study, we must do things
That will please her as no other.

Always, then, remember children,
Mother's teaching and affection,
Into life and all its byways,
She has given us direction.

After years of growing, learning,
Thankful for a mother's graces,
We will leave her then behind us,
Go to work in far-off places.

When that happens let's remember,
To send telegrams, write letters,
To the one who waits their coming,
To your Mother, don't forget her!

1953



Olexandr Pidsukha (b. 1918) was born in the village of Nizhilovichi, Kiev Region, to peasant parents. His numerous collections of poetry and plays are marked by both a lyric and epic style. Many of them have been translated into Soviet and foreign languages.

MOTHER ROCKED ME IN MY CRADLE

To M. Rylsky

Mother rocked me in my cradle,
Rocked me low,
Sang, as only she was able,
Rocked me high:
“Laddy, hush-a, hush-a-bye!”

Still this song my heart was troubling
When, black-browed, young spirits, bubbling,
I first strolled with girls through the rye.
“Laddy, hush-a, hush-a-bye!”

Then, when bombers started coming,
Shells and bullets began to fly,
I could hear somebody humming:
“Laddy, hush-a, hush-a-bye!”

Enemies wished to disunite us,
Trample on our hearts, affright us,
Flood the earth with blood, enslave us,
So that songs our mothers gave us
Children should not hear beside us...

Cuckoos, calling years, go flying,
And in prams lie babies crying.
And above them, mummy, daddy:
“Hush-a-bye, my little laddy!”

1961

ONE IN AGE

Father, you and I are one in age.
All too soon the lead your life-blood stilled.
On your twenty-third new springtime page
Eternity was spilled.

You and I were parted by that strife.
You have not watched me — I have watched you.
For my lot in youth, my lot in life,
The skies are blue.

Father, in my heart there creeps unrest.
O'er my dawn a stealthy shadow flees.
Firmly on your road I face life's test,
Repeat your deeds.

Spring, which through my twenty-third year streams,
Do not bring an early winter on.
From immortality, Father, come in dreams,
Embrace your son.

Father, you and I are one in age.
All too soon the lead your life-blood stilled.
On your twenty-third new springtime page
Eternity was spilled.

1967

* * *

Blessed is he, who the silver line
Crosses over with courage fine,
Not struck deaf, nor rendered dumb
By the hubbub, when new dawns shine.

Blessed is he, who has songs to sing,
Spring's arrival the nearer to bring,

Who does not hide his head in woe,
When thunderstorms rage and ring.

Blessed is he, whose masculine stride
Is elastic, and youthful and wide,
From his boyhood to late evening years,
Though misfortune and storms betide.

Blessed is he, who day after day,
Riding high, or under his horse,
For his Mother, and Motherland too,
Burns with sacred fire on his course.

1969

* * *

Specially for me, and on my birthday too,
Onto my window-sill three bluetits flew,
And tapped the window.

“What can I do for you?
Some water, or some bread-crumbs, just a few?
There’s food around on every tree and bloom!
Or is it bringing greetings that you come?
Just be so kind, and fly into my room.
Don’t come as visitors — really feel at home.
I’ll open all the windows and the doors,
Fly in please. I’m so glad to see you here.
Perch on my table, my papers — all is yours,
I won’t let anyone hurt you, nor interfere.”
But as I went toward the window-bay,
They fluttered off, and on the willow sat.
And, in surprise, began to chirrup away
In merry chorus. Wonderful was that!
The event did not end there, right at the start.
The whole day through, like dawn’s first rosy glow,
I felt that radiant joy within my heart.

Its warmth the early bluetits came to bestow.

1970

EARLY SPRING

The sky is clear, and pure as a tear,
A heady scent the meadows bring,
And March's emerald emerges clear,
Like shining feathers on a wing.

And now the breezes ring like strings,
The river banks grow bald and bare.
The valley opens its eyes and sings,
And all stands clear in the lucid air.

The streams are murmuring, breaking out
An open road to spring to keep.
What wide expanses here for thought!
What an unwrapping after sleep!

Collect all this, and lock it away
In wondrous lines, all you can glean,
This fragrance, space, these heavens gay,
For ever — this swift-flowing scene.

1977



Yaroslav Shporta (1922-1956), the son of a farmer, was born in the village of Salnitsya, Vinnitsya Region. He is the author of many collections of verse and translations, and his poetry, distinguished for its lucid imagery and both a lyric and epic style, is well known to readers in many Soviet republics.

ZAPORIZHYA *

Greetings to you, Zaporizhya, steel-clad,
Wrapped up in sorrow your heart does not lie,
Heaven stands high up above your proud head,
Glorious Maytime sky.

Early your hocters breathe over the world,
Breathe, so that walls start to shake;
Deeply the Dnieper's great turbines whirl,
Winter and summer alike.

Silver cascades of bright water beat,
Lenin's Lake glitters in sunbeams so gay,
Masts go a-striding far off o'er the wheat,
And the new motor-way.

Dawn, and I stand where horizons are red,
Furnaces breathe angry fire near the way...
There to the steel-workers I nod my head:
"Greetings, my brothers! Good-day!"

I know your toil, and its worth highly rate,
I know why the sky is still crimson at night;
You smelt the steel for our projects of state,
Peace is the goal you've in sight.

* Zaporizhya — city in the Ukraine; a major industrial centre

Greetings to you, Zaporizhya, steel-clad,
Wrapped in our fame, our good name you hold high...
Heavens are blazing, storm-clouds o'erhead,
Glorious Maytime sky.

1952

BALLAD ABOUT LIGHT

To his motherland Gurgen came back,
From a foreign land he came back home.
Then his mother wept: "You're blind, my lad,
How can blind ones recognize their own?
How to open fields can you go out,
Where for several years we have not been?
How can you see other youths about,
Waterfalls, and rocks, and seething stream?
Those black eyes the dark has robbed of sight!
How have I deserved this sorrow, say?
If so young you cannot see the light,
You'll be blind until you're old and grey!"

Now they walk the streets of Yerevan,
And from sympathy people step aside.
Though made welcome since their trip began,
Still their hosts anxiety cannot hide.
"We've good surgeons here!" the people say,
"Really wonderful miracles they can do,
And a man can be reborn this way,
Having broken the tombstone slab in two."

Doctors take Gurgen and lay him on the table,
His heart beating high — they cut the gauze in two.
Cold steel scalpels waiting — now he's in oblivion,
In an abyss of dying sparks goes flying through...
Coming slowly back from night — the road's not easy —
Wants to rub his eyes, but that he cannot do.
Only after ten whole days had passed
They set free his tied-up hands again
Took the bandages off his eyes at last,
And he did not feel the slightest pain.

"Look and see the light!" they said, "No mark of darkness!"
But Gurgen did not know how to see the day,
How to open up his eyes and see the distance —
"Just a minute," he said, "I don't quite know the way."

With a trembling hand he raised his lids and prickly lashes,
And cried aloud when first he saw the sunbeams play.

Then Gurgen went walking round Yerevan,
In his eyes the blinding sunshine beat,
Saw far skies where sunset just began,
Saw how life was like a rainbow sweet,
Saw the furnaces, and fiery steel,
And the kolkhoz harvest of golden grain,
Saw his native country, deep in toil,
Saw his dearest mother, clear and plain,
She, who with endless pains drove out the night,
Who through her efforts had brought her blind son light.

1950

BALLAD ABOUT A SMALL SEED

Upon our fire-swept soil's dry crust
It lay among the ash and dust,
First beaten down, and soaked with rain,
Then covered with black snow again,
Though lost and frozen, half-alive,
One small seed managed to survive.

The days and nights passed, all the same,
At last, in spring, the master came,
Dug in the ash, and found the seed,
That last and only one indeed,
And warmed it in the palm of his hand —
What harvest yet will be on the land!

The master was a soldier tried,
One minute he laid his gun aside,
And then with his entrenching spade
In the soil a ready hole he made.
Crow, then, he thought, when the seed was sown,
And off he went to free the town.

And when he had gone in the distance blue,
And when the hot steel no longer flew,
When the rumbling ceased, and petered out,
Then came the hot dry winds of drought.
The blazing sunshine dried the earth,
The seed begged water to slake its thirst.

It waited and waited, still no rain —
But then a collective farm girl came,

And watered it, and soaked it well,
So that the seed in its native soil
Should feel the moisture and the warmth,
And the sun should draw a green shoot forth.

The soldier came back from the war,
And then he went to that field once more.
He stood and looked — a dream it seemed —
All round the ripening wheat-ears gleamed.
Like gold rang the grain, by breezes blown,
Which he, with that one seed, had sown.

The wheat then whispered round his feet;
It was you who saved one grain of wheat,
Which scorched by fire once lay alone,
And, as you see, it has grown and grown,
And now it rustles in silence free —
Have you forgotten that year, maybe?

But he did not forget — oh, no!
Far off in those fields where he had to go,
Where the red explosions rocked the land...
And then he took an ear in his hand:
“See what it’s borne!

To our land so wide
One seed has given a harvest-tide!”

1948

THE BOOK WITH STEEL PAGES

Each word in that book I should like now to properly know,
Every page I should like, as a primer, to read through slow.

But those steel pages are millions and more, not few,
They say that mankind such a book before never knew.

They don’t bind those leaves — just try such a book to lift!
The jib-cranes would crack, and the steel rails beneath them twist.

They load them upon a wide platform, where lift-trucks swarm,
A hundred leaves in a batch — that for steel is the norm.

They all smell of paint, and with blue-grey colour they shine.
Who could write such a book in this world, who read every line?

I have seen how they write it, that poem, majestic, supreme,
Upon my own working, so little be-lauded, theme.

From far-distant basins they bring for it pig-iron here;
Girls load it in pyramids, laughing and full of good cheer.

The furnace at night — like a blizzard of red sparks it looks,
When the steel is smelted to make into future books.

Through the rolling-mills then go the sheets, fiery-hot,
And their signature on them the rolling-men have not forgot.

They wrote as they could, with their whole working life, and their skill,
Not at writing tables — in factory shops and the mill.

The book was then packed full of burning thoughts and ideas,
And was sent on its rounds to be read in the world through the years.

In the far-distant East, in the taiga, on one wharf at rest
The lads there unpacked it and read with attention and zest.

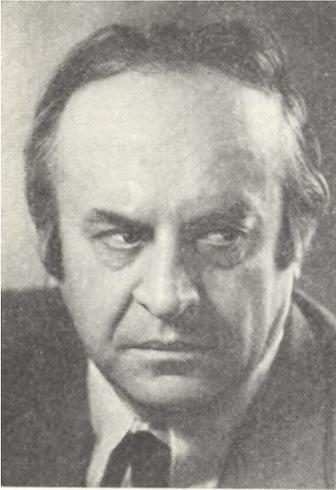
And good words in its praise passed around the folk like a song.
That book workers read at the motor-car factory ere long.

The tractor-constructors turn over each thundering page,
And the valorous tank-men add lines where the battles rage.

And upon the steel page are engraved other dates, other names
Which show how we worked, how we fought through the furious flames.

And the pages in that one book have grown more than before,
Each one of them praises my Soviet Motherland more.

Each one, like a flame, is gleaming with burning rays.
And our deathless glory to sons and to grandsons conveys.



Rostislav Bratun (b. 1927), the son of a teacher, was born in the town of Lyuboml in Volyn. He has written many collections of poems, journalistic articles, and pamphlets on civic themes. His poetry has been translated into many Soviet and foreign languages.

VOLYN SONG TO THE ACCORDION

Wherever I have travelled
My heart burned like a brand
For dear Volyn, my dear Volyn,
My own beloved land!

Up to the blue horizons
The waving wheat-fields stand.
My dear Volyn, my dear Volyn,
Collective farmers' land.

And now throughout the country
There's happy news at hand:
My dear Volyn, my dear Volyn
Is also miners' land.

And glorified by labour,
Like spring, it blossoms grand,
My dear Volyn, my dear Volyn,
My native Soviet land.

1955

REMEMBER!

No, the blood-stained secret can't be hidden,
In the pitch-black night it can't be lost...
By the sacred law of righteous hatred
Truth will nurture undying grapes of wrath.

And for years ahead, through my dear country,
Condemnation again, again will flood,
That those monsters siezed the wells to use them
As containers for fire-tried human blood.

Through the whole Ukraine they had intended
That none drank pure water from the spring,
That our people, unsubdued as eagles,
From the wood-framed wells their blood should bring.

And for long that work of Cain the murderer,
Like a nightmare still will haunt our dreams —
Derman stands there — a green Golgotha,
Horokhiv, consumed in blazing flames!

And Volyn, which crucified stood at the cross-roads
Stood in the tyrants' time, in slavery's day,
Won't permit forgiving nor forgetting,
But like conscience will torment our way.

While the seed of Cain is still existent,
Cast upon foreign soil, beyond the sea,
The hangman's nail, in children's foreheads driven
Calls for revenge and cries —
Remember me!

1957

* * *

Should you go out and leave the city,
When fields are full of whispering rye,
It maybe someone there will ask you:
"From where?"
"Where does your pathway lie?"

And why so seldom pay a visit?
Have you forgot how dry earth smelt,
Of simple village tasty bakery,
Of bread, without which salt's not salt?"

I want to shout aloud in answer:
"Oh rye, you hear me, rye, I'm yours!
I'm yours, you friends of mine be-whiskered,
On feast-days, and when the hooter roars!

I'll fall among the rye a-sprouting
In meadows covered in fresh green rime...
How welcoming you are, how tender,
As though the closest kin of mine!

When I'm oppressed by cruel longing,
And when my life gets out of tune,
With me in my city room there whisper
The gold-green fields of rye in June!

1962

LILIES-OF-THE-VALLEY
MAKE A LANDING

Do not trample,
Do not trample lilies:
Like a river they've flooded through the town —
Hosts of them on the asphalt,
In the alleys,
Hardly a spot
To set your two feet down.
All with fragrant little bells a-gleaming,
On pavements,
Squares,
And streets,
And lanes they lie.
This is the spring attack
So powerful streaming,
With these paratroopers
From the sky!
They have fallen
Like a silver shower,
Then took root
Upon the stony ground.
How's the Council
To assess this power?
On what point, if any,
Can guilt be found?
All has stopped...
All yielded in disorder.
Motor-cars
And plain pedestrians quail.

No-one suspected spring
As a marauder,
Nor such havoc
From lilies-of-the-vale!
A few short minutes —
And the attack's defeated.
Order is restored.
Time marches on.
The lilies' advance
Swept in,
And then retreated...
A pity
That all this
Is so quickly gone!

1963-1965

FAIRY-TALE ABOUT MY TOWN

Out of the night sailed Castle High,
Like a clipper 'neath clouds of sails.
Down the ladder of moonlight come
Unexpected travellers here,
Straight into the city
Of dreams,
And disperse, among the flats,
Like great shaggy-coated
Cats,
Lay their paws on sleepy heads,
Mew a soothing lullaby.
Of the distant roads they sing,
Of the storms on ocean waves,
Of the battles whose thunder's done,
Of the unfulfilled desires,
And of first young love...
One of them
Who's very tired,
Falls asleep beside a lion,
Just outside the old Town Hall.
And the lion so fatherly
Guards his sleep.
Which simply means
Someone will slumber till the dawn
And will see no world of dreams,
But, come morning, he'll be sad
That so empty was the night,
And so lacking in coloured light,
Like a life without memories.

1963-1965

VIKTOR KOCHEVSKY



Viktor Kochevsky (b. 1923) was born in the village of Rizunenkovye, Kharkiv Region, into a peasant family. His poetry proclaims the life, labour, and friendship of Soviet nations. He is also a translator of Armenian and other poets, and is a recipient of the Pavlo Tychina Prize. His works are widely published in the USSR.

LANDING NIGHT

Pale-blue Gelendzhik came to see off the Black Sea squadron
No signal lights showing...

Fierce waves lashed our sides, to and fro,
As if they were telling how there on the firm earth tomorrow
Through bursting shells and mine-fields and wire we must go.

Such a swinging sea, that even the old sailors tumbled.
We've hugged loved ones, and stand with the guns — commanders and
crews...

The Black Sea shrieks, like an echo from front line positions,
As if from Miskhako the sleepless commander sends news.*

Fags in silent cupped hands, stand the lads of the night operation.
Sky and sea have all merged. Each mile's like eternity black.
We wait for the time when we jump in the sea with our rifles,
And at the commander's order go in to attack.

But all of a sudden that waiting for onslaught is broken:
A German rocket-sheaf swayed overhead, and fell,
And cannon of every calibre answered with salvos,
And we saw how with flashes the shore was blazing like hell.

The launches cast anchor. The waves on our way swept us forward,
Soaked and frozen we ran to attack! German maxim's rat-tat...

* Caesar Kunikov, commander of a renowned commando battalion, Hero of the Soviet Union

And someone beside said: "At last, pal, the fun has started,"
And hurled grenade, "For the Motherland, forward! Take that!"

The whole earth trembled and swayed, like the decks of our launches,
Like captive birds, in our hands automatics beat...
From the fish-factory now they're embarking the first of the wounded.
O Black Sea, roar! Not a step shall we retreat!

The blast of battle shrieks in the taut steel cables,
The launches are swaying, ready to swing out of sight.
From behind the clouds shines the moon, like a sailor's breast-badge,
So out of place on this furious landing night.

1943-1961

IN YOUR NAME
THERE ARE SEVEN LETTERS...

In the quiet fire-glow of morning
The smoke from the trains twines and trails.
The poplar-fringed fields round Poltava
Resound with the cries of the quails.

The roofs, with the storks patrolling,
The flocks of gulls o'er the sea,
The Carpathian cliff-side fir-trees
In their resinous majesty.

And the ripened ears, which to berries
Their sun-darkened faces bend...
And the scattered old cartridge-cases,
My Ukraine, upon your dear land.

And well I remember the stations
With their chaos of refugee woe,
As if you were pierced by barbed wire
Of the drunken fascist foe.

And the mad young stallions trampled
Your suffering soil 'neath their feet,
And the blood of my comrades mingled
With my own in the battle-heat.

Sad mothers from far Siberia,
From Caucasian meadows high,
To this day in your boundless spaces
Seek the graves of their sons, and sigh.

Above them Polissya cuckoos
Flute out their unlived years,*
And the dawn above the Dnieper
Weaves with ripening obelisk-ears.

Above them, with guns of victory,
There thunders construction's day:
The ponderous concrete pyramids
On the Dnieper's bosom they lay.

You are writing a starry poem,
In the cosmos you venture forth...
In your name there are seven letters —
Like a rainbow they shine o'er the earth.

1963

CONVERSATION WITH THE SKY

Upon two birches,
As if on crutches,
The cloudy sky leant heavily lurching
Toward hot steppeland roads nearby...
It thundered at me: "Who are you, then?"
"Oh, I'm a common foot-slogging yeoman,
Who underneath you could have died.
I charged the pill-boxes of foeman,
Through a hundred fields I ran or writhed.

And bullets went whizzing, buzzing, appalling,
Prying and seeking out my youth...
And the cuckoos gave up useless calling,
Counting my future years — that's the truth!

The girl's eyes would be wet with weeping,
Who still unkissed till then would be.
The quail, in crippled fields a-creeping
Would lie that he had hidden me...
I tell you frankly, dear old heaven,
I could have died in the grass, the grain;
I dug in the earth, from you lay hidden,
And afterwards, deafened, rose again.

I cursed your thunder —
(Sun — be witness!)

* In accordance with popular superstition, the number of cuckoo-calls heard denotes the number of years the hearer has to live

Forgive these words and my abuse...
The ack-ack guns with their steely splinters
Lashed you, and gashed you, when they cut loose.
But you don't fall when the shrapnel spurns you,
Although from old wounds pain still stays...
While I'm alive they shall not burn you
With hellish strontium-atom rays.
Your clouds their rain on the rye abandon,
Your sun fills love's dark eyes with passion,
From rocket nozzles you slake your thirst.
I am your guardsman and companion —
In your affairs and thoughts immersed.

1965

BAREV *, MY ARMENIA!

Like some wide rainbow, which supports the sky,
May I not cease in life the skies to span —
One wing-tip touching the Dnieper running by,
One wing-tip touching distant Lake Sevan.

I see from Dnieper's steeply rising crest,
Just how the watchful vine-grower, wise old one,
The vine-shoots nurses, like a loving son,
Who presses his dear mother to his breast.

And from the vines sharp mountain dust he wipes,
And in reward for all his care and toil
He senses in a lucid bunch of grapes
The sweetness of Sevan, from the stony soil.

I see the master-craftsman work the stone,
And carve from it the clustering grapes so bright...
Armenia, from your mountain bosom flown —
The mighty David rises in sunny light.**

His horse flies on, with swiftly pulsing blood,
And gallops into Kiev's Bohdan Square.
The springs well up beneath his hooves steel-shod,
As dew falls on the thirsty chestnuts there.

And there the warmth of sunny distant skies
Familiar flocks of mulberry trees imbibe.

* *Barev!* — Greetings! (Armenian)
** David Sasunsky — hero of an Armenian epic

Barev, Armenia mine, my greeting flies!
Unnumbered songs with your breath are alive.

Upon my way together closely clung
The golden canvases of your Saryan,*
The starry worlds of your Ambartsumyan,**
And your Armenian guttural burning tongue.

That we've become firm friends — all praise to fate!
We stand in a polyglot family's fast embrace.
Like a fine bunch of your full-blooded grapes,
From your delightful vale of Ararat.

1960-1972

* Martiros Saryan (1880-1972) — Soviet Armenian painter
** Viktor Ambartsumyan (b. 1908) — Soviet Armenian astrophysicist



Anatoliy Kosmatenko (1921-1975), the son of a farmer, was born in the village of Vremivka, Donetsk Region. He is known for his fables and literary criticism. His satirical writings are marked by philosophic depth. His works have been published in many other republics of the Soviet Union and abroad.

PHILOXENES AND DIONYSUS

In those past days, when crowds of flattering lackeys
To tyrant Dionysus paid their dues,
For doggerel verses, hackneyed, stale and trashy —
The pride and glory of the Syracuse,
Philoxenes, a true, inspired poet,
Held open court upon this stuff, to show it
As ravings of a footman of the Muse,
For which he paid — was sent long years to lose,
Blowing his trumpet in the cold stone quarry.
But friends begged his exemption, feeling sorry.
The tyrant, insolent still, then bade them call
The poet to feast again in his sumptuous hall...

With torches burning, wine in goblets gleaming,
And guards stood stiff at the door, just like a wall,
The tyrant rose — one moment — all ceased speaking.
And thus he ordered, with a touch of gall:
“Now, listen, Philoxenes, to my creation,
Give judgment on these latest lines of mine,
Have they a touch of worthy inspiration,
Or do I merely woo the Muse in vain?”
And silence. Such as only heaven ordains!
Well, poet, rise, your life is at a gamble,
And let the lackeys' blood freeze in their veins.
And he arose, and with no sly preamble

Cried through the hall: "Hey, guards, I say,
Escort me back to the quarries straight away!"

.
A myth, or a true story, who can tell,
Which has since ancient times spread round the folk?
But we must praise Philoxenes as well,
For... what shall we say?..

the critical principle with which he spoke.

THE GOLDEN GATES

A scrounger suddenly found out,
The golden gates in Kiev are remaining:
"Just think, they're golden and still there?!" he even laughed.
"To take them never's crossed the mind of those about?
I'll go and whip a bit, and gold'll be my gaining!
And then goodbye to work and sorrows paining!"
He spoke and straight away set out.
Arrived in Kiev, stood, mouth wide, eyes straining...
Returned with empty hands, no time for feigning.
And, "Well?" his wife asked. He said "Hell!
You thought the people there did nothing, sat debating,
Or stood there still just me awaiting?
They stole the gold themselves, their greed full sating...
And from the golden gates remain just golden words to tell!"

Now any scrounger sings for you:
Take all you can if once the chance you're offered,
Since he himself would take the sunshine too
If only he could touch the sun quite safely,
And that he'd never burn his hands he knew.

ESSENCE AND EFFERVESCENCE

In order to study human natures,
Man's hidden potential to light to bring,
The scientists made an apparatus.
Quite small.

Not any old kind of thing.
In form, well, like a cap or beret.
Light. Quite beautiful. Modish. Very.
Inside were pick-ups, to fix and code
Each change of energy, thought, and mood...

And, as expected, they did not fail
To find a certain Person (male),
Who then agreed, (for a fee, I fear),
To wear the beret for one year.

That time elapsed — the results are here:

1. Military ability: A Napoleon.
2. Self-examination: A Spinoza.
3. Abstract thought: Well, Einstein's not the only one!
4. Gift of eloquence: A Cicero.
5. Energy: Orbits the globe many times. Spontaneous.
6. Creative talents: Here's a poet of genius.
Could be Dovzhenko, even Rafael,
Or Rodin, Korolyov, Buchma the actor,
Could be a marvellous acrobat as well,
You simply couldn't gauge the given data.

And that was just one ordinary Man on Earth...

Oh, what a revelation!

One pity, though. That data had no worth,
Was just the measure of idle imagination,
With which Man, all his life

Takes his own measure.

But energy there certainly was!

Great treasure...

What of it?

Lost on the envy and spite it covers:
The failure could not stand the success of others!

ZAKHAR HONCHARUK



Zakhar Honcharuk (b. 1921) was born in the village of Koritnya in Cherkasy Region into a farming family. He has written many collections of poems, literary criticism, and essays. The interpretation of the world through music-related symbols is a distinguishing mark of his poetry. His poems have been translated in the USSR and abroad.

PIGEON DAWN

To Pavlo Hrihorovich Tychina

In the window,
in the morning blue
pigeons —
a grey couple —
started cooing.
When the sun
its shining bugle blew,
on the lake
like lilies
birds were blooming.
Soft, the wind
above the tranquil Dnieper
sang its chorals
in the praise of Day,
happy chorals to the sun's first ray.
Sun and wind and pigeons seemed to say:
Morning has arrived,
awaken, sleeper!

1955

ZAPOROZHIAN ORATORIO

(From the poem *Titan*)

Introduction

I'll play the organ —
if you will!
or on a blooming mill!
or on a rolling mill
I'll spread the velvet of my chords...
From the Mesozoic to the aorta
of the Dnieper as it flows
bearing my woes —
On ligatures of the dark grief I feel
I will recast into bright steel
the stone dream of your epic past!
the stone dream of the past...

* * *

I go!

Ore crunches on my teeth... Outside it's 32 below —
What is it crunching — air or water, ice or snow?
Perhaps, the ages with their feet,— Sarmatians, metal?

Who can know?

Perhaps, your wine cup, Kuria? *
O Dnieper, no — it is your flow!..

III

You broke. You scattered. Smashed to bits
the manacles of fettered ages.
Your wave its banks eternal hits,
in a green ocean spreads and rages.
You bear

the white sails of my day,
you know no weariness nor rest.
no barrier can bar your way;
your depth no plumbline can attest.
The skyline on your heaving route
approaches,

then again recedes;
uncurbed, the gallop of my thoughts
wave after towering wave outspeeds...
A war was waged... Volcanoes raged. Rocks boiled in lava...
Storms died down, assuaged.

“WHO ARE YOU?”

asked the earth, the sky, the waters and the woods.

* Kuria — Pecheneg chieftain who killed Kiev's ruling prince Svyatoslav, making a winecup out of his skull

The dew alone smiled on the wheat, trees, grass — as if it
understood.
...Or the lightning on your eyebrows, thirsting for a storm,
on your eternal charm,
asked me: "Who are you?"—
Each day new voices ask me, thund'rous or subdued...

1958-1964

ADRIATIC AQUARELLES

The sun comes up behind the hills,
throws off its crimson mantle,
and like great Raphael begins
to paint the sky's clean panel.
In haste, it peeps into a gorge,
mixes paints in the sea,
and with a brush of fine bright beams
draws contours expertly.
It touches with ultramarine
Dinarian pines' sharp crowns,
steps back, looks narrow-eyed, then adds
new multicoloured tones.
And with my pad by a steep path
I quietly creep uphill
and on my paper, virgin-white
its motley palette spill.

II

Thin and sharp-pointed as a spear
up to the sky a cypress rears.
All round
there's not a blade of grass,
just limestone
in a huge grey mass,
while far off, like a grey old man,
Drowns the ancient sea — Jadran.
And such deep silence fills the world
That the heat's breathing can be heard.
Up to the proud green tree I go
And bend before it in a bow;
"Come with me,"
in a friendly tone
I say, "It's sad
to stand alone."

Then in reply
its branches stir;
it touches me,
and, as it were,
"Who then," it says to me, "will stand
on guard of our fair motherland?"

III

In hospitable Cetinje *
We'd seemed to drain day's wine.
To the Appenines — to sleep — the sun
rolled off, with wine ashine.
And I drove downhill to the bay
and watched
till dusk began,
sorry to see
the sun's red cup
spill into the Jadran.
How fine it would have been to drink
in Kotor ** too — how fine! —
I thought, forgetting day still had
to pour the globe more wine.

1955

PASTORALE

My thoughts are browsing
upon twilights' grass-green leas,
my conscience-sunbeams on their
ligatures —
like wheat-ears...
My Morvin *** minors me
with hungry bumblebees
to constellations' thirds
above me beating.
A willow-wand, I flow out, with the Tikich **** fusing...
My fingers bear
the smart of fissured graves;
stung, tortured by the bumblebees' dark music
above the obelisks
on Morvin forest glades...

Koritnya, 1970

* Cetinje — former capital of Montenegro

** Kotor — town on the Adriatic

*** Morvin — wooded area near Cherkasy

**** Tikich — river in the Ukraine

NEWTON'S BINOMIAL EQUATION

(A Passacaglia)

In memory of Vasil Yalovenko, who fell in battle for his motherland

My memory singles out your voice
at a singers' congregation

(now, when without you am I).

My memory cuts out your face —
as it was on your coming of age — with sad patience
on the azure stone of the sky...
On the clouds' white marble

(as it was when you entered a turn)

Fair-locked, your contours burn...
With the sharp break of your brows

(as you approached the foes)

your face like sunrise
every morning awakens me.

In silence it hits me with reproof
(when I fly home alone)...

Questioningly

anguished, it peers into my torn heart
(when I wake up at home).

Cruelly it punishes me,
in my veins, profundo, it sobs,
(a sore conscience in night's requiem throbs),
the leaden-black gloom its reverberations fill
(where is it — near Bryansk or
on Knyazha Hill?),

On frozen ploughlands stretching away.

On undecaying human clay,

on my hopes, on my pain as I ache and pine,
on the manuals of these prayers of mine,
on my wing
it strikes me!

Where are you, Vasil,

in which zone,
on which orbit,
on which parallel?

Daylight calls you!

My dawn calls you!

Wounded, Koritnya * sobs like a gull:

I can't live any more!

I can't wait any more!

I've crippled the white-feathered wings of
my days, bleeding and sore!

Be accursed, disperse, death's evil thralldom!

* Koritnya — village near Cherkasy

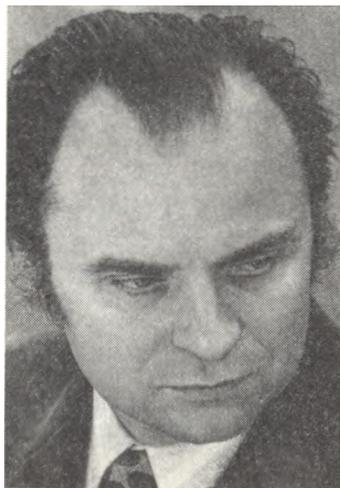
The horizon freezes on the gun-ring, taut —
on IL strafers —
 pianos triangular —
 O Passacaglia!..
 O Passacaglia!..

CODA

Like February's wound congeals the day...
My memory carves on your sky
the first path
 with the last.
Over the wide world
 after a black hearse with gloom overcast
goes the school...
 goes the Tikich...
 go bombers...
And after them goes Sashko —
 your fair-haired Newton
(barefoot, bareheaded, he stumbles along in the frost)
leading his mother — the gentle Koritnya — caressingly —
your passacaglia!..
Blue passacaglia!..

1966

Dmitro Pavlichko (b. 1929) was born in the village of Stopchativ, Ivano-Frankivsk Region, into a poor farmer's family. He is the author of numerous books of poetry, literary criticism, film scripts, and essays. His poetry is deeply lyrical, figurative, and rich in civic themes. He works much as a translator, and his poems are widely published in the USSR and abroad. He is a winner of the Nikolai Ostrovsky and Taras Shevchenko prizes.



MOUNT ARARAT

I

How Mt. Ararat calls with its sails
All of gold! Oh I yearn for its skyways.
For a ship or town clouded in veils,
Pallid town like a dream's secret byways.

Diamond white is Mt. Ararat town —
Electricity sadly superfluous.
Oh, from iron and plastic renown
To escape where pure skies are luminous!

Escape poisonous fumes, and the rust
That lie hidden in glittering churches:
In the lighted stained-panels august
Like untainted and innocent pictures.

Oh, to grow like the dawn in the sky,
So like greenish-toned dill in full flower.
Then, as if from the Flood, saved am I
From the false and the vile of the hour.

Should I change into sunbeams sublime
Which would pour healing nectar like honey
In the comb of man's heart! Could I climb
With that load up to mountain heights sunny?

I shall *not* reach my mountain-top ark
Where it sails, a dreamboat, the blue yonder —
For the heavy earth clings to my heart,
And the cornfields my thoughts won't surrender.

II

I flew up to that mountain of ice
I had thrown the black earth from my bosom.
Oh but why — I can't guess the device —
Was I pierced by a frost all in blossom?

Frozen thunder — that's Ararat's crest,
The white radiance — quartz-shine in porphyry.
In the ark sailing there, I suggest,
Man and beast failed to grow very brotherly.

They were saved from the waters that rose,
From the swamp and from food's fatal blight.
But their souls turned to ice, for they froze
On that summit of petrified light.

I want earth. Old Mt. Ararat's spell
Has deceived me with gleam of Flood fable.
I'd exchange this sky heaven for hell,
For a brimming with boiled-iron cradle.

I've no fear of the lie or of spite,
Nor of creeping human evil.
The implacable flame of Fight
Is my shield from the mud of coeval.

This, my mission, is eternal the while,
The code of my life and maturity —
To save souls that are sunk in the vile,
Cauterizing their ills in futurity!

Not a word way up here can I sow,
'Twould be grain in a city ground-poor.
Oh, if I could come down, seed and mow!
Oh, if I by a vineyard could moor!

How I ache for far land of my birth:
With no strength to return, passage bars —
Blue sky clings to my heart, and not earth,
And my wings have been punctured by stars.

From what source is this web due
That it flies across my track?
Thread of white and thread of blue,
Will there follow thread of black?

On the lowlands in the autumn,
I guessed the puzzle herein wrought —
White thread — that grows on my temple,
Blue thread — that's my inner thought.

I'd have liked to make a detour,
What the black meant — go without;
But it swings my eyes before,
Now vanishing, now ringing out.

It's relentless, I can't snare it,
It seems as strong as razor strop —
Terrible if my eyes must tear it
When, like a pendulum, it stops.

1973

NOSTALGIA

That woman haunts me. Always standing there
Upon a cloud of leaves all golden
Beneath each plane-tree. She awaits me
At midnight even on the city squares.

She walks to meet me on the waters
Of flooding spring that run twixt houses.
And through the porthole of my plane
At take-off, I can see her staring in.

Nothing so arouses in me fear
As the mournful smile upon her face,
Nothing so attracts me as her gaze.

Her eyes are most severe, and yet
I see in them a ray of kindness,
An inner gleam that speaks not grief —
but love.

1979

HANDS

Look closely at your hands. Look near,
And think of times you've given them unwilling.
Remember all the deeds they've done for you.
And thankful be if these your fingers ever
Look calmly on you free from bitter hate.

Look closely at your hands. Look near.
They live again your father's daily way
Who even by his work-worn hands gave thought,
And clenched his fist against injustice witnessed.

And they recall the times you burnt them
First in waters cold around your school
(Your teacher turned and saw, and ordered washing);
And they recall the times you burnt them,
Secondly upon the breast of first true love
So sharp, like horns fresh broken through
On wild brow of young ox-calf,
And they recall the times you burnt them,
Thirdly of fair woman's fickle cheeks
That flared up fierce upon the blows you rendered,
But some things lie forgot, and some things they've forgiven.

And thankful be that you did never make them serve
To copy movements made by dwarfs in spirit,
Who shrilly cry with hands so small and weak
To follow close their paucity of thought.
And thankful be your hands are not dishonoured
By ever joining in the death of false applause.
Look closely at your hands. Look near,
And ask simply, without compromise,
If they would rise to fight
Before your people's thrice accursed foe,
Rise even when the enemy's cold gun
Were pressing firm against your furrowed brow,
(False hypocrites seek justifying words!)
And is there e'er a need to hold up high the sun
Above the earth, above the earth?

All rivers terrified will change their course,
And veins when terrified will change their blood:
All pure and honest blood becomes most foul,
And then turns venomous and so on e'er.

Look closely at your hands. Look near.
And there without your will your fingers move —
Another creature over them takes sway
mysterious and at a gentle pace.

But all this happens whilst you're there, my friend,
Your heart is still in full control of all;
The explanation, if you seek the truth,
Lies in impatience of the future tree
That longs to firmly sink its roots in earth,
And shows already strivings to that end.
Look closely at your hands. Look near.

OŚWIĘCIM

From Oświęcim I will not return,
Though I went there upon my own accord.
The shoes of my little daughters here
Are speaking with their silent torn-out tongues.

Here father's glasses are lying on a heap
Of broken lenses and of twisted frames.
I recognize them by the tendon bound
Around the bridge-piece of the nickel rims.

And here I recognize my mother's hair,
In a heap of women's plaits, just like a stalk
Of dried-up hay from off the harvest field.

Don't look for metaphors among these lines;
You surely must have parents of your own,
And have you never brought young children up?

1967

IN HEMINGWAY'S HOUSE NEAR HAVANA

I went in and my spirit stood still.
All the words of great weight quickly dying.
The sad eyes filled with tears of the goats and sad eyes
Of the buffaloes wild started crying.

Fearsome lions stretched out on the ground,
On the walls stuffed horned trophies lamenting.
And the sadness of animal eyes
Stopped my heart with a sorrow tormenting.

Where's Alaska's wastes snowy and blue?
And where's Kenya's, Somalia's sands burning?

The beast wants his own land, to be far from a mirage of death
To a mirage of loving returning.

In the house lived a hunter of skill,
Who would shoot to his fill ever aiming,..
And the aurochs fell down with the roar
Of a plane, bathed in blood flowing, flaming.

With a head wound an elephant sank
To its knees, in the dust heavy falling,
And he lowered his tusks as a sword with blade curved
At the carbine's betrayal appalling.

And the golden-horned deer swiftly ran
Hoping wounds to shake off by the motion,
Through all Africa, ran, fell down, and ran
On in swift flight from one ocean to ocean.

In the eyes of the unhurt doe still I heard clear
Cries of Sodom rise as she stood mercy pleading,..
And the hunter so cruel and so sharp from the hunt
Yet took home unused shot, such pleas heeding.

And he stood there bewitched by the bullet's bright flash
Quite alone with his rifle, reloading,
When the funeral music from his final shot
Of his life through the silence came sharp, light exploding.

Like dark clouds in the sky hung wreaths
O'er America sadly floating.
And the wolves only clothed in false black
By the coffin walked silently gloating.

1976

LIGHTHOUSE

Whose heart is that
Above the sea at midnight,
Which regularly beats
And gleams with every pulse?

Whose heart is that
Beneath the mist's damp sheepskin,
Which still unceasing beats
And gleams with every pulse?

Whose heart is that
Which to love's shore now summons
The tired and the forgotten,
The thirsty and unsubmitive?

Whose heart is that
Which sends such hopeful signals
Into the endless wastes,
Not waiting thanks nor answer?

I stand and watch.
My hand upon my breast,
I wait, till through my fingers
The light immortal bursts.

If that is not my heart
Which regularly beats
And gleams with every pulse,
Why did I gather stars
Therein, which fell from heaven,
Why do I live on Earth?

1977

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

And for my coffin wood shall never want
As for my cradle once it was not wanting,
Yet while my cradle stays for countless others,
My coffin will remain for me alone.

And for my sadness words shall never want
As for my merry song they were not wanting,
But will my song be taken up by others?
And will my sadness die with me alone?

How hard it is to write a song for singing,
That like a cradle goes from man to man,
From eyes of mothers on to starshine swaying.

How hard it is in solitude to weep
To gather up alone your sadness sighing,
Your sadness never shared, like death alone.

1967

ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA

I

Like smoke upon the earth Guevara fell,
In bushes of pain his shattered shoulder burst...
So quiet between his fingers blood-streams well,
Like golden clouds between the cliffs dispersed.

Above him, like a ghost, his murderer looms,
And fires point-blank, yet once, and twice, and thrice...
“Well, isn’t that enough?” Che at him booms,
And ridicule sparkles in his dark brown eyes.

So take good care, you butchers, all the same.
Because he’ll rise from the grave to punish your souls,
And your foulness wipe away with flame.

And see, in oil-cloth now they wrap him fast,
And carry him secretly to the jail, like moles,
And there behind the bars his corpse they cast.

II

Well, burn him then, or give him to the ants,
Or wall him up, in concrete pack him tight,
Or hide him in an atomic bunker, gents,
That dust, as dangerous as dynamite.

Their spite so roared, their fears so furious ran,
That so dead Che should not reach for his gun,
They took an axe, and hacked off both his hands,
Scorched brown by many years of wind and sun.

But, like some fabulous blood-stained bird,
Those hands then came to life, and trembling stirred,
And flew out of the prison cell afar,

And new victorious troops they called and led,
And as a five-pointed early morning star,
They blaze on in American skies overhead!

1972

THE SEA

The frosty rime is laid on seas autumnal
As on a steppeland field. But all its deeps
Are crossed and lit by myriad beams of searchlights,
As if a fleet of submarines were there.

And through the waves that frozen shine like scales,
I look on sunken mountains. Now it's summer:
Like silver nets, the dew lies on the grass.
My father and my forebears there went reaping.

They come from their seafaring, and again
Put out upon the deep blue vistas yonder —
But still their scythes lie glinting on the shore.

Somewhere for sure the ships go sailing there,
And all these massive waters are supported
Upon my forebears' shoulders. Seas roll in.

1979

VASIL BONDAR



Vasil Bondar (1923-1969) was born in the village of Burbine, Poltava Region, into a peasant family. He is the author of numerous books of verse and fiction which combine expressive lyricism with civic themes. Many of his poems have been translated into other languages of the USSR.

THE FIRST
FROM THE LEFT
IN THE LINE

Came the hiss of barbed wire and clanking of iron...
Someone cried out and fell. Choking. Silence again.
Wings outspread, slanting flight through the air, cut the raven
Greyish yarn of sleet-rain.

The rain stopped. A red sun then peered out and was caught on
The far side of the factory's giant smoke-stack:
Standing frozen in water, a barefooted column —
They were eight hundred prisoners. Four days of lack.

Toad-like mouth all atwist in a mad fit of anger,
Through the gates came the bow-legged camp Commandant —
Running onto the platform he spoke, this haranguer,
Quite severely: "Well, who'll go to work at the plant?"

The first man from the left in the line (by the order
Of Committee. None else. Only he.) speaks as head.
For the first from the left in the line — life was over,
Scarce begun. He stepped firmly three paces ahead.

But the first from the left in the line will not ever
Go back home, or return to his place in the line.
"Not a one of us here will lift hand against brother...!"
So the camp Commandant's offer thus was declined.

where on each whitewashed doorframe is painted
the sign of the hammer and the sickle crossed,
where by each window grow the fresh-blown roses,
and in each room there is a place of honour
where, like sunlight or spring flowers, Lenin
is framed with wreath of lilies, cornflowers blue;
and at a table sits a small first-grader
with awkward fingers calloused from the pen
and busily engaged upon his homework.

His mother, back from fieldwork, in a basin
Is washing her fair feet — so lovely they —
such shapely legs Aphrodite alone
could dream of having when great Zeus
made perfect all creations in the world....

I still could mention other simple things:
Like blue-jays with their flashing tight-pressed wings
that shake the dews down from the oaken branches;
Or of weary student girls in resident dorms
who grind away for tests and dream of movies,
while their young knights with downless lips
await them on the sleepy streets by moonlight
and beg night-watchmen for a cigarette
when they have finished every butt in pocket;

but even these vignettes of life, though charming,
are quite enough to fill to overflowing
my one and only heart that I possess
with all the tenderness I would return
to people building living communism —
return it in the passionate form of song....

I'd like you to remember that nightingales
when singing break their hearts both night and day,
because they pour sincerely all, all their passion.
That's why I say to you and all my friends:
I wish I had two hearts, and not one only!

THE ITALIAN (Raffo)

We were walking phantoms or their shadows,
Bent like humpbacks, yet with no relief....
Raffo, the Italian, with bravado
Cursed in Russian his Duce chief.

Each his cross of insubordination
Bore, and bathed in burning bloody sweat....
Raffo, sending Hitler to perdition,
Used up German swear-words in his threat.

While the rest of us lay tired or sleeping,
Crying out or groaning through the night,
From unravelled socks he sat up knitting
Woollen vests for us till morning light.

So we would not suffer from the freezing
Winter drizzle in our exile stark.
To himself he sang, his sorrow easing,
Bandiera Rossa in the half-lit dark.

On the vests he crudely knitted even
Stars, five-pointed, crimson, for a crest —
Yes, our life was bitter pain, not heaven;
Yet warmth seeped to us a slight happiness.

Raffo and gloom — as matching words are wrong.
A truth he knew that's known in every land —
Life is short — soon over, like a song.
Contesting time — the future's in your hand.

SS-men forced us into catacombs
Of Munich cellars — we were labour cheap —
To remove still unexploded bombs
From underneath the massive ruin-heaps.

Raffo defused the bombs, yes sir,
At this work of danger — he'd no peer;
The officer, a coward and a cur,
Felt no longer any kind of fear.

Then other fascists also lost discretion:
To get a close-up view a few were spurred —
For Raffo won each fight without exception,
Battling against Death by deed, not word.

With respect the fascists formed a throng —
Then Raffo, boiling over with black evil,
Cried out: "Life is no more than a song!"
And hammered something swiftly as the devil.

Thunder, smoke. With earth and stone and scars,
Flew into hellfire every fascist Cain.
"Hear us, Raffo? All the vests with stars
Will treasures be, should we alive remain."



Mikhaïlo Klimenko (b. 1926) was born in the village of Levkiv, Zhitomir Region, to peasant parents. He has written many collections of verse about nature and the simple people of the land. Many of his poems have been translated into other languages of the USSR.

MY ORCHARD

This orchard
 Where I met my youthful spring,
 Where ripened summer also rustled away,
 Is empty now.
 I gaze on apple trees:
 They yesterday, it seems, were bending low
 Beneath the weight of apples with red cheeks,
 But now the wind sighs only in the leaves.
 And still the flying webs of Indian summer
 Catch everywhere...
 The days are clear and fine,
 And golden warmth so 'dreamy and caressing
 Flows down to earth...
 One wants to sweep it all
 Into one's breast, and to preserve it there,
 Until the cold days come, the rains, the autumn,
 When on the pale blue window of the sky,
 For one warm ray of sun, one would give all!
 My orchard takes a rest.
 It's true it laboured
 In summer gloriously, and earned much praise:
 How many warring winds and rains then shook it,
 How many fierce attacks it has fought off,
 From what long sieges it has freed itself,
 And from what thunderous anger, who can say?
 But on its way it went, and did not stumble,

And brought with honour
All its welcome riches —
Endowed the cellar
Where they wait in quiet,
These early apples, 'fragrant as June roses,
And just toward New Year, the best team-leader
Will take them to the distant town, still fresh
As though they'd just been gathered from the boughs.
The gardener then by people will be remembered
With frequent gratitude...
Now autumn calm
Has flowed between the rows, as if the water
Of some broad lake.
No playful breezes blow,
The orchard in the vale
Is not disturbed...
And on my soul tranquillity descends.
Within me too the gusts have died away,
The lilac days of May and youth are done...
I meet my autumn days too, like my orchard —
Subsiding, meet the coming autumn time,
With reason and with wisdom,
As one should do.

1956

AWAKENING

How fine to wander where the snow is thawing,
Awakening life in everything to note.
Already jack-daws 'neath the pines are cawing —
The March dawns are to blame for that, no doubt!
And snow-drops any moment may be showing,
Their buds from porous snow are peeping out,
And on the pond the icy seal is flowing,
In cracks and hollows water swims about.

And yonder, see, the pussy-willow's sprouting —
There's none whose buds come earlier in view...
All promises love and happiness for you.

“Fair skies to you! The first day of Spring's outing!”
The cranes have started ringing through the blue...
But didn't you dream of this all winter through?

1966

POLISSYA

Polissya!

Pallid snow-drops in the edges,
A delicate line, a tender ringlet there
Among the curly hair of the Ukraine!
When you are flooded out in fields of flax,
Not with a Black Sea, but with one of blue,
And the steppe breath,
The hot wind of Sahara,
How dry you whisper

then and

rustle through

Your warm cracked lips!
The forest's cosy coat...
The lake's blue dish,
The ponds' square panes of glass.
The pretty weaving streams, like playthings:
The Guiva,

the Ubort,

and there the Uzh,

And the Teteriv — ribbons of azure blue...
And crossing everywhere,
Through forests cutting,
The side-roads stretch, and there — the motor-ways.
At midday — see, an undulating river,
And far off gleams the surface of some reach,
And beckons, beckons...
Here a factory looms
Quite unexpected from the pines, all white,
And smoking its long chimney filter-tip
With springtime smile...

Is it not like a youth,

A merry-hearted fellow from Polissya?

His voice —

a hooter in the azure blue,
Embraces every morning with its call
The region round — vociferous and young,
And wakens people from their nightly sleep.
And answering back come Korosten,*

Popilnya,

Baranivka,

and Dovbish...

Darling Malin

With all its snow-white paper rustles here,
And letters to the whole Republic writes —
Don't let young Andrushivka sigh and pine...

* Korosten, Popilnya, Baranivka, Dovbish, Malin, Andrushivka — towns in Zhitomir Region. Malin is an old Ukrainian paper-producing centre

And lying parallel, running, so it seems
Far, far away, go steel-veined railway lines,
And on the side-tracks there's a smell of oil.
The land is stingy here —
No gold it gives,
No iron spouts forth, and only a merest trace,
In places, of the softish blue-grey coal.
But generously it yields
The prickly labradorite to cutters of stones.
Let them first trim them, polish the facets true,
And lock light in!

Then through your soul will pierce
The snow-drop's azure, and sunshines mottled spots,
A-trembling in its black incredible depths.
That is Polissya's soul,
and to attain it
Is no light task — an everlasting tale.

1956



*Mikhaïlo Tkach (b. 1932), a poet and screenwriter, songwriter and translator, is a recipient of the Taras Shevchenko Prize for his work on the documentary film *The Soviet Ukraine*. The songs written to his lyrics enjoy wide popularity in the Soviet Union. Some of them have been translated into foreign languages.*

SON,
THE DUCKS ARE FLYING

At daybreak a mother
Her baby son swaddled
When the stars foretelling
The fates are most bright.
— Look my son, my baby
For over the Ukraine,
For over our cottage,
The ducks are in flight.

At daybreak a mother
To her small son whispered:
— By the Chumak Highroad
Chumaks * spend the night,—
Get up son, my baby,
For over the Ukraine,
For over our cottage,
The ducks are in flight.

My son, when the day breaks,
I will listen closely,
When in the blue heavens
Wings will flutter by.

* Chumak Highroad — traditional Ukrainian name for the Milky Way: *chumaks* were wagoners who originally traded in salt delivering it from the Black Sea coast to all parts of the Ukraine

Fly to me then, dear son,
For over the Ukraine,
For over our cottage,
The ducks are in flight.

My son, when the day breaks,
How hard to be waiting,
And still worse the gazing
Into dark of night.
Don't wander, my dear son,
For over the Ukraine,
For over our cottage,
The ducks are in flight.

1974

MIRAGE

I gazed into the mirror of Baikal,
Where the waves rocked the shadow of the larch,
In the beginning it stretched long, so long,
Like the road I travelled from Ukraine, so far.
The sun climbed warmly up upon my back,
And I saw how the shadow flowed toward me,
How ever clearer details were revealed,
And how the shadow became small and smaller.
Then suddenly the wave broke at the shoreline —
And lost its shadow,
While in its place
As if out of a legend flowed toward me
The one I loved,
With two lilies in her braids,
Her head encircled with a narrow wreath,
Which by the Dnieper shore we wove together,
Her eyes shone mirror-like — two orbs of heaven,
And like two waves, her eyebrows curved above.
I wanted then to forward plunge to meet her,
Waving my arms like an eagle taking flight,
But somewhere down into the depths she dived —
And then toward me quickly swan another.
Within her eyes no longer smiled the heavens,
Her hoary locks did not flow thick and heavy,
Without the wreath she looked as though she'd never
Known beauty in her lifetime, or its pleasure.
I recoiled as though from death approaching,
But recognized within the voice an echo
Familiar, near and dear:

— Can you hear?
 Don't be afraid, my dove,
 Your beauty
 Did not perish in the waves.
 She lives beside the Dnieper river's shore,
 I'm but the shadow-grandmother of your love,
 Lost in the dreaming taiga evermore...
 I wanted to extend a helping hand,
 I wanted her to tell me of her fears,—
 She disappeared.
 The sun reversed,
 Toward Ukraine the sun moved with all speed.

LIVING EARTH

It's war...
 Above the centuries' ancient caves
 The echo of the primitive bow-string runs —
 The distant forbear of atomic guns.
 Already it seems —
 upon its own dead graves
 Stands living Earth,
 like some black widow-dame.
 And until now the butchers at her aim!
 And until now the shot still echoing goes
 That split the world up into friends and foes.
 Changing their form, the brazen spear-heads range,
 Go shooting through the earth from age to age,
 And until now still anxious and full of care
 Are human dreams.
 The war has ended, but the world's aware
 That conditions for war exist in all extremes.
 And mothers
 on five continents sing,
 Their babies in their cradles swing,
 Upon the world meridian's string:
 "Lullay, lullay,.."
 Dream, little ones,
 Grow up,
 grow up,
 grow up, dear sons...

O BEAUTIFUL ASH TREES

O beautiful ash trees,
By the road, past the village, I see you,
I see your glory,
When the dew gleams bright with the morning.
You come into my dreams,
Like the days of my barefoot childhood,
You come into my dreams,
O ash trees of fluttering leaves.

O beautiful ash trees,
Your tall crowns murmur soft far above me,
And like the passing years,
With the wind flutter down yellow leaves.
The first snows of greying
I've brought, like fear to my temples,
The first snow of greying,
O ash, on my temples is spraying.

O beautiful ash trees,
The storks have cried their way past the village,
And a cold, icy path
As they flew 'cross the heavens they've left.
In their searching for spring
They must fly to far-far distant places,
In their searching for spring,
O ash trees, then they'll return.

O beautiful ash trees,
By the road, past the village, I see you,
And bow on returning,
In salute, from far-distant journeys.
You come into my dreams,
Like the days of my barefoot childhood,
You come into my dreams,
O ash tree of fluttering leaves.

1974

TARAS' DREAM

I'll build a hut with a bright room.
Taras Shevchenko

O blessed dreamlet, thought-child so long lying
And cradled throughout childhood's tender years,
You call to him, O dream, like cranes do flying —
To fly from sick and weary times for sweeter spheres,

Where warmer waters lie, dawns swing like cherries,
Where over poplars hangs the Milky Way.
Oh, carry him, tormented, worn and harried,
Into the hut that by the Dnieper lay.
It's time he sat beside his door and rested,
And bowed in silence lone his thoughtful brow:
Too long he's been away, detained, arrested;
Too far from home, O dreamlet, look well now —
The blackthorn many times has bloomed from pain
That led his mother young unto the grave.
His dream of freedom's paid, time and again,
Within the army ranks — and none could save.
He flies to his homeland, back to his Ukraine:
His wings a brush and magic-writing quill,
It's time he built that hut, his dream so plain,
With windows on the Dnieper, roaring still,
So that this small but blessed heaven
Will bring his kinfolk finally some peace —
His brothers, sisters, relatives will then
Their further curses on Dame Fortune cease.
Thus through his loneliness go minutes flying,
For with his thoughts he breaks his chains each day;
Weeps only that with all his endless trying
His dream-hut's cornerstone he cannot lay.
Yet still he builds a hut from dreams of blue —
The honour-post his literary words.
Take them, people, and to yourselves be true,
Blend with them to form harmonic chords.
Your children with first cherry blossom swaddle,
But do not use his words as slumber songs —
Grant that they be a testament to follow,
Your children's bread of life their whole life long.
Be certain, for us all the day will come —
Our motherland will ask us one by one:
Can you recall the home from which you come?
Recall what gave you your place in the sun?

*Tamara Kolomiyets (b. 1935) was born in the town of Korsun-Shevchenkivsky into the family of a civil servant. She has authored several collections of poetry, some of them for children, as well as translations. The highly figurative and lyrical style of her first book of poems *Snowdrops* won her the top prize and gold medal at the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow in 1957. Many of her poems have been published in other republics of the Soviet Union and abroad.*



THE CRANES' SORROW

Two broad wings has a crane and a nest in the marsh
And a cry full of sorrow and pain.
But when Autumn's red troops mid the orchard-trees march
Distant roads lie awaiting the crane.

Over limitless seas, to far-off foreign parts
Lies its distant and difficult flight,
And the sorrowful message the crane's song imparts
Sounds, disturbing the clear autumn height.

Every flap of its wing takes it farther from home,
Brings new sorrow and grief hard to quell.
And like wheat-grains, fall into the damp autumn loam
The crane's sorrowful cries of farewell.

And like seed the earth takes in the crane's tender love
That will sprout in the springtime anew
In the shade of a dreamy and green-leaved spring grove
As a sweet periwinkle, deep-blue.

All its love, too, will sprout in a poet's sweet words
To the depth of men's hearts they will reach.
No two homelands nor mothers are there in the world;
Even cranes have but one of them each.

THE GIRL WHITE-WASHED
THE COTTAGE

The girl white-washed the cottage,
As cold as a winter's day.
I wanted to berate her —
But I scolded her in vain.

The girl white-washed the hallway,
White-washed it snow-cold pale,
She painted and she painted,
Producing an icy trail.

Along the trail he came, glowing,
Like the sun roaming springtime roads —
The snow wept as the lad went passing
And melted its frosty mounds.

The girl the wall began painting,
In purest white cherry blossoms,
She painted and kept on painting,
Her wedding bed she was making.

1979

* * *

Morning comes on grey steeds prancing,
The day — on white,
On black steeds — the night,
Out of colourful fairy tales,
They come by, the child to delight.

They open the gates of wonder —
The doors to the world far and wide:
Where with winds the falcon murmurs,
Where the snowdrifts in deep banks liel..

The universe, each in its own way,
Do the child's eyes learn to perceive,
As if through magical lacy patterns,
Like those that a frosty night weaves.

One must stand but behind a window,
As if playing blind man's buff,—
When a goldfish crosses your vision,
When the Snow-maiden runs down the path.

Beauty and courage and kindness,
In everything, children can see,
The dream gives birth to the fairy tale,
So the fairy tale'd nourish the dream.

Within the child's heart having buried,
The deep seed of eternal unrest,
When indifference a hand would wave,
I had taught him to say, "I must!"

Taught him to seek down in unknown depths,
To reach high for the tallest of heights,
To stand up in the face of danger,
In the vital ocean of life!

To leave to descendants the planet,
In the bloom of a radiant morn,
So as explorer and as poet
A person in this world is born.

1960

TO A MOTHER

When you rock your children without rest,
Wiping more than once your weary brow,
Not in vain the well-known proverb says,
Those who have no children — know no qualms.

When they are grown — a mother's heart is full
With fears for all that they attempt to do,
How many headaches when they're small and helpless,
And when they're adults — heartaches added too.

No matter though, the worries and distress,
As if with happiness they can compare,
Or to one's joy when baby takes first steps,
And walks around the room with balanced care.

When you hear, the first time, the word "mama",
When you take them to their school, holding hands,
When suddenly you learn you have a grandson,
In greetings sent to you by telegram.

Good it is to see yourself in childhood,
Know that child will give you longer life,
Good to give the world a human being,
And the human being give the world so wide.

Give it from the groves the primrose blossoms,
Mountains blue and turbulent running streams...
Those who have no children — know not fortune,
Robbed by fate forever through the years.

1960

ON THE HILL OF BATU KHAN

As fair Kiev golden lay
With the autumn bright falling,
On the hill of Batu Khan
I heard fate of mine calling:
“Do not fly from me speeding,
But stay here my words heeding,
Little stork!..”

In fair Kiev lying far,
Cold breath chilling froze the air,
Stands the hill of Batu Khan
I'll stay but one moment there:
“There's no hope for your pleading,
Nor will force e'er be leading
Little stork!..”

As fair Kiev sky blue lies
Autumn will soft weave cloud dome,
On the hill of Batu Khan
All my memories will roam:
“You honoured freedom when flying,
Why with pain are you crying,
Little stork?..”

1967



Volodimir Brovchenko (b. 1931) was born in the village of Mala Viska, Kirovograd Region, into the family of a collective farmer. He is the author of numerous books of poems, songs, and translations. His poetry is lyrical and rich in civic themes. Many of his works have been published in other republics of the USSR and abroad.

THE VETERANS WERE RETURNING
FROM THE WAR

When the veterans returned from the war,
Leaving half of Europe waste and rubble,
We striplings — in fact we were but lads —
Were healing still our feet cut by the stubble.

It couldn't be that all would be the same...
And some awaited theirs by day and night.
To living heroes — honour, glory came,
And immortality, of course, to those who died.

They greeted them, the mothers, very proud,
Of their Vasils, and their Ivans, returned,
The pot-pourri of tangos never ceased,
From resonant accordions, monogrammed.

Would you believe? They cleared their eyes of mist,
Our high and mighty aging village maids,
They walked, like pea-hens, on the village paths,
And suddenly ignored us as they went.

Because the warriors came back from war,
Oh how for stars and epaulets we yearned,
And cigarette lighters, and accordions...
How much we wanted to be — just like them,
The lads who from the field of war returned.

We did not then believe, could not foresee,
That all, that everything was still ahead,
That there'd be plenty in our youthful years,
Of bitterness and sweetness to be lived.

That though precocious, we were very young,
Suffering pain, but by the war well-taught,
That still to grow upon our liberated land,
Were the finest maids the world ever begot.

And truly, all these things have come to pass,
And transient, moved on, just as they should,
The poplars filled our hair with floating fluff,
And God or Satan guarded still our world.

Most tenderly we think back and recall
Those girls and do not wonder at their stand,
A longtime now these girls are girls no more,
And obviously, grandchildren now tend.

Yet still, at times, a chord of memory strikes —
How with affront they treated us those days,
When soldiers were returning from the front,
They paid no heed to us, those cursed maids!

1973

* * *

Again the steppe arises from the depths,
Out of my soul, my eyes, out of my speech,
Here I have reached the greying of my years,
Yet know no other love that runs as deep.

The starry heavens hanging o'er the steppe,
Have enveloped both time for me and space,
Round apple trees beyond the gully peep,
Extend their branches full of youthful grace...

One recollection from the past I have,
A thread of happiness my fate did yield,
There in the steppe a furrow deep I left,
And footsteps in a cultivated field.

Beats the fullness of the harvest day,
Summer nights give birth to herb and rue,
Cherish with your ears of grain your sons,
O steppe, for labour in the morning dew.

You have sunk so deep within my roots,
Paramount within my thought and vision,
You are magic music, and my bread,
My eternal secret and enigma.

1971

* * *

Beneath the plum-tree "Uhorka",
Where grasses murmur soft,
In well-spring free, unbounded,
'Twas here these words I sought.
'Twas here my youthful years were spent,
My kindred did reside,
Here windows opened wide to show
The wondrous world outside.
In the green hum of countryside
The youthful guelder rose,
Forever o'er the fountain's splash
My thoughts gave no repose...
Look well, as long as you can see,
Into the boundless blue,
So in its mysteries you'll find
The heavens, and you too.

1971



Yevhen Letyuk (1929-1976) was born in the village of Romanivka, Poltava Region, into the family of a farmer. He wrote many books of poetry and fiction as well as journalism, mainly concerning the workers of the Donbas region. Many of his works have been published in Russian.

WHO'S STIRRING THE STARS
AROUND UP THERE?

Who's stirring the stars around up there with a hand as big as a shovel?

Outside — a rain of stars.

Outside — a rain of stars.

Peace of heart again disturbed.

And I want to scream out:

"Hands off!"

As if skies weren't full of stars, but brilliant glow-worms of our souls.

Every star there — a friend; the Milky Way — the heart of Being.

Whose life now has burnt to ashes...?

Whose life burnt to ashes...?

Which one of my friends this alarming moment has joined the fallen?

What world's he from up there?

Who counts him loved and dear?

Perhaps in Africa a wounded Black the enemy's trampled?

Or else in Lisbon from an assassin's bullet someone fell?

Or on our borders a Soldier Guard encountered death in battle,

Not letting one of our foes cross our frontier,

Retreating not one step,

Not one inch back?

Outside — a rain of stars.

Outside — a rain of stars.

Who's stirring the stars around up there with a hand as big as a shovel...

Stars are falling....

But in my heart no pain,

Only hate, for hate in my heart is not asleep.
Not the first,
Not the first
Stars to fall within our ranks.
Not the first,
Not the first
Person next me to weep for a friend.
But we paste a smile on, even if it's bitter,
For the stars are not snuffed, they shine in the sky.
Not our first battle this — and such a rain of stars....

* * *

I've seen high wires trailing, torn loose by Big Gun battle spells:
They were hopelessly twisted and lay caught in grief's coiling spirals.
I have seen brothers-in-arms express their eternal farewells,
Though they knew only yesterday love, a love born out of trials.
I have seen little cranelets that fell sometimes out of the nest,
To be burned by oil-slick flaming — parents not circling or crying....
Oh, how easily, Memory, you build a bridge of unrest
Bringing pain, the incurable, uncalled, but time defying.
On a nest near my window the gape-mouthed fledglings are dumb,
Waiting mother and food, and the dream of dazzle-swift winging.
Now the wires are taut and aquiver with song, with a hum:
Like a musical staff where bird-notes compose joy with singing.



Stanislav Strizhenyuk (b. 1931), the son of a farmer, was born in the town of Haivoron, Poltava Region. He has written many collections of poems, marked by their dynamic and distinctive imagery. His poems have been widely published in the USSR.

THE SUNFLOWER

Once a lad and a sunflower grew up
On the shore of a salty blue sea.
Like a real sun the flower bore its head;
In the lad's eyes its light you could see.
In its petals bright sunshine it stored,
While the wind wiped the dew off its face.
Like a lighthouse, it shone from the shore
Letting out, unbeknown, into space
That the lad was a seaman by grace.

And the sunflower stood firm on the land
Under storms in those parts by the sea,
Turning after the ships that it saw
Its fair head for all captains to see.

It was stamped in the captain's brave soul,
In his head, grey as mists in the fall.

To Bombay he would sail, brave and strong, in the gale,
And hot tears from the lad's eyes would hail.
But the lad was ashamed of his tears
And in dreams to the ocean he hied;
While the sunflower stood still on the piers,
The young captain his tears could not hide.

And the captain felt hale and hearty
Because, after long weeks of parting,

When the ship sailed to land
Like a beacon would stand
That lad in a hat as yellow as sand.

1968

ODESSA

A dry lagoon
And Tatar country reaches,
And in the wind blue ribbons flowing still.
You look and think to yourself at will:
Above the Black Sea
Here Odessa rises,
As if a peakless cap, upon its hill.

Here lives the echo of *Potyomkin's* * glory,
Beneath the clouds she's lightly floating there.
And like a sailor's talisman, in the air,
Or some unsleeping watchful power, at mooring
The lighthouse burns and casts its reddish glare.

Odessa grew with the dawn-rayed panorama,
The nightingales composed to her their odes,
Where once the gendarmes pistols used to load,
In underground labyrinths of the Moldavanka **,
And by informers of the Czar's Okhranka ***,
Was her biography written down in code.

On quiet waters
Dawns are burning golden;
Grown in the stones
The scars of barricades.
Odessa
Is a builder and a soldier
The living pass-word of this present age.

And Lenin's mandate firm she holds till now.
And factories light the sky up with their glow.
The spirit of labour
Night and day is there
Upon the skies' red cotton bunting flares...

* *Potyomkin* — battleship of the Russian Navy; participated in the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907

** Moldavanka — district in Odessa

*** Okhranka — czarist secret police

For Odessa a soldier's Ribbon of Glory wears,
Which, like a machine-gun belt round her shoulders she bears.

A dry lagoon
And Tatar country reaches...
Hrihorivka * awakened where it dwells,
Where sea-wind with the distant voyage smells,
There stands the land
Which as Odessa features,
Upon three ports,
As if upon three whales.

1967

WHITE GULL SEAGULL

The wind is weeping at our parting
And beats the waters from the bow,
So wish me luck and all successes,
Embrace me in your thoughts right now.

White gull, seagull, white gull skimming,
Wing like brows that I adore,
Settled on the waves like sorrow,
Close beside my native shore.

Into the clouds she'll not go soaring
Alone at eve above the strand,
Like wisp of steam so white, elusive,
The winds whisk off to distant land.

White gull, seagull, white gull skimming,
Wing like brows that I adore,
Settled on the waves like sorrow,
Close beside my native shore.

The stars are sinking in the waters
The darkness flashes in the lull
And falls a shadow from the heavens,
The wing in blackness of the gull.

White gull, seagull, white gull skimming,
Wing like brows that I adore,
Settled on the waves like sorrow,
Close beside my native shore.

1968

* Hrihorivka — district in Odessa

MAMAYEV MOUND

Some dreams more bitter far than wormwood bite,
On sparrow nights come flocking fast, come flying.
In sleep I arm for war, prepare to fight,
Pack bread and kiss my mother deeply sighing.

I walk through swirling dust, gunpowder smoke,
Most likely then, nay, surely, no proof needing,
I come out near the town of Stalingrad,
From there, I know, for me no way back's leading.

Above the Volga rises high the mound...
I wield my shield and sword in sacred daring,
Volcano fierce, this daring rages wild,
The Reichstag's windows shake, its full force bearing.

So ever on, and now the stamp of time,
Like medal won in battle I bear steady,
And dreams of mine at dawn awake and cry,
Rise silent, for attack e'er standing ready.

1970

THE FIELD

An AN-2
Like a swing
In the clouds.
Green vistas.
My head goes round.
White blossoms
Shine everywhere.
Rains, headlong,
Pour down their balm.
The field's restiveness under my wing I bear
Like a schoolboy his copybook under his arm.

With you I hurry, o field green and cool
Towards life, like a schoolboy to school.

Like a first-form schoolboy,
I whisper low:
"Hello!"
The nightingale rings its bell for me.
Earth,
From you Nature's science I know,
Songs my geography.

At this point
In time and space
I'm in this world
Like a schoolboy in class.
In the midst of its white-cloud escort
In the sky, like a badge on a jacket,
To its far-off airport
Hurries
As if to lessons
An airplane, raising a racket.

Only I, not hurrying anywhere,
Just breathe in the field's restless air.

Let time, if it wishes, pass.
I am a humble man.
Admit me into your class,
Native field,
For a century,
If you can!

THE SUN

Scooping, palms cupping, deep waters,
Gently it swayed, languid, slow,
and slipping, fell in the river
down to the murky depths low.

Rolling their sleeves up for working,
willows bow down and soft sway,
and try to lift out the sunshine,
slipping through fingers away.

Swallows in fear above waters,
swirling dark waves, anxious sweep:
“With sunshine gone we will know sadness!
Lacking sunshine, sadly we’ll weep!”

Wind from pine forest came running:
“Simply, then, to oblige you!”
and drawing the sun from the river,
flung it up in the heavens so blue.



Volodimir Kolomiyets (b. 1935) was born in the village of Vovchkiiv, Kiev Region, into the family of a teacher. He is the author of numerous collections of short and long poems, literary criticism, and translations. Highly distinctive and melodious, his poetry has been published in many other Soviet republics and abroad.

VERNAL DOWRY

Fill the vernal cup a-brimming:
 Vernal rye,
 vernal bloodstream,
 Vernal bee,
 vernal rue-flower,
 Vernal hell, repent, redeeming.
 Springs from nether-earth,
 ravine,
 sub-waters —
 Vernal spirit
 of grass or word-spell?
 A hundred craters on high are opened —
 Spilling vernal fire
 from Yarilo.*
 Vernal-sown! Greenery grown! Vernality!
 So fleece is growing,
 grain is sprouting,
 Spilling where the Yatran wanders...
 Where Yaremche and Yampil towns are dreaming...
 Down to Pereyaslav spring's laughing.
 Vernal dancing! Vernal brightness!
 To armourers — swords a-flashing.
 To brewers — vernal meads and bitters...
 Svyatogori... Kudiyari...**

* Yarilo — Sun God in pagan Slavic mythology
 ** Svyatogor, Kudiyar — legendary knights

He was, to judge by all, both proud and daring,
And scorned all kinds of falsehood and deceit,
And, clearly, he could lift up human suffering
And her pure beauty to the highest height.

And could protect it when those rogues attempted
Upon her virgin body and mind to intrude,
For they o'erwhelmed her with their naked glances,
Those little men, lascivious and crude.

And still her beauty reigns in blinding whiteness...
But treacherous villains whet their blades to slay!
For such there are, alas! See, him they murdered,
But her — they merely hacked her arms away,

The arms which had embraced him... They'd no power,
Those bloody-minded butchers, to venture more,
And till this day she has no arms... But sorrow
Still sails to them on the far-divided shore.

And so perhaps, because that lasting memory,
The memory of woman's hands, in her still gleams,
She is so beautiful... And with arms invisible
Into reality, human reality, swims.

And purplish shadows from those arms have fallen...
Where are they now — in dreams, in sympathy yet?
In pulsing tracks of autumn cranes a-flying,
In early greyness, or in late regret?

In all — in silvery dew-drops on the seedlings,
In ringing buckets which for water go,
In children's tears, in maidens' fascination,
In asters which in autumn chill still blow.

And weightlessly above us floating, soaring,
They ring, and someone's tears stand on the brink.
They fly in futile dreams, through hands of others,
Who all their lives are slaves to the kitchen sink.

Those hands which are not fruitful, worn by labour,
Or reddened, like a beetroot, from cold earth...
So freeze and grieve those missing hands, still fleshless,
As if through them earth's sympathy shines forth.

For beauty gives and gives, itself not sparing,
Does not diminish, maybe so explained,
That beauty gives herself completely... Changes
Into creation... Drink — and there's no end!

And what does she ask back for that creation,
Creation which in people is inspired?
Maybe, just love... Well, then! Our work's more precious
Than any love we give by thankfulness fired!

So let the bright waves beat...

Oppressive. Pungent.
O music, o marvellous night that round us lies!
As if somewhere the vine-stems started bending,
Or tears of happiness welled up in one's eyes.

The rain to leaves its golden confidences
Is prattling... Ringing on the pavement lands.
And like a breath of wind in cosmic spaces
Is the jealous happiness of star-bright hands.

So let the impossible, then, become the possible.
With generous gifts fulfil my soul likewise.
And let the thunder sound for me a wonder,
Which in those hands, that living beauty lies.

That flood of life for all, for all's the solvent:
For honey and salt, for ice and flame up-curved.
Those chaste white arms o'er all the earth are flying
And weaving love... Love saves the whole wide world.

1971

A SOLDIER'S MEDALS

Beneath the glass, in their green frame,
Upon the white-washed wall,
Above the table quietly gleam
A soldier's medals all.

I don't know what relation was that,
I was only a passer-by,
And called in at a village hut
For a drink when feeling dry.

I further looked across the shack —
With a smile which seemed to speak
He stood, and with his hand pushed back
Some branches from his cheek.

That was a photo.
But he gave,
He gave his all for us.

I didn't enquire about the brave —
Not the time to question thus.

Perhaps his mother, old and grey,
Here murmured in dreams "My son!"
Perhaps his favourite sister may.
The embroidered towel have done.

Perhaps it was his brother's hand
Which knocked the nail in the wall,
Perhaps his darling daughter's hand
Plucked the bunch of flowers small...

The soldier lives in his own past
Most certainly, with his folk,
And I confess, that in my heart
Some deep response he woke.

As if across the nebulous mist,
Through blizzards of winter dim,
I suddenly, sharply felt just this:
I'm in debt, in debt to him...

A smile, and such an open look,
And medals in the row...
Beside the open door I stood,
Looked back, to remember so.

Farewell, small hut, where in green frame
Upon the white-washed wall,
Above the table quietly gleam
A soldier's medals all.

1959

* * *

The sun is now my visitor.
It organises all, in plenty straying.
The barley bearded beaming bright,
As languid lupin with sun's rays is playing.
And princely cats with whiskers pale
Acknowledge me, wink slightly...
As if already I were green,
A bowstring stretched out tightly.
The scent of sun comes, from the corn.
And to my soul moves skyline living,
Since after all I'm born quite clear for works
Of tenderness and giving.

And I am born quite clear for paths
Cut through high rye fields shifting.
And from the blackberry, crisscrossed with paths
I'm wrapped in mists' scent drifting.
And colour never sought a fern.
I know this truth that you keep, too, unfaded:
That he who's learnt to love the earth —
The mother of all wonders here and birth —
Pure colour will seek out unaided.

1976

SPIKY THOUGHTS,
OR HEART OF A HEDGEHOG

And fingers brushed keyboard, a woodland seeking
Where pathways twist and lie through undergrowth, forgotten,
Where miracles dovegrey and sharp are bathed in dawning
And where, with juice of blackberry on lips...

Naivety farewell! In bushes memories fade!
The moon here pitted hangs. The wind was dying.
Here's naphthalene. And yawns are hid with hand.
And all is painted fine with smile of fortune bland.
The world's filled full: hypocrisy and lying.

So tell me now beloved how you came
The path to this kingdom rotting here to follow,
It's not the ogre sits beside the chest,
His grandson young sits there and medicine swallows.

And on his lips so twisted, parchment dry,
An evil laugh that saddened too will die.
His eyes for sale and betrayal willing,
Are watching me, a client soon, with caution...

Run from the eyes, from night... But backwards can I run?
Two worlds exist, one real, one fairytale.
The one where mother constant questions you
And asks how much you earn, how much you're due.
And father hisses back: "Our son's a hedgehog, yet you must go
asking!..."

One world is fresh, with snow and raindrops sheeting!
Where finally you'll understand a hedgehog's living,
His spikes, his heart in tender prickles beating.

1976

MIKOLA SINHAYIVSKY



Mikola Sinhayivsky (b. 1936) was born in the village of Shatrishcha, Zhitomir Region, into a farming family. He is the author of numerous collections of civic and lyrical poetry and is a Nikolai Ostrovsky prize winner. His poems have been published in many Soviet republics and abroad.

MY NATIVE LAND

If not for you, my woods and fields,
if not for you, my green-banked streams,
unbearable torment I'd feel,
I'd die of thirst, of woeful dreams.

Praise be to life — to lucid springs,
green meadows, grassy leas and woods,
that rustled over me in spring,
that over me in verdure stood,

That gave their music and their shade,
my dreams and thoughts and words revived.
'Twas at their side, 'twas with their aid
Ukrainian songs and souls survived.

1974

DAILY BREAD

The sun in the window — an omen gay!
Sun, you beget every poem of mine!
'Tis your light that wakes the poet each day,
Filling his soul with your essence divine.

New, precious content it draws from your beam,
thought — bold, unfettered, untrammeled and young.
And yet the language of truth, its bright gleam
is bread for the poet, which makes him strong.

And for your mind, when the times become hard,
not to stray off like a sheep in the wild,
faith everlasting must live in your heart —
deep faith in Man, for hope is faith's child!

Help the oppressed, and their champion be,
share their anxiety, sorrow, delight!
Let your soul burn unextinguishably
with others' pain, with undying light!

1971

* * *

Underneath the Polissian sky
with my lips plucking daisies I lie.
To the voices of birds I respond
and merge with the grass, with the pond.
Long ago I was born in this world.
Here I lived, into grief and joy hurled.
Here, too, lifeless I lie in the morning
and the poplar above me stands mourning.
And my children and wife mourn for me
with their tears flowing plentifully.

Do not grieve:
'tis but dreams that I see.
I have not had my fill of life's glee.
I have long yet to live till I die.
With my lips plucking flowers I lie.
With the grass sprouting, coming to birth,
turning sunwards, I smile, like the earth.

1968

MIKOLA KARPENKO



Mikola Karpenko (b. 1925) was born in the village of Voronkiv, Kiev Region, to peasant parents. He has written many collections of poetry, humour, and sketches. His style is lyrical and epic and rich in folk elements. His poems have been translated into many languages of the USSR.

* * *

The weight of years' upon my back I feel.
My prime's already catching up with me.
To live life's harder than to cross a field,
I'm saying to myself more frequently.

But Youth, although already far remote,
Sometimes brings on its wings the sudden thought:
To cross a field is not so easy too
In cases when the field is all shot through...

1969

* * *

Like water, minute after minute,
Between life's banks time flows away;
Don't promise to do good to people,
But simply do it, be what may.

All still awaits us — snow and sunshine,
Grey rain and orchards full of scent.
To be a friend in need don't promise,
But simply always be a friend.

One day will come unknown emotions,
And then one life will start for two.
Don't promise that you will be faithful,
But simply love, simply be true.

And when red flags unfold for battle,
And when the bugle's call is heard,
The country will need not just pledges,
But soldiers who will keep their word.

1966

* * *

You remember how we loved to listen
When beneath a swarm of honey bees,
A delightful humming noise would issue
From the cherry trees and apple trees.

And it was so sweet to us, that music,
Like the honey brought by bees in May.
Meanwhile, a new pilot cap was being
Tailored for my head so young and gay

And an army shirt for youthful shoulders,
For a youthful waist — a leather belt.
Do you now still listen to the humming
Of the trees and feel as we then felt?

1975

ONCE I DREAMED

Once I dreamed that the earth was all rubble and smoke,
And, a young boy, I lay on it, starting to choke,
As they did in the last war, in anguish extreme,
But I wanted to live — and woke up from my dream.
Then unable to sleep, I went into the yard,
To the towering poplars and shimmering stars,
And pressed close to the earth — it was warm at this hour
And continued to breathe and to live and to flower.
And I saw walking over it happy and glad
A merry young couple, a girl and a lad.

Now they'd both spin around, and my head spun with them;
And they looked like two flowerbuds that grew on one stem.
Then they'd stop for a moment and join into one
And the fire of a kiss through their bodies would run.
And the words that they whispered came soft as a brook;
Only mothers and lovers so beautiful look.
And all voices on earth in a quire rose above
Singing praise to the future, to beauty and love.
Will the shadow of war ever fall on them too,
On their life, on their love, young and sparkling like dew?

1961

WHILE VESUVIUS SLEEPS

Vesuvius awakes — Pompeii's gone.
But anyway I watch the film go on;
Though excavated now, I watch it still,
As if I'm leaning on a sun-warmed sill
And read inscriptions and touch ancient things
And think of the disasters fortune brings —
Calamities that happened to mankind;
The past events unfold before my mind:
Patricians, slaves, plebeians led their life
Different, yet full of everlasting strife.
Some bathed in luxury, while others went half-nude,
While side by side with them hell boiled, subdued,
Like metal in a blast furnace alight
To lash out at Pompeii one fell night
And make a graveyard of it in its rage.
My fiery, my sophisticated age,
While excavating those Pompeii and those Troys
You pile up nuclear arms that can destroy
Mankind in no time: Yes, it is like this:
We live and wait — will it begin to hiss
That new Vesuvius, exploding in blind force?
Who then will excavate Mankind's dead corpse
And plough the ash-strewn steppes with furrows deep?
Vesuvius sleeps.

O my fair world, don't sleep!

1967



Vitaliy Korotich (b. 1936) was born in Kiev into the family of a scientist. He has written many books of poems, journalism, literary criticism, and essays which reflect the progress of humanity in our time. Most of his poems have been translated in other republics of the USSR and abroad. He is a winner of the Nikolai Ostrovsky, Pavlo Tychina, and Taras Shevchenko prizes.

FLIGHT No. S-957,
MAY 26, 1976

Upon my fortieth birthday a YAK-40
Carries me on its shoulders creamy-white.
...Two engines whine and weep throughout the flight;
Their tears disperse in rainbows, us escorting.
The third one seems to try and frighten me
Because it suddenly begins to play
Like a brass band, light-spirited and gay,
Then roars and dies down unexpectedly
Fading into a misty sea that's bluer
Than the blue eyes of my beloved wife.
The plane YAK-40 like a silver knife
Cuts through my days, of which there's ever fewer,
Through rainbow gates, through curtains raised by mists,
Through all the joys and troubles that life lists.
Why am I on this day 'twixt earth and sky,
Why the eternal YAK * stamped on it — why, oh why?
YAK-40... Is it proper to arouse
One's hopes when one has reached his fortieth year?
Meanwhile around us float the silver clouds
Like books of mine that never will appear.
Meanwhile, the weightless airplane engines hum
Like fiery birds, like vessels filled with light.

* *Yak* — Ukrainian for *how, why*

How far seems childhood — long, long out of sight!
How far am I from my beloved home!
But, sunflower-like, my old grandfather's world
Looks after me from yellow straw-thatched roofs.
My years fly on, white horses with loud hoofs,
Hoared horses of my memory unblurred.
Past days march in parade before my eyes,
Days just as short-lived as thin April ice.
My airplane starts to hum to me again;
I dreamed of firebirds — now I have this plane.
Oh where, where have you gone to, my short years,
Dissolved today in just one single word?
Who knows? But — festive tables fly on board
This plane, YAK-40, as on high it steers.
Friends — comrades —
Come to me, and fly to me,
Wave your white wings
And turn your engines on.
Let's fly — over black hills beneath the sun,
Over black grief, which in a trice will flee,
Over forgotten and abruptly quietened fear
Remaining on the runway far behind.
Fly, buying tickets from Aeroflot. Yes, mind
You meet your holidays on planes, up here!
Let all the world's misfortunes be forgot
When the champagne explodes in the saloon.
Let's feast till the successor of the moon —
The pale dawn blooms! Long live Aeroflot!
Come, fly to me.
We'll throw down from the sky
All melancholy, yesterday's dark gloom.
I'm on the plane YAK-40, forty soon.
The stewardess brings glasses on a tray.
There's no bridge from the heavens to the earth,
The skyline opens on infinity.
Earth, quiet, awaits the end of our festivity.
So simple! That's enough — you've had your mirth,
Now put down glasses. Fasten belts. Smoking is banned.
The aeroplane is just about to land.

ETERNITY

A person's age can't be defined,
For old age, youth — life's restless start —
Go through one like verse goes through rhyme
And like one's life goes through one's heart.

Who knows how many years I've roamed
About this planet called the earth,
How long ago I was first warmed
By the first sunshine at my birth,
When grass first bent beneath my feet
In its first bow? Whoever knows
In what year melted on my palm
The first of our Ukrainian snows?
The first of our Ukrainian snows?
In every minute intertwine
The tempests of our century.
How many times have I grown old,
How many youths have bloomed in me!
For hell and heaven would suffice
The woes and joys I hide inside.
I've lived the lives of all who lived,
And died with everyone who died.
Years are my comrades and my friends,
My hope, anxiety and strife.
The Revolution in my soul
Burns on, a beacon of new life.
Time's traces stay invisibly
Like marks storks leave on clouds. My day
Grows out of other people's days,
A child of years long flown away.
Bestow your blessing, Time, on me,
That I may recognize your face.
Nothing goes by without a trace
So has it been, so will it be.
From stifled night, from iron bars
Sunshine is born, and freedom's cry.
Ostrovsky's * now past seventy
And yet still thirty-two for aye.
Time's bareback horse in full career
Flies by — you are its rider, hear?
While Lenin looks on, having reared
By his eternity these years...

1977

TRACES

It's you who passed here.

Melting snow

Lies like a cloud that fell down, dark.

On the white of my destiny

A woman's feet have left their mark.

* Nikolai Ostrovsky (1904-1936) — Soviet writer
and Civil War hero

SUMMER IN KUTAISI *

How early blooms this year the linden tree!
It's only May,
 yet honeyed flowers hang on her.
Stately and still she stands, like a Madonna,
And angel-like, flies in her leaves a bee.
The linden glimmers candle-like at night,
Green
 as a flagon filled with honey warm,
Paying her tribute to the bees' black swarm;
Her honey scent fills the whole world like light.
Find her
 and listen to the honey bee,
Hoarse bugler at its post upon the tree.
It flies away
 and then returns again
Among the blooms that give their riches free.
The bee swarm flies off, humming satedly;
Upon my fingers from the little flowers
The pollen falls — so premature — in showers.
How early blooms this year the linden tree!

1977

THE PAINTER PIROSMANI'S SELF-PORTRAIT **

...I hear quite well —
 stop shouting at me, stop!
Don't shout at me
 without the slightest need.
I've room
 and sky enough
 my life to lead
And grains enough
 which on the stubble drop.
I live,
 create
 and pray to the new day
And dream
 of getting back my former might.
...After they'd flailed my harvest with cruel spite
A lot of grain
 upon the stubble lay.

* Kutaisi — city in Georgia

** Niko Pirosmani (Pirosmanishvili) (1862?-1918) — Georgian folk artist

ROBERT TRETYAKOV



Robert Tretyakov (b. 1936) was born in Perm, the Russian Federation, into the family of an army officer. He is the author of several books of poetry, journalism, essays, and numerous translations. His highly imaginative poetry has won him the Pavlo Tychina Prize. Many of his works have been translated and published in other Soviet republics.

PULL OF THE HEART

What marvels grand and glorious rose
Of which the human race may boast:
The pyramids — pride in stony pose,
Da Vinci's deep-hued canvased host.

Our history changes in its scale.
Time's endless stream makes change a must —
The very brightest colours pale,
The hardest granite seeps to dust.

The physicists and poets die,
But power immortal won't depart
Which keeps my planet and its sky
Rotating ever round its heart.

So Lenin's words remain immortal —
In orbit round, new generations run:
They feel the pull of heart that's universal
Like that of planets to their solar suns.

1971

Oh no, no infant cradles then
 Rocked my coevals — I'm attesting....
 And you? You worked as harvest-men
 In 'forty-three?

Went harvesting?

All right, it's good if you did not.
 About that, I can't boast at all.
 Simply, see, with doubts I'm fraught
 That you will think my story's tall...
 Just picture up a co-op farm
 With only kids and women left.
 The grain was cut — but what alarm —
 Siberian snows across it swept.
 Beyond the snows, beyond the snows:
 War and famine, blood and tears,
 Beyond Siberian women shows
 The homefront, the farthest rear.
 What other land, though vast its main,
 Could possibly have endured it all!
 In flames Kuban, in flames Ukraine,
 To top it, early snow must fall...
 A poet I'd have never been
 If I the women should forget —
 From every snowdrift they did glean
 Each ear of wheat with toil and sweat.
 Not only tanks and aeroplanes
 Won battles, now just history;
 Fatigued, frost-bitten, swollen hands
 Of women gave us our victory.
 Hands that broke the hard snow crust
 And letters wrote to men in the lines.
 To tell this story was a must —
 How grain was gathered, snow-confined.
 Perhaps my tale is told in vain...
 The method — an insignificant part
 Of garnering life-saving grain.
 The crux — psychology of the heart.

1967

My father has a wound that's old,
And yet today I feel its pain:
He lies worn out, alone and cold,
Past the Guadarrama range in Spain.

I think the dreams that he is sent
Are of the crimson flags he bore —
Though once the word of "Spaniard" meant
The opera "Carmen", nothing more.

He went. But no one made him go.
Donned soldier's boots — bit worn and old.
Good locksmith in our town, that's so —
To me, the best Dad in the world.

And thousands went with him to fight,
Knew no regret, knew no return.
Some here would know a widow's plight,
And others that of orphan...

And I picked cherries ripe and red,
Full of juice, spring's lively sap,
Like ball fringe around my head
I hung them on my Pioneer cap.

My schoolbag bulged with books that ran
Tales of Madrid, its passionate heroine —
I called myself a Republican
When I was only crowding nine.

1967

PORTRAITS

For scientist or poet comes a time
When his finished portrait is at last defined...
In history of science, arts, somehow
We link Shevchenko with his frowning brow,
And Marx with his leonine bushy beard,
As everlasting links that are revered;
Link Dante with a wreath, a harp with Massenet,
Shortsighted Chekov always with pince-nez...
We cannot picture them as otherwise,
Remember them in one particular guise.



Vasil Simonenko (1935-1963) was born in the village of Biyivtsi, Poltava Region, into a farming family. His poems are widely read in other Soviet republics and have also been published abroad. Besides his poetry, he is also noted for his writings of prose and journalism.

MILLSTONES

Those everstraining hands,
work-black and weary,
made veins stand out
in swollen rope-like strands.
Like molars, gritted millstones
as if
they chewed the yellow grain to
rough granules.
As if they ground out torment,
not fine flour...
In the light of flickering wick-lamp burning,
Moved hands so tender
Moved hands maternal
That turned the handle
Of flour-mill endlessly.

Despondent eyes were filmed with melancholy
while the flour
poured down like whited blood...
This was the time —
the twentieth century
swept over us with raging thunderstorms.
We often hear
malevolent joy in
the voice of our alien foe
that says
injustice and tragedy

often look into our
dear home
we built for happiness to dwell.
Let them be frenzied,
go mad with their screaming —
we do not shake
before this slander:
Those millstones meant
for us were brought here by the
barbarians on their tanks
from Europe, by Stone Age caught.
And then they got
from us a good hard lesson
when —
for all the world to see —
without a millstone
except strong hands
we ground the barbarous horde to dust.
O people mine!
Unconquerable Titan
On which the blue of heaven finds support!
No millstones ever
can slight your exploit —
they can but make you grander.
In vain they rage,
the malice of our foes can't mar
your glorious struggle...
I kiss the hands
that turned the millstones
the eve before the Space Age.

* * *

Native land of mine! My mind is brighter,
Tenderness and love in my soul grow,
When your mighty hopes and dreams uplifting
In my life here strong and steady flow.

You are bread for me, my aim for living,
From your soil I came and shall return,
And beneath your high domed heavens rolling
Life's hard lessons my young soul did learn.

People tricking you from love deservéd,
People who concern of yours avoid,
May earth's gravity betray them,
May they sink obscure into the void.

A MOTHER'S ENTREATY

Out of dreamy mist arise
 wings of rosy swans,
Scattered throughout lake and stream
 night reflects the stars.

Through the window fairy tales
 gaze with somber eyes,
With a mother's loving grace
 standing close behind.

Sorrow, fly, oh fly away, don't come
 to my home,
I'll not let you rock the cradle of my sleeping son.

Float up to the cradle, swans, bringing pleasant dreams,
Enter, quiet stars, to rest, 'neath his sleeping lids.

The roosters disquieted darkness with their calls,
While swan-shadows fluttered o'er the cottage walls.

With their rosy feathers and wings undulations,
Titillating phantoms with gold constellations.

You'll grow up, my son, and begin life's journey,
Growing with you too, sleep-lulled fears and worries.

In the spell of twilight, dark-browed dryad maidens,
Will await your tenderness, your love unawakened.

Into verdant orchards, they'll call, arms extended,
Black-haired lads enticing for their own intended.

One can choose one's friendships, or a maiden's hand,
What one cannot choose, son, is one's fatherland.

One can choose a comrade and soul-mate brother,
But you cannot choose, son, who will be your mother.

Mother's eyes will follow, as will the white cottage,
Wherever life takes you, wherever you'll wander.

And if you should fall, son, in some foreign meadow,
From Ukraine will follow the poplar and willow.

They will bend above you, their leaves palpitating,
In the grief of parting, the heart titillating.

You can choose of everything, on this earth, my lad,
What you cannot choose, though, is your homeland.

* * *

Ever shall I bless despite the sorrow,
All I suffer here and all the strife,
That day when I was born into the sunshine
For happiness, for troubles and for life.

That day when lips so small, impatient searching,
To mother's breast found first their welcome way,
The day that first of all caressed me
From darkness depths with warmth of sunshine ray.

And much have I received that's given freely,
Much happiness indeed has come my way!
We're born on earth for suffering and laughter
Midst people here to love and live each day.

* * *

Awake you new Magellan, fine Columbus,
Fill out your sails of dreams and speed away.
To travels distant clear now call the oceans,
And frothing surf licks softly tranquil bay.

Whoever said that all has been discovered?
If so, what reason for our birth, in truth?
How could we ever then in simple living
Find room enough for all our hopes of youth?

So, ships! Prepare yourselves for far-off voyage.
Awake my yearning now! My dreaming mind!
Your task, midst oceans of your native people,
Some isles of spirit's values first to find.

Free rusted anchors then from silt mud clinging,
On anchor chain the soul will fade and die!
Our chest fierce buffeted by strong winds beating
The caravel sets off, with flags hoist high.

No cockerel can the whole world scratch aside now,
No wind alone can give the sun a chill!
Ukrainian land, as long as I'm still living,
To find out more about you is my will,

To dream and search whilst breath I am still drawing,
To put indifference cold unto the flame!
And if my findings earlier were discovered,
Please tell me friends, and do so without blame.

BORIS OLIYNIK

Boris Oliynik (b. 1935) was born in the village of Zachepilivka, Poltava Region, into the family of a clerk. He has written many collections of poetry, journalism, literary criticism, and essays. He is also noted for his translations. Boris Oliynik was awarded the USSR State Prize for his civic and philosophical poetry, much of which has been translated and published in other republics of the Soviet Union and abroad.



* * *

On jagged rocks they bound him in duress:
The wrath of gods would brook no dispensation —
Because he gave, in throes of righteousness,
To people — Fire — but gave for good intentions.

The ages dragged. Time wandered hit or miss
In curving turns, in catacombs went straying.
He did it for man's good.....

But tell me this:
Can fire be controlled, or snuffed by praying?

We honour fire as sacred aureole:
But far too soon the gift to all we make:
You see, the fire Prometheus once stole
Was used for burning Bruno at the stake.

BACHELOR'S BALLAD

I flew off like a handsome devil
On my steed as black as night —
White foam fell from him like snow-flakes —
Ah!
to Churayivna bright,

She who swore to send for our wedding
A towel with three embroidered cockerels,
Yes,

to her... to her took flight,
Who, as soon as she raised a finger,
Nightingales in the springtime died!

Flew to her...

On Midsummer's evening
Two stars fell head-first from the sky.
The owl cried in the forest thicket...
Eh, fly faster, good steed, then fly!
Something on my heart hangs heavy,
Something night does not say fully,
Yes,

as from someone's evil eye
Or sorcery I lost a horse-shoe,
As if the night hid something sly.

I came flying fast at morning,
By the white porch on the green,
Where I once her lips had tasted...
Only why so fiery keen
Does this trio sow their music?
Listen, my steed, what can it mean?
Suddenly doors went flying open —
White as a sheet of paper I.
Out in her veil came Churayivna,
Like a sea-gull, she gave a cry.
From the best-man's hand fell the goblet,
And the trio looked ready to die.

Reins held in my hands were frozen.
So, it seems, my steed so fine,
We have galloped across the ages
To arrive too late this time?
And to attend another's wedding?
Where are your towels, Marusya mine?

Something she mumbles then of parting,
Holds out her white hand, once dear.
Let's return, my steed, by Heaven!
From this garden let's gallop clear,
Where I met with such tender treason.
A sick "Forgive me!" I'll not hear.

I flew out on the embankment,
On the earth my sorrow laid.
Snap went the strings of three musicians,
The cocks crowed thrice, the donkey brayed.
Churayivna fell with sorrow
Head in the wedding-towel betrayed.

More than once, my Churayivna,
Like an autumn gull you'll cry,
When at full stretch past your window
On my night-black steed I fly,
Like some daring handsome devil,
Wearing a wedding-towel, ride by.

Ah, to her,
 to such a woman
Who has only to tap her feet —
'Neath the bow the violin's weeping,
Yes,
 to her, to another indeed,
Yes, to her... but not to a traitor.
Beneath whose window are we, my steed?

* * *

From where the ages sleep
 in tombs along the Nile,
From jungles tropical
 where blooms the tamarisk —
Birds flying high, do tell
 where do you fly the while,
Why are you flying there
 where cold blue rime exists?
Here lies first paradise
 and cinnamon's spiced air,
Here copper-visaged Ra
 has lips of fire that burn —
But there above the lake
 the calico sky is bare,
There sedge and wormwood grows
 and knot-grass taciturn.
But does your leader know
 the hard way you must roam,
And know ye, brothers mine,
 what number falls and dies
Before you get half-way
 unto your fathers' home
And skies of ultramarine
 fade out before their eyes?
The leader silent grows
 and looks into his soul.
His biding weariness
 is gone like a broken chain....

More rare now the heart's dying beat from a first casual glance,
Demands in assessing the while cry out louder and stronger.

Ravines and harsh rocks you avoid with a step far more firm.
All movements and gestures and jokes grow more careful quite clearly...
While also the number of errors you make smooth decreases.
Though with increase tremendous they constantly cost you more dearly!

1970

SONG ABOUT MOTHER

She richly sowed cornfields of life
with the years of her living,
Bowed low to the earth,
in the steppe gathered slow swaying grasses,
Her children she taught well,
to live with their conscience untroubled,
Soft she sighed to herself —
and silent set out on her way.
“Mum, where are you going?”
her children cry running behind her.
“Gran, where are you going?”
her grandchildren shout at the gate.
“I’m not going far dears...
past the sun if I’m only not late there.
Time to go now my darlings...
May long life and sweet joys you await.”
“What life’s left without you?
How can you just go dearest Mummy?”
“And who then, dear Grandma, will read fairytales when we’re
good?”
“I’ll leave you the rainbows,
the silver of dew at day’s dawning,
The gold of the cornfields,
pale palm, and the bird in the wood.”
“We don’t want bright rainbows,
we don’t want fine silver gold riches,
If only forever
you’ll welcome us home at the gate.
Oh, dearest, we’ll do
all the work in the house and the meadow,
Oh, stay with us, Mummy,
the sun will not mind if you’re late.”
She turned away, smiling,
her face with grave pain cast in shadow,
Waved her hand,
and the cloth on her arm gently trembled.

MY DEBT

I am in debt,
 that I was born Ukrainian:
That fate was in merry mood, when oft she sings,
And has bestowed on me the earth and water,
And an azure sky, like a pair of wide-spread wings.

My good black earth, as fertile as a woman.
Even old history stood amazed meanwhile.
For only we, it seems,
 on such golden hay-fields
Have a sickle at hand and ready
 forged from a smile.

Call at my village. You need no better Eden:
The pond. The May-bugs. The green song of the pines.
The moon so young and wearing her new diadem,
The gift of a wondrous land beyond all times.

My Cossack Sich was rich, not in drunken gatherings,
But mighty sons, and when caught up in the strife,
In panic Europe floundered before the enemy,
I sent my sons to death,
 that the land might survive.

My blood is strong. And hotter than fires a-blazing.
And truly not in vain the Tartar flood
So harshly sucked the fire out of our maidens,
To freshen their already autumn-cool blood.

My humming plots their strenuous sap are driving
Into the melon, potato, and onion spheres.
Come in and choose, if yours have not been thriving.
Come in at the door.
 Through the window you've already peered.

The whole world's debtor am I. Not all were given
Such filtered singing wine as mine, just see —
I'll entertain you — drink, and strength recover,
Get a little merry — enough for you and me.

Not everyone received in his lot such an evening,
Persistent longing, yearning to reach the sky.
That was I who gave Korolyov to this planet.
May you also reach to vistas endless and high.

No, I have not chosen a role Messianic.
All I have, and all
 that in my days

I have received from fate, the eternal sower,
I bring to the common mill, to help always.

It's happiness to have in the world-wide dwelling
Your duties and your place of work at hand...
The whole world's debtor am I.

But to one indebted
I was not. Am not. Won't be.
By that I stand.

1970

THE LESSON

(excerpt from the poem)

* * *

All around just as it should be:
evening falls, the distance fades.
The sun comes up. The sun is setting.
Then steal up the night-time shades.
Oh, how banal! Oh, how lovely!
All in a spiral round appears,
all harmonious:
as it has been
for a thousand thousand years.

O, well-balanced runs world-order
in its alternating way!
All so wisely made in nature:
day after night, and night after day.
Father, having done his duty,
for his inheritors makes way.
All is passing, all is parting:
day after night, and night after day.
Ideal is the rhythm of nature:
father's killed,
but I live yet.
Ah me, what a stern world-order:
well, you weep — and you forget.
Oh, the cruel rhythm of nature:
dead ones
fall into the grass!
Oh, how serpent-wise the circle:
well, you weep — and let it pass.
Why then do you stretch your fingers,
bitter memory, to my heart?

All has passed, and all has fallen,
all is overgrown with grass!
"Maybe, son, it never happened?"
"Maybe so, it never happened."
But what do you mean, papa?"

III

"Well, I simply remembered. Wait a minute. What date is it today?"
"Ha!" I laughed roundly, "Don't be ironical, father! It's the twentieth of October. Tomorrow's your birthday... Ho, ho!" I echoed in his manner. "All the same, you remember at least one date. Yet still you say: 'What has history got to do with me?' I like to see you like that, dad, in a good humour."

"Well, why not? Tomorrow I was born. As a matter of fact, before daybreak on 21st October, 1935. See, such exactness! Well, then, let's glance at the calendar. At what time does the sun rise and set on that day? In the biographies of great people every little detail is weighed like gold." He stretched for the calendar, merrily and boldly young.

"That's not necessary..." I caught his hand.

Lazily he shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?"

"Because there is blood on that page!"

"Wha-a-t! What do you mean?" He sprang back from me stunned.

"What kind of blood? Where? I don't understand... Now I shall get it clear, my son... documentally." He read: "Before daybreak on October 21st, 1941, a punitive brigade under the command of Major von König broke into the small town of Kragujevac, and rounded up and shot seven thousand people. Among them were three hundred pupils of the High School. They took them off to their death in classes, each one led by its teacher..."

"But where's that... Kragujevac?"

"In Serbia. About 40 kilometres from Belgrade, my son. Yet you say: 'What good is geography to me?'"

"But what has geography to do with this? We aren't talking about that at the moment... I simply want to say that it is a chance coincidence of dates. You were born some six years before that..." "Ah, no, my son, there are no coincidences in this world — all is connected: the cause and the effect, day and night, birth and death, the bullet and the accusing index finger. My birthday, and that day of death in Kragujevac have entered the eternal circle of birth and death, and become cells in the universe. Nothing disappears in this world, my son. The law of the conservation of matter and... memory. Take a look here, more carefully. There is blood on my shirt!"

"Stop it, father! That's already... mysticism. I'm afraid, father!"

IV

"Don't be scared! That is Memory, with candle alight.
There some kind of shadows move, far in the night.
And with terror the red haze of daybreak gasps.
And the jack-boots, like fate, from the darkness march.

'Where are you taking the innocent ones?
...Innocent children, beloved sons?'

The commandant of the Yaniv prison-camp (that is not far away, in Lviv, my son) Sturmführer Gustav Wilhaus, as a game of sporting chance, shot with his automatic from the balcony of his office at the prisoners who were toiling in the workshops, and afterwards handed over the automatic to his wife, and she also shot at them. Sometimes, just to amuse his nine-year-old daughter, Wilhaus ordered them to throw two- to four-year-old children up into the air, and he then shot at them. His daughter clapped her hands (my God, what innocence!) and cried 'More, papa, more, papa!' and he went on shooting.

From that time on, my son, when I see white-winged cherubs in the frescoes of Sophia Cathedral, I want to ask them: You don't come, by chance, from the Yaniv prison-camp?"

"Tearing bridges, like bandages off from her breast,
The Tisza cried: 'Where go these innocents blessed?'

...To its fatal brink the finale drew.
On steel helmets the mist was lying like dew.
And in that finale the first letter 'f'
began with the blood-red stroke of death.
Strict order, for König, came first thing of all:
'Straighten lines, you Serbs!' he began to bawl.
'In classes, you Slavs, and learn, you swine,
even now to keep order, and not waste time!'
And the first column stood on the edge, and froze..."
"Oh, father, I hear now, the circle grows close!"

"The High School's director death's hand could not curb:
'Let me through to the children. I too am a Serb!
König laughed: 'And where are you going? *Weg!* *
We aim at the future, but you're *Plusquamperfekt!* **

The director cut in: 'Keep your trigger-finger stiff!
*Jedem das Seine.**** I've a lesson to give...

My children, we've but a few minutes to run.
Out of all the lessons, I've chosen just one.
Let the graveyard serve as a class-room, say.
H i s t o r y, children, we're making today.
Today raise no hands for the questions they pose...'
"Oh, father, I hear now, the circle grows close!"
"There is one assessment for me and for you,
Time makes it for us, and objectively, too.

* Away!

** Pluperfect Past Tense

*** To everyone his own

First of all, beneath the cold eye of the war
you are no longer children. Remember! What's more,
you're no longer family supports, firm as oak,
But f i g h t e r s, my lads. Behind you stands the folk.
Your names on the banner of saints will repose...'
"Oh, father, I hear now, the circle grows close!"
'Are you cold, then, my lads? It was always so
when loneliness froze on the victim's brow,
and with leaden eye poised the carrion crows...'
"Oh, father, I hear now, the circle grows close!"

'I am weighing the truth now of every word:
To a l l it was frightening to leave this dear earth.
And even the heroes of highest flight
were sorry to leave behind them the light.
Oh, how they wished danger would pass, those men!
So why, you may ask, call them heroes, then?

I am weighing the truth now of every word:
those heroes felt in themselves all the world.
That feeling protected them, just like a shield:
though they might fall, still the world would not yield!

So on Kosovo Field, reddened by Bayazid,
not only the Serbs, but the whole world bled.
And each of the Serbs came to realize:
though he might fall, the whole world never dies.

No need for the Slavs now to fall at their feet...'
"Oh, father, I hear now, the circle's c o m p l e t e!"
"Now König stood up in his column-like boots.
In his sights eternity, the moment he shoots.
He thought to himself for the trigger he'd reach,
with a bullet would put a full-stop to the speech.
'Unhappy wretch, does he not realize
that though we may die, the whole world will rise?'

But König just laughed: 'No more words, that's your last!
For words before bullets, old man, are but grass.
I'll just raise my pistol, my first finger curled,
and into the pit go your words and your world!
Six thousand seven hundred that truth can't revoke,
While you jaw away about honour and folk!'

The teacher looked thoughtfully up overhead,
But the whole world heard, when he quietly said:
'If kinsmen and Homeland are mere words, say,
What do Belgrade and Moscow tell you today?
Major König, in which rank does Memory stand?'
König's face went purple, he threw up his hand:

'Old idiot, now you have gone too far!
Your hatred pours out of your boot-soles. Ah!
You have cleverly played on my tender spot,
but it's not for you to decide our lot!
To me, and my trigger, must history bow.
You started the lesson, I'll finish it now!
And he screwed up his eyes, like a carrion crow."
"Oh, father, you see, in that circle I go!"
"The director sighed: 'Our Time's sailing past.
So as the first word, let there stand the last:
Brothers! for us sounds the closing bell.
I taught you to take your first steps well.
But remember:

the last step you're going to make
is no less important than the first that you take,
because your life's spiral it crowns, like a spire,
and from there our successors will step on higher,
to the truth of all truths, which won't die in the land:
A man may fall, but the whole world will stand!

Slav brothers, and sons!.. Take courage!.. Heads high!
We are mortals. Remember: The folk does not die!
The ominous soldiers like stiff corpses stood,
from König's red face drained away all the blood.
The peaks of Mount Triglav support the sky
with a powerful truth: "The folk does not die!"
And above the years,
like fate, the bell rings:
so son, having finished,
the lesson begins."



IVAN DRACH

Ivan Drach (b. 1936) was born in the village of Telizhintsi, Kiev Region, into the family of a state farmer. He is the author of many collections of poems, verse dramas, numerous articles of literary criticism, essays, film scenarios, and translations, which are widely read in the Soviet Union. He is also active as a translator from Slavic and other languages. His poems are distinguished for their rich imagery, innovative forms, and wide use of folk elements. His books have been published in many languages in the USSR and abroad, and he is a Taras Shevchenko prize winner.

THE BALLAD OF THE SUNFLOWER

The sunflower once was all arms and legs
With a green body, prickly and rough.
It raced with the breeze
And scaled a pear-tree,
And its bosom with ripe fruit stuffed.
I swam by the mill, on the sand lay still,
With a catapult sparrows potted.
It hopped on one foot,
From its ears water shook,
Then suddenly saw the gorgeous sun,
The glorious swarthy sun —
Among golden clouds
In a red country blouse
Riding a bicycle
Dodging the potholes in the sky...

The sunflower froze there
Gaping forever in golden rapture:
“Let me go ride your bike, old man!
Or put me astride the frame, at least,
O why be so mean, old man?!”

O poetry, my orange sun!
Every second a youngster
Discovers you for himself
And becomes forever a flower of the sun.

1962

And Karmelyuk brushed away the first tear he shed,
Shed at the hundred-and-first cruel stroke,
And only the grubby little boy kept calling:
"Mummy, I want a red toy, mummy, please!"

1966

THE MYSTERY

A funeral there was, and speeches.
The chill of eyelids, tightly closed.
Silent, uncensored, in his coffin
A man of great renown reposed.

On poles his pinewood skiff stood waiting
To start its voyage underground,
For at the bottom of the gravepit
A harbour for it had been found.

His wife in great distress was weeping.
His sons, strong lads, were fully grown.
And hot car tyres, of rubber reeking,
Were digging up, like hooves, the snow.

The brass band cooled its sweating forehead.
Lips lightly touched the dead man's brow.
And like an injured eagle's pinion
The earth lay waiting for him now.

And then mid the concordant silence
And ceremonial severe,
When even snowflakes rustling lightly
Highlighted the grave atmosphere,

There came, dressed in severe apparel,
A woman at that peak of woe,
An airy figure, more transparent
Than any shade, she crossed the snow.

Then bending over him and lifting
The veil, her funeral attire,
She kissed the dead man suddenly, giving
His dry parched lips a kiss of fire.

Great consternation seized the people,
Eyes darted, none knew what to say.
The big drum its broad breast was beating:
"Go, mystery! Go, go away!"

But she in mourning, like a poplar,
Stood there a challenge to them all.
Adventure? Destiny? His lover?
Her black gloves caught the white snowfall.

The dungeon for him designated
Drew him into its shadows dark.
And the mysterious woman waited
Together with a life now parched.

Just then the sudden scent enthralling
Was wafted of wild violets,
While on those fire-kissed lips still falling
The snowflakes did no longer melt...

1972

MARIA OF THE UKRAINE — No. 62276:
FROM OŚWIĘCIM
TO THE CHORNOBIL NUCLEAR POWER STATION

Maria Yarémivna leads us beyond Yaniv station.
The clover her bare feet touch drop dew in a shower.
There are stars mid the pine-trees.

Fields of flowering potatoes.
Homes on the Pripjat aren't lit yet by nuclear power.

Maria arrived home from work a short while ago,
Called at the grocer's, potatoes she brought in a net.
As if at confession,

Maria is sitting shyly,
A faraway look in her eyes though we sit tête-à-tête.

The skin of her hands is rough from paint and thinners.
Her brush in acetone soaks on the window ledge.
Photos with hues of despair on the table are glinting.
She calls to mind, citing his number,
an Oświęcim friend.

"Now this lad." she says,
"has married off his daughter in Fastiv.
I went to the wedding,
under canvas — it poured day and night...
On my second escape from camp I lay in deep grasses
And a goat comes licking my face,
it gave me a fright.

“Under my window girls in a ring are dancing.
It fills me with wonder, the way there’s no end to their dance.
And huge Belaz lorries go past...

Fifty tons they can carry,
And I see that my windows suit the nuclear plant...”

With a rustle of leaves Maria was lost in the mistiness.
Car headlights showed up the dust on the hardworking road.
Life with its sleeves rolled up all night was working...
I could not believe there was nothing more to be told.

Woman’s life story, like a phoenix from Oświęcim’s ashes
You’ve risen

to light up the Atom Town above Pripyat.
Nothing, Maria Yarémivna, is heading for disaster...
The stars shine for lovers, those stars over which you fret.

A tracer atom you were in destiny’s reactor
To show us clearly it’s people bring the world light,
And, while I am burning, your star I shall remember
And your delicate features, youthful, kindly and bright.

We’ll remember you for not memory’s sake but the special
Bright inspiration that’s thrilling and awesome too!
Good night, Maria! Good day, our Irrepressible One!
We, like those Pioneers, “forever are thinking of you!”

1973

IN THE SOCIETY OF THE BUMBLE-BEE

The bee that bumbled yesterday now quiet lies
Caught in a chilly spot. Its legs the air are pawing,
Its wings are stiff, with longing in its eyes
It watches me, my sympathy imploring.

I take it from the shade and place it where
The sun is casting generous warm glances.
Some aeroplanes go droning through the air,
The bumble-bee attempts a buzz in answer.

Then I forget about the bumble-bee,
But soon he’s warm, keen to resume his journey.
The earth, however, heavy to him seems,
The breezes, too, the invalid are spurning.

A pullover of gold and black he sports,
His chest is soft with a pure golden shimmer.

One tip of the rainbow arch touched faraway Striy,
The other tip lay nearby on the breast of Chernihiv,
An arch for this royal * family, for the Korolis,
Whose princess woken by thunder ran about eagerly.

And steam from the rainwashed pit in the ground arose
Where the wooden casing rested, and structures of metal,
And the sky — such clear sky never a headache knows —
Was propped on the iron pillars Korolis had welded.

Tomorrow it's back to work. But today in the wood
Go berrying.

Football matches, classes in the evening.
For ending our tale of the Korolis this is a good
Time: from the balcony the princess her rainbow is waving.

1979

A GIRL'S FINGERS

Heavens, how many groans in fingers,
How many cries in their blue tips,
Homeless, gentle, burnt to a cinder,
With suffering coming to grips!

Heavens, how great is the deep anxiety
In those fingers, swaddling grief,
In the flame of a heavy conscience
With which my ghost alone feels at ease!

How radiant they are — glow-worms, sun-ups,
Worlds that from kisses purer become,
Fingers of the prisoner-beloved
From the prison-labour of love that's dumb.

What can they do, these multi-lingual
Speechless ones? Up you flare and die...
The chastity and shamelessness of fingers
I curse, I lacerate with a blue cry!

A fivesome of little suns... Off I'm dozing...
Over me finger stars shine at night...
Savory-sweet, deep into the heart flowing
Your honey is bitter, dears, and sunny bright...

1964

* Korol (Ukr.) — king



Hanna Svitlichna (b. 1939) was born in the town of Pavlograd, Dnipropetrovsk Region, into the family of an office worker. She has written several collections of poems which are marked by cohesive imagery, emotion, and deep lyricism. She is a Nikolai Ostrovsky prize winner, and many of her poems have been published in other Soviet republics and abroad.

FATHER

Father walks among beds in the garden
Looking close at the blossoming trees.
The white Mays of the years which he lived through
On his shoulders are shed with the breeze.

Dad, it's May!

 Beaming, brimful of azure.
Dip a jug in and watch it fill!
But upon your old temples I notice
Autumn's silvery mist lying still.

Honest labour that calloused your fingers
Was the only delight which you knew.
You loved work as you used to love singing —
There was never enough for you.

Now you walk with those dribbling footsteps;
You might do with some peace, it would seem;
From your eyes flows old age's dim twilight,
But — to foster this garden's your dream.

Chills roam stealthily in the darkness.
Every bough needs the care that you give.
Only sometimes you envy a little
People able simply to live.

Don't live simply, though, don't, my dear father!
Or your heart will be burdened by debts.

Let's live generously and freely
As you always did — until death!

In the window hang clustering blossoms
As a clue to your nature, no doubt.
To pour out all your life into singing
And yet never to feel it's run out.

So you'll live as you've always been living,
Never choosing anything light.
Dad, it's May!

Blossoms hang there, not hoarfrost
In our garden so fragrant and white.

There'll be cherries maturing here, Father,
There'll be birds in a twittering flock.
Poems-grandchildren, too, will be coming,
Which I know you'll be glad to rock.

JOY

Out in the yard on a snowladen twig
Gaily a squirrel is dancing a jig.
Dear ginger thing, like a fluffy, soft toy!
It is my joy — disobedient joy...
Cunningly twinkle its mischievous eyes.
Surely it's played enough, one might surmise.
“Stop it!” I cry, but it won't, naughty chap.
Joy doesn't want to sit down in my lap.
Softly, I'll strew near the porch of my home
The very gentlest of words, while you roam.
Under the sill, where a pathway goes through,
Grains of my tenderness thickly I'll strew,
Sweetest caresses in silvery wraps,
Fairytale dresses in gay furcoats and caps,
Marking with honey the path where you hop.
Then I'll fall sad and a few tears I'll drop.
When all my hope I have lost to the last,
Joy, my dear squirrel, will run to me fast,
Prick up its ears in dismay and alarm,
Peer in my eyes as it climbs up my arm;
“Stop! Don't be sad any more!” it'll say.
“It was a joke — now I've come back to stay!”

RED BLIZZARD

Again October's blizzard blows
And dead leaves from wet branches throws:
Scatter, red blizzard, all the world
With leaves of crimson, tossed and whirled!

Scatter my yard with them for me,
And make my face glow merrily!
Fly in the face of passers-by
With your red, rustling battlecry!

In greeful frenzy beat at doors;
Knock at Madrid doors with red force,
Knock hard and wake up in the night
Vienna, Arles with flats locked tight.

And then with noise and songs and mirth
Embrace the axis of the Earth,
And let the Revolution's flag
On that blue axis never sag!

Storm till you've spread with a red sheet
Each resonant and singing street.
Come, blizzard, colour with your red
My heart, the thoughts that fill my head!

1966

THE COLOUR PRINT

I lay awake and in the quiet of home
I listened, cautious, to the talking boughs,
And from the little print upon the wall
My deer leapt on the floor and left the house.

Since morning it had looked at me askance
And petulantly stamped its young light hoof.
Then like the wind, it suddenly took flight
And fast as yellow lightning it made off.

Outside the window sunshine floods the sky.
To the horizon all the world blooms hot.
On August's raft down the blue river floats
A world where deer are free to graze and trot.

My deer ran off to drink the heavens blue.
Ran off to drink into its avid eyes

The wind's whole gamut, used to gather in
The whole world that outspread before it lies.

And softly it will sink its slender hoofs
Into the brew of fallen leaves and moss.
The golden trumpet of the sun will sing
In its dimmed eyes, as its long antlers toss.

Bless you, brave soul! The weeds of trivia
Have failed to choke your dreams of liberty.
Now it will not return to me till night,
Its antlers smelling like a green young tree.

Quiet, it will come and for a moment press
Its gentle lips to my hot waiting palm,
And for a long time then my hands will smell
Of fresh pine needles and the sun's warm balm.

MIKOLA VINHRANOVSKY

Mikola Vinhranovsky (b. 1936) was born in the town of Pervomaisk, Mikolaiyiv Region, to peasant parents. He has written many collections of poetry, prose, and essays, as well as film scenarios and translations. His lyric poetry is highly distinctive and innovative. He also works as film producer and has many feature films to his credit. His poetry has been translated in other Soviet republics and abroad.



SISTINE MADONNA

You gaze into the future, into worlds,
And unto them you bear your child.

M. Rylsky

Mined by Hitler, below in the black cellar's water piled,
Madonna, you stood in the last fast embrace of life.
And the crosses of aeroplanes floated above your child,
And the tanks slewed round, O Woman, toward your grief.

You gazed out into the future, at outrage and death,
And to them you bore your child, for your call is to bear,
And mistrust and sorrow, and hope and fear, drawing breath,
You rubbed from your eyes in unreasoning worlds of care.

Past the rusty barbed-wire, the first in that cellar to go
Was Ivan Bondarenko, from Dnieperside village Kovaly.
And he, with his brow blood-bespattered by death, bent low
Before you, Mother with Child, o'er the centuries a martyr.
You were tired, Madonna, and gave him your son, and with him
Ivan stood, with lowered sword, in a square in Berlin.*

* Monument in Treptow Park depicting a Soviet soldier with a German child in his arm

TO MY SEA

The time has come to meet again,
To tread your threshold, heaving high!
By strictest rule to live ordained,
I simply cannot pass you by!

You called me with your silent depths.
My heart, since it became mature,
Above your whirling, turbulent edge
Has never seethed upon your shore!..

You hear me, sea? My youth shines free
Upon your expanse's blue-winged haze.
I came to you when young, o sea,
Out of your depths a wave to raise.

My friends and I again explore
Our earlier youth, and greying hair,
And with our honour will shield once more
Your cleanliness, your depths down there.

Let's raise, my friends, our pinions high
Out of its depths, both old and new,
And all together level fly
With dream-filled sails above the blue.

Allow us, sea, in dawn's cool hour,
To mix our blood with your salt blood...
Allow us, sea, in your stormy power,
To taste your cruelty and your love.

ON THE GOLDEN TABLE

To Olexandr Dovzhenko *

The crimson cliff o'er the world's abyss
In the blue clouds stands, starts to reel.
The golden table's white surface kiss
Reflections of goose-quills, and pens nibbed with steel.

There stands Pushkin beneath the stars, and Taras,**
There Lermontov weeps in his dreams with rage.
The wind has died down where the rosy dawns mass,
And silence embroiders its cradle's braid.

* Olexandr Dovzhenko — outstanding Soviet Ukrainian film director and writer

** Taras Shevchenko

Beneath the high cliff rise the sun and the storm,
And numberless pour forth above it the days...
A Cossack of genius stood bowed there in thought
Of a cruel age, of a flowering age.

To the table with radiant kindness he strode,
With a golden pen then his words he wrote.

He strode to the table through common woe,
In the live unrestraint of furious fire.
He did not condescend to the people below,
But swiftly soared to his people higher!

And filled with victory, he burned out on earth,
Glimpsed the stars upon the pool's breast,
And below the high cliff, the cranes now fly forth,
The earth is in apple-bloom dressed.

The willows wash over the waves, like a haze...
At the last minute people have risen...
The Cossack behind the gold table rose —
The gold table of communism.

THE FIRST LULLABY

Sleep, my little baby, lulla-bye!
Sleep, my child, my little brown-eyed worry!
In warm dreams, above the fields stirs rye,
High above it sunrise starts to hurry.

Father's is the happiest of souls.
Sleep, my darling, it is very late.
There, outside the window, restless, roll
All your future years — your future fate.

Sleep, my little one, until your time.
Shadows drowse; the maple, too, is sleeping.
Only let Ukraine not sleep in you —
Like the sky reflected in the Dnieper.

Let it never sleep in you at all;
It is yours and all the world's, my sweetest.
Sleep, my little man, my little soul,
Silver dreams are dropping from the treetops.

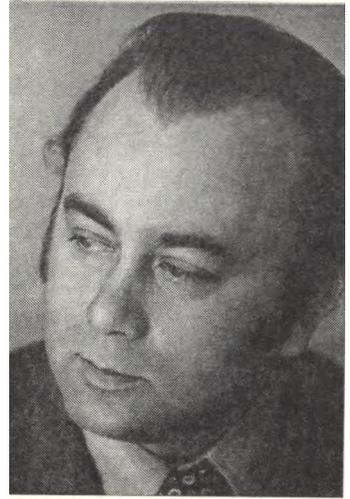
STAR PRELUDE

Evening hay filled the sea scent spray
In the calm of night lightning leaping...
And the wind took up waves in its palms
Far away to blue shoreline sweeping.

And we stood on the boat's low bow —
Hand in hand and with hearts close beating.
We both vowed with a word most sincere
To stay true to this love till each meeting.

Like a spear in sun's rays you stood,
Black your skin, thick-lipped, taut your bearing —
Stars in hundreds away from my home
To your Africa fixedly staring.

Then sweet grass filled the sky in sea scent
In the calm of night lightning leaping.
As the wind took up waves in its palms
And strew stars far on shoreline sweeping.



Roman Lubkivsky (b. 1941) was born in the village of Ostrivets, Ternopil Region, to peasant parents. He is the author of several collections of lyrical poetry, books of literary criticism, and translations, mainly from Slavic languages, and is a Pavlo Tychina prize winner.

GOLDEN SOWING

The Hammer and Sickle — a Star which won't dim,
Where fifteen sisters brought harvest sheaves in,
And the day shines warm under sunny blue skies,
And in layers of loam the golden seed lies.
The season is happy, the times are blest —
Over mountains and rivers from east to west.
And happy our family in brotherly toil,
And happy our land, that it's Soviet soil!
In the October dawn we arose with the sun,
And the beams of our brotherhood warm us as one.
We illumine the world with the light we create,
And bright versts and vistas behind us instate.
But once we were threatened with ruin and death.
The fascist hordes whirled like tornado's hot breath.
They wanted to thresh all the grain we'd sown,
But they got no bread — they were overthrown.
We sow only truth's selected seed,
And a generous harvest we reap, indeed.
We sow seeds of concord, and seeds of peace,
And the ears grow like giants, and crops increase.
Above the ditch death-cries, the ruins and dust,
Our mighty, victorious plough has passed.
We have ploughed in our sorrow, and ploughed in our pain,
For happy harvests, and weddings again.
Our wounds are healing... But memory lives
And to our successors a stern warning gives.

And it constantly knocks on our hearts day and night,
Where warriors stand, where the flame burns bright.
My fire, still blaze, like our dear flag again.
Your solemn reflection lies red on the grain,
On the Volga, and Nieman, and Dnieper blue,
On the smiling faces of blood-sisters true.
In the sunny grape-bunches in orderly rows
Our native Ukraine one unfailingly knows —
By its joyful songs, and its swinging strides,
By the light which shines in its youngsters' eyes...
The Hammer and Sickle — a Star which won't dim,
Where fifteen sisters brought harvest sheaves in...
Sow the seed, and reap, bring in the gold sheaves,
Our loaf for mankind liberal slices leaves.

THE SWEETBRIAR

The girls and boys run off to school.
From Bukovina lorries rush.
There, on the Dniester's other bank
Beside the roadway stands a bush.

Forgotten are old borderlines,
Forgotten, rusts the old barbed wire...
There, where the toppled concrete lies,
It grows — a bush of live sweetbriar.

At times the Dniester splashes up,
And bitter frost may chance to bite,
And galewinds from the mountaintop
Curl round its shoulders, breathing spite.

And yet it lives, a tiny dot,
Our homeland's little beacon-light.

Four heavy berries in a row;
It lifts them up on stems to me.
So that on all the roads worldwide,
Mid discord and anxiety,

Wherever in the world I went,
By air or sea, at any time,
I'd breathe September's luscious scent
And its embrace would not decline;

That somewhere, maybe, overseas,
Somewhere in everyday ado



Viktor Korzh (b. 1938) was born in the village of Bobrinets, Kirovograd Region, into the family of a teacher. He is the author of several collections of poems, literary criticism, essays, and translations. His distinctive poetry portrays the contemporary Ukrainian countryside, and much of it has been published in other Soviet republics.

LAND OF MY FATHERS

The window in the shadow burns with roses,
the pathway shimmers in the evening heat,
and it is thrilling, as the twilight closes
to stand, my native village at my feet.

The rye-field echoes with its gold-eared riot,
from far away each orchard apple gleams,
and falling stars, which stud the evening quiet,
play me a soothing melody, it seems.

The ringing dew-drops, on the grey stone biting,
the immortelle shows white in timeless sleep...
Land of my fathers, by the centuries lighted,
whispers words of love for me to keep.

The white-washed silhouettes of huts are showing
as dawn brings forth the daybreak splash of flame...
Near mother's tears, in the planet's depths a-flowing,
my love, as a son, up to the surface came.

WILD THYME

How resounds the height!..
Straight across the steppe
in the shades of night
galloping hooves beat hollow.
Day has burned out blood-red,
now smells the wild thyme —
herb of evening sorrow.

But the sky does not dim
crimson tints o'er the peaks.
Grasshoppers raise their din —
August cries from the furrow.
The living dew-drop seethes,
so that the wild thyme gleams —
herb of evening sorrow.

Once a warrior died
in these receding fields..
Dreams, to his grey-haired wife
Bring him, today, tomorrow..
The road runs on to the hills,
here the wild thyme thrives —
herb of widow's sorrow.

1976

FLOWERS OF MEMORY

Children of post-war years don't forget,
not only at school learn the alphabet.
They can trace out
the letters
well-known,
on memorial
marble,
and carven stone..
They learn in Bochechki, Zabuyani, Ternivka,
they learn in Chumaki, Solovyani, Sosnivka,*
where flowers by memorial stones are set
Children
learn
the carved
alphabet.

* Reminiscent of local things, such as barrels, ox-carts, thistles, nightingales, pine-woods, the names of these villages, burnt down by the Nazis, are commemorated, with those of their inhabitants, on memorials

Their grandmothers nurse and caress that stone,
with dreams, with tears, with wrinkles deep-grown,
for there they remember the war's evil flames —
for children
immortally
blaze
those names.

How they should love this precious earth,
This book of behests of sacred worth!

Children,
illuminated
by blood-red
skies,
on memorial stones
learn
letters likewise.

To the world came a family, which can't be upset,
our land is eternal, our kin deathless yet —
children
learn well
the carved
alphabet.

1976

FAITH

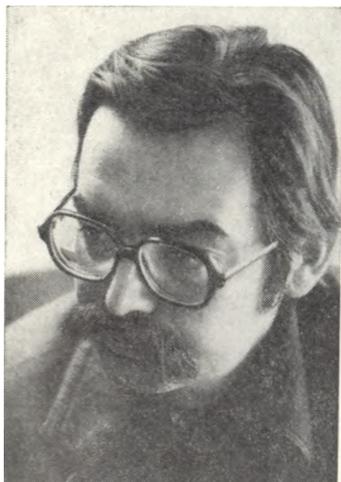
Blackest leaves of trees in slumber deep
chant this charm of old in whisper sighing:
“Someone's surely being born this night,
In these hours of night no one is dying...”

Morning brightly washed like tiny child,
from the cradle warm arms upward holding,
at confession of green shaking leaves
silent pain is my thoughts firm enfolding.

Faded forehead I now seem to see,
and to hear the secret at dream's breaking —
someone's heart on skyline far has set,
and at dawn will never now know waking.

I shall whisper through bright new-found night
this one charm of old, no curse implying:
“Someone's surely being born this night,
In these hours of night no one is dying...”

1976



PETRO SKUNTS

Petro Skunts (b. 1942), the son of a farmer, was born in the village of Mizhgirya in Transcarpathia. His poems, written mainly on civic and historical themes, have been published in many Soviet republics and abroad.

BIRTHTIME

Ah, that we never should have known such times!
On cripples' crutches, through the shreds of clouds,
Burned, doomed, cursed in all continents and climes,
Marched nineteen forty-two in funeral shrouds.
Guns aimed their muzzles at the very sun.
Who fell asleep, slept never to awake.
Death gobbled up the hopes of everyone
And washed them down with blood, her thirst to slake.
War blinded — blind, to see and think unable.
It didn't know that of all fir-trees one
Was cut down not for coffins —

for a cradle:

When Verkhovina welcomed a new son,
The little life was not allowed to die,
Though from the corners shone Fear's ghastly eyes;
The mother turned away — an anguished sigh
Escaped from her instead of lullabies.

Ah, lulla-lulla-lulla-by!

How can you sleep in peace?

Ah, better you were never born

In evil times like these!

The song broke out of the small, narrow hut.
Another echoed it from far away,
Telling, it seemed, about their bitter lot:
Somebody's sons went off to war that day.

Oh, I'm going off to war,

Mother. Mother dear!

Who will rattle at the door
 At night when I'm not here?
 When you hear, O Mother dear,
 That I've been shot dead,
 Tie that kerchief of red silk,
 Mother, round your head.
 When you hear,
 Mother dear,
 That I've been shot dead,
 Plant some flowers on my grave —
 Irises, deep-red.
 Plant red flowers on my grave —
 Flowers, the most red.
 The very youngest and most brave
 For our land fall dead.
 You suffered, yet you brought me up, O Mother!
 Although that year boded still greater woe,
 Beyond the years, thick clouds of blue smoke gathered.
 A crimson dawn marched towards the West's red glow.
 With it our lads returned to Verkhovina.
 Not all of them returned, by far not all.
 And Yaroslavna cursed the foreign killers
 Who caused the tears of Transcarpathian Rus to flow.
 Everything passes.

'42 passed also.

Men couldn't get accustomed to their woes.
 Fire, once a foe, becomes a friend to people,
 Not to destroy — to warm the world it glows,
 We all believe:

the past won't be repeated.

It seems, we needn't worry any more,
 Just live and live on, honest, modest, peaceful.
 But how about those who were killed at war?
 The earth has wept for them, and not a little.
 Yet what are will-less, woeful words for them?
 They died for me, too, in that year so bitter.
 Now I must live for them, for those brave men.

A BALLAD IN A TRENCH-COAT

A common night. Just night.

No special date.

Three hundred and fifty of them every year.
 To brighten life — with nought to celebrate,
 They showed the *Ballad of a Soldier* here.
 And love became a widow suddenly,
 The white screen flaring up from floor to ceiling

With the pure blood of war-wounds never healing,
Coming alive with war's cruel poetry.

The planet plays with tempests. Lightnings shine.
Storms in the ocean joke with one another.
But nobody will say Ma to that Mother,
Though somebody will call that young girl Mine.
Life won't submit to anyone's control.
Holy and sinful, it goes on apace.
Let all enjoy it. Yet inside me stays
Fear for the happiness of her on the screened wall.
Life must go on. Somewhere, at the sky's edge
The day holds promise of delight for her.
Her smile, though, will remind me flowers that were
Once planted on a grave beside a hedge.
Why am I saying this?

The film is through.

Too long we saw the world enwrapped in woe.
There'll be commands — what next to do, and where to go.
And yet what was will always ache anew.
Night lays for all, perhaps, its soft blue bed.
But I — but I — a soldier I still stay.
The ballad sleeps beneath a trench-coat grey,
Putting a tommy-gun beneath its head.

HOVERLA *

Oh, help me to retrace your destiny,
Carpathian land! The distance is so great;
Roads flow down from the hilltops to the valleys,
Roads fly up from the valleys to blue heights.
I saw a flower growing on the rocks,
Rivers conjoining, lightnings threatening,
Hills in grey army-coats instead of shepherds' smocks,
An autumn day, and a whole year of spring.
The years are also mortals, just like men.
Others will come with bright new dreams in hand.
Yet '44 brought freedom once again
To you, my own beloved native land.
Years are like waves — they too mature and fade.
But this one, which so many lands revived.
Washing the wounds of proud Hoverla, laid
Its trench-coat on her shoulders, frozen, knived.
O native land,
You held me in captivity.

* Hoverla — mountain in the Carpathians

Hordes of invaders trampled your soft earth.
Our arms and feet were shackled by a boundary,
Yet even then
My folk approached its birth.
We, sons of Rus, locked up in the Carpathians,
We — homeless raftsmen, shepherds — all as one
Each morning in the Dnieper would be bathing
Our fair-haired fellow-captive — our hot sun.
And so centuries followed one another.
Hangmen killed us, as well as traitor-kin.
Yet boulder rolled down after righteous boulder
From the Carpathians, bashing their heads in.
Yes, we experienced tremendous hatred,
Hiding love in our hearts as if in caves.
Yet came the day —
With awe-struck sunshine mated,
This land moulded my people, faithful, brave.
And not a single miscreant-invader
Can force our people off their chosen way.
The Revolution, Lenin's brain-child, came in
The twentieth century, and is with us to stay.
O country mine!
Locked up in the Carpathians,
We fought and sank in our own blood's red stream.
Yet every day we bathed our sun — in visions —
In the Neva, whose waters far off gleamed.
Still far away from me was my small people,
But, not awaiting mercy from the foe,
Pouring the blood we spilled into red banners,
My folk continued forming, sure though slow.
In vain the foemen posed as our well-wishers
And strewed their silver phrases, little worth.
Inexorable, wise, beyond the red horizon
The red sun died, again to see rebirth.
We perished also. From the very cradle
We were confronted by a thousand deaths.
Defying death which lurked nearby in ambush,
Mothers bore children, holding back their breaths.
The children cried — of life, for life they clamoured.
With what, o foe, could you have sealed their lips?
Our gains were far more humble than our losses,
And yet our folk emerged from thralldom's grips.
The Nazis marched, on human hearts they trampled
On every continent, in every land,
And we, so small, locked up in the Carpathians,
Caught up our hearts in stony, tight-clenched hands
With pain-wracked hearts we used to charge our rifles,
And death became the highest of awards.
Less, ever less of us returned from battle,
And yet our folk emerged from battle's childbirth wards!

He was not ours who cowered, cringed and grovelled,
Considering where he could lose, where gain.
Our free-born sun, bathed in the river Volga,
Each day we gave back to our land again.
The sun marched westward, bleeding on the boulders,
To our dear children, woods and mountain springs.
And came the day when mountains stood in trench-coats.
That autumn introduced a year-round spring.
Remember, hills, the biggest and the smallest:
O'er half the globe our soldier marched non-stop
And fought. But here he knelt and took the starlet
From his cloth cap and fixed it to your tops.
There were a million of us, locked in frontiers.
We drank from the Tisza, the Dnieper and the Don.
Then '44 was at long last behind us,
The year when, bright, in front the future shone.
There were a million of us. But the time
Had not yet come for feasts and celebrations.
We went to fight for a free '45
And all the others full of jubilation.
The time had come;
Not all were at the feast;
The lords ran off, and cowards took to cover.
But then in June of '45 we went to join
Not just with Rus — a Union of brothers.
Who could have barred us in our forward movement?
The birthland of October ours became.
Who could have hindered us, long-parted children?
To our great Mother's arms at last we came.
That year I treasure deep within my heart.
It gave to me the Dnieper, Volga, Don.
In that year I went over no-man's land,
The future boundary I crossed and then went on.
My steps were light, my bosom bore no wrath,
But while foes glared with eyes by hatred blurred,
Our men and mountains didn't take their trench-coats off.
And so I went
To build a new, wise world!



Irina Zhilenko (b. 1941) was born in Kiev into the family of an office worker. She has written numerous books of poetry, sketches, essays, as well as translation work. Her poetry is distinguished for its spontaneity and philosophical tone. Her works have been published in other Soviet republics and abroad.

SPEAK TO ME OF FIELDS

The break of dawn... The cool of morning tethers
down-dewy wings that flowed, from shoulders resting —
cool touch alone blessed coming sunny weather,
and on my youth I felt its tender blessing,

and on the earth, now resting from the war.
The windows open blinding wings that dazzle.
The streetcars, bright like sunny boats ashore,
along the streams of streets go, green streets razzle.

Not one false note dispels my magic charm
of crystal ringing.... So far does autumn fare!
Oh, how I laugh because such golden swarms
of merry suns are shimmering in my hair.

My fingers touched a tree and then a flower,
my eye has touched the sunlit clouds above,
my hearing is touched by voice of my neighbour,
by bill-and-cooing, high up, of a dove.

My heart has touched my own, my native land!
A land so large, and child-like when its boisterous!
My heart's face seeks you, so like a guelder rosebush,
To breathe your fragrance, grow intoxicant!

To love you! Fling the windows wide at dawn
and let the guelder-rose scent gambol
throughout my room, with nightingale storm-song,
let in your poplar and your crane's soft babble.

Good morning, Motherland! Come visit me,
sit at the table. Speak to me of fields,
of all my people — but don't chasten me
for swan-lyric voice that I, your daughter, revealed.

There's room in all your vast and kindly sky
For swans and eagle-owls and the gulls.
My Motherland, your child — that's also I.
Embrace, forgive me if my joy's too full.

Give pardon for this house, this sunny place
that opens on the garden, for light of silence —
resembling snow-white hands that form a garland —
this shaken light that flicks my sunlit face.

1971

SPRING

The spring is here. On breathing in bark moisture,
A chestnut reaches branches to the sky.
It radiates around a spreading picture
(Adds ring to ring) as blue-wings multiply.

Like bursting bubbles, fizzing, letting fall
Round husks from branches, buds with green enthrall.
And grackles riot, love intoxicated,
Their drunken wings the sun obliterated.

As high as this red roof, this chestnut tree,
Rise sun-gold waters! So it seems to me.
The stream-bed is the street... Downstairs I bustle
To taxis, people, music — all ajostle.

From open windows rush (desiring flight)
Some white pianos, like trout caught and leaping
In sunny tulle. And to the very ceiling
Float curtains, fragile nets of golden light.

Two patent-leather dolphins, shuffle-dancing,
Swim to the rhythm of my knee-bend prancing —
From beating tails gleam waterfalls of spray
That splash a nearby table, as in play.

I drink to spring! I drink to bright-blue windows,
To waves on counters — draper's colour rainbows,
To grandpaws, skipping ropes, to bows on hairbraids,
To violet bouquets for pretty mermaids.

1971

SELF PORTRAIT

This moment now is mine. And no one ever
Can take away from me this moment's fancies.
A crimson disk above white orchard hovers
That pours and blazes hues through garnet branches.

There will not be another place or sun,
There will not be another time, not ever.
Beneath this garnet disk then, love me ever!
And laugh and laugh and laugh till day is done.

There is a day for struggle, one for love,
A day for rapture, anger, one for toiling,
A day for joy creative, one to grow in,
A day for cold, for fire, inward wove.

Oh, how I love the time when dahlias flower,
What silence shines the moment light's unfurled,
When I'm all wife and peasant-like in power,
When I'm an entire tender kindly world.

I feel as light and lucent as the dew.
And streams of stillness all the earth enhances.
Grant there be sunlight and no dissonances,
Grant there be wisdom, quiet beauty too.

2

Around my brow streams out a violet aura,
My face an orchard where lie blossoms fallen —
The after-rainfall snowy flora.
Self portrait all in tints of white. Irina.

But still, I love it when inside I seethe
With fury. Spurring me to battle forward.
Then a Joan of Arc am I, that flames enwreathe.
Then a witch am I, to rouse resistance, discord.

I'm scaffold-high — my wrath alone could smite!
All glory be to fire, to the fight!
Before my eyes a flaming banner whips —
I hail the stake whose flame sears both my lips.

I hold my child and sword with burning fingers.
I laugh! While from my shoulder turning red
My red braid hisses, smoulders to a thread....
Self portrait — girl in red. This too, Irina.

1971



PETRO OSADCHUK

Petro Osadchuk (b. 1937) was born in the village of Ostrivets, Ivano-Frankivsk Region, into a peasant family. He is the author of numerous collections of poems, literary criticism, and essays, as well as translations. His civic poems are highly topical, and he is a recipient of the Nikolai Ostrovsky Prize.

* * *

My Ukraine begins and extends
Where my sorrow dwindles and ends —
At the start of the road, like a seagull's song,
My Ukraine begins and rolls along.
My Ukraine, my Motherland starts
Where broad decks move in jerks and starts,
Where on roaring Black Sea waves a long time ago
A battleship charged at the realm of woe.
My Ukraine, my land begins far away
Where the dawn of October was kindled one day —
Where the walls of prisons one morning fell —
There my Ukraine begins as well.
My Ukraine, my country begins where to *Pans**
No longer belong both waters and lands —
In the free Carpathians where fir-trees grand
Like rockets on guard of our country stand.
My Ukraine, my native land takes its start
Where fortune promises joy to my heart.
Like the sky to which nightingale songs ascend,
My Ukraine will never end.

* *Pan* (Ukr., Pol.) — landowner, master

* * *

I awoke from the nightingales' song at dawn.
The first rays were shining right into my eyes.
And since then I keep singing again and again:
Nightingales woke me, up I must rise.
I ran down to the sea over golden sand,
And its waves cooled my body, perspiring, hot.
And my thoughts kept on dancing around one phrase:
Nightingales woke me, and up I got.
Clear and bright is the world and my country is fair,
How happy, how lucky I am today.
To be happy, I need to say just these words:
Nightingales woke me, and cares fly away.

1973



Volodimir Zabashtansky (b. 1940) was born in the village of Brayiliv, Vinnitsya Region, into a working-class family. He lost both arms and eyesight in an accident while working in a quarry. He has written several books of poems, translations, and essays. His most distinctive characters are Ukrainian workers. He is a Nikolai Ostrovsky prize winner, and his works have been published in many Soviet republics and abroad.

FAITH IN MAN

Men need metal and clothing and bread,
Art and music, and books to be read.
But perhaps most of all, like air
Faith in man, people need everywhere.

What is man without faith in man
With his sorrows, his joys — their whole span;
With his eyes, with his thoughts and his roads
Unimpeded, far-reaching and broad.

For this faith men may chastise a man —
He may even be sentenced to hang,
They may take a man's freedom away,
Yet his faith will live on anyway.

From that faith, like strength out of health.
Every day grows belief in oneself,
In one's mother, one's friend and one's wife.
Faith in man is the mainstay of life.

It's the root which until the end
Through a tree trunk live juices will send.
If a tree, though, is cut from its root
It will stand, but won't live or bear fruit.

If you chance on a soul gone awry
To whom people all faith deny,

Do believe in him, give him your faith
And thereby you may save him from death.

Through all weather, through all his years
Proud and firm, his great faith man bears.
Remember: from faith in man
Starts belief in one's native land.

1977

THE STONE-HEWER

Uncle Ivan, if you'll kindly permit me,
I will tell people a bit about you.
Let them all know that you also mean something
When with such skill giant boulders you hew.

Somewhere today in the quarry you're thinking
Over the stones, in the whole world alone.
Meanwhile the wind beats its wings on a boulder
Just like the cock on the fence at home.

Taking your chisel, you hit at a boulder
With your left hand on its rugged grey sides,
And the first lines come to sight on the statue
That will astonish an onlooker's eyes.

True, for the moment it still has no value,
Simply a lifeless and shapeless grey stone.
Yet you can see it in all its entirety;
Stroking it gently, you stand there alone.

Wet with your sweat, you work on in a hurry,
Won't even stop for a smoke or a word.
The nuclear age with its smoke clouds hangs gloomy
Over us like Damocles' sword.

Tomorrow the splinter will ache in your shoulder;
You won't go to work in the morning again;
Lying in bed, you will read a fresh paper,
Politics bringing you worry and pain.

You will remember the world of the forties
Burning with battleflames — all that occurred.
Auntie will bustle from morning till lunch time,
Cursing your scars with a hot angry word.

Night from its pocket will let the new moon out.
There it will squat on the bed at your side.
You will start smoking again in your sorrow,
Yesterday's plan reawaking inside.

Bold, it was born among boulders last evening;
Sleepless, you lie, thinking over your plan,
Which is to carve a black oak out of granite,
Upon war's grave like a headstone to plant.

1977

SONNY

In this world he hasn't yet a worry.
So far, Mummy's all that he can say.
With him in his bed sleeps rubber Bunny
Which he plays and fusses with all day.

Sleep won't come; thoughts bother me till morning.
Mute rhymes, like torpedoes speeding on,
Hit into the gloomy ships of sorrow
Which sink in the darkness and are gone.

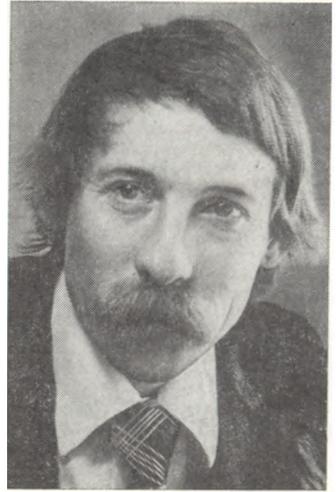
Only at these moments I've discovered
Joy can bring disquiet to us too;
If you want to make your child feel happy,
There's no sacrifice that is too great for you.

So I bend toward my sleeping sonny
With his fair hair smelling of the sun.
In the window, like in a blue icehole,
Yellow moonbeams in bright ripples run.

Vague anxieties are looming over sleepers
In these restless, dark hours of the night,
But I see there's joy in store for sonny,
Happy days for sonny shining bright.

1967

LEONID TALALAI



Leonid Talalai (b. 1941) was born in the village of Savintsi, Kharkiv Region, into the family of a farmer. His poetry, both laconic and philosophical, has been published in many Soviet republics and abroad.

SONG

The branches dripped
With heavy dew drops.
The women sat upon the grass.
With heavy sheathes,
With empty coat sleeves,
In silence wartime summer passed.
You sang a song.
Your voice flew, vibrant,
And full of feeling from your lips.
It was not concert halls that listened —
It was the dawn in war-torn steppes.
And we held on to your rude skirt-hem,
Children, so helpless and so small,
While like a bird
Your voice strove skyward,
Away from earth's too narrow ball.
Above the world you could have risen
In song,
But in the scythe-cut rye
You did not lift
Your wings
So vibrant,
To sing
And fly into the sky.

GIRL WITH BUCKETS

Girl with buckets,
The well will forget about everything
When you bend over it,
And your luminous shadow
Goes deep down into its heart
But all
You give it
You take back in buckets,
And only leave in it, swaying,
The sky,
The stars
And the moon.

ELUARD'S WORD

I write your name, O liberty...
Paul Eluard

To find one word out of millions,
Like the conscience of our time,
A word of unheard-of brilliance,
All other words to outshine.

Then to go out and write it
As a behest or song
On school desks, in palace chambers,
On grass, stone — with hands sure and strong —

On the walls of prisons and dungeons,
On blue lips of men tortured and maimed,
On bombs, automatic rifles
At executioners aimed.

A word! Not a sound, not a letter;
A word — torn from fathomless depths,
Bearing the wind of our epoch,
Its hope, its heartbeat, its breath.

A word that towers like a mountain
Over misfortunes and death,
A word whose life-roots are nourished
By the hopes nursed in human breasts.

Entangled in the petals of lips,
Do you have power over me then, power-lover?
Despise and abuse me —
I'm a woman, a mother!
What loftier title can there be?
From birth I am called to rule and judge.
Me begging alms you shall never see.

Happy am I — radiant in my children.
Blest in this instant. The day's fair and fine...
It's by my grace
 in this world you are living
And by my grace
 you are called Mankind.

1978

IN DEFENCE OF GOETHE'S
LATE LOVE

Who was it said
 love's light will perish?
The wiseacre cynic
 to whom all is known?
But one thing he does not know, one alone:
Gentleness wins.
 Love is ever ready.

What matter
 snowdrifts of experience and years
If the endless unquenchable thirst remains
And ever in the heart
 burn brightly the flames
Of love
 which no one has vanquished yet?

A spy comes crawling.
 Suddenly — look out! —
Though grey be your hair,
 her captive you'll be made.
I'm inviting you
 to dance the last waltz.
Its theme is immortal.
 It cannot fade.

...At the bitterly ironical words you're uttering,
At your polite and apologetic gaze,
Tender grief will light up the face
And a hot heart beat with feverish wing.

PETRO PEREBIYNIS



Petro Perebiynis (b. 1937) was born in the village of Sloboda-Shargorodska, Vinnitsya Region, into the family of a collective farmer. He is the author of collections of poetry, literary criticism, and numerous translations. A historical perspective combined with contemporary observation is a distinguishing trait of his work. A Nikolai Ostrovsky prize winner, his poems have been translated into many languages both in the USSR and abroad.

MY HEIRLOOMS

I try for size
a high-peaked helmet:
ancestral, and scarred by
sabre slashes;
and then surmise
the stars ring sharp against the steel
that tops my head above my brow,
and vanish.

I try for size
my Grandad's helmet:
the high-peaked, soft, Budyonny
grey-felt caplet;
and then surmise
a cavalryman, Red trooper,
with a star above
his brow, charge in flaming battle.

I try for size
my Father's helmet:
a casque of khaki,
steel gashed by bullets;
and am agonized
by searing metal — where a
red star
was burnt on Father's
tortured chest.

I try for size
this helmet, mine:
a spaceman's,
round as Earth's big globe and
polished.

My spaceship jets into sky like
a streak of lightning;
this ship resembling
both the time-worn helmet
and the Budyonny cap
high-peaked, with gleaming
star of crimson.

1975

A MASTER-CRAFTSMAN'S LOVE

I bow to you,
Old, weary master-craftsman,
The master of your word, your work, your art;
Through pain and joy, through worry and disaster
Your earthly love sprouts from your manful heart.

The love of master-craftsman knows no respite.
Not for an instant does its live thread tear.
And if a master-craftsman dies, his pupil
Breathes in his love, as if it were the air.

While in his heart like magma blood keeps boiling,
While he can hold his tools, see with his eyes,
The master-craftsman hurries, loving, toiling
And teaching others
To be kind and wise.

This world of ours is prone to alteration.
It once stood on three whales, the myth attests,
From death divided by a hair's-breadth on occasion;
On master-craftsman, though, it really rests.

It rests upon their honest, selfless talents,
Upon their heads which silver wreathes about,
And if in this old world there still are giants,
They are those master-craftsmen, without doubt.

Their load seems weightier to them as they grow older,
The world weighs heavier on their old backs,

The magma of their hearts gets daily colder,
And yet they know that they must not relax.

Their words live on,
Their craftsmanship is deathless,
Yet ceaseless doubts the master-craftsman scorch:
Will art survive, will there be fitting pupils
To carry further on its cherished torch?

O fire of love,
Omnipotent, majestic,
Whose rays warm every master-craftsman's heart!
O heart filled with eternal worry lest he
Should carry to the grave
His heirless art!

The masters hurry —
With their heart beats failling,
They hurry, hurry on for all they're worth.
They long for neither homage nor for honour,
Only for love to triumph on this earth.

Through all the roar of earthly roads and orbits
Love grows apace, connecting heart with heart.
Bow low, o people, to the master-craftsmen
Who give the world the secrets of their art.

1977

THE EARTH'S PALETTE

If your spirit is dead, nought will save you,
Neither style, erudition, nor form.
Pour the whole world into your bosom,
For your soul seek no uniform.

Look:
The boughs in the spring breeze are swaying.
Like a fount spouts the April shower.
All its palette the earth is displaying;
Choose the tints of most brilliance and power.

Coloured dreams from your slumbers arouse you;
Don't put off until later your choice;
Bow before the red colour of life blood,
In its crimson resplendence rejoice.

Let the wonderful blue of the heavens
Make your steps for a moment cease.
Only black is a colour unwanted:
Light and shadow cannot live in peace.

Only grey is a colour unneeded —
And be sparing, also, with gold;
Look —
Majestic yet simple, a rainbow
Sun-tinged, breaks from the storm-clouds' tight hold.

GLAZED HORSES

A grey-haired potter at the market offers
glazed horses
to the passers-by.
There, a whole drove of them, they graze
upon a piece of sackcloth spread before him.
Ah, horses! Gallant steeds —
it seems, just grip their bridles
and from the spot they'll gallop straightaway.

The only trouble, though,
is that nobody buys them.
Yet that big lad beside the potter,
crimson with success,
sells in a trice
chimeric horses, creatures
whether with horns or manes —
no one can guess.

For just ten kopecks
the old man
would sell his —
but alas! —
He says to me offended,
“They're real ones, mine are, don't you see?
And those... and those that fellow just invented.”
So I took pity on the grey-haired potter
and bought for souvenirs
two supple horses
and set them, fiery red,
to graze upon my desk.

I watch them now, and they remind me
about those crazy creatures sold by the young lad.

VOLODIMIR ZATULIVITER

Volodimir Zatuliviter (b. 1944) was born in the village of Yabluchne, Sumy Region, into a farming family. He is the author of several collections of poetry which have won him wide recognition. He is active as a translator and has won the Pavlo Usenko Prize. His poems have been published in many republics of the Soviet Union.



BIRTH DEBT

The bird-cherry rejoices, meeting May Day,
Delighting in its sunshine, fresh and green.
An awkward cherry-tree in the front garden
Its elbows on the dewy wattles leans.

It hides its eyes down at its heart's white bottom,
Shy of the baby storks and windows open, smiling,
Still unaccustomed to its maiden garment —
Its blossom-printed frock of Mother's nylon.

It blooms — it breathes with light. Its elders' equal,
Unable to believe that it can be —
Resplendent as a happy visitation,
In wordless azure silence stands the tree.

Not only blossoms, but the whole world far outspread
In which you're just a faceless wisp of smoke
Will not be yours until a berry plain,
Clear as a blood-drop, you have brought your folk,

Until you've heaved upon your spring-lit boughs
The weighty blue of your dear Motherland,
Until a brook that once like shavings wound
Lies buried by the drought beneath the sand.

It won't be yours — to the point of blinding pain —
This black soil upon which you have been bred,

Till with your fruit, sweat, self you will repay
The debt that birth incurs, borne till you're dead.

Whether you have been born as man or garden,
Ploughfield, rye, tractor, or the Dnieper's flow,
Your fatherland you do not just inherit —
It is a debt which all your life you owe.

A THEORY OF WINGS

Arise, O Father! Ploughs fly back to fields
Like birds from warmer climes back to their home.
The Vorskla, too, with banks like wings unfurled,
To the first grass drives water-flocks in foam.

Arise, O Father! With the tramp of roads
Such clamour comes to us from winged creatures!
And mother sets out sweet and honest loaves
Like youthful sunshine rising white in pitchers.

Arise, O Father! Teach me all your tokens,
For far still lies the road across life's plain:
If April smells of rain, there will be honey,
If the soil steams, it means there will be grain.

Yes, teach me all, don't leave out anything:
To dig wells, to build houses strong and stout,
For we have yet to live long centuries.
Our rural strength's by far not running out.

Our throaty youth protects the flight of birds,
And opens up new sense in ancient things,
Tomorrow morning to initiate
Assuredly, a theory of wings.

RODIN. A SONNET

I learn from stone. It's only now at last
This axiom had dawned upon me. Sculpture
Is not the play of fancy, but the task
Of penetrating through material. The texture

Of blocks of granite, so austere and gloomy,
And not experience dictates a chisel's course.

Aye, not our own and others' skill and schooling
But granite granulation, crude and coarse.

I'm all for fancy, skill and education,
And yet I'm sure they form a meagre share
Of talent. The quintessence of creation
Lies in material — that is the foundation
Of art. And how to liberate it — there
Is what among the Great demands deliberation.

THE STELLAR MESSAGE

Constellations illumine the heavens;
Like the words of a letter they glow,
The sole language which everything living
Like us humans must certainly know.

The sole language which plants can decipher
And like humans — like us — understand.
This at least we and they have agreed on
Through the ages our planet has spanned.

Nay, the other way round — it was Nature
In the course of the planet's first term
Who had taught us, unhaughty and patient,
Waiting till her star language we learn,

So that we, with our keen eyes absorbing
The past aeons' unsoundable depth,
Could at last read the meaningful message
Of eternity which they had left,

So that we should at last know its essence;
Like a spring to the sea, from its fount,
The Past flows through us men to the Future,
But it's only the Present that counts.

Write this down in the pledgebook of ploughfields,
With the ploughshare your autograph leave —
Understandable, legible, lucid
For us people, for beasts and for leaves.

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