



Lion Sun: Poems by Pavel Chichikov

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"Lion Sun" contains more than 70 poems by a poet who was received into the Catholic Church in 1988 and who derives much of his inspiration from the natural world. His poetry takes the reader to gardens inhabited by warblers, groundhogs, toads, and bumblebees, to the beginnings of the cosmos, to the Garden of Eden, to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, to the foot of the Cross, and to lonely chapels where God himself hears confessions, where St. Christopher drowsily guards the tabernacle, and where painted statues "earless listen to the chants." Pavel meditates on serpents, spiders, thunderstorms, geological processes, and the obstinate sinfulness of humanity. Reminders of the Creator are everywhere:

"Sight of God, a white-tailed buck / Apparition in the meadow-- / Tines aloft above the rack / A temple's undulant menorah..."

"Crocodiles are hammered out with tongs / Strong to grapple, strong to sprawl and squat / Fire sprays around them in the forge / Sparks arise, the iron jaws are hot..."

"A cormorant, glistening with oil and water / A wise crane, ordained as was Melchizidek..."

Pavel's relationship with the spiritual is intimate and affectionate:

"Our Lord was in the chapel cleaning / Swung his mop in curving lines / As once he wrote archaic dust / So now he soaps a long design..."

"Mary fell on greyish ice / Near St. Pimen's church on Seleznovskaya-- / An angel helped her, saying: / 'There, there, go slowly dear,' / and led her to Tikhvinskaya..."

"Gabriel stands behind my chair / Folding brown-blue wings to fit the room..."

Eric Young created the cover image of the Lion and the six black-and-white text illustrations. The poet and artist, who had not yet met in person, worked together by e-mail, sharing their understanding of the poetry. Eric's illustration for one poem led Pavel to change the title, to "Pouring the Moon." About the crucifixion poem "The Voice of the Birds," Eric wrote: "There was probably little apparent difference between Christ's figure and the others crucified that day. And it struck me that this 'omega' for his physical self complemented his entry into the world: He came in like a common man and went out like a common man. At first glance, people may not be sure which figure in the drawing is Christ, but I think they will figure it out...like the birds in the poem." Of "Dark Lightning": "While Pavel visualizes the angel with traditional wings and robes, readers are free to see their own angel, to see the presence of God in their own life, which I think is unique from person to person." Of "Poets": "I've placed a tasty dragonfly just out of reach of the hungry kois' gaping mouths. Though they strain and stretch, they're never going to catch that bug. This is how I envision that journey of poets and seekers-we see it and can almost taste it but sometimes feel we can't quite swallow it."

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