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A Journal of Translations

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Introduction

This third issue of *Ukrainian Literature* appears much later than I had intended. The fault is entirely mine. When I took on the editorship of this journal, I was fully aware of how much work such a responsibility entailed but I nevertheless believed it would fit comfortably into my other responsibilities. I was wrong. My obligations at the University of Toronto and the desire to keep up my own scholarly research and writing became insurmountable obstacles in the timely production of this next issue of the journal. For this I apologize. I know that some of the lessons learned will help me produce the next issue in less time than was required for this one. Despite the delay, I take pride in the fact that this third issue has appeared. There is no other journal of translations from Ukrainian literature. There are few other forums where such translations appear. The continued existence of this journal still serves an important function, and I do not intend to abandon this endeavor. But the editors and the readers of this journal must be reconciled to its irregular, infrequent appearance.

Both the selection of works and the nature of the translations of these works appearing in this issue are heterogeneous. True, in the selection of works that our translators have chosen, there is an emphasis on contemporary Ukrainian literature. I welcome and encourage this emphasis for a number of reasons. Contemporary writing in Ukraine is frequently of high quality and merits a wider audience. Contemporary writing is more likely to appeal to contemporary readers. Contemporary writing is more likely to find a sympathetic translator who can find the appropriate language to render a text that is understood, appreciated, and apprehended from a perspective of familiarity. Contemporary writing is also more likely to attract a commercial publisher and thus an ambitious translator who hopes for greater recognition and remuneration. That's all for the good. But contemporary writing also holds its own peculiar pitfalls for the translator.

In Ukraine today, writers are producing works that are linguistically, intellectually, and structurally more complex than much of what preceded them in the history of modern Ukrainian writing. Authors employ a wide variety of linguistic registers, differentiated by social, geographical, demographic, and historical criteria. They use the street slang of young adults, the vocabulary of professional intellectuals, the dialects of remote mountain territories, and the personal idiolects that arise from their own or their characters' experience. They mention antiquated toponyms, they refer

to people and events that were for many years deliberately kept unknown, and they cite texts that the reader might not recognize. This accumulation of nuance adds energy and life to contemporary Ukrainian writing. It also presents challenges to the translator and editors.

In our work on the texts in the journal Uliana Pasicznyk and I don't enforce any particular approach to translation, although we don't pretend to be without personal preferences. The journal follows American (rather than British) vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation, but that pragmatic choice does not resolve the myriad difficulties that arise, for example, in translating Zhadan's *Depeche Mode*. The novel is a repository of Ukrainian street slang with a particular wealth of derogatory terms for various types of individuals. Contemporary Ukrainian is rich in terms like *pidar*, *chuvak*, *uiobok*, *lokh*, *debil*, etc. Neither the translator nor the editors are especially fluent in this subset of the English language. Besides, American English usually prefers the f-word for most such expressions. Overuse of that word would make for a bland, unsatisfactory translation.

Another set of problems arises in works like Moskalets's *Evening Mead* and Prokhasko's *The UnSimple*. Both works contain a wealth of allusive reference that may escape the reader's notice, particularly in translation. For example, Moskalets quotes poems by Mykola Riabchuk, sometimes without clear attribution. These poems don't exist in translation. The English reader cannot possibly recognize them (many Ukrainian readers also won't!). The text is characterized by the (often inebriated) wordplay of a group of intellectual writers. The exact puns do not translate, of course. That leaves the translators looking for reasonable equivalents, which they do very successfully, but, nevertheless, the translation loses some of the peculiar references of the original, for example, in the terms for drunken hallucination that are tied to the word "squirrel." There are also many factual references (the philosopher Saul Kripke, for instance) whose connection to the text (often a pun) is hidden in the translation. These problems, and others, are also found in *The UnSimple*, where the geography, history, botanical specificity, material culture, and dialects of the Ukrainian regions of the Carpathian mountains inundate the translator and the reader with unfamiliar (in English) material. But these are the ineluctable challenges of all translators. To the degree that these challenges have been successfully overcome, the reader will, I hope, discover in these texts the wonderful beauty, vitality, complexity, and diversity of contemporary writing in Ukraine. For their courageous efforts, the translators deserve our gratitude and praise. They certainly have mine. And I encourage them and other skilled translators to submit their work to our journal for publication. There are many grateful readers waiting. Not least among them—

Maxim Tarnawsky
Toronto, 2011