

UKRAINIAN LITERATURE

A Journal of Translations

Volume 5
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Ukrainian Literature
A Journal of Translations

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Introduction

Ukrainian Literature has survived! It has a new home and a fresh injection of financial support. A little more than three years ago, when I was writing the introduction to the previous issue (Volume 4), the situation was different and not as hopeful. Our original publisher, the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the USA, had abandoned our journal, even though one of its former presidents had been an initiator of this enterprise. The Society declined to produce a print version of Volume 3, which had already appeared online, and withdrew support for honoraria and production costs. In those circumstances, Volume 4 appeared as an unsponsored publication in an online form only. Authors and translators who agreed to the publication of their works in that issue had to forego the usual honoraria. And so the future of the journal depended on finding a publisher and a source of financial support.

They have been found! Following a vote at its annual meeting, in June of 2017, the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada agreed to become the publisher of *Ukrainian Literature*. For this, I am very grateful to the Society's members, its executive board, and particularly to its president, Daria Darewych, for the trust they expressed in accepting the journal. There is, of course, considerable irony in the fact that a journal created by the US branch of the Shevchenko Society was rescued by the Canadian branch. The irony grows when the relative financial strength of these two institutions is compared. The Shevchenko Scientific Society in the USA has far greater financial resources than its Canadian counterpart. Thus, in accepting responsibility as publisher of *Ukrainian Literature* the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada could not assume the responsibility of funding the journal from its own resources. As editor, I promised the Society that if it took on the role of publisher, I would find funds elsewhere, outside the Society, to support the journal.

The required funds were found at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) of the University of Alberta, specifically at the Danylo Husar Struk Programme in Ukrainian Literature. This unique program was founded after the sudden and premature death of my colleague Danylo Struk, who was a literary scholar at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures of the University of Toronto. The program was funded by Danylo's family and friends and is dedicated to popularizing Ukrainian literature in the English-speaking world. A substantial grant to the journal was approved by the director of CIUS from the funds of the Struk

Programme. The grant allows the journal to resume normal operations with this issue: the usual modest honoraria will be paid to the authors and translators, and in addition to the online publication, a print version of this issue, as well as of Volumes 3 and 4, will be produced.

While the journal's expenses are small and the Struk Programme's grant has generously funded its immediate needs, the future of the journal depends on additional financial contributions. The journal will be turning to various philanthropic organizations and individuals who value culture and literature for further support. One such individual, Marta Tarnawsky, who is also a co-founder of the journal, has already made a sizable donation. I am confident that many of the journal's readers will also help support our ongoing efforts with individual contributions in smaller amounts. What better way to show appreciation for the fine literary translations on our pages than to contribute \$20 or \$25 to the journal's publication fund? The Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada is a registered charitable organization, and contributors will receive Canadian tax receipts for their donations. Look to our website, UkrainianLiterature.org, for details on how to contribute and also on how to purchase a print copy of the journal.

* * *

The excitement I feel regarding the institutional and financial rescue of the journal is considerable, but I am no less excited by the contents of this issue. It's quite a lineup! The most remarkable item is Part 1 of *Stalinka* by the late Oles Uliianenko, one of contemporary Ukraine's most noteworthy authors. Uliianenko died suddenly in 2010, a few days after his 48th birthday. By then he had stirred up a great deal of both praise and controversy in Ukraine's literary world. In 2009 his novel *Zhinka ioho mrii* (The Woman of His Dreams) was deemed to be pornographic and barred from publication. But a dozen years earlier, *Stalinka*, the work published here, had been awarded the Shevchenko State prize, Ukraine's highest public literary award. Evidently, Uliianenko's writing evoked very strong and very different reactions among different readers! And that's hardly surprising—his writing is a very complex mix of diverse elements. It includes all the usual tropes of popular Hollywood crime stories: sex, drugs, corruption, and chainsaws used as surgical instruments. Yet, at the same time, his text overflows with literary and philosophical allusions of an unmistakable religious flavor. And then there's his language! Nothing like it exists in Ukrainian literature. It's hard, gritty, difficult, and full of energy. It's also focused on the lower rungs of a social and psychological pathology with which, fortunately, neither the translator, Olha Rudakevych, nor the editors have any real familiarity. Nevertheless, Olha has done a superb job conveying this very difficult text in English, and I hope the journal's readers will appreciate this rare gem of contemporary Ukrainian writing. Part 2 will appear in Volume 6 of the journal.

Volume 5 also contains a large dose of classic Ukrainian literature. Yuri Andrukhovych's "Samiilo, or the Beautiful Brigand" and Mykola Riabchuk's "Heron's Birthday" are well-known stories from the early years of Ukrainian independence. The Ukrainian originals of both have recently been re-released in a new format, underscoring their status as readers' favorites. There are also two canonical classics from the turbulent and culturally very fruitful 1920s, a decade usually called the *Rozstriliane vidrodzhennia* (The Executed Renaissance). Mykola Kulish's *The People's Prophet* (best known under the name of its protagonist, Malakhii) and Valerian Pidmohyl'ny's *The City* are genuine monuments of Ukrainian literature and jewels in the literary curricula of schools and universities in Ukraine today. These are not only brilliantly entertaining works of literature but also valuable sources of historical information about the period when they were written.

Works that depict a historical reality give translators—and their editors—numerous problems and temptations. The most obvious problem boils down to footnotes. How much should the translator explain? Kulish's play is saturated with a Soviet reality that is no longer present in Ukrainian society: acronyms, government agencies, and topical references occur on every page. Perhaps a greater surprise is the religious detail found in the play. In his work on translating it, George Mihaychuk carefully identified all these references and allusions with great precision. But in the final text of the translation, such information is limited to what is necessary to understand the play. Readers who can't identify the precise hymns mentioned by the religious peasants in the play are welcome to write to Professor Mihaychuk and ask for the details. Much the same is true of the topical and geographical allusions in Pidmohyl'ny's *The City*. Stepan's wanderings around Kyiv, for example, can be traced very accurately on a map of the city, but these details are not explained in the translation. Nor is the name of the poet who coined the phrase "catarrhal stomach of history." That was Oleksa Slisarenko.

Another dilemma for the translator is the key term "kum" that Kulish uses as a character's name in *The People's Prophet*. Baptismal kinship is a well-established social relationship in Ukrainian (and not only Ukrainian) society, but Kulish does not use the term for anthropological reasons. In fact, he uses it for comic effect and with satiric purpose. The village bumpkins who use the term and respect the kinship ties it entails are, of course in Kulish's view, provincial boobs locked into ancient ideas and rituals that keep them from entering the modern world. At the same time, however, that ancient, provincial world turns out to be no less ridiculous than the sophisticated modern world of urban Soviet social norms that Kulish is satirizing throughout his play. No translation of the word could carry all that meaning, so it is simply "kum."

A whole new set of translation issues arises in the short story and the play by Volodymyr Dibrova, translated in this issue by Lidia and Volodymyr Dibrova. If translators are at their best when they capture authorial intentions, then who could be a better translator than the author himself? Yet when authors translate their own works, they often introduce small changes and new elements that were not present in the original. Of course, these changes are meant to clarify, sharpen, or otherwise enhance an effect in the target language that the author/translator deems inadequately conveyed by a more literal translation. What's an editor to do in such cases?

Translations are interesting to study, but the purpose of this journal is not to initiate a forum for translation studies. Our purpose is to give readers the pleasure of experiencing fine works of Ukrainian literature in English. With the commitment of our new publisher and a fresh infusion of funding, as well as confidence that further funding will be found, I am very happy to offer readers the pleasure of discovering the works in this issue and in those issues to come.

Maxim Tarnawsky
Toronto, January 10, 2018