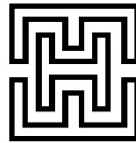


# *UKRAINIAN LITERATURE*

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A Journal of Translations

Volume 6  
2021



Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada

Ukrainian Literature  
A Journal of Translations

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## Contents

Introduction: Maxim Tarnawsky  
7

MARTA TARNAWSKY  
“The Gift”  
Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk  
11

MARTA TARNAWSKY  
“The Little Man and the Sea”  
“American Triptych”  
Translated by Maxim Tarnawsky  
17, 21

### POEMS FROM THE FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN POETRY

---

Introduction. Alex Averbuch  
33

DARYNA GLADUN  
Translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin  
36

OLENA HUSEINOVA  
Translated by Khrystia Leshchuk and Grace Mahoney  
46

IYA KIVA  
Translated by Olena Jennings  
52

MARIANNA KIYANOVSKA  
Translated by Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky  
60

OLEH KOTSAREV  
Translated by Ali Kinsella  
70

VÁNO KRUEGER  
Translated by Ali Kinsella  
78

HALYNA KRUK  
Translated by Olena Jennings  
88

MYROSLAV LAIUK  
Translated by Anand Dibble  
94

OKSANA LUTSYSHYNA  
Translated by Olena Jennings  
100

SERGO MUSHTATOV  
Translated by Grace Mahoney  
110

LESYK PANASIUK  
Translated by Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler and Reilly Costigan-Humes  
118

ANTON POLUNIN  
Translated by Ali Kinsella  
122

IRYNA SHUVALOVA  
Translated by Anand Dibble  
130

YANIS SINAIKO  
Translated by Oksana Maksymchuk  
136

OSTAP SLYVYNS'KYI  
Translated by Alex Averbuch  
144

MYKHAILO ZHARZHAILO  
Translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin  
150

---

OLES ULIANENKO  
*Stalinka*  
(Part 2)  
Translated by Olha Rudakevych  
157

YURI ANDRUKHOVYCH  
“Lviv, Always”  
Translated by Mark Andryczyk  
201

OLHA KOBYLIANSKA  
“Crossing the Sea”  
“The Blind Man”  
“My Lilies”  
Translated by Olha Rudakevych  
225, 229, 231

EUGENIA KONONENKO  
“Archibald and Patricia”  
“Andrii Yarylo”  
“The Ghosts’ Graveyard”  
Translated by Patrick Corness  
233, 237, 245

MYKHAILO YATSKIV  
“The Girl on the Black Horse”  
“The Child’s Breast in the Violin”  
Translated by Mark Andryczyk  
251, 255

PAVLO VOLVACH  
“The Class”  
Translated by Ivan Kovalenko  
257

IHOR KOSTETSKY  
“The Price of a Human Name”  
Translated by Anna Bohoniuk-Golash  
261



Marta Tarnawsky, 1930–2021

## Introduction

This issue of *Ukrainian Literature* is dedicated to Marta Tarnawsky, who passed away on January 26, 2021. I honor her not only because she was my mother, but because she was the founder of this journal.

Marta Tarnawsky was a poet, writer, translator, bibliographer, and librarian. Most importantly, she was a tireless civic activist promoting Ukrainian literature. Professionally, she was the Foreign Law Librarian at the Biddle Law Library of the University of Pennsylvania from 1967 to 1993. At her retirement, she held the post of Associate Director for Foreign and International Law. Yet she took an early retirement from the law library in order to focus her energy on her own creative work and on civic involvement in the Ukrainian community. In particular, she was the head of the Publications Committee of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the US (NTSh-A) from 2000 to 2006. It was in this capacity that she finally succeeded in realizing a long-held dream—the establishment of a permanent forum for the publication of English translations of Ukrainian literary works. She had advocated for such a publication for many years. As the foremost bibliographer of literary translations from Ukrainian into English (her four-part magnum opus, *Ukrainian Literature in English*, is still the primary source of information on this topic), she was acutely aware of the need for such a forum. And through her advocacy within NTSh-A (and after twisting my arm and using all her motherly influence to overcome my reluctance to take on this assignment), the journal *Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations* was established as an ongoing publication of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of the US. Although NTSh-A no longer sponsors the journal, its existence is worth celebrating, and the person who most deserves credit for the vision and effort to establish it is certainly Marta Tarnawsky.

Of course, not everything about the journal lived up to Marta's expectations. Above all, she wanted the journal to be effective and influential in promoting Ukrainian literature in the English-speaking world. For her, that meant that printed copies of the journal would be in the hands of as many readers as possible and, even more importantly (she was a librarian, after all), on the shelves of libraries throughout the world. Unfortunately, that has not happened. The number of printed copies of all five volumes of the journal that are in circulation is very small. This was something that I anticipated. In my initial agreement to take on this journal, I insisted that the publisher handle all matters associated with the print version, while I would concentrate on the internet version. I still believe that the latter is a far more important venue for this journal—a place where the translations it contains are available

to everyone around the world at no cost, and without the need to locate an actual copy of the printed volume and deliver it into the reader's hands. Also, there the contents will remain available in perpetuity, unlike books that disappear when their publishers retreat or fail to keep a book in print (without, moreover, releasing the rights to others—thus making texts permanently unavailable).

But my mother's preference for print over electronic publication was not just the prejudice of an older generation—this bias still dominates the world of literature, particularly Ukrainian literature. Authors and translators prefer books, even when the financial incentives point the other way. This journal has lost translations intended for its pages because an author later balked at publication in a journal or a translator preferred to see the work in book form, even though its potential publisher required a subsidy while the journal would have paid an honorarium. The machinery of the Ukrainian translation industry is geared toward books. The Ukrainian Book Institute of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine will subsidize for profit publishers who accept a Ukrainian translation for publication as a book, but not in a journal. Translation prizes in North America are for books, not journals. An internet journal may be convenient for university students or for those who read on electronic devices, but authors and translators still prefer the look and feel of a paper book in their hands, even if that means storing boxes of them in the basement.

Marta Tarnawsky's goals in founding this journal were not limited to promoting printed works. Translations themselves were the goal. Fortunately, the availability of Ukrainian literature in English is growing. That increase is largely limited to the work of living authors, some of whom may not fare as well as others with the next generation of readers. The success of contemporary Ukrainian authors with commercial publishers is certainly a positive development, although it is usually limited to subsidy-seeking niche publishers. This journal still has a vital role to play in stimulating translations of those authors and works that are not part of the ongoing commerce of profitable literature. Most of Ukrainian literature is still in this category. And as for the distinction between print and electronic, between book and journal, I promise that some of the larger works that first appeared in this journal will soon also appear as bound paper and ink, flesh and blood books, that readers can purchase and hold in their hands.

\* \* \*

In tribute to Marta Tarnawsky, this volume of the journal opens with translations of three of her works, by Uliana Pasicznyk and me. Uliana has translated an early, dare I say feminist, piece that captures Marta's thoughtfulness and irony. I could not resist translating the story about a child on the beach, since it's about me, or at least I was the pretext for it. "American Tryptych" is one of her more important works. I don't pretend to be a good



translator of poetry, but this highly autobiographical poem, even in my pedestrian translation, showcases my mother's characteristic blending of the civic and the personal. My parents did arrive in the US at Boston on the USS Mercy (AH-8) and then went to Scranton PA, where my mother worked as a seamstress for the Lackawanna Pants Manufacturing Company. They later moved to Philadelphia, where her father paid for her university education, while my father volunteered many hours at the UUARC, the organization that had helped bring so many refugee Ukrainians to the USA. In the final section of the poem, which she translated herself, she pays tribute to Morris L. Cohen, who was her boss at the Biddle Law Library and a lifelong friend.

This volume also contains a special section of poetry. In the summer of 2020, Alex Averbuch, a poet and a graduate student in the department where I teach, organized an online Festival of Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry. It ran weekly from July 2 to August 20, 2020, and included sixteen poets. The event was sponsored by the Danylo Husar Struk Programme in Ukrainian Literature of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, and the recorded sessions of the festival are available on the programme's website (<http://sites.utoronto.ca/elul/Struk-mem/Writers-series/2020-Poetry-Festival.html>). Alex had the further idea of organizing English translations of selected poems by each of the festival participants. The result is this volume's long, special section, where the poems appear both in the original and in translation on facing pages. The publication of these poems has its own intrinsic value but is also meant as an extension of the festival itself. Alex Averbuch tells us more of this story in his introduction to the special section.

No less special, although not a surprise since it was previously announced, is the conclusion of Oles Uliianenko's *Stalinka* in Olga Rudakevych's masterful translation. I commented on this work in the previous issue, so here I will only say that I am delighted this important novel is now available in English in its entirety.

The volume also contains some familiar authors (Andruchovych, Kononenko, Kobylanska) and some new ones (Yatskiv and Volvach). It is rounded out by a complicated work from the pen of an unjustly forgotten diaspora modernist author, Ihor Kostetsky (aka Eaghor Kostetzky, 1913–1983), whose real name was Ihor Merzliakov. Although he is better known for his theatrical works and literary criticism, his somewhat experimental prose is also worthy of attention. I am very happy to offer readers the pleasure of discovering this work and all the other works in this issue of the journal.

Maxim Tarnawsky  
Toronto, November 16, 2021