

## The Role of the Ukrainian Diaspora in Translating Lesia Ukrainka's Works into English

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### ABSTRACT

This article deals with the English translations of Lesia Ukrainka's works. The author considers the new approaches to translation that emerged after the Cultural turn in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, attention is paid to issues of migration and translation, negation of Eurocentric ideas about translation, and translation as a constituent part for the formation of a migrant community. Considering the chronology of the translation of Lesia Ukrainka's works into English, it is argued that as a rule they were done by the Ukrainian diaspora and published in periodicals financed by the Ukrainian communities in Great Britain, the USA, and Canada. The most intensive phase of the popularization of the poet's works in English happened to take place during the middle of the last century. This could be explained by the nature of the third wave of migration, which occurred after World War II. This wave brought highly politicized people to the West, who tried to oppose the Soviet regime. They used literature to oppose the Soviet appropriation of the Ukrainian cultural heritage. In addition, the Ukrainian diaspora utilized the native fictional discourse to maintain the boundaries and consciousness of their collectivity.

**Keywords:** translation, diaspora, Lesia Ukrainka, migration, reception.

### Introduction

The formation and cultural history of diaspora cannot be imagined separately from translation. One of the first verbalizations of the heritage of immigrants is done through the translation of the main texts from their homeland language to the host-land one. People move not only with their material possessions but also with their spiritual legacy and extrapolate it on the new terrain. "Diaspora space is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them', are contested" (Avtar, 1996: 209). The relation between migration and translation has become a recurrent topic in recent critical writings: Cronin (2006), Gentzler (2008), Polezzi (2012), Sakai (1997), Tymochko (2006). Migrants bring with them the texts from their culture and popularize their written heritage through translation among new recipients. Loredana Polezzi (2012) emphasizes the connection between the movements of people and the movements of texts. In particular, she observes:

*Once we consider the mobility of people as well as that of texts, the linear notion of translation as something that happens to an original (usually a written document which already exists as such in a specified language) as it moves across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries becomes largely insufficient. Translation takes place not just when words move on their own, but also, and mostly, when people move into new social and linguistic settings (Polezzi, 2012: 348).*

Moreover, it can be argued that immigrants are always in the process of translation and it is not only a linguistic or literary activity, the process happens during their everyday life. Translation takes place in their objective reality as well as in the fictional one. Migrants' experience embraces the notion of self-translation as a creative and an existential practice.

The new language opens new possibilities of self-fashioning, another level of freedom and expression. Within this paradigm we are dealing neither with the betrayal of a mother tongue, nor with the pure desire to achieve recognition. It is more akin to the simultaneous processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, described by Deleuze and Guattari (2004).

Translation extends beyond the sphere of mere *techné* or linguistic practice. It changes collectivities, identities, and worldviews. In this context Apter remarks:

*Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out from the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements (Apter, 2006: 19).*

Considering the migrant's and postcolonial translation experience forces us to move beyond the Eurocentric ideas about translation that have concentrated on the issues of influence of the translated sacred texts and canonical literary works. Victor Hugo once observed: "When you offer a translation to a nation, that nation will almost always look on the translation as an act of violence against itself" (Lefevre, 1992: 2). This dictum of influence has dominated the Eurocentric approach to translation. Maria Tymochko writes that European cultural contexts are "based on Greco-Roman textual traditions, Christian values, nationalistic views about the relationship between language and cultural identity, and an upper-class emphasis on technical expertise and literacy" (Tymoczko, 2006: 14). While considering translations of postcolonial or migrants' literary traditions we rarely speak about the influence but rather about the relocation of the minor or local narratives into a dominant discourse. In this context a translation helps "to shift the perspective, to look simultaneously from within and from without, to question oneself and one's own culture as much as one questions the other" (Bassnett, 2011: 32). Meanwhile translation of the local texts provides a counter discourse to the standardized global discourse of fictional writings.

The other important aspect of translation lies in the fact that it bears witness to the common origin of humanity *per se* as well as the common origin of human language. In this context Walter Benjamin declared:

*Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages. It cannot possibly reveal or establish this hidden relationship itself; but it can represent it by realizing it in embryonic or intensive form. This representation of hidden significance through an embryonic attempt at making it visible is of so singular nature that it is rarely met with in the sphere of nonlinguistic life. This, in its analogies and symbols, can draw on other ways of suggesting meaning than intensive – that is, anticipative, intimating – realization. As for the posited central kinship of languages, it is marked by a distinctive convergence. Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express (Benjamin, 2007: 72).*

In a broader sense, translation helps people from different collectivities to recognize their common human nature, their similar reactions to one and the same event. Benjamin's idea of the kinship of languages suggests common roots of people's reactions, cognitions, and worldviews. That is to say that in translation, peoples recognize themselves more than the Other. They read about themselves, but in a new verbal expression. This new reading gives them an opportunity to look on their emotional experience from a new perspective.

The current study provides fresh insights into the correlation between diaspora and translation with special attention given to the role Ukrainian immigrants have played in spreading Lesia Ukrainka's works in the Anglophone world. Extrapolating the idea of translation to the zone of diaspora communities, we encounter new dimensions of translation that have been neglected in Western translation and cultural studies. In particular, I mean translation as a resistance to the oppressing regime migrants left behind and translation as a way of integration into the large multinational and multiethnic paradigm of a host culture.

### **Diaspora and Translation**

Diaspora plays an important role in translating home-language literature into the host-land one. Through translating or encouraging translations of their own literature into the language of their host country, immigrants pursue different tasks. Rarely do they intend to influence the development of the receiving culture, as usually happens with translations from the dominating cultures. On the contrary, we can argue that translation is a way of survival for immigrants, a way of affirmative action, and a way to work out cultural in-betweenness. The commitment to present their literature in a new language goes together with two simultaneous acts: forging the national consciousness and opening the authentic national identity to a new world. Translation is a means of articulating the difference and distinctiveness of a collective identity. Maria Tymochko argues that translations are not innocent and along with other narratives they "form images of whole cultures and peoples, as well as of individual authors or texts, images that in turn come to function as reality. When such representations are done for a people themselves, they constitute a means of inventing tradition, inventing the nation, and inventing the self" (Tymoczko, 2016: 18). Translating their national literary texts into the language of a host country, immigrants are reinventing themselves in a new language paradigm. They search for new verbal structures to present their heritage.

Acute feeling of belonging to the national collectivity is the immanent feature of the immigrant's existence. Describing the peculiarities of diaspora formation, Vic Satzewich in *Ukrainian diaspora* (2003) emphasizes that newcomers become highly conscious of their national identity and rigorously keep their homeland traditions in a host country. "However, in addition to providing Ukrainian peasants with the work and land that they could farm, emigration at the turn of the century also resulted in their discovery and definition of themselves as "Ukrainians". Put differently, part of the process of diaspora formation involved becoming conscious of themselves as Ukrainian" (Satzewich, 2003: 5).

Distancing from the native land causes not only longing and melancholy, but also strong identification with the primary collectivity. This strong attachment to the national spirit and pathos determines the selection of texts for translation. Literary works with the dominant theme of love for the Motherland, praise of the Motherland, and descriptions of the Motherland's nature and history are of primary concern for diaspora.

Victimization is the other dominant theme for diaspora. The glorification of collective traumas constitutes the grand narrative of displaced communities. This metanarrative defines the texts for translation as they have to witness and tell the world about the national tragedies. Moreover, the biographies of writers and artists are also written in the mode of victimization

to exemplify the cruelties of the political power the migrants left behind. The victimized identity has framed the core rhetoric of Ukrainian writings and has influenced the selections of texts for translation. Recently Volodymyr Kish (2019) summarized repeated formula about the sad fate of the Ukrainians:

*Ever since the Mongols under Batu Khan invaded Kyivan Rus in the thirteenth century, Ukraine has known little peace, and its inhabitants have arguably suffered more oppression, death and destruction than any other European nation. The list of invaders and oppressors over the past eight hundred years is a long one, including amongst others, the Mongols, the Tatars, the Turks, the Russians, the Poles, and the Germans. In that time, there have been brief periods of freedom and autonomy, but for the most part, Ukrainians have suffered immeasurably under the yoke of ruthless occupiers. Ukraine's history is basically a painful narrative of perpetual victimization* (Kish, 2019).

This sense of victimization as a dominant manifestation of Ukrainian national identity has been reconsidered by those generations of Ukrainians who were born and raised on a new soil. They often tried to overcome inherited victimhood. Thus, they chose among the translated texts those that do not speak only about the national tragedies. A vivid example is *The Forest Song* by Lesia Ukrainka. This drama has attracted the attention of artists abroad mostly because of “the themes of alienation from nature and betrayal of one’s own nature” (Robson, 1993), or because it “[explores] the shifting boundaries between wilderness and civilization” (Yara, n.d.). The production of the drama carried out by Virlana Tkacz and the Yara Arts Group appealed to different audiences and the cast included artists of Asian, African, Eastern and Western European heritage.

Translation contributes to the formation of the cultural image of a particular diaspora collectivity. It is a mode to familiarize the world with the land they come from, to which they belong, how people feel, behave and think in their native land. Moreover, through presenting the home cultural legacy, the newcomers demonstrate their civilizational advance, their artistic achievements, and overcome their inferiority complex. It gives them the grounds to show and exhibit their artistic and intellectual genius. Translations and popularization of the immigrants’ culture foster their national pride. In this context James Weldon Johnson pointed out:

*A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior* (Johnson, 1922: 9).

Diaspora has been conscious of the strategic mission of translation. It is obvious that the Ukrainian diaspora considered the idea of translation as a public act. Translation has been understood in a broader sense than just rendering a text from one language into the other. Its mission was to pass the love for Ukraine on to children who won’t speak Ukrainian. In this sense, translation is a means of **intra-cultural** communication between first, second and third generations of immigrants. Born in a new country, the diaspora generations lose their connections with mother tongues and fail to embrace the direct experience of homeland.

Those who did not know the language of their ancestors, the land they came from and its history, get a chance to know all this through translated works. Translations done by diaspora are meant for reading by the second or third generation of immigrants. The agenda to build a national collectivity without a nation and in completely new realities determine the need to translate cultural texts so in the future those who do not speak the ancestors' language may claim their national distinctiveness. Translation embodies the intention to preserve the core cultural texts that bear the values and traditions of the migrant's collective identity into a new vernacular. This agenda of preserving is one of the dominant concerns in the immigrant communities and is the cornerstone for maintaining the group consciousness.

**Inter-cultural** communication is sporadic if we speak about the immigrant's culture and the host culture. Traditionally there is little interest from the host-community about the life of immigrants. Julia Kristeva, writing about the Foreigner, reflects that he or she is lonely, has no self, and is always melancholic. Further she notes:

*The foreigner's speech can bank only on its bare rhetorical strength, and the inherent desires he or she has invested in it. But it is deprived of any support in outside reality, since the foreigner is precisely kept out of it. Under such conditions, if it does not founder into silence, it becomes absolute in its formalism, excessive in its sophistication – rhetoric is dominant, the foreigner is a baroque person (Kristeva, 1991: 21).*

However, there have been waves when this or that minority group has attracted attention from the dominant culture. This is caused by the desire to add exotic charm to the dominant discourse (for example, the interest in African American music and folk heritage at the beginning of the twentieth century in the US), or when the dominant tradition is exhausted and is searching for new artistic sources (European modernism and primitivism). But as a rule, translations that are done or published by immigrant communities rarely gain broad reception in an alien literary polysystem. This situation is similar to the role of translation in the postcolonial context. In the words of Tymoczko (2006), “[...] translation in a postcolonial context can mediate across languages within a single group, functioning to connect a people with its past, for example, more than to connect one people with another” (Tymoczko, 2006: 16).

The other issue of translation is its level of signification. Translating their best literary examples into the host language, immigrants exhibit the desire to become a part of a larger community. Thus, translation is the second-level signification of the eagerness of the newcomers to contribute to the host culture and constitute a part of it. It is more the act of the recognition of the power of a host-culture, the act of carving a place for a new immigrant identity.

The important factor is the political attractiveness of the immigrants' culture, that is their cultural capital is used to show support from the host-country, which in turn can be in ideological opposition to the home-country of the immigrants. This draws attention to the issues of translation and ideology. Although ideology has been always present in the translation process, its relevance to translation has only recently (after the cultural turn in Translation Studies by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s) become the hot topic for discussion. Patrons, political parties, governments, foundations, and different funds have played the paramount role in the choice of texts for translation, and in the way they

have been translated and popularized. These issues were previously overlooked in translation studies as the main concern was the linguistic adequacy of translation. The “cultural turn” in translation studies in the 1990s caused the redirection of translation studies from the purely linguistic level to the role of translation in cultural production, to ideology, politics, and hegemony in the sphere of translation. Maria Tymoczko has underlined: “... [t]he key topic that has provided the impetus for the new directions that translation studies have taken since the cultural turn is power” (Tymoczko, 2002: xvi). Attention has been drawn to the issues of how translations are used by governments, what translations are favoured by publishing houses, universities, and different institutions of power. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevre (1992) in *Translation, History and Culture* claimed: “Translation has to do with authority and legitimacy and, ultimately, with power, which is precisely why it has been and continues to be the subject of so many acrimonious debates” (Lefevre, 1992: 2). Thus, translation should be considered as a way of resistance to the ideology of the regime immigrants left behind. We may argue that the Ukrainian diaspora was conscious that translation could be one of the ways of presenting alternative cultural practices to the Soviet ones. Émigré culture became a counter model for the Soviet cultural paradigm.

### **The Chronology of the English translations of Lesia Ukrainka’s oeuvre**

The reception of Lesia Ukrainka’s works in the Anglophone world has a long history. The dynamics of their publications and popularization in the USA, Great Britain, Australia or Canada coincides with the ideological agenda of a specific historical period. Her oeuvre was used to proclaim or disclaim the ideologies of different political systems. This is the fate not only of Lesia Ukrainka’s works, but of many artists whose works were used as a political weapon. The reception of her oeuvre includes the English translations as well as critical writings.

The initial translations of Lesia Ukrainka’s works were done by Carl Eric Bechhofer Roberts (1894 – 1949), Percival Cundy (1881 – 1947), and Honore Ewach (1900 – 1964). The first two translators were not of Ukrainian descent. The first English translation of Lesia Ukrainka’s work was published in London in 1916 in the book *Five Russian Plays: With One from the Ukrainian* (1916). This was the dramatic poem *Babylonian captivity*, translated by Carl Eric Bechhofer Roberts – a British journalist and professional writer. His own creative writings were published in the magazine *The New Age*. He travelled in India, Russia, and China for ten years and during his travels studied Russian. His choice to translate the work written by the Ukrainian poet proves its high artistic value. In the *Introduction* the translator wrote that the poem “represents the enslavement of the Ukraine by its powerful neighbours; but its style is a victory” (“Five,” 1916: 6). In turn, J. Rudnycky observed that the translation “[...] is a well-styled rendering of Lesia Ukrainka’s poetical world” (Rudnycky, 1963: 19). *Babylonian captivity* was the only text written by the Ukrainian author rendered by Roberts, although he continued to translate from Russian and in 1917 published *A Russian Anthology in English*.

The next step in the popularization of Lesia Ukrainka’s works was taken by Honore Ewach in 1933, who translated her poem *The Broken Glass* (“With the glasses the wedding guests ring...”) and included it in *Ukrainian Songs and Lyrics: a Short Anthology of*



*Ukrainian poetry* (Ewach, 1933). Honore Ewach migrated with his relatives from Ukraine to Canada in 1909. He also translated the works of Ivan Kotlyarevskiy, Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko and Markiyany Shashkevych.

Percival Cundy was another important promoter of Ukrainian literature in the Anglophone world. He was born in England and brought to Canada as a boy. During his studies at the University of Manitoba, he met Ukrainians. Their culture impressed him so much that he decided to study it. Cundy translated a number of Lesia Ukrainka's works. His translations were published in *The Ukrainian Weekly* (1945) and *The Ukrainian Quarterly* (1946, 1947). Moreover, the collection of Lesia Ukrainka's poems *Spirit of Flame* (New York, 1950; Westport, 1971) included only his translations. Marta Tarnawsky emphasized that "the translations by Percival Cundy are probably the best of those available in English" (Tarnawsky, 1967: 26). The first English version of the dramatic poem *The Noblewoman* was also done by Percival Cundy.

Florence Randal Livesay (1874 – 1953), a Canadian writer and journalist, is known for translating Ukrainian literature into English. She learned Ukrainian from her Ukrainian servant and was deeply impressed by the Ukrainian songs. In 1916 she translated and published *Songs of Ukraina, With Ruthenian Poems* (1916). The collection comprised pagan songs, wedding songs, historical songs, Cossack songs, and tchumak songs. Livesay did the first translation of Lesia Ukrainka's masterpiece *Forest Song*, which was included in the collection *Down Singing Centuries: Folk Literature of the Ukraine* (1981), published in Canada.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, translations of Lesia Ukrainka's works appeared in different literary collections and magazines, mostly financed and published by the Ukrainian communities. In 1963 W. Kirkonnel and C. Andrusyshen compiled the anthology *The Ukrainian poets: 1189-1962 ("The Ukrainian", 1963)*. This included seven poems by Lesia Ukrainka: *Contra spem spero; My heart is ablaze; O Where have you gone, my voicerous words; If all my blood had from my flesh been drained; The forgotten shadow; Why art thou not like tempered steel and Jeremiah*.

The most influential periodicals (*The Ukrainian Weekly, The Ukrainian Review, The Ukrainian Canadian, and The Ukrainian Quarterly*) popularized Ukrainian literature in the Anglophone world.

*The Ukrainian Review*, published in London since 1954 by *The Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain*, contributed to the representation of Ukrainian literature in English. A translator and British poet, journalist, and historian Vera Rich (1936 – 2009) did a lot to familiarize the world with the oeuvre of the Ukrainian poets. While studying at Oxford University, she took Ukrainian language courses. Vera Rich translated many of Lesia Ukrainka's poems. Her translations appeared in 1963 (*Contra Spem Spero, Rhythm. Part I, Seven Strings*) and in 1971. Together with Constantine Bida, Vera Rich published the book *Lesya Ukrainka: Life and Work* (Bida, 1968). It included the biography of the poet and her poetic dramas *The Stone Host, Cassandra, The Orgy*, and others. In 1993 Vera Rich presented her translation of *Babylonian Captivity* (Ukrainka, 1993) and a year later *The Ukrainian Review* published Rich's version of the fairy-drama *Forest Song*. ***The Ukrainian Quarterly***, published by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, presented the English translation of *Her Excellency* in the version of Vera Rich in 1992. In the *Introduction*

to the translation, we read:

*In Her Excellency Lesya Ukrainka expressed her deep patriotism and grief for the fate of her native land, and presented her views on Ukrainian independence and national and cultural identity. Although set in 17<sup>th</sup> century Ukraine, the ideas expressed in the drama can easily be related to the problems of Lesya Ukrainka's own age. For these reasons publication of Her Excellency was banned by both the tsarist and communist regimes (Ukrainka, 1992).*

***The Ukrainian Canadian***, founded by John Weir, introduced translations of Ukrainian writers to the English-speaking audience in 1947. John Weir was born into a family of Ukrainian immigrants in Canada. He was a member of the Communist Party of Canada. From 1974 he worked as a correspondent for the newspaper *Canadian Tribune* in Moscow. John Weir's translation of Lesia Ukrainka's dramatic poem *In the Catacombs* (Ukrainka, 1971) appeared in Kyiv. In 1971 a special edition of *The Ukrainian Canadian* was dedicated to the anniversary of Lesia Ukrainka. Her poems were published in the magazine during the years: 1981 (*The Lake's Asleep*, translated by Maria Skrypnyk); 1982 (*Epilogue, To Nature, Fa*, translated by Gladys Evans); 1984 (*When I am weary of life's daily round...*, translated by Gladys Evans) and 1986 (*My Path*, translated by Maria Skrypnyk). In 1972 Gladys Evans published her interpretation of the poem *On a Motif from Mickiewicz* (Ukrainka, 1972). She also translated *The Forest Song* (Ukrainka, 1985). The collection of Evans' translations of Lesia Ukrainka's works became a part of the bilingual book "Надія. Hope" issued in Kyiv in 1975. Larysa Onyshkevych underlined the Soviet influence in the selection, translations, and interpretations of the poet's works in this volume. In particular, she remarked: "Regrettably, both in terms of selection and translations, this publication leaves much to be desired and does not compare favorably with the versions by Vera Rich (published in Canada). The forty-seven poems here are uneven in their quality of translation, and many sound quite rough. When reading the translations, one may wonder whether the original was actually written by the eminent poet herself" (Onyshkevych, 1982: 726).

Among the dramatic poems written by Lesia Ukrainka, translators favoured *Forest Song*, *Babylonian Captivity*, and *The Noble Woman*. The last two attracted the translators' attention because of their strong political messages: the duty of an artist under a foreign dictatorship, political and spiritual captivity. *The Noble Woman* was strictly banned during Soviet times, contrary to the Western world, where it was widely popularized. In this context we can highlight the ideological nature of translation. Other poems aroused interest as they deal with the topics of world history. For example, the plot of the dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* (Ukrainka, 1988) (the English translation was by Roxolana Stojko-Lozynskyj) is set in New England and describes the puritan community.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we may argue that Lesia Ukrainka's oeuvre was popularized in Canada, Great Britain, and the USA. The translations were mostly published in magazines and journals that circulated in the Ukrainian communities and as a result they did not influence the mainstream Anglophone literatures. Translators who were not of Ukrainian descent and decided to render the Ukrainian poems into English were impressed by the charm and



musicality of the language. Their translations were stimulated by personal interests and preferences. However, most of Lesia Ukrainka's translations were accomplished by the Ukrainian diaspora. Through their translations they tried to forge their national identity, to preserve their cultural heritage, to pass it to the next generations, and to introduce their culture into the broad cultural paradigm of the host country. The ideological battle between the Soviet interpretations of Lesia Ukrainka's works and Western literary criticism revolved around the questions of her style and political views. There are many articles in English dealing with comparative studies of Lesia Ukrainka's dramatic poems. The critical reception of Lesia Ukrainka's works has been presented in periodicals such as: *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, *The Ukrainian Review*, *The Ukrainian Canadian*, *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, *Comparative Literature*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, *Slavistica*, and *Studia Ucrainica*. They were written by scholars who had Ukrainian roots (Em. Revyuk, C. Bida, J. Rydnycky, V. Smyrniv, A. Shum, O. Prokopiv, W. Zyla). They opposed the Soviet interpretations of Lesia Ukrainka's poems and tried to incorporate them into the broad Western cultural discourse.

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