

Ukrainian Poetry in Translation

Special Feature—Part I



Welcome to our Special Feature dedicated to Ukrainian poetry in translation! Although National Translation Month happens in September each year, we couldn't wait that long. We felt it was urgent and of utmost importance to highlight these voices rising against the invasion of a sovereign country *now*, when Ukraine is under attack, in a show of support, solidarity, and strength.

The response to our call was enthusiastic, so we decided to split the feature into two parts. The first installment includes the poetry of Lyuba Yakimchuk translated by Oksana Maksymchuk, Max Rosochinsky, and Svetlana Lavochkina, Natalka Bilotserkivets translated by Ali Kinsella and Dzviniia Orłowsky, Iya Kiva and Lyudmyla Khersonska translated by Katherine E. Young, Mykola Bazhan and Yevhen Pluzhnyk translated by Oksana Rosenblum, Vasyl Makhno translated by Olena Jennings, Dmitry Blizniuk translated by Sergey Gerasimov, and Serhi Zhadan translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps.

Our gratitude goes to Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky, editors of the groundbreaking anthology [*Words for War*](#) (Academic Studies Press, 2018), which includes many of these poems, to the editors at [Lost Horse Press](#) for their unwavering support, as well as to all the editors of journals, collections, and presses where some of these poems were first published. Many thanks to all the translators who helped spread the word and sent us poems in just a few days, and to our Translations Editor, Dana Serea, who edited this special feature.

We'd also like to request your support for these tremendous poets and their translators. Many of them are still stuck in Ukraine, dealing with unthinkable difficulties—so please consider donating to the organizations below. Please keep sharing Ukrainian poetry, using [#TranslationMonth](#), and stand united against the horrors of this war.

[Red Cross](#)

[Help Ukraine Win](#)

In addition, our Romanian-American editors recommend donating to [Immigration Research Forum](#) and [Blue Heron Foundation](#), two organizations with volunteers on the border with Romanian and Moldova, helping Ukrainian refugees.

Thank you all for being part of this project. [#StandWithUkraine](#)

—*The Editors*

Ukrainian Poetry in Translation

Special Feature—Part I

Lyuba Yakimchuk

Translated from the Ukrainian by Oksana Maksymchuk, Max Rosochinsky, and Svetlana Lavochkina

Poems from the collection *Apricots of Donbas* ([Lost Horse Press](#), 2021)
also included in the anthology *Words for War* (Academic Studies Press, 2018)

decomposition

nothing changes on the eastern front
well, I've had it up to here
at the moment of death, metal gets hot
and people get cold

don't talk to me about Luhansk
it's long since turned into *hansk*
Lu had been razed to the ground
to the crimson pavement

my friends are held hostage
and I can't reach them, I can't *do netsk*
to pull them out of the basements
from under the rubble

yet here you are, writing poems
ideally smooth poems
high-minded gilded poems
beautiful as embroidery

there's no poetry about war
just decomposition
only letters remain
and they all make a single sound — rrr

Pervomaisk has been split into *pervo* and *maisk*
into particles in primeval flux
war is over again yet peace has not come

and where's my *deb alts evo*?
no poet will be born there again
no human being

I stare into the horizon
it has narrowed into a triangle
sunflowers dip their heads in the field
black and dried out, like me
I have gotten so very old
no longer Lyuba
just a *ba*



prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven
of the full moon
and the hollow sun

shield from death my parents
whose house stands in the line of fire
and who won't abandon it
like a tomb

shield my husband
on the other side of war
as if on the other side of a river
pointing his gun at a breast
he used to kiss

I carry on me this bulletproof vest
and cannot take it off
it clings to me like a skin

I carry inside me his child
and cannot force it out
for he owns my body through it

I carry within me a Motherland
and cannot puke it out
for it circulates like blood
through my heart

Our daily bread give to the hungry
and let them stop devouring one another

our light give to the deceived
and let them gain clarity

eyebrows

no-no, I won't put on a black dress
black shoes and a black shawl
I'll come to you all in white—
if I have a chance to come
and I'll be wearing nine white skirts
one beneath the other
I'll sit down in front of the mirror
(it'll be hung up with a cloth)
strike up a match
it'll burn out and I
will moisten it with my tongue
and draw black eyebrows
over my own, also black
then I'll have two pairs of eyebrows
mine and yours above them
no-no, I won't put on a black dress
I'll put on your black eyebrows
on me

knife

with relatives, we share table and graves
with enemies—only graves
one such candidate comes
to share a grave with me
says to me:

—I'm bigger than you
I'm harder than you
I'm tougher than you
sticks knife after knife into my stomach and below
knife after knife
his pressure springlike
but

he is smaller than us
he is softer than us
because he's only got one knife
and there are plenty of us
at the table
and each has their own "but"
and each has their own cut

says to me:
—I'm a sharper blade cut you
I'm a thicker blade cut you
chip, chop, chip, chop
the last one is dead

hold on they say hold on
and we hold onto our table
from the gun muzzle
we all drink our bullets
we pour our enemy one, too

Lyuba Yakimchuk is a Ukrainian poet, screenwriter, and journalist. She is the author of several full-length poetry collections, including *Like FASHION* and *Apricots of Donbas*, and the film script for *The Building of the Word*. Yakimchuk's awards include the International Slavic Poetic Award and the international "Coronation of the Word" literary contest. Her writing has appeared in magazines in Ukraine, Sweden, Germany, Poland, and Israel, and has been translated into eleven languages. She performs in a musical and poetic duet with the Ukrainian double-bass player Mark Tokar; their projects include *Apricots of Donbas* and *Women, Smoke, and Dangerous Things*. Her poetry has been performed by Mariana Sadovska (Cologne) and improvised by vocalist Olesya Zdorovetska (Dublin). Yakimchuk also works as a cultural manager. In 2012 she organized the "Semenko Year" project dedicated to the Ukrainian futurists, and she curated the 2015 literary program Cultural Forum "Donkult" (2015). She was a scholar in the "Gaude Polonia" program of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Poland). In 2015 Kiev's *New Time* magazine listed Yakimchuk among the one hundred most influential people of culture in Ukraine.

Oksana Maksymchuk is the author of two collections of poetry in the Ukrainian language, *Xenia* and *Lovy*. She holds a PhD in philosophy from Northwestern University and has recently been named Writer in Residence at the Institute for Advanced Study at the Central European University.

Max Rosochinsky is a scholar, translator, and poet from Simferopol, Crimea. With Maksymchuk, he co-edited *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine*. He holds a PhD from Northwestern University. His work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.

Svetlana Lavochkina is a Ukrainian born novelist, poet, and translator residing in Germany. She was runner-up for the Paris Literary Prize, and finalist in both the Tibor & Jones Pageturner Prize and the Million Writers Award. Her latest novel in verse, *Carbon*, was published by Lost Horse Press in 2020.

Natalka Bilotserkivets

Translated by Ali Kinsella and Dzvinia Orłowsky

Reprinted from *Eccentric Days of Hope and Sorrow: Poems by Natalka Bilotserkivets*, translated from the Ukrainian by Ali Kinsella and Dzvinia Orłowsky ([Lost Horse Press](#), 2021).

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SKIN GETS DRIER AND THINS

Skin gets drier and thins—
as does life—on contours of recently
familiar faces. All of youth
is crazy faith, like the wistful cry
of a lost animal.

And thirst and contemplation and the cramped
poverty of food shops, cafeterias;
the freshly painted spring
of April ravines from far-off outskirts—
everywhere, signs of impassable loss.

Someone will become the humus of native fields.
Others will fill the city waste sites
where a factory crowns housing
with a crematorium pipe—
and the path to heaven flutters like a banner
and a sarcophagus shines over hell.

NIGHT PLANES

Overhead, night planes fly past unseen
while snow falls on city streets.
At 1 am, pale streetlights die
and last trams disappear . . .

Now

only sleeping buildings remain
among ill-lit trees. But the heart is hot—
a warm lump of living earth.



Iya Kiva

Translated from the Russian by Katherine E. Young

is there hot war in the tap
is there cold war in the tap
how is it that there's absolutely no war
it was promised for after lunch
we saw the announcement with our own eyes
"war will arrive at fourteen hundred hours"

and it's already three hours without war
six hours without war
what if there's no war by the time night falls
we can't do laundry without war
can't make dinner
can't drink tea plain without war

and it's already eight days without war
we smell bad
our wives don't want to lie in bed with us
the children have forgotten to smile and complain
why did we always think we'd never run out of war

let's start, yes, let's start visiting neighbors to borrow war
on the other side of our green park
start fearing to spill war in the road
start considering life without war a temporary hardship

in these parts it's considered unnatural
if war doesn't course through the pipes
into every house
into every throat

First published in Asymptote

when they kill my father i dream
i'm surrounded
by uprooted trees
muddy waters

coming up to the very edge
of the second story balcony
one step more until its sepia embrace

and it's really beautiful
like in a Tarkovsky film

and to the right
the earth rises in mountains



don't even think of leaving the house

either you're a raft
or a carpenter
reverse perspective

father father why hast thou forsaken me

First published in Asymptote

[Untitled] “you think you're turning on Bach”

you think you're turning on Bach,
in the speakers are military marches,
you think that's Jascha Heifetz,
you hear the plaintive whistling of shells,
the violin sounds coarser,
the coloratura soprano of war
is an octave higher,
blood fills your ears,
the bow's been killed

First published in *Words Without Borders*

Iya Kiva (b. 1984) is the award-winning author of two poetry collections, *A Little Further from Heaven* (*Podal'she ot raya*, 2018) and *The First Page of Winter* (*Persha storinka zimy*, 2019); she writes in both Russian and Ukrainian. Kiva's poems have appeared in English translation in *Asymptote*, *Literary Hub*, *The White Review*, *Words Without Borders*, and others.

Katherine E. Young is the author of the poetry collections *Woman Drinking Absinthe* and *Day of the Border Guards* (2014 Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize finalist) and the editor of *Written in Arlington*. She is the award-winning translator of work by Anna Starobinets (memoir), Akram Aylisli (fiction), and numerous Russophone poets. Young was named a 2017 NEA translation fellow; from 2016-2018, she served as the inaugural Poet Laureate for Arlington, Virginia.

Lyudmyla Khersonska

Translated from the Russian by Katherine E. Young

* * *

The whole soldier doesn't suffer —
it's just the legs, the arms,
just blowing snow,
just meager rain.
The whole soldier shrugs off hurt —
it's just missile systems "HAIL" and
"BEECH,"
just bullets on the wing,
just happiness ahead.
Just meteorological pogroms,
geo-Herostratos wannabes,
just the girl with the pointer
poking the map in the stomach.
Just thunder, lightning,
just dreadful losses,
just the day with a dented helmet,
just God, who doesn't protect.

First published in Words Without Borders



* * *

that's it: you yourself choose how you live,
whose hand to shake,
for whom the bell tolls, for whom you grieve,
whom you'll run to save.
as in a solfège class, you're the one who listens,
picks out the false note, conducts one-two-three.
you lift up your head — flocks of angels sail the heavens,
cranes in v-formation, see.
life passed without war, war passed to the side,
but forgot something, left it, turned back mid-stride.
then you yourself choose how you'll handle war,
you select the weather — hurricane, hail?
you slam the window closed.
all this was long ago...

First published in Poem

* * *

I planted a camellia in the yard.
I wanted to be a lady, not a war-ravaged rag,
to cast down my lashes, let fall a light glove,
put on red beads, patent-leather boots,
I listen: are there explosions,
does someone stomp the earth...

First published in Tupelo Quarterly

* * *

One night, a humanitarian convoy arrived in her dream.
Legs drawn to her chest, head under the sheet,
she sleeps on her right side, back braced by the wall,
the way people sleep during humanitarian wars.
The same exact way all tribes sleep at all times,
waking only because of silence, that awful silence,
during that silence, don't open the gates —
behind them, little humanitarians, heads facing the wrong way.

First published in Tupelo Quarterly

* * *

the enemy never ends,
he's just trouble, just trouble
that spreads like lichen on the brain,
like moss underfoot,
the enemy's there: where your own folk are offended, where they're humbled,
the enemy's there: where you can't keep quiet.
the place you wanted to explore, protect, shield,
that's where the enemy appears, plants his hoof in the earth,
to that hoof, all living things are just blood, death, earth.
from kremlin to kremlin
to Crimea itself, to Crimea
stretches moss, moss, moss,
but the enemy says cross, cross, cross
and people shrug their shoulders, turn aside, and walk right by

First published in Hayden's Ferry Review

* * *

every seventh child of ten — he's a shame
to give up on, but troublesome to maintain —
digs a pit for the next, who can't be saved.

the brothers who remain — nine little Indians —
all want to stay alive, yet want to kill,
and doing as they wish, pitch into that pit.

every teenage moron who goes to class
mocks the teacher sideways, then to his face,
every teenage moron, he hates your ass.

for every moron there's a diploma, photo,
certificate, paid vacation, doctor's note,
but what he really loves: when things explode.

every fool who can, grips his gun tight,
refuses to give up, dives into the fight —
who goes there, halt — oaths crackle, flare, ignite.

who do you want to shoot? who goes there, halt!
heartsick, knife in your brother's back, yawn
of the pit — you don't want to, but in you fall.

First published in Poem

* * *

you really don't remember Grandpa — but let's say you do.
he walked on one leg, because the other leg
came unbuckled and lay nights on the bed's edge
watching over the room, many rooms.
when you're a youngster, short and small,
when every large object seems to be Grandpa
— you really don't remember Grandpa — Grandpa's always
coming closer, closer in winter than in summer.

First published in Poem

Lyudmyla Khersonska is a war refugee from Odesa, Ukraine. She's the author of two books, *Vse svoi*, named one of the ten best poetry books of 2011, and *Tyl'naia-litsevaia* (2015). She has won the Voloshin competition, among other awards. Evenings devoted to her poetry have been held in Moscow, Kiev, Lviv, Munich, and New York; her poems have been translated into Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and German. In English, her poems appear in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poem*, *Poetry International*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *Words Without Borders*, where she was recognized as one of "33 International Women Writers Who Are Bold for Change." These translations were commissioned for *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine*, eds. Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky, Academic Studies Press and Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2017.

Katherine E. Young is the author of the poetry collections *Woman Drinking Absinthe* and *Day of the Border Guards* (2014 Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize finalist) and the editor of *Written in Arlington*. She is the award-winning translator of work by Anna Starobinets (memoir), Akram Aylisli (fiction), and numerous Russophone poets. Young was named a 2017 NEA translation fellow; from 2016-2018, she served as the inaugural Poet Laureate for Arlington, Virginia.

Mykola Bazhan

Translated by Oksana Rosenblum

Excerpt from **Conversation of Hearts**

From the collection *Budivli*, Kharkiv, 1929

...In foreign dumps, like a starving dog,
Your Rus' expired.
Your bailiff, holy fool Jesus
Won't hover over me in a wreath of dog-roses.
Holy policeman
And the bailiff of miserable souls,
The angry lord of Malyuta¹ and Rasputin²,
Won't prevail over me.
I won't follow him
Into a dull penitential jail.
I mock, ridicule, and laugh
At the custodian of humility and ethics.
The prison guard christened with the neat
Transparent word – Rus'.
Your brothel and your pub –
 For me are not a temple;
The filthy tables –
 Not my confessionals.
How I abhor
 Your sad akathist hymns³,
Fake prayers
 Of your laymen's faith.
Hold your heart's protruding form
In your powerless and lustful hands!
You drag your ugly, rotten shadow,
 beneath your feet,
Like a bunch of blue bloodless guts.
All your words are but a rustle of inertia
Displacing people's hearts.
Every heart squashed into the ribs -
Like a nail hammered in a house.
You claim that I am yours, and swear to god – I am ready
To break your traitor's heart in two, and throw it
To the dogs, to drink the evil blood,
If there is a drop
 Of your evil blood in there.
I know – you are alive,
 I know – that you did not bite the dust,
I scream and scream at you:
 How long
Will the hunched hearts be limping, terrified,
On three-foot floors,
Pitiful coffin of a home,



¹ Malyuta Skuratov (d. 1573): one of the notorious leaders of *Oprichnina*, a state policy implemented during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, between 1565 and 1572. The policy included mass repression of the *boyars* (Russian aristocracy), public executions and confiscation of property.

² Grigorii Rasputin (1869-1916): Russian mystic and self-proclaimed healer, who gained considerable yet controversial influence on the family of Tsar Nicolas II.

³ *Akathist* hymn: (Greek: "not seated"): a type of hymn recited by the Eastern Orthodox Christians. It is dedicated to the holy event or Holy Trinity and is an important part of the Easter services.

Cramming words down narrow throats?
 The wild, desperate, and convulsive silence,
 a black hole into eternity, will break under their feet.
 Sweat and mucus gush from their mouths,
 Bulging like deep black circles...
 All roads tied like a noose
 For those little jesuses, *khlysty*⁴, and preachers.
 Placemen, murderers, and pimps,
 Slaves of a slave and servants of a servant,
 Sons of Russian grand hysteria,
 Of pan-Russian worldwide *ennui*.
 You – universal, all-human hyena,
 Expire in a closed kennel!
 She raises up in a fire and storm, challenged,
 A different Ukraine and a different Rus'...
 What on earth is the use
 Of all your screams, pain, and hatred?
 The lamp's radiance walks by in silence,
 Like a somnambular.
 One can hear the moisture of the steam
 And how the vapor of darkness
 Congeals into a shadow.
 The awakened shadow dances
 On the bones.
 Hideous darkness
 Cannot conceal the glow of dull anguish.
 And Dostoyevs'kyi with his withered arms,
 Lifts his humped forehead like a boulder.
 His temples wink like ardent animals,
 His mouth chews unspoken words...
 Heart,
 My quiet heart, -
 The one who thinks himself infallible,
 Has fallen.

Mykola Bazhan (1904 – 1983), one of the most important representatives of Ukrainian literary renaissance of the 1920s, was born into an educated family of Polish-Lithuanian roots in Kamyanets'-Podil'skyi in Ukraine. He was associated with the literary groups *Nova Generatsiya* and *VAPLITE*, and edited the journal *Kino*. In the 1920s and 1930s, Bazhan emerged as a futurist but eventually embraced romantic Expressionism, with frequent references to the turbulent Ukrainian history. During his extensive career spanning some six decades, Bazhan was prolific as a poet, literary critic, translator, editor, art collector, and a political and cultural figure. In the 1930s, Stalin allegedly saved Bazhan's life from the purges by awarding him for the critically acclaimed translation of Shota Rustaveli's poem *Vytiaz' u tyhrovii shkuri* (The Knight in the Tiger Skin, 1927). In the 1950s – 1960s, as a high-profile political functionary of the Ukrainian SSR, Bazhan used every opportunity to protect and advance Ukrainian culture. Despite his fact that Bazhan not only survived the purges but eventually became an influential political figure, his early works continued to be repressed until the early 1990s (most famously, his epic poem "Blind Bards, written and partially destroyed in 1930-1931).

Oksana Rosenblum is an art history researcher and translator based in New York City. She was born and raised in Ukraine but calls NYC her home since 2003. Her poetry translations from Ukrainian, essays, and book reviews appeared in National Translation Month, Versopolis, Ukrainian Weekly, and Asymptote. She co-edited a bilingual volume of the early poetry of Mykola Bazhan, an important and prolific Ukrainian poet of the 20th century (Academic Studies Press, 2020).

⁴ *Khlysty* (Russian; singular: *khlyst*): an underground sect that split off Russian Orthodox Church in mid-17th century and whose representatives were known for ascetic and ecstatic rituals.

Yevhen Pluzhnyk

Translated by Oksana Rosenblum

From collection *Days* (Дні, 1926)

She wept...Day's tired back
Hid behind the rooftops of cottages.
All I remembered was just this little line,
"Enough, don't you cry".

Enough? Don't you cry? How bizarre,
How hollow these words come across!
Wish I could've thrown my heart to the ground!
"Gosh!" —

She would have screamed...In a blink of an eye
Would have seen my steps on infinite roads...
Day's tired back was hunching
Over the curl of rooftops.

Tough luck – hey you, to the wall!
Leaned against the porch...
Remembered just this: his wife
Has nothing to eat in the morning.

Felt neither pity nor pain.
Saw the revolver aimed at him...
As if the role was scripted
For a dull show.

All he could think – in the morning
My wife has no bread...
Porch.
Corpse by the wall.



Yevhen Pluzhnyk [Євген Плужник] (1898, Voronezh guberniya, Russian Empire -1936, Solovets Islands, USSR) was one of the most powerful lyrical voices in Ukrainian poetry of the 1920s. In 1923–1928 he belonged to the Kyiv writers' groups Aspys, Lanka, and MARS and contributed poetry to several Soviet Ukrainian journals. During his lifetime he published only two poetry collections, *Dni* (Days) in 1926 and *Rannia osin'* (Early Autumn) in 1927; a third, *Rivnovaha* (Equilibrium), appeared posthumously in an émigré edition in Augsburg in 1948. Pluzhnyk's work was criticized by the Soviet literary establishment for its contemplative, laconic, and frequently gloomy lyricism and depiction of revolutionary atrocities of the Civil War (1918-1921), famine, and economic inequality of the early Soviet reality. In March 1935 he was sentenced by a military tribunal to death by firing squad. The verdict was commuted to ten years' imprisonment in the Solovets Islands in the White Sea, where he soon died of tuberculosis.

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Vasyl Makhno

Translated by Olena Jennings

TO MY HOMELAND

my homeland – why are you so sweet?
a spring magpie chirping
a cuckoo counting my summers – a turtledove cooing
smoke beyond the buildings, beyond the forest...
Antonych is with his fox
Shevchenko is standing on a cliff

my homeland – why are you like a widow entombed?
and what are you guilty of?
for our people's germination – our flowering over the ages
no – mother – your boots are holding ground...
Antonych is with his fox
Shevchenko is standing on a cliff

my homeland – why have we had to
defend you and battle for so long
why do we need widows and orphans – blood and sweat?
drawn boundary lines intersecting
Antonych is with his fox
Shevchenko is standing on a cliff

my homeland – a soldier and a widow
Yaroslava in Putyvli is a cuckoo bird
I will command my aching heart today: be quiet
spring fog blankets the waters...
Antonych is with his fox
Shevchenko is standing on a cliff

my homeland of war annals and chronicles
the enemy seeks to bury you soon
I say to them – stop shut up
you will be ours now and rightly so
for Antonych is with his fox
and Shevchenko is menacingly silent

WEDDING

I look: a silver carp swims up
in a camisole of scales, obviously a prince
who woke up from winter and is happy for spring
swimming between the stems of slender reeds
cutting through the river like knives
cut through bread and a winter's song

from starvation for oxygen and loss of home
in the company of orphans and unfortunate widows
in the warm clay, in a robe of silt
in the ice-covered sleepy river
in the sonorous sounds of hammering hammers
in the secret language that we forgot



well of course when spring comes
he looks for a princess, in the same river
schools of ruffel and perch awaken
and also princes and probably poets
the river will have to carry on its shoulders
itself and everyone in spring's streams

and as soon as the ice starts to melt
the prince will curl his moustache and beard
and clean his camisole embroidered with silver
and consider the money and dowery
“and if you do not agree, it's the monastery for me,
believe me – I swear – Margarita”

he will also promise her mountains of gold:
“after the wedding, you'll see the sea with me
and our life will be happy and eternal”
he will say again to the young princess:
“I will be a faithful husband until death”
“and anyone will testify to that for me.”

and relatives will gather and say – a widower
that his pockets and wallet are empty
that he only has the silver camisole
that she accepted the ring in error
they understand that spring is coming
or are they kicking her out of the house?

failing to convince, I see: the prince and princess
their silver thread intertwines into one
anything can happen in a poet's poems
I can say that I was at one of the weddings
when carp fins blossomed in the water
happiness for you, Margarita!

Vasyl Makhno is a Ukrainian poet, prose writer, essayist, and translator. He is the author of fourteen collections of poetry and most recently the book of poems *One Sail House* (2021). He has also published a book of short stories, *The House in Baiting Hollow* (2015), a novel, *The Eternal Calendar* (2019), and four books of essays, *The Gertrude Stein Memorial Cultural and Recreation Park* (2006), *Horn of Plenty* (2011), *Suburbs and Borderland* (2019), and *Biking along the Ocean* (2020). Makhno's works have been widely translated into many languages; his books have been published in Germany, Israel, Poland, Romania, Serbia and the US. Two poetry collections, *Thread and Other New York Poems* (2009) and *Winter Letters* (2011), were published in English translation. He is the recipient of Kovaliv Fund Prize (2008), Serbia's International *Povele Morave* Prize in Poetry (2013), the BBC Book of the Year Award (2015), and Ukrainian-Jewish Literary Prize “Encounter” (2020). Makhno currently lives with his family in New York City.

Olena Jennings is the author of the poetry collection *Songs from an Apartment* (2017) and the chapbook *Memory Project* (2018.) Her novel *Temporary Shelter* was released in 2021 from Cervena Barva Press. Her translations of Vasyl Makhno's poetry have been published in *Consequence*, *Asymptote*, *LA Review of Books*, and other journals. Her translation of Vasyl Makhno's collection *Paper Bridge* is forthcoming from Plamen Press. She is the founder and curator of the Poets of Queens reading series.

Dmitry Blizniuk

Translated by Sergey Gerasimov

My First Drafts

My first drafts – rusty catamarans, --
I will never return to you.
A confident foot will never rest on your pedals,
and the river has become shallow –
just a mirror-like soap sliver of magic.
The sharp-pointed army of reed has been smothering the current,
which is already slow like a sperm whale's heartbeat. Do you
remember?
We are tiny ants on a beach
and a long sticky tongue of an anteater, wrapping around us,
pulls us in with a speed of happiness, of a sunny day.
We are sprinkled with immortality, as if with a mosquito
repellent spray.
As if a sorcerer's wagon drove in a puddle
and splashed magic all over us,
kids with a ball and a fishing rod.
Oh, a care-free time of first drafts!
You lie in a night field,
like on the back of a black horse,
and the stars tremble above you –
herrings taken in nets on the coast.
Or a nameless evening gets swollen with colors and lights;
a cathedral in the glow of sunset looks like a one-eared rabbit
flooded with carrot juice. Then darkness condenses;
headlights slide slowly along the road – ice skaters that run faster, faster,
holding their arms behind their backs,
until they crash into the wall, and then,
overturning gracefully, keep sliding, now on the sky,
dissolving in the purple ripples...
First drafts of people, first drafts of poems.
Mistakes that seem too wasteful to burn.
And Bradbury with a flamethrower sits on a chair in an empty room,
leafing through a thick stack of A4-sized sheets of paper...



Dmitry Blizniuk is an author from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Pinch*, *Salamander*, *Willow Springs*, *Grub Street*, *Spillway* and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of "The Red Forest" (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine. Member of PEN America. Poets & Writers Directory: http://www.pw.org/directory/writers/dmitry_blizniuk

Sergey Gerasimov is a Ukraine-based writer, poet, and translator of poetry. Among other things, he has studied psychology. He is the author of several academic articles on cognitive activity. When he is not writing, he leads a simple life of teaching, playing tennis, and kayaking down beautiful Ukrainian rivers. The largest book publishing companies in Russia, such as AST, Eksmo, and others have published his books. His stories and poems written in English have appeared in *Adbusters*, *Clarksword Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, *J Journal*, *The Bitter Oleander*, and *Acumen*, among many others. His last book is "Oasis" published by *Gypsy Shadow*. The poetry he translated has been nominated for several Pushcart Prizes.

Serhiy Zhadan

Translated from the Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps

Published in *What We Live For/What We Die For* (Yale University Press, 2019)

TAKE ONLY WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT

Take only what is most important. Take the letters.
Take only what you can carry.
Take the icons and the embroidery, take the silver,
Take the wooden crucifix and the golden replicas.

Take some bread, the vegetables from the garden, then leave.
We will never return again.
We will never see our city again.
Take the letters, all of them, every last piece of bad news.

We will never see our corner store again.
We will never drink from that dry well again.
We will never see familiar faces again.
We are refugees. We'll run all night.

We will run past fields of sunflowers.
We will run from dogs, rest with cows.
We'll scoop up water with our bare hands,
sit waiting in camps, annoying the dragons of war.

You will not return and friends will never come back.
There will be no smoky kitchens, no usual jobs,
There will be no dreamy lights in sleepy towns,
no green valleys, no suburban wastelands.

The sun will be a smudge on the window of a cheap train,
rushing past cholera pits covered with lime.
There will be blood on women's heels,
tired guards on borderlands covered with snow,

a postman with empty bags shot down,
a priest with a hapless smile hung by his ribs,
the quiet of a cemetery, the noise of a command post,
and unedited lists of the dead,

so long that there won't be enough time
to check them for your own name.



HEADPHONES

Sasha, a quiet drunk, an esoteric, a poet,
spent the entire summer in the city.
When the shooting began – he was surprised,
started watching the news, then stopped.
He walks around the city with headsets on,
listening to golden oldies,
as he stumbles into burned out cars,
blown-up bodies.

What will survive from the history
of the world in which we lived,
will be the words and music of a few geniuses,
who desperately tried to warn us,
tried to explain, but failed to explain anything
or save anyone;
these geniuses lie in cemeteries
and out of their rib cages
grow flowers and grass.
Nothing else will remain –
only their music and songs, a voice
that forces you to love.

You can choose to never turn off this music.
Listen to the cosmos, shut your eyes.
Think about whales in the ocean at night.
Hear nothing else.
See nothing else.
Feel nothing else.
Except, of course, for the smell,
the smell of corpses.

Serhiy Zhadan was born in the Luhansk Region of Ukraine and educated in Kharkiv where he lives today. He is the most popular poet today in Ukraine and the author of twelve books of poetry that have earned him numerous national and European awards. His prose works include *Voroshilovgrad*, *Mesopotamia* and *The Orphanage*. Zhadan's books have been translated into English, German, French, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Belarusian, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Russian. He is the front man for the band Zhadan and the Dogs, and has collaborated with Yara Arts Group since 2002. Yale University Press published his selected poems as *What We Live For/What We Die For*, translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps in 2019.

Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps have received the Agni Poetry Translation Prize, the National Theatre Translation Fund Award, and thirteen translation grants from the New York State Council on the Arts. *What We Live For / What We Die For: Selected Poems by Serhiy Zhadan*, with translations by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps, was published by Yale University Press in 2019. Their translations have also appeared in many literary journals and anthologies, and are integral to the theatre pieces created by Yara Arts Group.

Virlana Tkacz heads the Yara Arts Group and has directed almost forty original shows at La MaMa Theatre in New York, as well as in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Bishkek, Ulaanbaatar, and Ulan Ude. She has received an NEA Poetry Translation Fellowship for her translations with Wanda Phipps. www.yaraartsgroup.net

Wanda Phipps is the author of the books *Mind Honey*, *Field of Wanting: Poems of Desire*, and *Wake-Up Calls: 66 Morning Poems*. She received a New York Foundation for the Arts Poetry Fellowship. Her poems have appeared in over one-hundred literary magazines and numerous anthologies.