

Reviews

Yuri Andrukhovych, *Perverzion*, translated from the Ukrainian and with an Introduction by Michael M. Naydan, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005. Writings from an Unbound Europe. xiv+328 pp.

Juri Andruchowytsh, *Zwölf Ringe: Roman*, aus dem Ukrainischen von Sabine Stöhr, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005. 307 pp.

The two decades since the mid-1980s have witnessed the appearance of much important Ukrainian fiction. Valerii Shevchuk's historical and philosophical novels, as well as his whimsical explorations of gender relations; the gloomy hyperrealism of Oles Ulianenko, Yevhen Pashkovsky, Viacheslav Medvid and, most recently, Serhii Zhadan; the experimental work, postmodern in outlook and style, of Yuriy Izdryk and Taras Prokhasko; the emphatically feminist prose of Oksana Zabuzhko and Yevheniia Kononenko; the humorously parodic short works of Volodymyr Dibrova, Bohdan Zholdak and Yuriy Vynnychuk – these have drawn the contours of a vibrant new Ukrainian literary scene. And yet, whether because of the long colonial shadow that still obscures the non-Russian cultures of what was the USSR, or because of the complex economics that governs the world market for high culture, no Ukrainian writer of recent times has achieved the international recognition of a Kiš or a Pavić, let alone a Kundera, Lem or Solzhenitsyn. Against this background, the appearance in English and German, in highly visible publishing houses, of novels by Yuri Andrukhovych acquires the significance of a debut for contemporary Ukrainian high culture, as Ruslana's Eurovision success in 2004 was a debut for Ukrainian popular culture and the Orange Revolution for Ukrainian televisual mass politics.

Andrukhovych (b. 1960) has in Ukraine a reputation that rests as much on the grace and sophistication of his poetry and his often parodic, always finely crafted prose as it does on the scandals attending the iconoclasm of some of his works, most memorably his short novel *Recreations* (1992). *Perverziia* (1996), whose plot revolves around the participation of the itinerant intellectual Perfetsky in a Venetian conference born of the spirit of cultural theory, represents the apex of Andrukhovych's postmodern play with ideas and

aesthetic forms. Shimmering with allusion, parodying one genre convention after another (the song, the conference program, the catechism, the opera buffa, the Bible, the translation of Rilke and the itemised expense report, to name but a few), sharing while satirising the deconstructive rhetoric of Western academe of the 1990s, *Perverziia* presents the translator with a gruelling task. Michael Naydan, a professor at Penn State's Slavic Department and well established as a translator from Ukrainian and Russian, chooses to aim for approximate equivalence of effect rather than dogmatic loyalty to the original. In an introduction useful also for its biographical and contextual information, Naydan describes his translation as 'one that seeks to find functional equivalents of the original in the target language' without seeking, as adherents of one strand of literary translation theory demand, to 'domesticate' the text (p. xiii). Nonetheless, Naydan succeeds in producing an English text that is engaging and readable.

There are, of course, effects that simply cannot be replicated in English: Andrukhovych's play with the transliteration of Ukrainian into Latin letters, or with the difference between contemporary Ukrainian and the vocabulary and orthography used by post-war Ukrainian émigrés. Sometimes the translator takes his quest for non-literal equivalence too far – why, for example, increase the satirical temperature by translating the fictional newspaper names *Bazar-vokzal* and *Kievskie dela*¹ as the *Daily Blurb* and *Kyiv Stuff* (p. 7), while omitting to signal the significant fact that these titles are in Russian? But on the whole, Naydan does well, as the following example, bristling with colloquialisms, illustrates:

Я влип, влип, влип – я беззастережно, категорично влип, я пропав з головою й руками, згорів, залетів і втраскався. Мені настає кінець, хана, край, finale apotheoso, година X, зоряна година.²

I'm sunk, sunk, sunk – pell-mell, categorically, I'm sunk, I was lost head over heels, I'm trashed, I'm burned up and crashed. The end awaits me, kaput, the edge, finale apotheoso, the X-hour, the starry hour (p. 70).

Like any book from a culture likely to be unfamiliar to the target audience, *Perverziia* tempts its translator also to become an annotator. Wisely,

¹ Yuri Andrukhovych, *Perverziia: Roman* (Ivano-Frankivs'k: Vydavnytstvo "Lileia-NV", 1997), 6.

² Ibid., 71.

Naydan has kept the notes – a mixture of factual clarifications, remarks about translation problems, and translations of Andrukhovych's own annotations, to a not unreasonable eleven pages.

After *Perverziia*, Andrukhovych commenced an arduous quest for human values, individual and communal, that could be affirmed without contradicting the relativist and deconstructive ground rules that informed his early work. Following a lengthy detour through essayistic and even journalistic prose, Andrukhovych re-embraced the genre of the novel with *Dvanadtsiat obruchiv* (*Twelve Rings*, 2003). The book is replete with echoes of Andrukhovych's carnivalised prose of the 1990s and contains a fanciful and pronouncedly sexualised bohemian biography of the modernist Ukrainian poet Bohdan Ihor Antonych, whose documented life story, by contrast, was remarkable only for its staidness. Andrukhovych's reinvention of Antonych stimulated one of the outpourings of culturally conservative wrath that have regularly propelled Andrukhovych into the focus of public attention. And yet, the book seeks, with all due poststructurally informed qualifications and hedgings, to rehabilitate a number of wonderful things (or, perhaps, the myths of them): love, loyalty and art.

Sabine Stöhr has chosen to play the role of translator unobtrusively, creating a convincingly 'domesticated' German text. While not compelled to struggle with the difficulties of representing in another language the stylistic and formal heterogeneity of *Perverziia*, she has the task, perhaps even more exacting, of conveying the lyricism of the novel's prose (Andrukhovych's poetry of the 1980s was seldom as 'poetic' as certain passages of *Dvanadtsiat obruchiv*). What is more, she must give plausible renderings of the mellifluous and mysterious fragments of Antonych's poetry that are embedded in Andrukhovych's text. On both counts, Stöhr (who acknowledges the assistance of Sofia Onufriv and Yurii Prokhasko in navigating the nuances of Andrukhovych's linguistic register) receives full marks. Her afterword is somewhat less satisfying, containing some dubious judgments (e.g., that *Dvanadtsiat obruchiv* does not represent a new departure for Andrukhovych),³ some needlessly journalistic turns of phrase (e.g., the novel is "a declaration of love to the Ukrainian language" [p. 298; my translation]), and even a factual

³ For the contrary view, see my article '*Dvanadtsiat*' *obruchiv* Iuriiia Andrukhovycha, abo Tuha za seredynoiu', *Suchasnist'*, No. 7-8, 2004, 69-85.

error (*Perverzija* was published, not in 1999, as claimed [p. 295], but in 1996 in *Suchasnist* and in 1997 as a separate book). Like *Perverzion*, *Zwölf Ringe* has endnotes, but in this case the author is Andrukhovych himself, who furnishes the German-speaking reader with his own perspective (subjective, and not without polemical missiles hurled at Ukrainian cultural conservatives) upon the social and cultural realities of contemporary Ukraine.

The audiences of choice for these translations are cross-culturally interested English-speaking and German-speaking readerships accustomed to the demands and rewards of modern and postmodern prose. Such audiences, unacquainted with, but potentially curious about, the new neighbours of the European Union, should find in *Perverzion* and *Zwölf Ringe* much that will delight and challenge (and, perhaps, inform).

Marko Pavlyshyn
Monash University

W.J. Leatherbarrow, *A Devil's Vaudeville: The Demonic in Dostoevsky's Major Fiction*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press (Series: *Studies in Russian Literature and Theory*), 2005, xi + 210pp. ISBN: 0-8101-2049-6.

In this relatively slender (181 pages of text, 27 of notes, references and index), but erudite contribution to Northwestern's series on Russian literature and theory, W.J. Leatherbarrow illumines one of the most important if ambiguous aspects of Dostoevsky's art: the 'inscription of the demonic' in his fiction. His concern is both with the nature and sources of the writer's *demonology* (his understanding of what the demonic means), and with his *demonography* (the literary means 'through which the presence of the demonic may be mediated'; pp. 1-2). The framework for the enquiry is further elaborated in the Introduction, which considers the critical influences of Russian folklore, Orthodox theology and the Romantic literary tradition, as well as the aesthetic and ethical systems shaping Dostoevsky's worldview and the 'demonic' dimension of fiction itself as the art of deceit and a usurpation of divine authority. It also acknowledges the contribution of Bakhtin, Lotman, Uspensky, Robert Louis Jackson and many others who have mapped the territory Leatherbarrow means to explore in detail.