

Zaleska Onyshkevych, Larissa M. L. (ed.), *An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2012, 521 pp. ISBN 978-1-894865-27-2

An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama is surely among the most valuable of Larissa Zaleska Onyshkevych's many contributions to critical and editorial scholarship concerning Ukrainian drama and theatre. This splendid anthology offers English-speaking readers ten Ukrainian twentieth-century dramatic works by nine authors, capably rendered by eleven translators.

These ten plays exemplify different nuances of the meaning of the term 'modern'. Lesia Ukrainka's verse drama 'In the Wilderness' reflects in the spirit of turn-of-the-century aestheticism on the conflict between creative imagination, on the one hand and, on the other, philistinism and ideological stricture. 'The Prophet', a topical problem-play from Volodymyr Vynnychenko's inter-war émigré period, dramatises capitalism's wily co-optation of the technology of mass communication. Four plays exemplify the risk-taking flirtations of Soviet playwrights with formal experimentation: from the decade preceding the tyranny of Socialist Realism, Mykola Kulish's masterpieces 'The People's Malachi' and 'Sonata Pathétique', both of which recklessly questioned the plausibility of communist utopianism, and Ivan Kocherha's 'Masters

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of Time'; and, from the 'Thaw' of the 1960s, Oleksii Kolomiets's 'Planet Speranta'. Three plays by post-Second World War émigrés variously refract the formal non-realism and some of the philosophical preoccupations (pre-eminently existentialism) of Western modernisms, while obliquely or directly allegorising and condemning totalitarianism: Liudmyla Kovalenko's 'The Heroine Dies in the First Act', Eaghor G. Kostetzky's 'A Play about a Great Man' and Bohdan Boychuk's 'Hunger – 1933'. The one play dating from the period of Ukraine's renewed independence is the dystopian historical fantasy 'Birds from an Invisible Island' by Valerii Shevchuk.

Each of the texts is accompanied by a brief biography of its author, select bibliographies of editions (especially in English) of the dramatist's work and of relevant scholarship, and short essays by Larissa Zaleska Onyshkevych containing contextual, interpretive and critical observations. Alternative versions of sections of the two plays by Kulish offer insight into what was (or was not) sayable at different times and even at the same time but in different places in the Soviet Union. An appendix to 'Hunger – 1933' presents several pages of poetry which, though part of Boychuk's Ukrainian-language original, were omitted from the English translation at his request; highlighting their removal raises interesting questions about the authoritativeness of various versions of a literary work and the meaning of the differences between them.

As was even more explicitly the case in the collection of scholarly articles that Zaleska Onyshkevych co-edited with Maria Rewakowicz, *Contemporary Ukraine on the Cultural Map of Europe* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), the editor's concern in her *Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama* is to foreground works of Ukrainian culture which manifest an affinity with Western thought and Western stylistic paradigms. Zaleska Onyshkevych draws attention to qualities of the plays that, for example, align Lesia Ukrainka's 'In the Wilderness' with neoromanticism and Kostetzky's 'Play About a Great Man' with expressionism (p. xiii), although elsewhere she jus-

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tifiably remarks that the intertextual, self-referential and parodic playfulness of this work qualifies it as an exponent of 'the early postmodernist style' (p. 331). In contrast to Ukrainian nineteenth-century drama, whose popularity rested on ethnographism and local reference, and to the drama of mainstream Socialist Realism with its narrowly circumscribed propagandist content, Zaleska Onyshkevych emphasises the 'broader themes and universal concerns' (p. xiii) that her selection of plays addresses even as they take note of contemporary social and political realities. The existentialist conception of the individual human being as essentially free, even though that freedom is threatened by uncomprehending social environments or tyrannical states; the affirmation of steadfast commitment to ethical principles; preoccupation with time as the medium which makes possible judgment of the past and present, and hope for a better future – these are some of the features which, in her Introduction, Zaleska Onyshkevych identifies as spanning many, if not all, of the plays in her selection.

A notable and admirable feature of the *Anthology* is the consistently high quality – the fluency combined with accuracy – of the translations that it contains. Two were previously published: Kulish's 'Sonata Pathetique' in the 1975 rendering of George and Moira Luckyj, and Kocherha's 'Masters of Time' in John Wixley's translation of 1934. The English-language version of Boychuk's 'Hunger – 1933' was created by the distinguished translator Vera Rich in collaboration with the author himself and Zaleska Onyshkevych, who also translated Shevchuk's 'Birds from an Invisible Island'. The remaining texts were produced by translators who – unfortunately, given the excellence of their work – have not elsewhere figured in that role: John Prasko ('The People's Malachi' and 'A Play about a Great Man') and four of Zaleska Onyshkevych's students at Rutgers University: Christine Oshchudlak Stawnychy ('The Prophet'), Roxolana Stojko-Lozynskyj ('In the Wilderness'), Charles A. Steck (or

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Stek? – his surname appears in different forms in the Preface and on p. 329 – ‘The Heroine Dies in the First Act’) and Don Boychuk (‘Planet Speranta’).

An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama is a book as valuable in English as it was when it first appeared in Ukrainian as *Antolohiia modernoi ukrains'koi dramy* in 1998. For most recipients in both audiences, it introduced an unfamiliar picture of recent Ukrainian drama as the work in equal measure of playwrights in Ukraine and in emigration, and as challenging both formally and intellectually. The book should have enduring interest for students as well as general readers – and, one hopes, theatre professionals looking to expand their ensembles’ repertoires in novel directions.

Marko Pavlyshyn
Monash University