

Seventh volume of translation journal brings Ukrainian literature to English-language readers

by **Ułana Plawuszczak Pidzamecky**

The seventh volume of "Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations," released in August, brings together contemporary accounts of Russia's war against Ukraine, poetry by writers from several generations and works from the Ukrainian literary canon, offering English-language readers a broad view of the country's literary heritage and the experiences shaping its present.

Established in 2001, the journal was created to make Ukrainian writing more widely available through high-quality English translations. Volume 7, published in August, includes prose and poetry addressing war, displacement, national identity, spirituality and everyday life. Its selections range from early 20th-century writing to contemporary works shaped by Russia's full-scale invasion.

The new volume arrives amid growing international interest in Ukrainian culture. In his introduction, editor Maxim Tarnawsky observes that the war has drawn attention to Ukrainian literature and increased demand for translations. He argues that efforts to suppress Ukrainian national identity have instead brought greater international recognition to the country's cultural life.

The journal also faces a transition of its own. Mr. Tarnawsky and longtime manuscript editor Ułiana M. Pasiecznyk have indicated that new editorial leadership will be needed to sustain the publication. Volume 7 was delayed by two years because of time constraints, according to the journal's account of its publication.

Despite those challenges, the latest issue continues the journal's central mission: presenting Ukrainian literature to readers who might otherwise have little access to it.

The volume opens with contemporary prose by Borys Artemov and Vira Kuryko. Mr. Artemov's "Women's Day" portrays the devastation experienced by civilians living under Russian missile and drone attacks. Ms. Kuryko's "The Second Lie of Letycia Kuryata" examines the psychological effects of combat on a veteran returning home.

Together, the stories explore the war's effects on civilians and those who have served in the military. They also reflect the linguistic complexity of contemporary Ukrainian writing, presenting translators with the challenge of conveying distinct voices and registers in English.

That attention to language is central to the journal's approach. Ukrainian writing

encompasses regional dialects, colloquial speech, professional vocabulary and other forms of expression that do not always have direct equivalents in English. The journal seeks to preserve the character of those voices while making the works accessible to an international readership.

A section devoted to prose poetry and short literary works by Ukrainian women features Iryna Vilde, Katria Hrynevych, Natalena Koroleva, Sofia Parfanovych and Ułiana Kravchenko.

The selections demonstrate the variety of subjects and styles explored by these writers. Ms. Vilde's miniatures examine romantic longing, while Ms. Hrynevych's works address war refugees, childbirth and spirituality. Ms. Koroleva contributes a religious legend about a grieving mother who is transformed into a crying seagull.

Ms. Parfanovych reflects on patience, loss and experiences in hospital settings, while Ms. Kravchenko uses botanical imagery to explore broader emotional and symbolic themes.

By presenting these writers together, the journal draws attention to a form of literary expression that combines elements of prose and poetry. The works rely on compressed narratives, imagery and subtle variations in language to communicate experiences that range from intimate personal moments to historical upheaval.

The poetry section spans more than a century of Ukrainian writing, bringing together historical, avant-garde and contemporary voices.

Among the earlier selections is poetry by Mykhail Semenko from 1913, representing the experimental spirit of Ukrainian futurism. Works by Hryhorii Chubai and Vasyl Stus offer a contrasting perspective from the later Soviet period. The collection includes Stus's sonnets from 1968, providing readers with an example of his earlier poetry.

The section also features "Five Poems" by Moisei Fishbein, written during his exile in Germany. Drawing on displacement, spiritual memory and historical trauma, the poems explore connections between Kyiv and Jerusalem.

Ivan Malkovych contributes intimate love poetry, while contemporary writers Liuba Yakimchuk, Iryna Tsilyk and Ułiana Hlynchak address the experiences of Ukrainians during Russia's invasion. Their works explore personal and collective trauma and place the current war within a longer history of policies directed against



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The volume's final section turns to longer prose works by established literary figures, including Ivan Nechui-Levytsky, Petro Hulak-Artemovsky, Valerian Pidmohylny and Volodymyr Vynnychenko.

Their writing provides historical context for themes that recur throughout the collection, including national identity, social relations, morality and the effects of Russian imperial policies on Ukrainian life.

The section also includes work by Yeva Biss, whose writing reflects the experiences of communities in the Carpatho-Rusyn borderlands of Slovakia. Like some of the contemporary works in the volume, her writing presents linguistic and cultural complexities rooted in the region's history.

The arrangement of Volume 7 places contemporary accounts of war alongside writing from earlier periods, allowing readers to encounter both the immediate experiences of Ukrainians today and the literary traditions that preceded them.

The journal's own history reflects the difficulties involved in sustaining literary translation.

When it was established in 2001, English translations of Ukrainian literature were relatively scarce. Earlier translation efforts had been shaped in part by the Cold War and the work of Ukrainian refugees

and diaspora communities in North America, which sought to preserve Ukrainian language and culture abroad.

The Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York supported the journal's creation to provide a continuing forum for Ukrainian writing in English. Its editors sought to present a wide range of genres and styles, with particular attention to contemporary literature.

In September 2013, the Shevchenko Scientific Society ended its financial support, placing publication of Volume 4 in jeopardy.

Mr. Tarnawsky and the journal's translators continued work on the issue, which appeared online in 2014 without financial sponsorship. Translators contributed their work without payment to keep the publication going.

The journal subsequently secured support from the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada, based in Toronto, and the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. Beginning with Volume 5 in 2018, that funding allowed the publication to resume paying honoraria to translators and authors and to return to a publishing model offering both digital and print-on-demand editions.

Volume 6 followed in 2021. The seventh volume continues that work, although its delayed publication and the anticipated departure of its longtime editorial leadership present questions about the journal's next stage.

Alongside Mr. Tarnawsky and Ms. Pasiecznyk, the journal's editorial board includes Taras Koznarsky, Askold Melnyczuk, Michael M. Naydan and Marko Pavlyshyn.

Volume 7 received partial funding from the Shevchenko Foundation Ukrainian Canadian Veterans Fund.

For English-language readers, the latest volume offers an opportunity to encounter Ukrainian literature across different historical periods and literary forms. For the journal, it represents another installment in a project that has continued through funding interruptions and changes in the wider cultural landscape.

The editors' work has made writing by Ukrainian authors available to readers, students and scholars who may not read Ukrainian, while providing translators with a forum for bringing new and established works to an international audience.

Volume 7 is available online at the journal's website. Information about ordering printed copies is available at ukrainianliterature.org.

'Black Sunflowers...'

(Continued from page 5)

Angeles while working on the documentary with a local crew.

"While the front-line footage is harrowing and necessary to show, the things, places and people worth fighting for, and their everyday stories in extraordinary circumstances, are generally omitted from Western news," he said.

The filmmaker said he encountered people whose interests and ambitions remained recognizable despite the extraordinary circumstances surrounding them: an electronic DJ who enlisted but continued performing while on leave, a nature photographer who became a war journalist, young soldiers with years of combat experience and couples separated by deployments to different parts of the front.

"And as I looked into these faces, I couldn't help but see parts of myself," Mr. Haney said.

The film was produced with the participation of Ukrainian production company Limelite and a Ukrainian crew. Its production team includes Volodymyr Yatsenko, Anna Yatsenko, Yevhenii Zdorovyylo and Vlad Bolyelov, among other Ukrainian participants. American actor and filmmaker Sean Penn joined the project as an executive producer.

Mr. Penn has previously documented Russia's full-scale invasion. His 2023 documentary "Superpower," co-directed with Aaron Kaufman, examined Ukraine and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the opening period of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Ukrainian producer Volodymyr Yatsenko described the film's title as a metaphor for a generation whose transition into adulthood has been transformed by the war.

"We have an entire generation of young people who did not have time to experience the happiness of growing up without the war that we have," Mr. Yatsenko said. "Many young people were killed, wounded, trau-

matized by the war or became refugees. This is an entire generation scorched by war. They are the black sunflowers."

Music is central to the documentary's portrait of that generation. Its soundtrack includes music by British producer Fred Again, Brian Eno's Secret Life project, Aphex Twin, Four Tet, Idles, Sega Bodega and Ukrainian artists, among them Nastya Vogan and Koloah. The film also features an original score by Brad Oberhofer and Koloah and closes with a version of Morpheus's Do Not Go Quietly Unto Your Grave, performed by a traditional choir based in Kyiv.

"Black Sunflowers" was one of several films connected to Ukraine presented at the Toronto festival this year. The Short Cuts program included "Patronymic," an autobiographical short by Ukrainian director Mariia Ponomarova, made as a Ukrainian-Dutch co-production. The film follows Ms. Ponomarova, who has lived abroad for more than a decade but regularly returns to Ukraine, as she examines the disappearance of her patronymic, Volodymyrivna,

from her international documents.

The festival's Centerpiece program also featured "The Betrayers," a Canadian-Ukrainian film directed by David Bezmozgis adapted from his 2014 novel. Its story is set in Yalta shortly before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The recognition for "Black Sunflowers" comes a year after Ukrainian director Valentyn Vasyanovych's "To the Victory!" won the festival's Platform Award in 2025. Mr. Vasyanovych's dystopian drama explored the psychological and social challenges of a postwar future for Ukraine.

For "Black Sunflowers," however, the focus remains firmly on the generation living through the war now – young Ukrainians whose military service, friendships, relationships, music and ambitions unfold simultaneously amid the war rather than as separate wartime and civilian experiences.

"Wars aren't just fought by soldiers, but by entire generations," Mr. Haney said. "The film is both a generational portrait and an exploration of war."