

**NOTES FROM THE TRANSLATOR:
MICHAEL NAYDAN**

... I'll usually decide to translate poetry based on an initial reading of it. If it engages me and I feel I can do justice to the original in English, I'll begin by doing a draft of it after reading the original (usually aloud to myself) several times to pick up on the rhythms and overall sound. Subsequently I revise a poem several times after letting it sit for a while. Translations are like a good wine – the longer you let the wine age in the barrel, the better it usually tastes. You need a little distance from the translation to see it in a different way, too.

... I usually choose poets in different ways. Sometimes I leaf through literary journals and discover authors or pick up books in bookstores or libraries. I also have met particular authors whose personalities engage me, which often leads me to translate their works. Additionally I have a small group of authors and critics I regularly speak with or am in contact with by email (for example, Yuri Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak, Olha Luchuk, Maria Zubrytska) who often give me good advice on new and upcoming writers I should look at.

...The Internet, my personal library and university libraries are my main resources for finding out more information on cultural or literary references. I also use many native informants (like Olha Luchuk and Larysa Bobrova) to help me with translations of the words I can't find in dictionaries.

...Your goal, of course, is to present a vision as similar to the original as possible in the target language. But since every translation is just an approximation of the original, you can never translate the original in a perfect way. Every translation is an act of interpretation and the translator creates his or her understanding of the original. I recall reading my translation of Natalka Bilotserkivets' poem "A Hundred Years of Youth" for an American radio program when the interviewer asked questions on sexual imagery in the poem based on my translation. Natalka answered that she didn't notice any of that when she wrote the poem. I saw it though when I translated it – a deep-rooted fear of sexuality. Since writers write intuitively, they don't always have a deeper understanding of what their works are about. The Muse takes them to a place and they follow. As long as a translator knows both languages well and knows the respective poetic similarities, differences and possibilities of both languages, then there is a high probability of success.

...It is obviously much better to be a poet and translate poetry. Then you have a better feel for the language into which you are translating. That doesn't mean that non-poets aren't capable of doing good poetic translations. It's just something which you have to work at. Since I've published my poetry in English and in Ukrainian translation, I suppose I could be called a poet. But it's not something I do professionally. So it all depends on how you understand the term.

...The hardest things to translate are colloquial expressions and poetic prose and poetry. Dialectisms are difficult too. It helps that my family came from Halychyna, because I'm more attuned to the Halychyna dialect when I translate a writer like Yuri Vynnychuk. Additionally, since I didn't grow up in Ukraine, I've had to learn how Ukrainian is spoken and written there in the present day. Visits to Ukraine as well as extensive contacts with

Ukrainian writers and artists from there have helped me quite a bit to modernize my own Ukrainian.

... If you want people to read writers from the nineteenth century in translation, then the translation has to be in an idiom that contemporary speakers can understand and find interesting. If you translate a 19th century writer (other than a great world-class writer like Gogol), you really can't rely heavily on archaic diction. If you do that, the writer will sound old-fashioned and no one will read him. That's not to say that you can't have certain archaic elements in a translation, but those elements can't dominate. For example, my translations of Shevchenko are modernized a bit in the hope that Anglophone readers of our time will have the desire to read him and understand his message.

...I've worked closely with several contemporary writers on my translations. Yuri Andrukhovych and Viktor Neborak have both been fantastic in the way they've helped me come to a better understanding of their works. It's easier when they have access to email like Andrukhovych. I have scores of emails from Andrukhovych in answer to my questions about the intricacies of *Perverzion*. He also visited me here in the United States for close to ten months and was extremely generous to me in explaining the secrets of his writing and the realia in his works. Natalka Bilotserkivets and Liuda Taran have also been quite helpful to me in answering questions about their poems. Other writers have not been as helpful. For example, although Lina Kostenko visited me here in the US for five months, she never answered any questions I had about her works or my translations. But that's just her personality. She's not a particularly open person and often is in her own world. Great artists can be that way sometimes. Oksana Zabuzhko was fairly helpful in answering questions for me at an early stage of her career when I was translating her poetry, but I stopped translating her a while ago. I just find her prose style to be convoluted and ponderous in translation for a contemporary reader of English. While it doesn't work well for me, it might for other people.

...If an interpretation is feasible and reasoned for a translator, then it's valid to differ from what a poet might feel a poem is about. Great works of art and literature have many different interpretations. That's often what makes them great.

...If there is ambiguity in the original, there should be ambiguity in the translation. Translators shouldn't be "correcting" poets or over-explaining their works.

...Practice is how a translator hones his or her craft, so that is how they are "made." It's always good, too, to be mentored by someone. I had good mentors in graduate school like Robert Maguire, who was a scholar-translator at Columbia University. Translators have to have certain linguistic gifts and abilities, so that's something inborn. Translators can sometimes be writer wannabes early in their careers and for various reasons shift from writing to translating.

...A translator wants to look for good works deserving of translation. Translators are conveyers of literary artifacts from one culture to another. Most do what they do out of love, not for money. There are only a handful of translators in the world who can make a living just from translating.

...Work, work, more work. Enjoy and love what you're doing. Make connections with people –with writers, editors, publishers. Once you make a name for yourself, it's always easier to get things published. I also try to support talented younger people interested in translating. My academic position allows me to devote the time to translation, which is considered a part of my creative and scholarly output. Not all translators have that luxury. It's also important to have a thick skin. People will often criticize you for mistakes in translations or for word choices. You'll get attacked in reviews. You have to learn that you can't please everyone and have to be satisfied with your own work. I always appreciate

when someone corrects a translation for me or makes a good suggestion. I also never attack other translators in my reviews of translations. If I can't find something good to say about someone else's translation in a review, then I prefer not to review it. That might just be my nature.