

## Kupała's Translations from Ševčenko

BY

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Rarely do two national writers have so much in common as had the Ukrainian Kobzar and Kupała, the 'Byelorussian Ševčenko':<sup>1</sup> the man who had given lyrical expression to Ukraine's cultural, social and political aspirations evoked a uniquely sympathetic response in the poet-prophet of the Byelorussian early 20th-century renaissance. Uncommon too was Kupała's extensive work as a translator, an activity which is all too often ignored by the greatest poets unless (as was the case with Pasternak, for instance) they are in effect precluded from original writing by external pressures; uncommon but not unique, though, for Kupała's contemporary, Maksim Bahdanovič, provides a magnificent contemporary example of a major poet turning to translation in order to enrich and develop the resources of his native literature.

The abundance of translations on the pages of *Naša niva* played an important role in the accelerated development of modern Byelorussian literature, just as in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, to which Byelorussians increasingly looked back as to a golden age, translations of medieval ecclesiastical and secular tales — apocryphal, chivalrous and heroic — reflected a broadening of national horizons and aspirations. But whilst translations from French and German writers, for instance, might bring added sophistication to early 20th-century poetry, the role of Ševčenko in the development of not only Byelorussian literature but also Byelorussian national awareness was a more organic and fundamental one. The critic A. Bulba described something of this in an issue of *Naša niva* devoted to the centenary of Ševčenko's birth in 1911: 'To us Byelorussians Ševčenko is dear in that already half a century ago he was expressing the ideas by which we now live. More than one of us has awoken on reading *Kobzar*. Ševčenko shows us the way to go.'<sup>2</sup> Kupała himself had expressed similar feelings two years earlier in his verse *Pamiaci Šaičienki* when he invited Ševčenko to be the spiritual 'father' of not only Ukraine but Byelorussia also,<sup>3</sup> and he is reported as having traced the origins of his own creative career to the same source when he declared to the Ukrainian poet Teren' Masenko: 'I began to write after I had read *Kobzar*. The Ukrainian national poet and his language evoked in me love for my own native, Byelorussian language.'<sup>4</sup>

Not only was Ševčenko one of Kupała's lifelong favourite poets, but he also evoked a particularly skilful and sensitive response in him as translator. The Ukrainian critic Luka Luciv has drawn attention to the remarkable faithfulness of Kupała's versions, which he regards as

second to none,<sup>5</sup> and a unifying feature of these translations is indeed their high artistic quality and closeness to the original. Kupała was the first of a line of Byelorussian translators of Ševčenko which has included Kołas, Biadula, Krapiva, Broŭka, Kulašoŭ, Klimkovič, and Hlebka, and three versions from Ševčenko are found amongst his earliest works in Byelorussian: an excerpt from *Hoholju* (II.1-14 and 27-8) ('Za dumaju duma rojem vylataje...', 1905-7); 'Pažoŭknuŭ list... Pryhašli vočy...' (1906) from 'Minajut' dni, minajut' noči...', and *Dumka* ('Našto čornyja mnie brovi...') (1908) from *Dumka* ('Naščo meni čorni brovy...'). The remainder of Kupała's Ševčenko translations date from the 1930s when he had already ceased to be active as an original lyric poet, confining himself for the most part to occasional or programme poems and to translations.

The missing twelve lines from *Hoholju* relate to tsarist and Russian oppression of Ukraine, and may well have been omitted to avoid trouble with the censor. The last two lines which, appropriately for Gogol', are concerned with laughter and tears, are changed in Kupała's otherwise very close version to '... Budziem lepš śmiajacca, choć hoład u chacie!...'; a somewhat different concept, and one that is little reflected in his early original verse. Indeed, some years later, during the debate in *Naša niva* aroused by Vaclau Łastoŭski's attack on those 'Parnassians' who depicted only misery and squalor,<sup>6</sup> it was Kupała who replied on behalf of his fellow poets in an article entitled 'Why Does Our Song Weep?' 'Pažoŭknuŭ list... Pryhašli vočy...' is also for the most part faithful, but Kupała omits the first two lines (for no apparent reason), divides the poem up into stanzas (one of six lines and the remaining six of four lines), and, perhaps also with censor in mind, considerably alters lines 15-18. Ševčenko's 'And let me live, live with my heart/And love people,/And if not... then curse/And set the world on fire!' becomes 'And let me live with my soul, with my heart/And praise thee,/And thy world not made with hands,/And love people'. *Dumka*, a maiden's lament, on the other hand, is close to Ševčenko throughout, reproducing all the Ukrainian's poetic devices such as anaphora (with one exception) and illustrating well the tremendous linguistic community of Ukrainian and Byelorussian compared with, for instance, Russian. It is also an example of the use of lines of alternating eight and six syllables, so beloved of Ševčenko, and found in the majority of Kupała's translations of the thirties, as well as in over sixty original lyric and narrative poems which cover almost all his creative life (the first, 'I jak tut śmiajacca...', dates from 1905; the last, *Z novaj dumkaj* and, significantly, *Tarasova dola* from 1939). This verse form is closely related to the Ukrainian *kolomyjka*, though there is little agreement amongst prosodists as to how exactly the latter is to be defined. Some commentators like Bahdanovič and Kołas, whilst seeing it as a link between Ševčenko and Kupała, have analysed it in syllabo-tonic terms, whilst more recent analysts have preferred a tonic approach.<sup>8</sup> The nature of the label, however, does not alter the object labelled, and the close analogy between this type of verse in Ševčenko and Kupała cannot be gainsaid.

The theme of an ill-used and abandoned maiden recurs frequently in Ševčenko's poetry; indeed, nearly all his heroines can be thus described, one of the best-known examples being *Kateryna* (1838).<sup>9</sup> As an editor of *Naša niva* Kupała gave extensive help and guidance to F. Čarnyševič, the first Byelorussian translator of the work, whose version appeared in 1911.<sup>10</sup> His own translation, smoother and more accurate in all respects, was to appear in 1938, a century after the poem's first composition.

A glance at Kupała's collected works shows clearly the tremendous falling off in the level of his composition of original verse in the Soviet period, particularly in the late twenties and early thirties; some three times as many poems were written in the decade 1905-15 as between the 1917 Revolution and Kupała's death in 1942. The year 1933 saw only one original lyric, *Maj*, and a decidedly weak example of extended verse journalism, *Nad rakoju Aresaj*; but with a skillfully executed version of Ševčenko's satirical and revolutionary poem *Son* ('U vsjakoho svoja dolja . . .') it also marked the beginning of a period during which Kupała would put almost all the Ukrainian's major poetic works into Byelorussian.

The range is broad: from fiercely revolutionary pieces like *Kavkaz* and *Zapovit*, and major national and historical poems such as *Tarasova nič*, *Ivan Pidkova*, *Do Osnov'janenka* and, most important, *Hajdamaky*, to romantic, almost Žukovskian ballads, rich in Ukrainian ethnography, like *Pryčynna*, *Perebendja*, *Topolja*, and, especially, *Kateryna*. It is the ballads which seem most naturally close to Kupała's own poetry, namely the romantic narrative poems of 1910-13, and numerous links can be drawn between, for example, the poet-bard of *Perebendja* and the hero of Kupała's *Kurhan*, or, on the other hand, *Kateryna* and, to a degree, *Hajdamaky* and *Bandarouňa*.<sup>11</sup> It is not hard to imagine Kupała's sympathy with Ševčenko's social and political attitudes in *Kavkaz*, or, indeed, that poem's separatist and patriotic motives; the Ukrainian patriotism and nostalgia for a more glorious past expressed in poems like *Do Osnov'janenka* would have found an immediate echo in Byelorussians who in the *Naša niva* period had come to look back to a noble past as well as forward to a new dawn, to the re-birth of their country like the Prometheus envisaged by Ševčenko in *Kavkaz*.

Apart from those already mentioned, Kupała's translations of the thirties comprise an excerpt from *Jakby vy znaly, panyči* (II.14-42) entitled *Z uspaminaŭ pra dziacinstva*, 'Svite jasnyj! Svite tychyj! . . .', *Dumka* ('Tjažko-važko v sviti žyty . . .'), *Dumka* ('Vitre bujnyj, vitre bujnyj! . . .'), *Na vičnu pam'jat' Kotljarevskomu*, 'Viter z hajem rozmovljaje . . .', *Dumka* ('Teče voda v sinje more . . .'), 'Dumy moji, dumy moji . . .', *N. Markeviču* ('Banduryste, orle syzyj! . . .'), and *Na nezabudz' Šternberhovi*. They are almost without exception faithful to the originals in line division, line length, metre and rhyme patterns, although some poems are divided up in a slightly different way: for example, in *Dumka* ('Teče voda v sinje more . . .') Kupała divides the twenty-four lines into three stanzas whereas Ševčenko's original has a division into sixteen and eight.

The major factor enabling such closeness of translation is, of course, the linguistic closeness of Byelorussian and Ukrainian, particularly in lexicon and syntax, a closeness which no longer leads to destructively nationalistic disputes and 'annexations' of literary monuments as it has done in relation to the middle period (late 14th to 17th centuries).<sup>12</sup> The problems facing any Byelorussian translator of Ševčenko are considerably less than in the case of Goethe, Byron, Mickiewicz, or Puškin. Kupała's version of *Mednyj vsadnik*, for instance, though excellent in many ways, cannot approach the great fidelity of such Ševčenko translations as *Kateryna* or *Topolja*. None the less there is nothing automatic about Kupała's approach to the task of translation, and he avoids the temptation of choosing Byelorussian words that may seem to correspond to Ševčenko's Ukrainian when there are, in fact, better, different alternatives. Many later translators of Ševčenko have been inclined not so much to excessive use of words shared by Byelorussian and Ukrainian as to a sometimes spurious search for uniquely Byelorussian alternatives. As in so much else, Kupała stands out for his judgement and balance.

In addition to Ukrainian, Kupała translated from Polish, Russian, and to a far lesser degree, from French and German, but his translations from Ukrainian are nearly as extensive as those from the other languages together, and, in particular, his versions of Ševčenko clearly occupy a special place in his *opus*.<sup>13</sup> In both quality and quantity Kupała's Ševčenko translations represent both an important part of his creative output and a valuable contribution to the enrichment of Byelorussian literature.

## FOOTNOTES

1. For examples of the use of this appellation see V. A. Kavalenka, *Vytoki. Uptyvy. Paskoranašć*, Minsk, 1975, p. 259; Bohdan Čajkovs'ky, *Nezabutnja storinka družby (T. H. Ševčenko i Bilorusija)*, Kiev, 1964, p. 136; E. M. Martynava, 'Niekatoryja rysy blizkaści i svojeasablivaści razvičcia biełaruskaj i ŭkraińskaj litaratur pačatku XX st.', in N. Pierkin, ed., *Staronki litaraturnych suviaziej*, Minsk, 1970, p. 168.  
V. V. Ivašin has described Kupała as being 'of all the Byelorussian poets, inwardly the most prepared to receive the creative heritage of Ševčenko in all its variety': 'Ševčenko ta šljachy rozvytku bilorus'koj poeziji' in *Zbirnyk prac' juvilejnoji 13-ji naukovoji ševčenkivs'koji konferenciji*, ed. Je. P. Kyryljuk, Kiev, 1965 (hereafter Ivašin, 'Ševčenko'), p. 290.
2. A. Bulba, 'Pamiaci Tarasa Ševčenkí (u 50-letniuju hadauščynu jaho šmierci)', *Naša niva*, no. 8, Vilna, 1911, p. 115.
3. Janka Kupała, *Zbor tvoraŭ u siamí tamach*, ed. V. V. Barysienka, Minsk, 1972-6, II, pp. 82-3.
4. Tareń Masenka, 'Słova pra Kupału', *Poŭmja*, no. 6, Minsk, 1952, p. 133.  
For a more detailed description of the role of Ševčenko in Byelorussian literature, and of the relationship between Kupała and Ukraine, particularly Ševčenko, see the present author's 'Kupała's *Bandarouna* and Shevchenko: Towards the History of the Development of Byelorussian Literature in the Early Twentieth Century', *Slavonic and East European Review*, LX, no. 2, London 1982, pp. 211-20.
5. Luka Luciv, 'Ševčenko v bilorus'kij movi', in Taras Ševčenko, *Povne vydannja tvoriv* Warsaw and L'vov, 1934-9, XV, pp. 196-7.

6. Jury Vieraščaka [Vacłaŭ Łastoŭski], 'Spiačyvajcia doŭh', *Naša niva*, nos 26-7, July 1913.
7. Adzin z Parnašnikaŭ Janka Kupała, 'Čamu plača pieśnia naša? (Adkaz Jurcy Vieraščaku)', *Naša niva*, no. 30, August 1913.
8. For examples of different views on this subject see: Maksim Bahdanovič, *Zbor tvoraŭ u dvuch tamach*, ed. V. V. Barysienka et al., Minsk, 1968, II, pp. 140-1; Jakub Kołas, *Zbor tvoraŭ u dvanaccaci tamach*, ed. V. V. Barysienka et al., Minsk, 1961-5, XI, p. 205; Ivašyn, 'Ševčenko', pp. 292-3; I. D. Ralko, *Bielaruski vierš: staronki historyi i teoryja*, Minsk, 1969, pp. 146-57 and *passim*; M. M. Hrynčyk, *Šlachi bielaruskaha vieršaskładańnia*, Minsk, 1973, pp. 78 and 208-9; and V. P. Rahojša, *Hutarki pra vierš. Mietryka. Rytmika. Fonika*, Minsk, 1979, pp. 60-1.
9. See George S. N. Luckyj, 'The Archetype of the Bastard in Shevchenko's Poetry', in G. S. N. Luckyj, ed. *Shevchenko and the Critics 1861-1980*, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1980, pp. 386-94.
10. On the circumstances surrounding the translation of this poem see T. V. Kabržyckaja and V. P. Rahojša, *Karanj družby: Bielaruska-ŭkraínskija litaraturnyja ŭzajemasu- viazi pačatku XX st.*, Minsk, 1978, pp. 206-9.
11. *Kateryna* is in fact closer to Kupała's earlier *Zimoju* than to *Bandaroŭna*. For a reference to my article on the latter poem see note 4.
12. For a remarkably judicious analysis of this problem see George Y. Shevelov, 'Belorussian versus Ukrainian: Delimitation of Texts before A.D. 1569', *Journal of Byelorussian Studies*, III, 2, London, 1974, pp. 145-56.
13. For further views on this far from neglected subject see S. Aleksandrovič, *Staronki bratniaj družby. Artykuly pra litaraturnyja suvlazi*, Minsk, 1960, especially pp. 73-110, and the same author's 'Kupałaŭskaja škola pierakładu', in *Narodnyja pteštnary*, ed. I. Ja. Navumienka et al., Minsk, 1972, pp. 135-57. Also worth consulting are E. M. Martynava, *Bielaruska-ŭkraínski paetyčny ŭzajemapieraktad*, Minsk, 1973, and D. Palityka, *Janka Kupała — pieraktadčyk*, Minsk, 1959, especially pp. 38-64.