

**Maria Matios. *Hardly Ever Otherwise*.** Trans. Yuri Tkacz. London: Glagoslav Publications, 2012. 178 pp. Foreword by Yuri Tkacz. Paper.

**I**n the original, Maria Matios's *Hardly Ever Otherwise* is full of rich language and colourful idioms. According to Yuri Tkacz, Matios is the popular author of seven collections of poetry and fourteen books of prose. "Herself born in the Carpathian Mountains, Matios bases many of her books on her family's unique experiences" (5). The novel tells the stories of the tragic lives of people living in a small village in the Carpathians of western Ukraine during the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and shows the destruction that lust, jealousy, and greed can cause. The novel consists of three parts. In the first part, we are introduced to the Cheviuk family and their friends and acquaintances. Tragedy befalls the family when their youngest son, Dmytryk, is viciously injured and dies as a consequence of an affair with a married woman and Kyrylo, the hierarch of the family, is killed during a hunting trip. The second and third parts of the book concentrate on the personal stories of characters introduced in the first part and reveal their secrets and the significant roles they played in the tragic events that occurred at the beginning.

In this translation, Yuri Tkacz captures many of the vivid moments of the novel, which takes place in an intensely specific Ukrainian setting that necessitates footnotes even in the original. There are many terms that refer to the Hutsul culture of the region. It is always a challenge to translate this type of work. Tkacz succeeds, for the most part, in his attempt to stay true to the flavour and intensity of the original in his translation. At times, however, he falls short when trying to replicate some of the idioms and language in English. Tkacz sometimes settles for literal translations, rather than making the effort to come up with expressions and syntax that are both more understandable and more pleasing in English. There are some expressions that work in Ukrainian but simply puzzle the reader in English.

For example, in the first paragraph we are introduced to one of the main characters, Dotsia. In the second paragraph, we stumble over the English translation. "From time immemorial women's pregnancy has been accepted as an everyday affair. Almost a secondary thing" (9). What does it mean that it is a secondary thing? In connection with Dotsia's pregnancy we encounter the lines, "Meanwhile Pavlo was making Dotsia children. And he did this without using carrots. The proper way" (12). While the phrase "Pavlo was making Dotsia children" sounds a little clumsy, the phrase "he did this without using carrots" may leave readers perplexed. The translator could have searched for English expressions that are more understandable and equivalent.

Later in the text, there are more images and idioms that don't transfer well into English. "However, wonder of wonders, Andriy seemed to puff out visibly at the invitation, just as a cow's udder distends with milk in the last month of being with calf" (19). In a reference to a loose woman, we encounter, "Even though your wife brings our family into disrepute because she rides the rivers with the raftsmen like a cart without a shaft" (29). What does it mean to be a "cart without a shaft"? When a character is asked how he slept, he answers, "I slept on my hand, not my fist" (57). More awkward expressions follow: "Bees buzzed at the tops of their voices" (133) and "Now Nastunia looked after Andriychyk and molly-coddled him instead of his mother, compensating for the tatty dowry with which she had arrived with caresses and lovemaking" (48). The latter sentence falls short at "molly-coddled."

There are also some unexplained traditions or actions, such as, "No sooner had the door closed after Andriy, than she covered the windows with linen cloth" (23) and "They carried empty pails and wore their skirts inside out" (35).

There are images that work well. One of these is, "Petrunia moved about with lowered eyes between the oven and the table, like a poisoned mouse in the storehouse" (19). Another of these is, "And his blue lips looked like crushed plums" (25).

Tkacz creates footnotes for words that are specific to the Hutsul culture and are either not translatable or he believes that the English reader will not know them—words such as *kosa*, *prazhyna*, *mytska*, *trembita*, *bryzna*, etc. These words are italicized in the text wherever they appear and have a footnote on first mention. This creates a difficulty for readers who may not recall the meaning of a word when encountering it again, as they then need to search for the definition. A glossary appended at the end of the book would have solved this problem. Some additional footnotes would also have helped explain a few of the traditions and actions that readers may find baffling.

The unique voice, character, and compelling stories of the Ukrainian book make it worth translating. Tkacz has made a good effort to translate a difficult text. Had he produced more colourful English equivalents without sacrificing the flavour of the Ukrainian novel and added a few more footnotes and a glossary, he would have enhanced his translation.

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