

**Larissa M. L. Zaleska Onyshkevych, compiler, editor, and with introductory essays. *An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama*. CIUS P, 2012. xviii, 522 pp. \$64.95, paper.**

**T**he book *An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama* is a groundbreaking collection of nine plays by Ukrainian authors; the plays were written between the 1920s and the 1990s. Larissa M. L. Zaleska Onyshkevych is the editor and compiler of the volume. In her preface to the book, she points out that for a long time, hardly any Ukrainian plays were available in English (vii). She and a team of her students decided to fill that void by collecting the translations of (or themselves translating) the most representative Ukrainian plays of the twentieth century.

As the book's critical introduction (ix-xv) notes, the development of Ukrainian drama was influenced by two major factors: the political situation in a given time and the artistic climate. Although the roots of Ukrainian drama can be traced back to seventeenth-century mystery plays (*misterii*), Ukrainian dramatic literature had its most fruitful period in the nineteenth century. In the western (Austro-Hungarian) part of Ukraine, it was perfectly legal to publish and stage plays in Ukrainian. In the eastern part of Ukraine, under the Russian tsars, Ukrainian plays could be staged but a special permit was required. In the early Soviet period, Ukrainian drama and other art forms and literary genres experienced a genuine renaissance; and the most fashionable artistic trends, from symbolism to realism, existed in Ukrainian artistic life at that time. However, this period of relative artistic freedom was cut short by the Great Terror of the 1930s and by repressions against writers and intellectuals. In the later Soviet period, drama again occupied an important place in artistic and social life. Despite the constraining limits of "socialist realism"—the only artistic ideology that was sanctioned by the government—playwrights still managed to address universal themes, such as the issues surrounding individual existence, sacrifice, and the philosophical problem of the concept of time. As Zaleska Onyshkevych indicates, Ukrainian drama, surprisingly, did not focus on themes relating to the absurdity of life; instead, life was cherished and treated as a treasure and a privilege—perhaps in response to the difficulties that Ukraine had experienced throughout its history and the enormous human losses that were incurred there during times of war and through Stalin's repressive machine.

The book's choice of authors is one of its many strengths. The first author is Lesia Ukrainka ([1-65] Roxolana Stojko-Lozynskyj, translator), whose artistic legacy in many ways still defines Ukrainian culture as a whole. Ukrainka's creative energy was at its peak in her plays, which deal with themes from history and from European cultural heritage. Her works remain

immensely influential in Ukraine. The next authors in the collection, Mykola Kulish ([66-188] whose two plays are translated, respectively, by John Prasko and by George S. N. Luckyj and Moira Luckyj, jointly [with an appendix translated by Zaleska Onyshkevych]) and Volodymyr Vynnychenko ([189-244] translator: Christine Oshchudlak Stawnychy), each in his own way, delve into the psyche of the zeitgeist, or the tectonic changes in culture and life brought about in the new century and the no less drastic transformations of society under Soviet rule. Kulish, notably, created the play *Narodnii Malakhii* (*The People's Malachi*, 1927), which is about a man who is so enthralled by Communism's ideas that he becomes obsessed with the vision of an "azure yonder" (e.g., 82) for humankind; in the process, the man abandons his family and loses every ounce of his sanity. Kulish presents a tragic travesty of the "new man" of Soviet mythology. Next, the anthology offers the reader a play by Ivan Kocherha ([245-306] translation by Anthony Wixley, revised by Larissa Onyshkevych and Roman Senkus), a writer who survived the Soviet terror and was even decorated by the Soviet state as a prominent playwright. The collection then offers plays by the émigré authors Liudmyla Kovalenko ([307-29] Charles A. Stek, translator); Eaghor G. Kostetzky ([330-99] Prasko, translator), a rather unique writer with penchant for the experimental; and Bohdan Boychuk ([400-34] translated by Vera Rich, in collaboration with Boychuk and Onyshkevych), a prominent modernist writer—one of the leaders of his generation—and the author of a play on the Holodomor. The collection presents next Oleksii Kolomiiets' ([435-73] Don I. Boychuk, translator), who is best described as a "Soviet Ukrainian playwright" (435), and, finally, Valerii Shevchuk ([474-521] Zaleska Onyshkevych, translator), one of the most important living Ukrainian writers.

The anthology, in documenting a century of Ukrainian drama, includes authors from both the Soviet Union and the émigré milieu. This is another of the book's strengths. For a long time, writers in the diaspora had no contact with society in Ukraine as the Iron Curtain effectively separated the two. And after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it took a while for the two literary branches to come together. Although the Ukrainian diaspora had played a vital role in preserving important aspects of Ukrainian heritage and stood up for a country that, in effect, did not exist on the map, the process of integrating the writings of diaspora authors was not easy at first. Literary figures and critics in post-Communist Ukraine tended to be blinded by the remnants of "socialist realist" ideology and to judge diaspora authors as overly "experimental." Zaleska Onyshkevych includes authors from both camps in her collection, and this makes a powerful statement: that there is only one camp now—one community of artists.

The anthology is very comprehensive, and it is an excellent teaching tool. It contains information about each author, with accompanying short bibliographies, and a critical introduction to each play that situates a work within its time period and within the context of a particular trend. This is another distinctly positive feature of the anthology.

While it is true that, ideally, a book review should focus not only on the strengths of a book but also on potential areas of improvement, in the case of this anthology, this is not so easy to do—partly because the anthology is well composed and contains good-quality translations and partly because the collection, at this point, is a rather unique undertaking. The volume offers the reader an array of first-class dramas by acclaimed playwrights; these works are contextualized in a scholarly way but are nevertheless understandable to the general reader. The collection will be indispensable to those who teach Ukrainian (or Eastern European) literature(s); to scholars of drama; and, more broadly, to those interested in Ukrainian history. The book should also appeal to the curious reader who enjoys discovering new things.

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