Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky, editors. *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine*. Introduction by Ilya Kaminsky, afterword by Polina Barskova, Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University / Borderlines Foundation for Academic Studies / Academic Studies Press, 2017. Ukrainian Studies, edited by Vitaly Chernetsky. xxvi, 246 pp. Illustrations. Glossary. Geographical Locations and Places of Significance. Notes to Poems. Index. $37.00, cloth.

This beautifully made and illustrated collection of poems by sixteen Ukrainian writers in English translation, edited by Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky and published in the Ukrainian Studies series (edited by Vitaly Chernetsky), has left me with an ambivalent bittersweet feeling. As a Ukrainian-born scholar of translation studies and Slavic literatures, I am excited when poets from Ukraine are given a new voice in English and can be appreciated by a wider audience. However, as a human being living in this strange and increasingly disheartening world, I would prefer if poems about war had never appeared in the first place, in Ukraine or elsewhere.

As the collection's alliterative—and palliative—title, *Words for War*, suggests, the poems offer a collective artistic response to the unlawful Russian-led war in the eastern-Ukrainian Donbas. (On the front book-jacket flap, the war is referred to, with somewhat surprising impartiality, as "the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine"; conflict and unprovoked aggression are, of course, very different things.) After the Ukrainian pro-Russian puppet government was ousted during the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in a blatant violation of international law. With the help of local insurgents, mercenaries, and its own armed forces, it also occupied parts of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, displacing millions of people and leaving thousands killed and injured. As this war goes on and the international community unrelentingly continues to express its "grave concern," Ukraine deals with the pain and suffering inflicted on the entire country and the daily tallies of the dead (which, as Serhiy Zhadan puts it in "Take Only What Is Most Important" [187-88], are "so long that there won't be enough time / to check them for your own name" [188]). Despite Theodor Adorno's admonition, poetry continues to be written after Auschwitz. It continues to be written today after "Yasynuvata, Horlivka, Savur-Mohyla, Novoazovsk . . . Krasnyi-Luch, Donetsk, [and] Luhansk," even though "[t]alking becomes impossible" and "[e]very hope is being ended" (Afanasieva 17). As Lyuba Yakimchuk concludes in her poem "Decomposition" (152-53), "there's no poetry about war / just decomposition / only letters remain" (152).

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The collection opens with a preface (xiii-xviii) by Maksymchuk (from Lviv, in western Ukraine) and Rosochinsky (from the Crimea, in southern Ukraine), a couple whose marriage encapsulates the cultural and linguistic divides in Ukrainian society and, yet, also exemplifies the possibility of rapprochement. The editors, who are themselves poets and translators, explain how the poems that they selected for translation perform different functions, specifically those of testimony and therapy (and even catharsis). For them, poets are uniquely sensitive agents of change, driven not only by actual events but also, in a Heideggerian sense, by language, which speaks through them so that the experiences and emotions of war can be chronicled. In the moving and thought-provoking introduction, "Barometers" (xix-xxv), which follows the preface, poet and translator Ilya Kaminsky (who is of Ukrainian descent but is now working and teaching in the United States) shares reflections on war, language, and poetry, based on his personal acquaintance and correspondence with the poets featured in the collection. Lyrical and philosophical, Kaminsky invites us to ponder what happens to language in wartime, with the reminder that "poetry is not merely a description of an event; it is [itself] an event" (xxiv).

One of the collection's greatest assets is its diversity. Established and internationally known writers, such as Izdryk and Zhadan, rub shoulders with emerging younger talents, like Yakimchuk and Kalytko. The book gives voice to poets who come from the Donbas, like Vasyl Holoborodko, and to those who volunteered and fought in the battlefield, like Borys Humenyuk. Moreover, it offers a very balanced representation of female and male writers and, importantly, of poets who write in Ukrainian and those who write in Russian. An example of the latter is Boris Khersonsky, who, as Kaminsky's essay poignantly illustrates, supports Ukraine and even switched to teaching in Ukrainian to protest the ludicrous propaganda claim that the Russian invasion was aimed at "protecting" the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine.

Thematically, the collection is also very rich. Although most of the poems address the horrors of war, specific themes include death, pain, loneliness, prayers, funerals, bodies, hostages, and refugees. Several poems examine the possibility of writing poetry about war during wartime while a few, albeit without much hope, talk about love. A moving example comes from Kalytko's poem "He Writes" (68-69), in which a young soldier is writing a letter to his mother, whose face, along with other things, he is beginning to forget; in the last line, he asks if a girl whom he used to know still sings in the church choir (69).

Since the collection is mostly intended for English-speaking readers, the editors' decision not to use the dual-language parallel-text format is justified. It allows the poems to stand as works of art (written in English) in their own

right and prevents nitpicking bilingual critics (like me) from shifting into a "comparative fault-finding mode" and tracking all of the little infelicities. However, it might have been useful to provide an index with the Ukrainian or Russian titles of the poems or their opening lines, especially when the edition already contains many other truly outstanding paratextual elements, such as the preface and introduction; biographies of the authors and translators (198-211); a glossary of cultural concepts, realia terms, and geographical locations (212-21); endnotes—rather than footnotes—which do not interrupt the reading and provide important explanations (222-32); and a very erudite and perceptive afterword (191-97) by the Saint Petersburg-born poet, translator, and scholar Polina Barskova.

The quality of the translations, which have been undertaken by more than thirty translators and scholars, often working in collaborative tandems, unfortunately varies throughout the collection. Most of the translations succeed in recreating the original soundscapes and images and in capturing the subtle nuances of Slavic prosody and syntax—a daunting task given the still-prevalent rhyming tradition. Some, however, offer rather approximate renditions, with omissions and changes that can hardly be said to serve the purpose of literariness or creativity. For example, in Humenyuk's brilliant, blood-chilling unrhymed poem "These seagulls over the battlefield—" (30-32), which, in a rather detached tone, recounts how different birds feed on the flesh of fallen soldiers, major and minor inaccuracies in almost every stanza create the impression of a rushed translation, which despite reading fluently, falls short of doing justice to meaning and language. At the same time, the translation of Izdryk's "Darkness Invisible" (48-49), a complicated poem, is audacious in its attempt to reproduce rhyme, a crucial element of his poetry. However, in doing so, it neglects much of Izdryk's ubiquitous (homonymous and paronymous) wordplay, and consequently, this gives a drastically different impression of that writer, whose poems are almost always inherently driven by sound and the unexpected and playful tensions between similar-sounding words. Finally, the translators of Aleksandr Kabanov's witty and sharp satiric poetry (he is perhaps the only poet in this collection whose words evoke a smile) certainly must have faced serious challenges in their task, but they made some counterintuitive choices. For example, the ingenious, untitled allegorical poem "Once upon a time, a Jew says to his prisoner, his Hellenic foe:" (59) has several controversial aspects. The appositive word *kolorad* (a derogatory term for a pro-Russian separatist coined after the Colorado beetle, which resembles the Saint George ribbon), an essential concept that certainly belongs in the notes, is missing in the opening line. The salutation "'Girkinson, shalom!'" is interpreted as "'Girkinson, helmet down!'" (59) which made me think of the Ukrainian word *sholom* 'helmet,' even though the poem was written in Russian (in which it

would be *shlem*). The word *terykony* (in Russian, *terrikony*), which denotes the typical Donbas terrain, scattered with spoil tips or pit heaps, is rendered as "steppe" (59); again, it would have been beneficial to explain this term in the notes. Vladimir Maiakovskii's famous *shtaniny* 'trousers,' in "Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte" ("Poem on the Soviet Passport," 1929 [see "Stikhi"]), are thus described in Herbert Marshall's translation ("My Soviet Passport," 1982): "I pull out / of my wide trouser-pockets" (Mayakovsky 154). But in the collection under review, the same phrase is translated as "trendy trousers" (59). Also, an allusion to Vladimir Putin's infamous comment regarding the shelling of Grozny (which he made at a 1999 Astana press conference), "My i v sortire ikh zamochim" ("We'll waste them [that is, 'terrorists'] in a shithouse"; see "Mochit'"; my trans.), appears in this collection as the line "how his foes cornered him, placed a bounty on his head" (59).

Despite these insignificant and occasional translation shortcomings, the book *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine* is an impressive collection of poetry—perhaps one of the best collections of Ukrainian poetry in English translation that I have recently read. I have no doubt that it will be enjoyed by readers for both its informative/educational and its aesthetic merits, and I applaud the editors and, especially, the translators for this tremendous effort. I want to hope that, by reading these poems, the international community will pay tribute, albeit symbolic, to those fallen Ukrainian heroes who have given their lives protecting their motherland.

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