

**Michael M. Naydan, comp. and ed. *HERSTORIES. An Anthology of New Ukrainian Women Prose Writers*.** London: Glagoslav Publications, 2014. 443pp. Introduction. Paper.

**T**he cover of the book under review reads: “Over the past two decades, scores of fascinating new women authors have emerged.” With this anthology, Michael Naydan, its compiler and editor, definitely proves this claim.

Very thoughtfully, Naydan provides biographical and bibliographical data on the writers in this compilation. For the reader, this is very helpful for placing the authors against the appropriate backdrop of historical events (only four of the writers were published during the Soviet period) and geography (ranging from Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Cherkasy to Kyiv, Poltava, Donetsk, and Kherson) and, thus, for seeing these authors as representatives of contemporary Ukrainian writers from all regions of the country. Aside from the well-known Lina Kostenko, Emma Andijewska, Nina Bichuya, Sofia Maidanska, and Oksana Zabuzhko, many of the authors in this anthology had their books published primarily after the 1990s: Liuko Dashvar, Ludmyla Taran, Eugenia Kononenko, Maria Matios, Iren Rozdobudko. Those born between 1972 and 1983 published their first works mostly in this century: Larysa Denysenko, Svitlana Povalyaeva, Svitlana Pyrkalo, Natalka Sniadanko, Irena Karpa, Dzvinka Matiyash, Sofia Andrukhovych, and Tanya Malyarchuk. They, too, provide a good argument for Naydan to call his introductory article “Emerging Ukrainian Women Prose Writers.”

History has left its mark on several authors in this anthology, who were brought up as Russian speakers and had to find their Ukrainian identity and their own voice: Andijewska (the only writer here from outside Ukraine), Dashvar (Iryna Chernova), and Denysenko all switched to writing in Ukrainian. Surprisingly, few of the above eighteen authors deal with historical events. Matios (from Bukovyna) is among those who do, depicting the undesirable Russian presence in a Carpathian village in 1914. Bichuya, a widely popular author since the 1980s, in her phantasmagoric novella “The Stone Master,” deals with the terrifying effects of Stalin’s deeds, his influence on people’s psychological state, and their resulting hypocritical behaviour. In this almost Gogolian, or even Kafkaesque, work Bichuya also includes several haunting scenes of the Holodomor. (Although Bichuya wrote this text in 1978, it was published only in 1990 and, thankfully, is included in this collection.) One author, Kostenko, focuses on contemporary historical events, depicting her individualistic protagonist as he greets the Orange Revolution of a decade ago. (One may question the translation of the title *zapytsky ukrains'koho samashedshoho* as “Diary of a Ukrainian Madman,” as it

leaves out the important aspect of *samashedshoho*, which focuses on the *lonely* path of the protagonist).

While some narratives in the anthology depict life in the early decades of the previous century, most are rooted in contemporary times, whether set in Ukraine or abroad; several writers specifically seem at ease in both places (Rozdobudko, Sniadanko). The issues that the authors often present are community interrelations (Matios, Dashvar), postcolonial problems, interpersonal relationships and self-fulfillment (Kononenko, Zabuzhko, Sniadanko). Taran depicts the “white slavery” of the Natashas. Although Sofia Andrukhovych deals with people from the lower depths of society, describing them in a naturalistic manner and an almost black atmosphere (“Death Is Sexy”), her stories are quite sensitive. Most of the above women writers do not present marriage in rosy colours, although many of their protagonists share dreams of true communication and commitment. While the majority of the authors rely on realistic depictions, some delve into dreamy semirealism (Denysenko). Andijewska and Maidanska (the latter being the only writer here born to exiled parents in a gulag), as well as Matiyash, create parable-like or even fairy-tale-like, philosophically leaning stories dealing with goodness and light. While many selections illustrate the particular styles of each writer, the fact that several texts are excerpts from novels presents an obvious disadvantage—such chapters do not always stand on their own and may detract from appreciating the story or the style.

There are only a few works that might almost fit the best of the “chick-lit” genre. However, most are mainstream literature, with several real gems: “The Stone Master” by Bichuya; “About a Girl Who Drew on Sand” by Maidanska; excerpts from *Sweet Darusya* and *Apocalypse* by Matios; a selection from “Fifteen Stories about Rain” by Matiyash; “Lesya and Her Dentist” by Malyarchuk; as well as Zabuzhko’s “Girls.”

The outstanding literary quality of most of the above works goes hand in hand with some great translations by seventeen individuals, many of them often-published translators (Halyna Hryn, Uliana Pasicznyk, Yuri Tkacz); several are also distinguished writers (Askold Melnyczuk), editors (Olesia Wallo), professors (Michael Naydan, Vitaly Chernetsky, Mark Andryczyk, Alla Perminova), translators (Svitlana Benazh, Nataliya Bilyuk, Jennifer Croft, Natalia Ferens), journalists (Svitlana Pyrkalo), doctoral candidates (Roman Ivashkiv and Olha Tytarenko), as well as other professionals (Liliya Valihun). Many of their translations read as well as the best original works of any literature. However, a few translations definitely needed more thorough editing and double-checking of footnote information.

One quibble about a claim made by Naydan: he lists several Ukrainian women writers who wrote at the end of the nineteenth century and notes that later, “The Soviet period, unfortunately, experienced a dearth of

influential Ukrainian women prose writers” (15). This may be too categorical a statement. After all, while Ol'ha Kobylans'ka and Natalia Kobryns'ka were still being published, the prose works of Zinaida Tulub, Liudmyla Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka, and Katria Hrynevychyeva were also accessible in the 1920s (until they were excluded by the Soviets in the mid-1930s), as were those of Natalena Koroleva and Irena Wilde in Western Ukraine from the 1930s. In the 1990s, prose works of Ukrainian émigrés Liudmyla Ivchenko Kovalenko, Dokia Humenna, Halyna Zhurba, Vira Vovk, and Emma Andijewska became available in Ukraine. They, too, were the bridge to the present generation of talented women prose writers, who now do not have to face roadblocks created by historical or political events.

One may well ask: Is there still a need for separate anthologies for the literary output of women writers? Vasyl Gabor thought that there is, when in 2005 he compiled *Neznaioma* [Unfamiliar Lady], a highly regarded Ukrainian-language anthology of current Ukrainian women prose and essay writers; ten of them are also among the eighteen authors in Naydan's anthology. Both are in the good tradition of *Pershyi vinok* [The First Garland] (1887, 2nd ed. 1984), an anthology of literary works by Ukrainian women writers, edited and published by Natalia Kobryns'ka and Olena Pchilka, who wanted to acquaint Ukrainian readers with Ukrainian women writers of their day.

Whether Naydan took the gynocritical approach in promoting specifically women writers, or just wished to promote new Ukrainian literary works, his anthology for English-speaking readers achieves both objectives quite successfully.

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