

Iryna Starovoyt. *A Field of Foundlings: Selected Poems*. Translated from the Ukrainian by Grace Mahoney, Lost Horse Press, 2017. Lost Horse Press Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry Series 1. 92 pp. Illustrations. \$21.00, paper.

A *Field of Foundlings: Selected Poems* is the first collection of poetry by Iryna Starovoyt (Starovoyt) to be translated into English. The facing-page edition, beautifully laid out and printed, is a significant contribution to the small corpus of contemporary Ukrainian poetry that is accessible to an audience who cannot read in the original. As the flagship publication in Lost Horse Press's new series of Ukrainian translations, *A Field of Foundlings* suggests that the series will be well produced, aptly translated, and easily accessible to a wide audience.

In the almost three decades since Ukraine's proclamation of independence, Ukrainian poetry has flourished, particularly in the wake of the Revolution of Dignity and in the face of the war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Starovoyt's first collection of poetry, *Vzhe ne prozori: Poezii (No Longer Limpid: Poems)*, was published in 1997. *A Field of Foundlings* contains the poetry that she wrote after the Orange Revolution (centrally, those poems that were published in the eponymous section of her book *Hroninhens'kyi rukopys [The Groningen Manuscript]*), and it includes several works that date to the time after the Maidan events. As a consequence, the dislocation and confusion of the first two decades of the twenty-first century are wound through the work. Identities shift and morph inside single poems; "I" becomes "she" becomes some other whom the poet addresses directly. Language slips between metaphor and concrete reality, leading the reader effortlessly from one thought to the next.

It is this aspect of Starovoyt's poetry that *A Field of Foundlings* brings most clearly into focus. The poetry is undated, and without external research, the reader has no way of knowing when each poem was published or in what order the poems originally stood. Despite this, the pieces flow easily together, allowing the reader to move seamlessly through them—for example, from the personal musing of "Inodi meni vydaiet'sia, shcho ia, iak Afina," ("Sometimes I feel like I'm Athena,"; 8-9) to the political and social in "Khlopchaky-dyplomaty z emotsiiamy emu," ("Diplomat-boys with ostrich inclinations,"; 32-35). There is a fluidity to Starovoyt's language and syntax that is clearly revealed in the choice of poems and, indeed, is well maintained in the translation by Grace Mahoney.

The translation also captures Starovoyt's masterful use of metaphor throughout her poetry. This is generally so easily lost in the move from one language to another, but Mahoney manages to capture the double meaning of lines—for example,

і обирати сходи,
якими можна піднятися над собою.
(Тепер скрізь замість сходів ліфти).

and choose the steps
by which you could better yourself.
(Now everywhere elevators replace stairs).

in “Ty був til'ky epizodom moho zhyttia.” (“You were only in an episode of my life.”; 26-27). Mahoney carefully maintains the rhythm of Starovoyt’s Ukrainian while rendering the poems readable in English.

Every translation is a recreation of the original work and, indeed, a creation on the part of the translator. In *A Field of Foundlings*, Mahoney has captured the depth of feeling of Starovoyt’s original poems. Perhaps even more importantly, her translations stand as powerful poetry in English, not simply as serviceable renderings. Her choices as a translator do not always hew close to the literal, and she often maintains form and rhythm over exact phrasing. This is an excellent decision. Starovoyt’s free verse is dependent on the structures that the poet herself creates. There is no sonnet metre to give the reader clues as to how a poem should be read. Instead, there is only the work itself and its internal logic. Mahoney, in her translations, seeks to preserve this structure. This allows the English-language reader to feel the ebb and flow of Starovoyt’s excellent versification.

A Field of Foundlings serves well as an introduction both to Starovoyt’s work and to contemporary Ukrainian poetry. It is easily accessible for a reader whose Ukrainian is not at a level advanced enough for reading Starovoyt’s work entirely in the original and who could benefit from a facing-page translation. Because of the success of the collection’s translations, an English reader who is new to free verse, or to poetry as a whole, should find it quite accessible. One can imagine this collection being used very effectively in a first-year undergraduate course or in a graduate course where students are familiar with another Slavic language.

A Field of Foundlings is, at its core, a work for the non-specialist and for the casual reader. The lack of dates and context for the poetry outside of the introductions means that any academic work using the text would require considerable external research. A reader who is not well acquainted with recent Ukrainian history or with the religious context of the poems would be hard-pressed to understand them, and thus, the book could benefit from some explanatory notes. This would be especially helpful in the second half of the book, where the poetry turns to more political and religious matters. It sits in a slightly odd position inasmuch as it is too sparsely annotated for the totally ignorant reader and the educated reader alike.

The quality of the translation itself and the good selection of poems are by far enough to make up for these few flaws. But this should definitely be an area of consideration for later works in the Lost Horse Press Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry Series. More careful copy-editing would also be valuable for future books in the series. There are several typographic errors in the English portion of *A Field of Foundlings*, which mar the appearance of an otherwise beautiful book. On the whole, however, *A Field of Foundlings* is an exciting start to what promises to be an excellent series of translations.

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Works Cited

- Starovoit, Iryna. *Hroninhens'kyi rukopys*. Illustrated by Tvorchma maisternia "Agrafka," Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva, 2014.
- . *Vzhe ne prozori: Poezii*. Vydavnytstvo "Feniks," 1997.