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## TRANSLINGUAL WRITING AND CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN LITERATURE THROUGH THE LENS OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION: LIMINAL CREATIVITY OF TANJA MALJARTSCHUK

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*The present paper explores the perspective of translingual writing within the global framing of contemporary Ukrainian literature, with a specific focus on the liminal creativity of Tanja Maljartschuk, who has been producing her creative fiction both in Ukrainian and German. The study suggests that translingual writers develop a new identity by establishing an interlingual dialogic space, that is a new habitus for their creative expression. The paper hence examines Maljartschuk's philosophy of translingual writing, focusing on her motivations and social underpinnings and how she frames this practice within the context of her bilingual identity. The article then argues that translating the works of Ukrainian authors, originally written in languages other than Ukrainian, into English provides a unique perspective on the concept of "global Ukrainian literature." To support these objectives, the paper analyzes the English translation of Maljartschuk's German-language award-winning Ukrainian short story, featured in the 2022 anthology "Love in Defiance of Pain: Ukrainian Stories." The paper posits that the editors of the anthology, through their careful selection of texts, aimed to present an inclusive and global image of present-day Ukrainian literature, reflecting diverse lingual pathways in Ukraine's literary landscape. It is indeed exemplified by the inclusion of two stories by Tanja Maljartschuk – one originally in Ukrainian and the other in German in the edition under analysis.*

**Keywords:** *translingual writing, translation, Ukrainian literature, global literature, self-translation, editorial practice of translation.*

**Introduction.** Although the concept of translingual writing has gained prominence in world literature studies, particularly in influential works by Steven G. Kellman (1991; 2000; 2003; 2022), this phenomenon has only recently started to receive focused attention in research on Ukrainian literature. However, in Ukrainian literary history, there is a notable presence of translingual writers – individuals who wrote in multiple languages or in a language other than their primary one – thus demonstrating their ability to adopt a new linguistic identity. Certainly, this phenomenon in Ukraine can also be attributed to colonial power imbalances, which compelled writers to adopt the language of the imperial power, that is Russian. Nonetheless, examining the translingual perspective, particularly through contemporary writing, underscores the importance of exploring "global Ukrainian literature," or as framed by the Bloomsbury series, "Literatures as World Literature" ("Polish Liter-

ature as World Literature," "Bulgarian Literature as World Literature," etc., hence extending to "Ukrainian Literature as World Literature"), which centers on processes of mobility, cross-cultural exchange, and entanglements across languages, topics and domains. Indeed, it challenges the conventional perspective on national (mono-lingual) literatures.

In this scope, it is worth drawing attention to the anthology "Love in Defiance of Pain: Ukrainian Stories," released in 2022 under the editorship of Ali Kinsela, Zenia Tompkins along with Ross Ufberg, which samples stories in English translation for the global audience by some of the best Ukrainian writers. Among them is Tanja Maljartschuk, who primarily writes in Ukrainian but has been producing creative nonfiction in German since 2014. Her debut story in German, "Frösche im Meer," earned her the esteemed Ingeborg Bachmann Prize at the Festival of German-Language Literature in 2018,

and this German-language story is also represented in English translation in the aforementioned anthology. Tanja Maljartschuk can thus be characterized as a translanguaging writer, whose German texts are further translated, representing her as a Ukrainian author.

In view of this, the ultimate ambition of this study is to reflect on translanguaging writing within the broader context of contemporary Ukrainian literature, honing in on the distinct creative approach of Tanja Maljartschuk, who engages in the creation of imaginative narratives in both Ukrainian and German languages.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Mary Besemeres has suggested that every instance of translanguaging writing could be seen as a form of self-translation (Besemeres, 2002), where two languages form part of a personal linguistic repertoire. This has been further explored by Marja Sorvari in her analysis of Zinaida Lindén's novels in Swedish, which were later self-translated into Russian (Sorvari, 2018). In this regard, Steven Kellman distinguishes between "ambilingual translanguaging writers," who have produced significant works in multiple languages, and "those who have written in only a single language but one other than their native one, the monolingual translanguagers" (Kellman, 2000, p. 12). In the examination of German émigré writers who have ventured into English-language texts, Verena Jung articulates the concept of cultural mediation, examining the process of "self-translation back" – from English, the language of their host country, into their mother tongue, German (Jung, 2004, p. 532). She asserts that the role of a cultural mediator becomes evident in significant changes and restructurings made in the final German version (ibid).

On a more comprehensive note, the collective volume *"Switching Languages: Translanguaging Writers Reflect on Their Craft"* provides a multifaceted perspective on the experiences and creative processes of translanguaging writers, underscoring that "the aspirations and achievements of translanguaging authors have been almost as varied as the languages they linked" (Kellman, 2003, p. xvii). The most recent contribution to the theme is the 2021 *"Routledge Handbook of Literary Translanguaging"* that offers a thorough exploration of translanguaging literature, encompassing writers, traditions, and genres from Polish, Baltic, Balkan, German, French and various other language mediations (Kellman and Lvovich, 2022), yet it did not shed any light on the Ukrainian perspective, which conditions the relevance of this undertaking.

**Formulation of the purpose and objectives of the article.** The present paper explores the per-

spective of translanguaging writing within the global framing of contemporary Ukrainian literature, with a specific focus on the liminal creativity of Tanja Maljartschuk, who has been producing her creative fiction both in Ukrainian and German. The primary objectives of the paper lie in (1) the exploration of Maljartschuk's philosophy of translanguaging writing, focusing on her motivations and social underpinnings, and how she frames this practice within the context of her bilingual identity, as well as in (2) developing the argument that translating the works of Ukrainian authors, originally written in languages other than Ukrainian, into English provides a unique perspective on the concept of "global Ukrainian literature." To support these objectives, the paper analyzes the English translation of Maljartschuk's German-language award-winning Ukrainian short story, featured in the Anglophone translation within the 2022 anthology "Love in Defiance of Pain: Ukrainian Stories."

**Presentation of the main research material.** After moving to Vienna in 2011, Tanja Maljartschuk started writing in German, precisely during the events on the Maidan in 2014. In one of the interviews, she mentioned, "I felt the need to express my opinion from a Ukrainian perspective, because in the German-speaking space there was only one prevailing, pro-Russian opinion" (Maljartschuk, T. and A. Safarov, 2018; translation – I. Odrekhivska). In fact, she kept contributing short essays to the German newspaper "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", to the Austrian weekly "Falter", and later – to the website of the newspaper "Die Zeit". Her most recent publication is indeed a collection of these essays "Gleich geht die Geschichte weiter, wir atmen nur aus", written between 2014 and 2022 for the German media. Writing in the German language was an act of affirmation for Maljartschuk, positioning her as an active participant in a new culture, empowering her to challenge past narratives about her native country, Ukraine.

In this collection's review published in "Süddeutsche Zeitung", Gustav Seibt (2022) wrote, that the art of merging personal and general matters shines in this "small yet weighty book." This comment highlights Maljartschuk's artistic talent in crafting stories in German with eloquence and depth, as if she were writing in Ukrainian. As a matter of fact, she shared that it is much easier for her to write in German about personal matters than in her native language (Maljartschuk, T. and A. Safarov, 2018; translation – I. Odrekhivska):

*"It even seems to me that I manage to express my thoughts more clearly and simply, using fewer words... It's strange, but I've never talked about this in Ukrainian before, so now it's hard for me*

to find the right words. Imagine, I even mentally translate from German, although my thoughts actually go through Ukrainian [...] But to write a text in German, I really need a lot more time. That's true. I have to think not only about the content, but also about syntax, grammar, about what mistakes I might make. This noticeably slows down the process."

What is more, she stresses that writing in the adopted language creates a sense of distancing, allowing her to frame her thoughts in a more rational way:

"Language, obviously, is closely tied to certain traumas and fears, and when I write about them in a non-native language, a psychotherapeutic distance appears – it's not as painful, the causes and effects become clearer, and it's easier to laugh at myself [...] I wanted to try another language. And since German has become practically a second language, not native, but a second working language, it was not difficult to do so. German is simultaneously a convenient refuge for me. I can write some things only in Ukrainian, some only in German" (Maljartschuk, T. and A. Safarov, 2018; translation – I. Odrekhivska).

Reflecting on the poetics of displacement, Adrian Wanner states that translingual writing can be read as a means of self-exploration and as a dialogue between two selves of the writer located in different temporal, geographical, linguistic and cultural spaces (Wanner, 2018). The dynamic inner dialogue between her two linguo-geographical selves reflects the intricate layers of identity and memory, shaping Maljartschuk's unique voice. Furthermore, as a translingual writer, she develops a new identity by establishing an interlingual dialogic space that becomes a new habitus for her creative expression.

In "World Literature Today," Ali Kinsella's review of the English translation of Maljartschuk's novel "A Biography of a Chance Miracle" highlights Maljartschuk's original Ukrainian wryness and her "darkly humorous take on life and hope", noting that humor is more pronounced in the original language than in the English version of the novel (Kinsella, 2019). Yet, displaying the same wit, Tanja Maljartschuk penned her first German-language story, "Frösche im Meer", stating in one interview that she knew from the beginning what its title would be and what it would be about:

"The image in my mind – frogs living in an unnatural environment, in the sea, in salt water – resonated deeply with the story of the main character, a Ukrainian immigrant who has been living in a German-speaking city for 17 years without documents (he destroyed his passport

himself to avoid deportation if he got caught). Frau Grill, who is slowly losing her mind due to old age, is also like a frog in the sea. Their stories cannot have a happy ending" (Maljartschuk, T. and A. Safarov, 2018; translation – I. Odrekhivska).

Despite being written in German, the story features Ukrainian names for the main characters, who migrated to Austria as laborers. As the main character Petro tears up his Ukrainian passport, Maljartschuk poignantly conveys, "*Dann blieben ihm nur noch der Vorname und die Erinnerung*" / "Then all he had was a first name and a memory" (Kinsella, A., Tompkins, Z. and Ufberg, R., 2022). Using German as the language medium that "hosts" immigrants, Maljartschuk blurs the line between "we" and "they." The deixis in her writing indicates that Petro perceives himself as part of "this country" while still referring to other Ukrainians as "us": "*Gefängnisse in diesem Land sind voll mit uns, Petro, voll mit uns, wurde ihm gesagt*" / "The prisons in this country are full of us, Petro, full of us, he was told" (Kinsella, A., Tompkins, Z. and Ufberg, R., 2022).

Maljartschuk consistently evokes Ukrainian settings, such as the town of Bolekhiv and the Carpathian Mountains in her German narrative, symbolizing the absence of Petro's homeland. Intentionally, she references a specific historical moment in her story – the first gold medal in the Olympics for independent Ukraine, won by a sixteen-year-old figure skater Oksana Baiul (who later emigrated to the US). This moment serves as the final symbolic event for Petro at home before his escape and is one of the very few references that the author unveils in her text.

The end of the story, however, reaches a powerful climax with the concluding sentence: "*Der, der niemand ist, muss endlich heim*" / "The one who is no one must finally go home" (Kinsella, A., Tompkins, Z. and Ufberg, R., 2022). This line encapsulates the central theme of identity and belonging that runs throughout the narrative, reflecting the existential struggle of the protagonist, Petro, who, despite his efforts to assimilate and find a sense of belonging in his new land, remains haunted by his fragmented identity. The notion of being "no one" underscores the alienation and dislocation experienced by many immigrants, who often find themselves in a liminal space, neither fully accepted in the new country nor able to return to their old lives.

The editors of the English-language anthology of Ukrainian short stories "Love in Defiance of Pain" selected two writings from Tanja Maljartschuk for translation – her Ukrainian piece "Me and my sacred cow" (rendered by Oksana

Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky) and the German one "Frogs in the sea" (translated by Zenia Tompkins). They aimed to present an inclusive and global image of present-day Ukrainian literature, reflecting diverse lingual pathways in Ukraine's literary landscape. As Serhii Plokhly wrote, "this volume, from some of Ukraine's best contemporary writers, is an excellent introduction and gateway to Europe's most vibrant but as yet little-known literature" (Kinsella, A., Tompkins, Z. and Ufberg, R., 2022). It is the translingual writing that becomes one of the hallmarks of this edition: Oleg Sentsov's "Grandma" is also included in the translation from the Russian by Uilleam Blacker, as well as Stanislav Aseyec's "The Bell" in the version by Nina Murray and Zenia Tompkins. By integrating these works, the anthology underscores the multifaceted nature of Ukrainian literary expression, bridging linguistic and cultural divides.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** The present study has delved into translingual writing, one of the distinctive features of contemporary Ukrainian literature. The liminal creativity of Tanja Maljartschuk, who writes in both Ukrainian and German, has opened this field of exploration. The study argues that translingual

writers forge a new identity by constructing an interlingual dialogic space, which serves as a new habitus for their creative expression and self-translation. Moreover, the paper goes one step further by discussing the positioning of translingual writings of Ukrainian authors in the English rendition. Originally written in languages other than Ukrainian, these texts once translated into English provide a unique perspective on "global Ukrainian literature." For instance, the English translation of Maljartschuk's German-language award-winning Ukrainian short story featured in the 2022 anthology "Love in Defiance of Pain: Ukrainian Stories" alongside the publication of the English rendition of her another Ukrainian-language text repositions contemporary Ukrainian literature into the cross-cultural setting and presents diverse linguistic pathways in Ukraine's literary landscape.

This standpoint opens avenues for further explorations of the implications, specifically sociopolitical ones, of translingual writing in contemporary Ukrainian literature. This could involve examining other works by Ukrainian writers, such as Olena Stiazhkina, Oleg Sentsov and others, analyzing how their creative expressions shape cultural narratives in Ukraine.

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## **ТРАНСЛІНГВАЛЬНЕ ПИСЬМО ТА СУЧАСНА УКРАЇНСЬКА ЛІТЕРАТУРА КРІЗЬ ПРИЗМУ АНГЛОМОВНИХ ПЕРЕКЛАДІВ: ЛІМІНАЛЬНІСТЬ ТВОРЧОСТІ ТАНІ МАЛЯРЧУК**

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*У цій статті досліджено транслінгвальне письмо як новий динамічний вектор та концептуальне тло сучасної української літератури, зокрема – зацентовано лімінальність творчості Тані Малярчук, яка пише свої художні твори українською та німецькою мовами. Ця студія висуває твердження, що транслінгвальні письменники розвивають нову ідентичність, встановлюючи міжмовний діалогічний простір, який є новим габітусом для їхнього творчого самовираження. З огляду на це, в статті розглянуто філософію транслінгвального письма Тані Малярчук, зосереджуючи увагу на психологічних аспектах самоперекладу, мотивації і соціальних чинниках авторки, а також на тому, як вона вписує цю практику в контекст своєї двомовної ідентичності. У статті доведено, що переклад на англійську творів українських авторів, які написані не українською мовою, дає унікальний погляд на поняття “глобальної української літератури”. Для підтримки цього твердження у статті проаналізовано англійський переклад оповідання Тані Малярчук, що в оригіналі написане німецькою мовою та яке увійшло до антології “Любов всупереч болю: українські оповідання” (“Love in defiance of pain: Ukrainian stories”), що вийшла друком у 2022 році у видавництві Deep Vellum. У праці окреслено, що редактори антології, ретельно відбираючи тексти, прагнули представити інклюзивний та глобальний образ сучасної української літератури, що відображає різноманітні мовні шляхи в українському літературному ландшафті. Прикладом цього є включення до аналізованого англомовного видання перекладів двох оповідань Тані Малярчук – одного з української, а іншого – з німецької мов.*

**Ключові слова:** *транслінгвальне письмо, переклад, українська література, світова література, самопереклад, едітологія перекладу.*