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## Teodosij Os'machka as a Translator of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*\*

In his book *Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth*, John Russell Brown remarks that "like most Jacobean plays, *Macbeth* resists a single classification." For him "in important ways it is a history play, one of a new kind developed in England, established during the last decades of the sixteenth century, and dominated by Shakespeare's achievements." Moreover, according to Brown, in such a play the dramatist could easily provide "comedy, satire, pathos, battle, pageantry, romance, argument and commemoration of events of national importance."<sup>1</sup> In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare apparently used almost all these combinations of themes and created indeed an intense, moving drama, packed with meaning.

In this paper I wish to examine some aspects of *Macbeth*'s Ukrainian translation in order to show how the translator interpreted and presented Shakespeare's masterpiece. Through such an examination I hope to show the translator's understanding, his imagination and feeling.

Teodosij Os'machka (1895-1962),<sup>2</sup> a Ukrainian writer and poet, was, in my opinion, uniquely suited to undertake the translation of *Macbeth*. "In his poetry, even more than in his prose," writes C. H. Andrusyshen, "Os'machka was a painfully incisive expressionist," who stormed "with elemental hatred against those who caused his ruin and that of his country."<sup>3</sup> Therefore the fate of Scotland during *Macbeth*'s tyrannical years was very close to his heart. In it he could easily identify the tragedy of Ukraine, the tragedy that he described in his own works written with an agitated soul and at times in a spirit like the ocean roused by a powerful tempest. As a highly talented writer he was capable of easily making his impressions descriptive and analytical and in that respect he was perhaps unsurpassed in Ukrainian literature. He is known for the originality of his concepts and for his ability to make these concepts work. The repressive 1930's in Ukraine left a profound imprint on his soul; after all in that decade he was twice arrested. Only by feigning insanity was Os'machka able to escape the liquidation suffered by most of his closest friends who lived and worked under Stalin's regime.

His interest in Shakespeare began in the late 1920's. At that time Ukrainian literature had three translations of *Macbeth*: one by Osyp Jurij Fed'kovich,<sup>4</sup> another by Pantelejmon Kulish,<sup>5</sup> and the third by Jurij Korec'kyj.<sup>6</sup>

Os'machka explains his involvement in translation of Shakespeare's works<sup>7</sup> in the following way:

I began to study English while I was still in Kyjiv... At that time I was attracted to Byron's lyrics and Shakespeare's tales which were narrated by people who were more literate than I. The writer Pidmohyl'nyj was then translating the works of Anatole France and knew French very well. And he often was telling me that the best way to study a foreign language was to translate from that language into your native language. Pidmohyl'nyj was also in excellent relations with the members of the [Ukrainian] Academy who were openly saying that there was no Shakespeare in Ukrainian because the Kullish translation did not communicate directly to the listener. Thus there was a need to rework Kullish's language and at least in that way to do some justice to Shakespeare in Ukrainian. And there in the Academy, through the efforts of Pidmohyl'nyj, they became convinced that the translation of *Macbeth* should be given to me, because my verse was considered powerful and vigorous. I began working on the translation of *Macbeth*, not with the purpose of reworking the language but rather of producing an original translation using all available Ukrainian translations, foreign translations, and the English original. And I did it.<sup>8</sup>

This brief story explains how Os'machka became involved with *Macbeth* and decided to make his first translation.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately I have been unable to obtain this translation. In the 1950's, already living abroad, Os'machka wrote a second translation because, as he says, he was "not satisfied with the accuracy of his first effort and with its emotional expressiveness."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, at that time he had a better knowledge of English and could handle Shakespeare's poetic language much better. He could also better understand *Macbeth's* locale and more easily conquer the difficulty of the dialectal expressions.

*Macbeth* is a short play and in its original version contains 1,993 lines. It is perhaps the most condensed of Shakespeare's tragedies (*King Lear* contains 3,298 lines, *Othello* – 3,324, *Hamlet* – 3,924, and *Julius Caesar* – 2,440).<sup>11</sup> The Ukrainian translation, on the other hand, contains 2,764 lines (Act I – 644, Act II – 434, Act III – 583, Act IV – 642 and Act V – 461). Thus the Ukrainian text is 770 lines longer than the Shakespeare's original. Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in blank verse and therefore almost entirely without rhyme. Each of his lines normally iambic pentameter – of

course contains ten syllables divided into five feet of two syllables each with the accent usually falling on the second syllable. However, in order to avoid monotony the author also used run-on lines with eleven syllables in which the rhyme of the last syllable carries right into the first syllable of the next line thus giving the text a smooth continuous flow. Shakespearean witches, on the other hand, speak trochaic tetrameter to separate them rhythmically from human beings. A special exception is made for Hecate who is of superior rank among the witches and speaks iambic tetrameter. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare also uses prose, spoken usually by common people in order to differentiate them from the nobility, or to communicate Macbeth's letter to his wife, thus setting it apart from the rest of the play.

Os'machka carefully approaches the Shakespearean text. For example, the English original reads:

My liege,  
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke  
With one that saw him die; who did report  
That very frankly he confessed his treasons,  
Implored your Highness' pardon, and set forth  
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life  
Became him like the leaving it. He died  
As one that had been studied in his death  
To throw away the dearest thing he owed  
As twere a careless trifle.

(I, iv, 1-10)<sup>12</sup>

The Ukrainian translation reads:

Владарю мій, ще не вернулись, тільки  
Я розмовляв з одним, що бачив смерть  
Кавдорову він розповів, як щиро  
Кавдор признався в зраді та благав  
У вашої величності прощення  
Бо виявив глибоке каяття  
Ніщо йому не пасувало так,  
Як розлучатися із тим життям,  
Яке він мав не по заслугі.  
Неначе смерть його навчила  
Розлуку брати з річчю найдорощою,  
Немов з дурничкою якоюсь,  
Коли потрібно.<sup>13</sup>

The translation appears also in blank verse and therefore without rhyme. It is to be noted that the ten Shakespearean lines are rendered by 13 lines in the Ukrainian translation. But to our surprise the latter contains only 63 words versus 70 words in the English original. The translated lines

contain the Shakespearean charm and beauty as well as the imagery. The lines are vivid, compact and intense. They translate correctly the idea that Cawdor had confessed and has died with a nobility he had not achieved in life. Furthermore, this report of Cawdor's death is an intelligent and clear statement by Malcolm. Thus the passage has the spirit of the original and reveals the facts clearly and distinctly. It proves the translator's originality in selecting the correct Ukrainian words for the English text in order to make the translation accurate and emotionally as close to the original as possible.

The fact that the translator used 13 lines to render 10 English lines easily demonstrates how there can be 700 lines more in translation than there are in the original. After all, Os'machka himself is a poet who realizes that a translation which offers the exact literal meaning without poetical form is certainly not art. Therefore he tried to achieve a reasonable accuracy in his work so that it might merit designation as Ukrainian blank verse. This successful attempt to render reasonably acceptable verse has thus increased the translated lines without however necessarily inflating text in number of words. This is probably the best way to give a meaningful equivalent of the original.

Os'machka's prose renderings are also skillful and original. Macbeth's letter to his wife is not only interesting but important enough to be sent by a special messenger. In it the translator depicted the good news and the Macbeth's love for his wife, whom he called «моя подруга найдорожча» (my dearest partner of greatness). The Ukrainian translation of the concluding lines of this letter is a good example of profound understanding of the English and is quite characteristic of Macbeth's personality and his ambitions. In so far as prose is concerned one should also mention the Porter's soliloquy in which he appears as a common man and therefore speaks in prose. This passage in Ukrainian translation is very significant because of the sound effect. The Ukrainian «гуп, гуп, гуп» repeated three times is perhaps even more forceful than the English "knock, knock, knock". Therefore "the knocking within" in the Ukrainian translation creates a strong background undoubtedly very effective on stage. It also accounts for some irony because of the fact that the drunken porter should imagine himself as a porter of Hell's gate. The mention of Satan at night in the Ukrainian translation creates a very specific situation which is certainly as effective as the mention of the "Belzebub" in English.

I cannot conclude my discussion of Shakespeare's poetry and prose in *Macbeth* without mentioning the witches that represent the supernatural in the play. Witchcraft was very common in Shakespeare's time and there existed a universal belief in it. The play begins with the appearance of three witches who speak a different rhyme from the humans:

When shall we three meet again?  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

(I, i, 1-2)

In Ukrainian translation these lines sound:

Коли ж ми стрінемося ще  
Під блиск громів та під дощем? (p. 51)

In English the witches speech is trochaic tetrameter which consists of four feet of two syllables each with the accent falling upon the first syllable in each pair. The same meter is preserved in Ukrainian translation. Since this meter is suggestive of dance, it is quite appropriate for the assembly of witches. Os'machka rendered these scenes very carefully, observing not only the requirements of the English original but also the spirit of Ukrainian supernatural poetry. The Ukrainian supernatural world is very rich and quite complex in its content. Os'machka accounted for all the difficulties presented in English, and, in his translation, expressed them in terms of elements carefully selected from Ukrainian folksongs and folklore in general.

Thus Os'machka's rendering of *Macbeth's* meter is not a sporadic effort or an incidental undertaking. It is a thorough search for the appropriate metrical form to make the translation natural and unprosaic. Each line that Os'machka translated shows his great struggle in order to avoid a rough version and to give the Ukrainian reading public a fundamentally original and poetical translation carefully derived from the proper handling of the English text.

In addition to its metrical merits, Os'machka's translation also shows his rich imagination, profound feelings and precise directions in keeping the work unified and appealing. The names of the characters of the tragedy are not presented according to one standard. Some names that are unusual for the Ukrainian language are used as nearly as possible in the way in which they are pronounced in English (Malcolm – Маком, Donalbain – Дональбен; Macduff – Макдаф, etc.) Those names that have already acquired usage in Ukrainian, like Macbeth or Duncan are even printed almost in their English forms – Макбет,<sup>14</sup> Дункан, etc. This variety in names adds much to the atmosphere that dominates the play and makes the translation visibly closer to the original for the reader.

Reading carefully the original and Os'machka's translation one cannot easily spot how much the translator tried to preserve the Shakespearean imagery. He treated the descriptive passages, especially those that are vivid, compact and particularized very carefully. Such imagery creates intensity and makes the lines of translation emotional and meaningful.

In *Macbeth* there is a special atmosphere of darkness. In the whole drama the sun is mentioned only twice – at the beginning and at the end. The action takes place either in some dark places or at night. Duncan is

murdered at night, as is Banquo. Witches dance in the thick atmosphere of a storm when the thunder is heard. This action takes place in a cave, and here each image creates horror and disgust while darkness prevails. Macbeth, who enters the scene, calls the witches «таємні, чорні і північні відьми» (secret, black and midnight hags). Os'machka approaches these images with knowledge and feeling. He penetrates their being and sees in them not only mental pictures but a multiplicity of factual images which can be taken collectively or individually. For example, each apparition forms an image by itself and its function is to express prophesy. The first apparition of a helmeted head represents Macbeth himself and echoes the fears of his mind which is by now desperate; he is nearly insane. He fears Macduff, who will finally cut off his head, because he has been suspicious of him from the beginning. The second apparition, a bloody child, represents Macduff. It assures Macbeth that no one born of woman shall ever be able to harm him. Finally, the third apparition, a crowned child bearing a tree, represents Malcolm. This apparition tells Macbeth that he never will be harmed until Birnam Forest will come to Dunsinane Hill. But the significance of each image is the product of Macbeth's mind and wish. Their meanings are subjective but still have artistic merits. Each image builds overconfidence and fails to indicate the real significance of the prophesies for the future. The last collective image of eight Kings and of Banquo's ghost appears after triple incantation. This time Macbeth is warned not to insist on knowing if Banquo's descendants will reign. However, he does not obey; his violent and destructive nature carries his demand to a final end and the re-appearing of Banquo's ghost points to the Kings as his descendants. Os'machka not only truthfully depicted these images in his translation but portrayed them with a carefully selected vocabulary that makes his translated lines close in spirit to Ukrainian supernatural poetry. He accounted for the darkness that accompanies these images. They are imprinted in Macbeth's mind and have an effect on his spirit, a spirit that remains in darkness and is overconfident. Thus the translation of these crucial and eventful scenes parallels the original in its imagery and in the profoundness of its meaning. It is truly very unusual to see a translation that is so close to the original; at points they are separated only by a total linguistic incompatibility, rare indeed for Os'machka.

On many occasions Shakespearean imagery carries in itself violence that contributes to the formation of the atmosphere in the tragedy. Macbeth's scheme to massacre Macduff's wife and family is purposeless savagery of great magnitude. On that occasion the Ukrainian translation sounds very grim. The original imagery is fully depicted with striking force:

Макдафів замок

Із Файфом раптом захоплю

І там жінок, дітей на меч візьму. (р. 120)

**In English:**

The castle of Macduff I will surprise,  
Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword  
His wife and babe.

(IV, i, 150-152)

Here the Ukrainian translation seems equally dynamic because of the force of the poetic lines. It also portrays vividly Macbeth's spiritual resolution and is stormily tumultuous.

Of great importance in the tragedy is the image of blood which is forced upon Macbeth and his wife.

Підіт, обмийте руки від липкого,  
Брудного свідка. (p. 78)

**In English:**

Go get some water  
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.

(II, ii, 45-46)

Or

Чи кров пречисту  
Великий океан Нептунів відмити здужа  
Від рук моїх? Ох, ні. Моря безмежні  
Скоріше хвилями зачервоніють  
І кров'ю закиплять від рук очих! (p. 79)

**In English:**

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine  
Making the green one red.

(II, ii, 59-62)

What is important in these examples is the blood that must be washed away because, as Macbeth feels, it indicates the enormity of the crime. Metaphorically there is probably enough blood on Macbeth's hands to make the measureless seas red. The powerful images appear equally strong in the original and in the translation. They both leave an impression that cannot easily be forgotten. In the second example the image appears metaphoric but dreadful enough to indicate a terrible crime.

The Scene iii of Act IV is, without doubt, of great importance for the translation. This scene is usually omitted in the acting of the play because of its dragging tendency. However, it contains the most realistic imagery of an enslaved country. In translating this imagery that refers to Scotland, Os'machka was writing about his own country because of the striking similarities between the two. In the translation of this imagery, Os'machka demonstrates his genius, his ability to raise himself spiritually above the original, and to speak emotionally in crystal-clear words about the dark realistic Shakespearean reality:

Боже добрий,  
Змети оте, що нас вигнанцями  
зробило!

.....  
Бідна  
Моя країна вже боїться тіні  
Своєї... Нам вона не матір'ю  
Назветься, тільки – домовиною.  
Нічого там нема. І хто не зна  
Нічого, тільки той сміється там.  
Там стогін, голосіння і зідхання  
Повітря роздувають, і ніхто  
Не поміча. Там горе лютее  
Лиш модним хвилюванням видається.  
А дзвонять по душі, то ледве хто  
Спитає, по чий. Життя в людей  
Від квіток на брилях там швидше гине,  
І мруть раніше, ніж недуга прийде. (р. 131)

In English:

Good God betimes remove  
The means that makes us strangers!

.....  
Alas, poor country,  
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot  
Be called our mother but our grave, where nothing  
But who knows nothing is once seen to smile;  
Where signs and groans, and shrieks that rent the air,  
Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems  
A modern ecstasy. The dead man's knell  
Is there scarce asked for who, and good men's lives  
Expire before the flowers in their caps,  
Dying or ere they sicken.

(IV, iii, 162-172)

Conditions in Scotland worsen and the situation becomes desperate. It is truly a drama of large magnitude portrayed with emotion and pathos that are gradually intensified and appear strongly resonant with the translator's country's suffering. Only one who knows Os'machka's own works may judge his translation of this passage and his unique understanding of its imagery. I consider that this is the highest point in the whole translation. Os'machka's words become powerful tools, truly superb in portraying with great accuracy the Shakespearean reality.

The translation shows Os'machka's profound emotional involvement. He is extremely sensitive to all of the experiences of the characters

involved. He looks at them with understanding and interprets their functions correctly. He is perfectly eloquent and perhaps somewhat rigorous in interpreting the tragedy's atmosphere of horror and of the hidden forces which control words and deeds. Os'machka's presentation of *Macbeth* does not suffer because of complexity; it is a straight-forward moving play, embodying the Shakespearean reality but viewed through Os'machka's prism of mind and spirit. I see in it Os'machka's feelings, sensations and his manner of perception, important qualities in order not to underrate the greatness of the tragedy. The translation is presented in powerful, appealing language. It fascinates the reader not only because of particular passages, such as the one I have just cited but because of its forceful totality.

In translating *Macbeth* Teodosij Os'machka has produced an important work of art which, though falling within the highly specialized category of belletristic translation, is of wide interest and application. He filled the great gap in Ukrainian Shakespeareana, and we can be grateful to him for demonstrating the significance of a good translation of an important universal literary figure. Finally, it should be noted that the grace of this translation complements its poetical and intellectual achievement.

### Notes

\* This paper in essentially its present form was read at the Meeting of the Ukrainian Shakespeare Society in Montreal, June 3, 1980. The Ukrainian Shakespeare Society abroad was organized in 1957. Professor Dmytro Chyzhevs'kyj, then of the University of Heidelberg, Germany, was elected the first president and Professor J. B. Rudnyc'kyj, of the University of Manitoba, the first vice president. The Society has 20 members – translators of Shakespeare's works into Ukrainian, researchers, bibliographers and others. (Incidentally, the first Ukrainian translations were published in Ukraine some 120 years ago.) Thus far, the Society has issued, in collaboration with publishers, Ukrainian translations of plays, sonnets, and other works of the English bard. *The Ukrainian Translation of Shakespearean Sonnets: A Stylistic Analysis*, a monograph by Professor O. Prokopiw, was published in Edmonton, Canada in 1976. Professor Yar Slavutych, of the University of Alberta, the current president of the society, has prepared a book involving new translations and research that was published in 1987.

1. John Russel Brown, *Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1963), p. 22.

In this article the system of transliteration used in Slavic Philology has been followed.

*The Ukrainian Poets: 1189-1962*, selected and trans. C. H. Andrusyshen and Watson Kirkconnell (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 400.

4. *Писання Осипа Юрія Федьковича (Works by Osyp Jurij Fed'kovych)*, ed. with a preface by Іван Франко (Львів: Наукове Товариство ім. Шевченка, 1902), vol. III, part 2. This publication involves translations of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.
5. Уїліям Шекспір, *Макбет*. trans. P. A. Kulish, preface by Ivan Franko (Львів: Наукове Товариство ім. Шевченка, 1900).
6. Jurij Korec'kyj's translation was used for the theatrical performance of *Macbeth* in Donec'k in 1938.
7. Вільям Шекспір, *Макбет*. Tragedy in Five Acts, trans. Теодосій Осьмачка (Харків-Київ: Державне видавництво України, 1930). Os'machka also translated *Henry the Fourth*, Part I and II, but this translation was never published in Ukraine. From this translation only Scene iv, Act II, Part I was published abroad in *Україна і світ (Ukraine and the World)*, No. 18 (Hannover, 1958).
8. Вільям Шекспір, *Трагедія Макбета, Король Генрі IV*, ed. with a preface by Ihor Kostec'kyj (München: «На горі», 1961), p. 48. Translation mine.
9. See note 7.
10. *Трагедія Макбета, Король Генрі IV*, p. 48. Translation mine.
11. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1961), p. 379.
12. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 35. All subsequent English citations will be to this edition.
13. *Трагедія Макбета, Король Генрі IV*, p. 61. All subsequent Ukrainian citations will be to this edition.
14. The very characteristic English unvoiced "th" does not exist in Ukrainian.

## ТВОРИ З ШЕКСПІРІВСЬКИМИ МОТИВАМИ

*Максим Рильський*

\* \* \*

Як Гамлет, придивляюсь я до хмар,  
А олівець, невірний мій Полоній,  
Переливає в слово дивний чар,  
Святого сонця відблиски червоні.

Не слухай, принце, непотрібних слів  
Улесливо-брехливого вельможі!  
Нащо для хмар цей галасливий спів?  
Так добре, що ні з чим вони не схожі.