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The Real Voice of Ukraine: Poetry Translations of Ukrainian Diaspora

The defeat in the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917–21) and the non-acceptance of Soviet ideology caused the mass emigration of Ukrainian patriots, mostly highly educated. In the second half of the 20th century, Ukrainian diasporic literati actively engaged in translation activity, primarily poetry translation, in Germany, Canada, the USA, Brazil, etc. The aim of this paper is to analyse the diasporic translations of Ukrainian poetry after WWII within the broad historical and ideological context, to reveal the major factors that influenced this activity, as well as to highlight the effects of the latter. The research comprises an empirical study of the flows of poetry translations (based on the Foreign Ukraine database of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, Diasporiana electronic library database, and Book Chronicle: The State Bibliographical Index of Ukraine) and translation agents (based on their interviews, publications, forewords, and other paratexts).

As will be demonstrated, the repertoire of diasporic translations included the works of Ukrainian “classics” and those that could not be made public in the USSR for ideological reasons: the works of “non-persons” (the repressed, deprived of the opportunity to publish their works, emigrants), works that contained criticism of the Soviet regime or did not meet the Soviet aesthetic norm. Translating Ukrainian poetry, the diasporic literati aimed to present it to the Western reader in its diversity, to demonstrate the uniqueness of Ukrainian culture, and to underscore the freedom-loving, anti-totalitarian aspirations of their people.