

TRANSLATÓRIUM

VIII Literary and Translation Festival
Khmelnyskyi, 19–21 September 2025

TRANSLATION AS AN ACT OF FREEDOM

What is translation? At its core, it is undoubtedly an art and a craft: the ability to carry meaning, rhythm, and intonation from one language to another. It is a constant dialogue between “I” and “you,” between text and reader, between one culture and another. But translation is also a space of power. It shapes imagination, creates or erases identities, opens or closes access to worlds and meanings. Through translation, some voices gain the chance to be heard, while others are lost or silenced.

This is particularly evident in contexts where language has never been just a tool of communication but a field of struggle. For Ukraine, with its centuries-long history marked by linguicide, the erasure and replacement of words and meanings, translation has always been more than the art of moving texts between languages. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the imperial strategies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union actively used translation as a mechanism of control: foreign authors’ texts often reached Ukrainian readers only through Russian, distorting their content, tone, and political nuance. Ukrainian authors, in turn, were translated in ways that dissolved their uniqueness into a standardized framework convenient for the authorities. Many translators were forced to serve ideology rather than art.

In colonial logic, translation often functioned as a tool of subordination. The language of the empire was given the status of “universal,” suitable for philosophy, science, and ideology. The languages of colonized territories were reduced to dialects, folklore, or marginal notes. From this perspective, translation acted as a filter, allowing only those texts that could be adapted to the “grand idea” to pass through. In Ukraine, this meant that classical and contemporary Western texts reached readers through Russian intermediaries. We read Kant, Whitman, or Beckett already twice-interpreted—filtered through language and style adjusted to the imperial vision of the world.

Similarly, Ukrainian classics—texts by Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, or Hryhorii Skovoroda—were either not translated at all or adapted to fit the rhetoric of the “single Soviet culture,” erasing religiosity, dissent, and ambiguity. These works were not allowed to exist as themselves, they had to be “fitted in.” Anything that did not conform was edited or silenced.

Yet, even under such circumstances, translation has also been an act of resistance. Even in the darkest times, there were translators who dared to work with the originals, who fought for the dignity of the language, proving that Ukrainian could convey the subtlest nuances of thought and the deepest searches of the spirit. In their hands, translation ceased to be

merely a craft—it became a political act. They translated not only texts but the very possibility of the Ukrainian presence in the world's cultural space.

In the 21st century, translation in Ukraine gains yet another function—openly, radically, loudly. It becomes a tool for decolonization, reevaluation, and the restoration of linguistic dignity. Translators increasingly act not only as professionals but also as activists and agents of change. They return to Ukrainian readers voices that were hidden, distorted, or inaccessible. They reclaim names and narratives that open new ways of imagining the world and ourselves within it.

Work with texts that were previously lost or ideologically distorted has become particularly significant. Translation now restores original meanings. This is not just about text—it is about the right to see, to name, to experience one's own reality.

Today, translation is an act of freedom. And this freedom is layered. It is the freedom to choose: what and how to translate. It is the freedom to speak: do we have the words to express war, trauma, and love? It is the freedom to listen: how do we receive texts that differ from our own experience but have the power to transform us?

The TRANSLATORIUM Literary and Translation Festival is a space where these freedoms are not only proclaimed but actively practiced. It is a place where translators move from the margins of the page to the spotlight on stage. The festival brings together translators, writers, publishers, and other cultural practitioners who see translation not just as a tool, but as an idea, not just as a technique, but as a way of being in the world.

At a time when freedom itself is once again a matter of survival, translation reminds us: we have a voice—and we can make it heard.

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