

POSTCOLONIAL ORIENTAL SYMBOLISM IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF OKSANA ZABUZHKO BY UKRAINIAN DIASPORAL TRANSLATORS

Anastasiia Romanchuk

PhD in Translation Studies,

Prosecutor's Training Center of Ukraine

ORCID ID 0009-0004-2895-6693

anastasiiaromanchuk11@gmail.com

Key words: *Oriental imagery, Oriental symbolism, cultural translation, cultural rootedness, ethno-specific coloring, diasporal translator, interpretative potential.*

The article outlines transformations of postcolonial Oriental symbolism of Oksana Zabuzko's poetic texts in the English translations by Ukrainian diasporal translators Michael Naydan, Virlana Tkach and Vanda Phipps. Oksana Zabuzko's poetic texts are characterized by the following essential features: frequent allusions to the traditional East, national historical context, anti-Soviet references and innovative esthetics.

Focusing on metaphors of the Oriental silence, spiritual rebirth, and post-Soviet landscapes, Zabuzko promotes new dimensions of Oriental philosophy. In this article, Oriental symbols are analyzed from the standpoint of cultural translation studies, which enables us to trace a profound connection of symbols with the individual cultural memory of the diasporal translators and derive conclusions as to their own interpretative potential and propensities.

The topical problem of Oriental imagery associated with the archetypal symbols of the East is highlighted in the article. Based on the collections of the translated materials by representatives of Ukrainian diaspora, their approaches to alternative thinking in the context of reproducing the author's original cultural sense are analyzed.

Special attention is also focused on preserving ethno-cultural potential of the original texts in the English translations. Translator's strategies are analyzed and cases of potential ethno-cultural neglection are detected.

Future research perspectives lie in the comparative analysis of Zabuzhko's translations by female and male translators, which would help trace both universal and specific tendencies in the interpretation of Oriental symbolism through the prism of gender. Another significant direction is the study of how translators' cultural memory shapes the representation of postcolonial experience across different literary contexts. Such inquiries would contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between national identity, translation, and the global literary process.

ПОСТКОЛОНІАЛЬНИЙ СХІД ОКСАНИ ЗАБУЖКО В ПЕРЕКЛАДАХ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ДІАСПОРНИХ ПЕРЕКЛАДАЧІВ

Анастасія Романчук

кандидат філологічних наук,

Тренінговий центр прокурорів України

Ключові слова: *східна образність, Східна символіка, культурний переклад, культурна вкоріненість, етноспецифічне забарвлення, діаспорний перекладач, інтерпретаційний потенціал.*

У статті окреслено трансформації постколоніальної східної символіки поетичних творів Оксани Забужко в англійських перекладах українських діаспорних перекладачів Майкла Найдана, Вірляни Ткач та Ванди Фиппс. Поетичним та художнім текстам Оксани Забужко притаманні такі спільні рии: перманентно вживані алюзії на традиційний Схід, національно-історичний контекст, антирадянські згадки та новаторська естетика.

Зосереджуючись на метафорах східної тиші, духовного відродження та пострадянських пейзажів, Забужко апелює до нових вимірів східної філософії. У статті проаналізовано східні символи з позицій культурознавства, що дає змогу простежити глибокий зв'язок символів з індивідуальною культурною пам'яттю діаспорних перекладачів і зробити висновки щодо їхнього власного інтерпретаційного потенціалу та перекладацьких можливостей.

Окремо висвітлено питання орієнтальної образності, пов'язаною з архетипними символами Сходу. На матеріалі перекладів представників української діаспори проаналізовано їх підходи альтернативного мислення у контексті відтворення оригінального культурного смислу автора.

Особлива увага також зосереджена на збереженні етнокультурного потенціалу оригінальних текстів в англійських перекладах. Проаналізовано стратегії перекладачів та виявлено випадки потенційного етнокультурного занедбання.

Перспективи подальших досліджень убачаються у зіставному аналізі перекладів творів Оксани Забужко перекладачами жінками і чоловіками, що дозволить простежити універсальні й специфічні тенденції інтерпретації східної символіки крізь призму гендеру. Також важливим напрямом є дослідження впливу культурної пам'яті перекладачів на відтворення постколоніального досвіду в різних літературних контекстах. Такі розвідки сприятимуть глибшому розумінню взаємодії між національною ідентичністю, перекладом і глобальним літературним процесом.

Introduction. Oksana Zabuzhko's creative work has long served as an active and dynamic space for unexpected scholarly inquiries and experiments. While the postcolonial reading of O. Zabuzhko's prose no longer provokes surprise, rethinking of the role of a diasporic translator – one with minimal or no experience of (semi-)colonial dependence – remains unique in the context of conveying the cultural dimension of the original to the English-speaking readers.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. In recent years, the field of postcolonial studies by both Ukrainian and foreign scholars has been enriched not only methodologically but also interdisciplinarily. The theme of postcolonial discourse in Oksana Zabuzhko's works is actively

developed by contemporary Ukrainian researchers, namely Kateryna Kyryliuk, Nataliia Kobchenko, Mark Andryczyk, Vitalii Chernetsky, and Olena Tarnavska. Their studies focus on corporeality, identity, the decolonial dimension, and alternative thinking as cultural representation.

Hanna Kostenko explores anti-colonial and postcolonial narratives of the contemporary Ukrainian culture based on Oksana Zabuzhko's creative legacy, paying attention to the phenomenon of the female voice in post-totalitarian consciousness (Kostenko, 2018: 149–156). Nadiia Lazarevych and Nataliia Korol analyze the aspects of postcolonialism through the lens of the modern socio-cultural space explicitly, outlining the key vectors of its discursive practices in the national

culture (Лазаревич, Король 2025: 345–351). However, very few translation studies address this topic, and the subject of Eastern symbolism in O. Zabuzhko's translations remains insufficiently explored – thus defining the scholarly novelty of this research.

Research purpose. Within the framework of a postcolonial reading of Oksana Zabuzhko's prose, the position and role of diasporic translators, as well as their perception and interpretation of the intertextuality of the cultural dimension of the original texts, merit a thorough examination. The purpose of this article is to analyze the translation potential for conveying the cultural component of O. Zabuzhko's poetry – primarily Eastern symbolism – and postcolonial allusions by diasporic translators into English. This also includes the aspect of translating Oksana Zabuzhko's works into English, which in turn significantly contributes to the promotion of Ukrainian culture.

Materials and methods. Diasporic translators possess a unique characteristic that distinguishes them from other translators, particularly when comparing translations produced in Ukraine and abroad. Residing within two different cultural dimensions – Ukrainian and Anglophone (USA, Canada) – they lack a personal (post)colonial experience. Consequently, symbolic transcultural exchange in a non-colonial cultural paradigm occurs through the prism of the translator's individual experience.

On the globalized publishing market, O. Zabuzhko's translations enjoy popularity, with her name prominently displayed on the covers of English-language editions. In 1996, the anthology "From Three Worlds: New Writing from Ukraine" was published in English, featuring six poems by Zabuzhko and their translations, including "Letter from the Dacha" (trans. Larysa Shporlyuk), "Clytemnestra, On the Way to Hell, Farewell among the Stars" (trans. Lisa Sapinkopf and Oksana Zabuzhko), and "Definition of Poetry" (trans. Michael Naydan) (Личук, 1996).

The following year, the World Commitment Foundation in the USA awarded O. Zabuzhko with a poetry prize. In the annotation to "A Kingdom of Fallen Statues: Poems and Essays by Oksana Zabuzhko", translated and published by the Foundation, the laureate noted: "The language of poetry can be understood even without specialized knowledge of the country and its literary tradition—or, in other words, in our crazy world poetry, however exotic it may seem, still retains the role of a universal means of communication 'from heart to heart' across all borders" (Zabuzhko, 1996: 2).

In 2011, the bilingual anthology "AU/UA Contemporary Poetry of Ukraine and Australia" was

published, edited by Les Wicks, Yurii Zavadskyi, and Hryhorii Semenchuk, containing 20 poems by contemporary Australian and Ukrainian poets, including Zabuzhko. Translators for the anthology included Ostap Kin, Marlowe Davis, Ali Kinsella, Abby Fentbert, Alexander Motyl, Olha Herasymiv, Anand Dibble, Mark Rudman, Sarah Luczaj, Virlana Tkacz, Wanda Phipps, Liuba Havor, Michael Naydan, Orest Popovych, and Olena Jennings.

That same year, Halyna Hryn translated O. Zabuzhko's novel "Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex" (Zabuzhko, 2011), and the following year Nina Murray translated "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" (Zabuzhko, 2012), both published by Amazon Crossing.

In 2019, O. Zabuzhko's poem "New York", translated by Ostap Kin, Ali Kinsella, and Dzvinia Orlovsky, appeared in the anthology "New York Elegies: Ukrainian Poems on the City", edited by Ostap Kin (New York Elegies, 2018).

In 2020, Amazon Crossing published the English translation of O. Zabuzhko's short story collection "Your Ad Could Go Here" (Zabuzhko, 2020), which received the American Association for Ukrainian Studies (AAUS) prize for the Best Translation from Ukrainian into English. The collection comprises translations of works from the original *After the Third Bell You Cannot Enter the Hall* (Komora, 2017), including "Sister, Sister", "Girls", "A Tale about the Kalyna Flute", "I, Milena", "An Album for Gustav", "Your Ad Could Go Here", "The Tennis Instructor", and "After the Third Bell You Cannot Enter the Hall", translated by Nina Murray, Halyna Hryn, Askold Melnyczuk, Marko Tsarynnyk, and Marta Horban. Notably, the bulk of the work was undertaken by Nina Murray and Halyna Hryn, as the collection also includes the translation of the novella "I, Milena" by Marko Tsarynnyk and Marta Horban (first published in English in Canada in 1998) and the short story "Girls" by Askold Melnyczuk (Arrowsmith, 2005) (Zabuzhko, 2005). O. Zabuzhko herself praised this translation, comparing N. Murray's overall editorial work to "a beautifully played chamber orchestra under the baton of a talented conductor" (Electronic resource: Читомо).

That same year, Arrowsmith published "Selected Poems of Oksana Zabuzhko", translated by Lisa Sapinkopf, Marko Tsarynnyk, Askold Melnyczuk, and Douglas Burnet Smith (Zabuzhko, 2022).

In 2022, the anthology "Love in Defiance of Pain: Ukrainian Stories" appeared, featuring O. Zabuzhko's short story "Girls" (Kinsella et al., 2022). This provides a vivid example of the publishing market's keen interest in presenting O. Zabuzhko's works to English-speaking audiences. A similar pattern is observed in the author's own active role – not only as editor of certain editions

but also as a direct mediator between the author and translator, sometimes co-authoring poetic translations.

Results and discussion. Overall, the interpretation of Eastern symbolism in the context of postcolonial reflection on O. Zabuzhko's work prompts us to regard both the original and translated texts as cultural phenomena that naturally undergo transformations associated with the readers' and translators' interpretations. Diasporic translators thus serve as mediators between the Ukrainian postcolonial experience and the English-speaking reader – most often a representative of Western culture.

The Ukrainian diasporic translators, who often themselves bear a burden of postcolonial consciousness, frequently interpret the Eastern symbolism outside a strictly postcolonial framework, focusing instead on their own understanding of universal cultural identity. In her scholarly work "The Postcolonial Novel of Generational Trauma and Postcolonial Reading in Eastern Europe", Tamara Hundorova notes the new possibilities for analyzing modes of writing and reading that are emerging today on the Eastern European borders of the Western world. Here, orientalism meets occidentalism, and the question remains, as always, who speaks and whether the subaltern can speak (Гундорова, Матусьяк, 2015: 44).

The actualization of the East – as a metaphorical space – in O. Zabuzhko's texts embodies the experience of colonization. Oriental symbols serve as a reminder of how Ukrainian culture was deliberately and forcibly pushed out of the cultural avant-garde. Several examples of translational interpretations of the Eastern symbolism,

considering the above observations, are worth examining. The first example is O. Zabuzhko's poem "Definition of Poetry" and two poetic translations: by M. Naydan and V. Tkacz and W. Phipps.

In the original, images of the human body and corporeality itself are sacralized by the author. The mortality of the human body acquires a mystical, to some extent enigmatic, dimension, while the fading of inner life energy is identified with the philosophical notion of the slowing of life's rhythm. The Sanskrit language foregrounds the symbolism of the archaic, the sacred, and, consequently, of universal knowledge. Michael Naydan, employing a strategy of neutralization, renders the original poetic line «Далекою тайною смислу, як слово санскритської мови» as: "Shimmering with mystery, like a Sanskrit word." Here we observe a fading of the cultural meaning embedded in the original symbolism, which slightly alters the authorial tone of the source text.

In contrast to M. Naydan's translation, Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps choose to reproduce the cultural content of the original symbolism with maximal precision. Their version reads: "With the mystery of ancient meaning like a word in Sanskrit." This provides a vivid example of the successful realization of the meaning conveyed by the polysemous adjective ancient.

Let us turn to another highly expressive example: «Дякую Тобі, Боже, що дав нам тіло!» The practice of expressing gratitude to the Creator or higher powers is characteristic of many cultures and religions. The Christians and Muslims thank God (Allah) for His mercy and blessings during prayer. The Hindus offer thanks to deities for blessings and protection during religious ceremonies; the followers of Judaism express gratitude to God for help and

Oksana Zabuzhko

Знаю, що вмиратиму тяжко –
Як усі, хто любить точену музику
власного тіла,
Хто вміє легко просилувати його
ув отвори страху,
Як у вушко голки,
Хто ввесь вік ним протанцював –
так,
що кожен порух
Плечей, і лопаток, і стегон –
світився
*Далекою тайною смислу, як слово
санскритської мови,*
І м'язи під шкірою грали,
Мов риби в нічному ставку, –
*Дякую Тобі, Боже, що дав нам
тіло!*
(Лучук, 2008: 156)

M. Naydan

I know I will die a difficult death –
Like anyone who loves the precise
music of her own body,
Who knows how to force it through
the gaps in fear
As through the needle's eye,
Who dances a lifetime with the body –
every move
Of shoulders, back and thighs
*Shimmering with mystery, like a
Sanskrit word.*
Muscles playing under the skin
Like fish in a nocturnal pool.
*Thank you, Lord, for giving us
bodies.*
(Лучук, 1996: 173)

V. Tkacz and W. Phipps

I know I will die a difficult death –
Like anyone who loves the precise
music of her own body,
Who knows how to easily thread it
through the eye of her own body,
As through a needle,
Who dances a lifetime with that
body – so that each move
Of shoulders, back and thighs
glimmers
*With the mystery of ancient meaning
like a word in Sanskrit*
And muscles play under the skin like
fish –
Thank you, Lord, for this body
(Лучук, 2008:157)

mercy in prayer and blessings; the Buddhists express their thanks to the Buddha, who is not a deity in the traditional sense, for enlightenment and the opportunity to be freed from suffering during spiritual practices. In Christianity, this is a widely accepted tradition at the level of ritual. This is confirmed in the New Testament, specifically in the First Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians (5:18): “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (Електронний ресурс: Біблія в перекладі Івана Огієнка).

Within the Ukrainian postcolonial worldview, it is customary to be grateful for everything one has. The intertextual layering of Christian allusions onto the postcolonial dimension of the source text may serve as a certain implicit challenge for both diasporic translators and readers from Anglophone cultures. In the original, we encounter a religious allusion that was accurately interpreted and appropriately rendered into English by all the translators. Thus, Michael Naydan changes the singular noun form to the plural “Thank you, Lord, for giving us bodies.” This translatorial action was likely motivated by the translator’s desire to emphasize the connotative subtext of the source text, as the author speaks about the metaphorical death of all poets. V. Tkacz and W. Phipps omit the verb “gave”, imparting a notable conciseness to their translation: “Thank you, Lord, for this body.”

Let us examine yet another example that is complex from the standpoint of translating the original’s symbolism, Oksana Zabuzhko’s poem “Letter from the Dacha”:

Втім, метелики все ще паруються,
отже, шанси на гусінь не підупали. В сусідки
через дорогу обродилась дочка – кажуть,
трохи переносила: хлопчик відразу з зубами
й волоссям; можливо, й мутант, бо вчора, тобто
маючи дев’ять днів, закричав...

(Лучук, 2008: 168)

At least *the butterflies are mating*. We should see
Caterpillars soon. The neighbor’s daughter
across the way

Gave birth – a boy, long overdue. *He had hair
And teeth already*:

Maybe he’s a mutant too, because yesterday,
Nine days old, he shouted...

(Лучук, 1996:173)

The butterflies are mating: so there’s still hope
we’ll have *caterpillars*. The neighbor across the
road

gave birth to a boy, well overdue *they say*:

had teeth and hair already, maybe it’s a mutant,
because yesterday

when he was only nine days old he cried out...

(Лучук, 2008: 169)

Let us examine the opening lines of the poem: «Втім, метелики все ще паруються, отже, шанси на гусінь не підупали» (“Yet the butterflies are still mating, so the chances for caterpillars have not diminished”). From the perspective of biological rhythms, this is a complete inversion, as butterflies do not produce caterpillars; rather, caterpillars metamorphose into butterflies. In this example, the author allusively hints at global degradation, where cause and temporal sequence are confused.

Michael Naydan renders these lines literally, without preserving the irony: “At least the butterflies are mating. We should see caterpillars soon.” V. Tkacz and W. Phipps, by adding the fragment “so there’s still hope”, convey a sense of allusion to life after death, although overall their version, “The butterflies are mating: so there’s still hope we’ll have caterpillars”, fails to reproduce the ironic incongruity and certain absurdity of the original.

In the analyzed poetic works, Oksana Zabuzhko appeals to new dimensions of the Eastern philosophy, whose Oriental imagery serves as a kind of intertextual code for translators. This constitutes a particular challenge for translators who have a minimal experience of (semi-)colonial dependence.

Conclusions. Future research could expand the comparative scope by examining translations of Zabuzhko’s poetry by male and female translators, thereby revealing broader patterns of intercultural adaptation of Oriental symbolism through the prism of gender. Moreover, it would be productive to investigate how contemporary translators deal with postcolonial discourse and whether their strategies reflect shifting cultural and political contexts. Such studies may deepen our understanding of the dynamic interplay between national identity, translation, and global literary circulation.

In conclusion, it may be asserted that the symbolism of the East in Oksana Zabuzhko’s poetry emerges not only as an aesthetic component of her idiolect, but also as a profound intertextual code closely linked to the postcolonial experience and philosophical concepts of identity, freedom, and spiritual renewal. In the process of rendering these texts into English, translators from the Ukrainian diaspora demonstrate both the preservation of the core concepts of Oriental imagery and the manifestation of alternative, individualized interpretations of the author’s meanings.

The analysis of Michael Naydan’s and Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps’s translation strategies in rendering O. Zabuzhko’s poetry into English has revealed varying degrees of reproduction of the original’s ethnocultural potential: from careful preservation of allusions to the traditional East to a partial neutralization of national-cultural connotations. This attests to the deep influence of

a translator's cultural memory on the process of interpreting the text, as well as to the boundaries and possibilities of translational transformation in the postcolonial context.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Britannica encyclopedia online. *Daoism*. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hun-Daoism/>.
2. Hogan, E., & Melnychuk, A. (eds.). (1996). *From Three Worlds: New Writing from Ukraine*. Glas Series.
3. Kinsella, A., Tompkins, Z., & Ufberg, R. (eds.) (2022). *Love in Defiance of Pain: Ukrainian Stories*. Dallas : Deep Vellum Publishing.
4. Kin, O. (ed.). *New York elegies: Ukrainian poems on the city*. Boston : Academic Studies Press.
5. Zabuzhko, O. (2011). *Fieldwork in Ukrainian sex*. (H. Hryn, translation). Amazon Crossing.
6. Zabuzhko, O. (2005). *Girls*. (A. Melnychuk, translation). Arrowsmith Press.
7. Zabuzhko, O. (1996). *Kingdom of Fallen Statues: Poems and Essays by Oksana Zabuzhko*. (M. Carynnyk, A. Melnychuk, M. Naydan, W. Phipps, L. Sapinkopf, D. B. Smith, V. Tkacz translation). Wellspring Ltd.
8. Zabuzhko, O. (2022). *Selected poems of Oksana Zabuzhko*. Arrowsmith Press.
9. Zabuzhko, O. (2012). *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*. (N. Shevchuk-Murray translation). Amazon Crossing.
10. Zabuzhko, O. (2020). *Your Ad Could Go Here*. (H. Hryn translation). Amazon Crossing.
11. Буцька, К. (2023). Український постколоніальний роман як національний наратив: «Музей покинутих секретів» О. Забужко та «Букова земля» М. Матіос». *Синопис: текст, контекст, медіа*, 2, 96–101.
12. Войтович, В. (2002). *Українська міфологія*. Київ : Либідь.
13. Гундорова, Т., & Матусяк А. (Ред.). (2015). *Постколоніалізм. Генерації. Культура*. Лаурис.
14. Костенко, Г. (2018). Жіночий голос в колонізованому та постколонізованому просторі: «нова чуттєвість» та «уважність» до етнічного як символу «культури присутності»: (на прикладі творчості Оксани Забужко). *Вісник Харківського національного університету ім. В.Н. Каразіна*, 8, 149–156.
15. Лазарович, Н., & Король, Н. (2025). Дискурс постколоніалізму в контексті сучасного соціокультурного простору. *Культурологічний альманах*, 1, 345–351. <https://doi.org/10.31392/cult.alm.2025.1.39>.
16. Лучук О. (Ред.) (2008) *В іншому світлі: антологія української літератури в англomовних перекладах Вірляни Ткач і Ванди Фипс та в театральних дійствах мистецької групи «Яра»*. Срібне слово.
17. Послання до солунян. Біблія в перекладі Івана Огієнка. URL: <https://www.bible.com/uk/bible/186/1TH.5.18.UBIO/>
18. Сент-Клер, К. (2022). *Потаємне життя барв*. Київ : Видавнича група КМ-БУКС.
19. Читомо. (2025, 20 червня). Премію AAUS за найкращий переклад отримали перекладачі книжки Оксани Забужко. <https://chytomo.com/premiu-aaus-za-najkrashchij-pereklad-otrymaly-perekladachi-knyzhky-oksany-zabuzhko/>.

Отримано: 15.08.2025

Прийнято: 30.09.2025

Опубліковано: 30.10.2025

