

MYTHOPOETIC AND POSTCOLONIAL DIMENSIONS IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF VIKTOR NEBORAK'S "THE FLYING HEAD"

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The paper explores the mythopoetic and postcolonial dimensions of Viktor Neborak's poem "The Flying Head" through a comparative analysis of its English translations by Michael M. Naydan and Wanda Phipps and Virlana Tkacz. As one of the key representatives of the Bu-Ba-Bu literary group, V. Neborak constructs a distinctive poetic universe in which mythological archetypes, folklore and postmodern experimentation intersect with reflections on Ukrainian historical memory and postcolonial identity.

The study examines how these culturally embedded meanings are reproduced in English and analyses the translators' strategies for rendering symbolic imagery, intertextual references and nationally marked cultural codes. Particular attention is paid to the translation of cultural motifs and the representation of postcolonial discourse, which challenge translators to balance semantic accuracy with the preservation of the poem's aesthetic complexity. The article argues that the translators adopt complementary translation approaches that maintain the polyphonic and experimental nature of V. Neborak's poetry while making it accessible to Anglophone readers. Their translations preserve the poem's mythopoetic structure and contribute to the international reception of contemporary Ukrainian literature by transmitting its cultural specificity and postcolonial perspective. The findings confirm that literary translation functions as an act of cultural mediation through which Ukrainian poetic discourse enters the global literary space without losing its symbolic and ideological depth.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that differences in the translators' interpretative choices reflect distinct approaches to reconstructing the poem's mythopoetic imagery and postcolonial meanings while preserving its cultural specificity for the English-speaking readers.

МІФОПОЕТИЧНІ ТА ПОСТКОЛОНІАЛЬНІ ВИМІРИ АНГЛОМОВНОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ ПОЕЗІЇ ВІКТОРА НЕБОРАКА «ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА»

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Ключові слова: міфопоетика, постколоніалізм, поетичний переклад, Віктор Неборак; культурний переклад, перекладацькі стратегії.

У статті досліджуються міфопоетичні та постколоніальні виміри поезії Віктора Неборака “Літаюча голова” крізь призму його англomовних перекладів, виконаних Майклом М. Найданом, та Вандою Фіппс і Вірляною Ткач. Поезія В. Неборака розглядається як складний художній простір, у якому поєднуються культурні архетипи, фольклорні елементи та постмодерністська поетика, що репрезентують українську культурну пам’ять і постколоніальний досвід. Особливу увагу приділено відтворенню у перекладі англійською мовою символічної образності, інтертекстуальності та культурно маркованих елементів першотвору. Проаналізовано перекладацькі стратегії, спрямовані на збереження естетичної багатозначності тексту та його національно-культурної специфіки в англomовному середовищі. Доведено, що перекладачі Майкл М. Найдан та Ванда Фіппс і Вірляна Ткач послуговуються різними підходами для відтворення авторської поетики, ідіолекту та культурного компонента першотвору, прагнучи досягти балансу між змістовою точністю міфопоетичної структури поетичного тексту з врахуванням його постколоніальної інтертекстуальності для англomовного читача.

Порівняльний аналіз засвідчує, що відмінності в інтерпретаційних рішеннях перекладачів відображають різні підходи до відтворення міфопоетичної образності та постколоніальних смислів твору, водночас забезпечуючи збереження його культурної специфіки для англomовного читача. Отримані результати підтверджують, що поетичний переклад є важливим інструментом міжкультурної комунікації, який забезпечує міжнародну рецепцію української літератури та сприяє збереженню й актуалізації її культурної пам’яті в глобальному літературному просторі.

Introduction. The increasing international visibility of Ukrainian literature has significantly intensified academic interest in its English translations, particularly in the context of the ongoing reassessment of Ukraine’s cultural and poetic heritage. Poetic translation has become an essential means of introducing Ukrainian poets to global readerships while simultaneously facilitating intercultural dialogue and expanding the international circulation of Ukrainian literary, and poetic works. Within this context, the translation of contemporary Ukrainian poetry presents particular challenges due to its complex interplay of linguistic experimentation, intertextuality, cultural symbolism, and historical references. These features require translators not only to reproduce semantic meaning but also to preserve the aesthetic, ideological, and cultural dimensions of the source text.

Among the leading representatives of contemporary Ukrainian postmodernism, Viktor

Neborak occupies a distinctive place through his innovative poetic language, mythopoetic imagination, and engagement with historical and cultural memory. His poem “The Flying Head” exemplifies the characteristic features of postmodern poetics, combining mythological archetypes, cultural background, and intertextual play with reflections on Ukrainian identity and postcolonial experience.

Materials and Methods. The present study investigates the mythopoetic and postcolonial dimensions of the English translations of “The Flying Head” by Michael M. Naydan and Wanda Phipps together with Virlana Tkacz.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach, combining close reading, translation analysis, and postcolonial theory to demonstrate that the mythopoetic code of Ukrainian postmodern poetry of Viktor Neborak is not simply transferred, but reproduced in the English through diasporic mediation. By foregrounding both successful

strategies and zones of transformation or loss, the study contributes to a more differentiated understanding of translation as a site of cultural negotiation.

The aim of this article is to investigate how the mythopoetic code of Viktor Neborak's poetry is reproduced in English translations by Michael M. Naydan and Virlyana Tkach and Wanda Phipps, within a postcolonial and diasporic framework.

Results and Discussion. The translation of contemporary Ukrainian poetry cannot be separated from its postcolonial context. As Robert Phillipson observes, language is "one of the most durable legacies of colonial and imperial expansion" (Phillipson, 2010: 1). This statement is particularly relevant to Ukrainian literature, whose historical development was profoundly influenced by imperial policies aimed at restricting the use of the Ukrainian language and diminishing its cultural visibility. Consequently, translating Ukrainian poetry into English extends beyond linguistic transfer and becomes an act of cultural representation that challenges inherited imperial narratives and introduces Ukrainian literary voices into international discourse.

The growing international interest in Ukrainian literature has intensified discussions concerning its place within the Anglophone literary canon. According to Uilleam Blacker, one of the leading translators of Ukrainian literature into English, the inclusion of Ukrainian classics in the Western canon remains a gradual and complex process. Reflecting on the British literary context, Blacker notes that literary discourse in English-speaking countries continues to revolve around a relatively limited group of canonical authors, while works written in other languages often remain outside mainstream literary imagination. At the same time, he emphasizes that the literary canon is not fixed but constantly evolving, creating new opportunities for Ukrainian literature to gain international recognition through high-quality translation (Neborak, Pavlov, 2025).

The poetry of Viktor Neborak should also be considered within the broader framework of postmodern aesthetics. As T. Bodnarchuk argues, the postmodern individual appears as a marginal figure situated at the intersection of different historical epochs; "it is the product of a crisis of existence, and this crisis affects its inner state" (Bodnarchuk, 2011: 94). Such characteristics are reflected in Neborak's poetic universe, where mythological imagery, grotesque, irony, and historical memory coexist within a highly experimental poetic discourse.

These features correspond to broader tendencies of contemporary postmodern poetry. Joosten and Vaessens argue that the democratization of literary

culture has produced an unprecedented plurality of poetic forms in which traditional stylistic boundaries have become increasingly blurred. Rather than developing within clearly defined literary movements, contemporary poetry functions within a multidimensional cultural space characterized by stylistic hybridity and experimentation (Joosten and Vaessens, 2006: 15). V. Neborak's poetry "The Flying Head" exemplifies these tendencies through its synthesis of mythopoetic symbolism, postmodern playfulness, and culturally embedded historical references.

The complexity of such poetry inevitably creates substantial challenges for translators. Zhao Dan emphasizes that "the poetic spirit or flavour is responsible for the most difficult part in poetry translation" (Dan, 2021: 167), since the aesthetic qualities of poetry are deeply rooted in the linguistic and cultural structures of the source language. Consequently, preserving the mythopoetic imagery and symbolic density of V. Neborak's poetry requires much more than lexical equivalence; it demands careful reconstruction of its aesthetic and cultural dimensions.

The translator's role therefore extends beyond linguistic mediation. As Michael M. Naydan observes, contemporary publishers increasingly recognize translators as co-authors of translated literary works, acknowledging their creative contribution to the production of meaning (Naydan, 2024: 129). This shift reflects the growing recognition of literary translation as an interpretative and creative practice in which translators actively reconstruct the aesthetic, cultural, and semantic dimensions of the source text rather than merely transferring its linguistic content. Such an understanding places greater emphasis on the translator's individual expertise, literary competence, and cultural awareness. Furthermore, M. Naydan argues that translators must balance the sensibilities of both source and target cultures, since only a deep sensitivity to the author's style, vocabulary, imagery, and linguistic nuances enables them to recreate the complex texture of the original text (Naydan, 2024: 134). This principle is particularly relevant to the English translations of Viktor Neborak's "The Flying Head", where the preservation of mythopoetic symbolism and postcolonial meanings depends largely upon translators' interpretative competence rather than literal correspondence.

The analysis below focuses on Viktor Neborak's poem "The Flying Head" and two of its English translations by Virlyana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps and Michael M. Naydan, which are presented in Table 1.

First of all, it should be noted that Viktor Neborak's "The Flying Head" represents one of the

Table 1

Comparative Presentation of Viktor Neborak's poem "The Flying Head" and its English translations

Viktor Neborak	Translation by Viriana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps	Translation by Michael M. Naydan
ВОНА ПІДНІМАЄТЬСЯ, ЯК ГОЛОВА, відрубана голова волоцюги. Вона промовляє уперше, і вдруге, і втретє свої потойбічні слова: Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА! Над юрмищем площі нависло навскіс її всевидюче летюче бароко. Кров гусне в повітрі, розчухнутий зріз тінь відкидає, важку і глибоку: Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА! Сокира невидима в місто ввійшла, стягнути з помостів тіла безголові, роззяви напились дешевої крові, та зіскребе слід іржавий з чола ПРИВИД ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА! Жереш мелодрами телевізійні? Ти розглядаєш драконів за склом! Стіну тобі проламає чолом ожила куля з Оркестру Фелліні – Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА! Запам'ятай, не сховатись ніде! Площа приходить у схови, площа! Бруківку темну свято полоще і в Реберітаційне небо гряде МАСКА – ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА Я ГО ЛОВА ЛІТА ЮЧА ГОЛО ВАЯ ЧАГОЛО Ю АЯ АО А О (Luchuk O. & M. Naydan; 630)	It lifts up like a head, a head, a phantom, a derelict. It speaks, and then again I AM THE FLYING HEAD! Its all-seeing flying baroque-eye crowded square, streams from the sky, the cut is ragged. Blood thickens in the sky, the cut is ragged. I AM THE FLYING HEAD! An invisible ax hits the city. The guillotine handles bodies off the scaffold, so gaping fools can drink blood cheap. Scrape that rusty mercy of the dead. A PHANTOM... A FLYING HEAD! You devour television melodrama. You're watching monsters under glass! The wrecking ball from Fellini's <i>Orchestra</i>^[1] <i>Will</i> <i>Rehearse</i> you'll wear upon your head first- I AM THE FLYING HEAD! Remember, there's nowhere to hide in the square! The dark pavement is ritually washed, the best splotches and the Renaissance hymn A MASK – A FLYING HEAD I AM THE FLYING HEAD I AM THE HE AD FLY ING HEAD AM I ING HEAD FLY I FLY I LY I (Luchuk O. & M. Naydan: 631)	It rises up like a head, the lopped off head of a vagrant. It utters words from the beyond once, twice, and for the third time: I AM THE FLYING HEAD! The all-seeing flying Baroque hangs above the city square's horde. Blood clots drip in the air, the torn cut casts a deep and heavy shadow: I AM THE FLYING HEAD! An invisible ax has entered the city, headless bodies are thrown from the scaffold, gawkers have drunken their fill of cheap blood, and will scrape off the rusty smudge from the forehead A GHOST THE FLYING HEAD! Are you devouring TV soaps? You gaze at dragons behind the glass! The wrecking ball from Fellini's Orchestra* has come to life and breaks through your wall- I AM THE FLYING HEAD! Remember, you can't hide anywhere! The square is coming to the hiding places, the square! The feast rinses the dark cobblestones and moves to the heavens of the Renaissance A MASK – THE FLYING HEAD I AM THE FLYING HEAD I AM THE HE AD FLY ING HE AD I ING HE A I AM AYO AYO (Неборак В., 2005: 20)

most culturally saturated examples of Ukrainian postmodern poetry that has quite rare experimental poetic form. Rather than constructing a coherent lyrical narrative, the poem functions as a semiotic space in which cultural memory is continuously deconstructed and reconstructed.

The comparison of two English translations – by Viriana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps and by Michael M. Naydan – demonstrates two distinct models of cultural translation. Although both translations remain generally faithful to the semantic content of the original, they differ considerably in their

treatment of Ukrainian cultural codes, symbolism, and postmodern poetics.

One of the dominant ethnosymbolic images of the poem is the recurring figure of the Flying Head, repeatedly proclaimed through the refrain: "Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА!"

Within Ukrainian cultural discourse, the severed head carries multiple layers of meaning. It simultaneously evokes the memory of political executions, Cossack martyrdom, Soviet terror, and the grotesque theatricality characteristic of the Bu-Ba-Bu literary movement. Rather than

functioning as a purely surrealistic image, the Flying Head becomes a metaphor for cultural memory refusing to disappear despite repeated historical attempts at symbolic decapitation.

All the translators preserve the refrain almost identically: *"I AM THE FLYING HEAD!"*.

The decision to retain the lexical simplicity of the phrase successfully preserves its performative function. Since the refrain resembles a political slogan, theatrical proclamation, and ritual incantation simultaneously, any attempt at stylistic embellishment would diminish its symbolic force. In this case, both translations employ a strategy of formal equivalence, allowing the repetitive structure itself to produce the intended effect.

A greater divergence appears in the next image: *"відрубана голова волююги"* (Luchuk, O., M., Naydan, 2000: 630). V. Tkacz and W. Phipps translate the line as *"a phantom, a derelict"* (Luchuk, Naydan, 2000: 631), whereas M. Naydan renders it as *"the lopped off head of a vagrant"* (Неборак, 2005: 20).

The difference illustrates two fundamentally different approaches to cultural translation. V. Tkacz and W. Phipps partially neutralize the physical violence by replacing the explicit image of decapitation with the metaphorical "phantom." The emphasis shifts from bodily execution toward spectral existence, creating a more universal image of social exclusion. Such a solution corresponds to what S. Bassnett defines as cultural mediation, where semantic modification facilitates accessibility for the target readership.

M. Naydan retains the materiality of violence through the expression *"lopped off head"* (Неборак, 2005: 20). This choice preserves the corporeal grotesque characteristic of Neborak's poetics while simultaneously maintaining historical associations with political executions. Following Venuti's concept of foreignization, Naydan deliberately resists domestication, allowing the cultural trauma embedded in the original to remain visible to the English-speaking reader.

The poem's symbolism provides another significant example of divergent translation strategies. V. Neborak writes: *"всевидюче летюче бароко"* (Luchuk, Naydan, 2000: 630).

The phrase represents a striking example of semantic hybridity. Ukrainian Baroque occupies a unique position within national cultural memory as both an artistic style and an epistemological framework associated with the Cossack Hetmanate, Orthodox spirituality, and excessive visuality. By transforming Baroque into a flying, all-seeing entity, V. Neborak simultaneously monumentalizes and parodies one of Ukraine's foundational cultural myths.

V. Tkacz and W. Phipps translate the phrase as *"Its all-seeing flying baroque-eye"* (Luchuk, Naydan, 2000: 631). The introduction of *eye* functions as an interpretative expansion, making explicit the metaphor of omniscience only implied in the original. While this strategy increases semantic transparency for readers unfamiliar with Baroque iconography, it simultaneously narrows the symbolic openness of the source text. The abstract cultural category "Baroque" becomes reduced to a single visual image.

M. Naydan instead translated: *"The all-seeing flying Baroque"* (Неборак, 2005: 20). This version preserves the ontological ambiguity of the original. Baroque itself remains the acting subject rather than being transformed into an object possessing an eye. From the perspective of cultural translation, M. Naydan more successfully reproduces the conceptual indeterminacy characteristic of Ukrainian postmodern discourse.

The symbol of historical violence might be interpreted in the next line: *"Сокира невидима в місто ввійшла"*. V. Tkacz and W. Phipps translated: *"An invisible ax hits the city"* (Luchuk, Naydan, 2000: 631), M. Naydan translated: *"An invisible ax has entered the city"* (Неборак, 2005: 20).

Although both translations appear semantically close, the difference between *hits* and *has entered* significantly alters the symbolic dynamics. The Ukrainian verb *ввійшла* emphasizes gradual invasion rather than immediate destruction. The invisible axe functions less as an instrument than as an allegory of totalitarian violence infiltrating public space. M. Naydan reproduces this spatial movement, whereas V. Tkacz and W. Phipps foreground the result of violence rather than its process.

Another culturally significant reference appears in the allusion to Federico Fellini: *"ожила куля з Оркестру Фелліні"* (Luchuk, Naydan, 2000: 630).

Both translations *"The wrecking ball from Fellini's Orchestra"* and *"The wrecking ball from Fellini's Orchestra"* correctly preserve the intertextual reference to Federico Fellini's film *"Orchestra Rehearsal"* (1978). According to the plot, a film crew arrives at a historic chapel for shooting a documentary about a group of musicians during rehearsal. However, what begins as a routine filming session soon descends into complete chaos: the musicians stage a rebellion, challenge the conductor's authority, and turn the rehearsal into anarchy. The film serves as a brilliant metaphor for society, politics, and the dynamics of power. V. Neborak recontextualizes this cinematic image within post-Soviet urban experience, transforming F. Fellini's metaphor into an allegory of historical catastrophe. Since both translations retain the original reference without explanatory additions, they preserve the intertextual openness of the

source text while relying upon the reader's cultural competence.

Perhaps the greatest translational challenge concerns the poem's visual ending, where the refrain gradually disintegrates into fragmented letters and isolated phonetic units. This typographic decomposition recalls both concrete poetry and the visual experiments of the historical avant-garde. More importantly, it symbolically performs the collapse of language itself under historical pressure.

Both translations preserve this graphic structure with remarkable precision. Rather than reconstructing syntactic coherence, both translators reproduce the gradual dissolution of textual integrity. Such a decision reflects an understanding that the poem communicates not solely through lexical meaning but also through visual semiotics. In this respect, both versions successfully achieve multimodal equivalence.

Conclusions. From the perspective of diaspora studies, however, the translations reveal different philosophies of representing Ukrainian culture abroad. Although W. Tkacz and V. Phipps (that are not representatives of Ukrainian diaspora) themselves occupy a distinctive position within the North American Ukrainian cultural milieu, their translation demonstrates a tendency toward performative readability and intercultural accessibility. Their rendering frequently clarifies implicit metaphors and privileges the communicative effect experienced by the English-speaking audience.

M. Naydan adopts a different translational ethos. Rather than reducing cultural opacity, he consistently preserves lexical ambiguity, historical violence, and symbolic density. His translation positions the reader within the unfamiliar cultural landscape of Ukrainian postmodernism instead of adapting that landscape to Anglo-American literary expectations. Consequently, his work exemplifies a foreignizing model of cultural translation in which alterity remains visible rather than assimilated.

The comparison ultimately demonstrates that the two translations construct different international representations of Ukrainian literature. American translators W. Tkacz and V. Phipps emphasize intercultural communication, whereas translator of

Ukrainian origin M. Naydan foregrounds cultural specificity. Neither strategy should be considered universally superior; instead, each reflects a distinct understanding of translation as cultural practice. Nevertheless, with regard to the preservation of ethnosymbolic complexity, historical memory, and postmodern semantic multiplicity, M. Naydan's version more consistently reproduces the cultural architecture of V. Neborak's original. His translation allows the English-language reader to encounter Ukrainian postmodernism not as a domesticated literary product but as an autonomous cultural discourse whose symbolic complexity resists complete assimilation into the target culture.

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