

A Guide to Ukrainian Literature
by Alessandro Achilli

MUST-READ BOOKS

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Each year, at the request of the Ukrainian Institute, leading Ukrainian and international literary scholars and translators compile a recommended list of key works of Ukrainian literature. These are texts that deserve to be translated into multiple languages, published abroad, studied in academic research, and enjoyed by anyone seeking to explore Ukrainian writing. Some have already been translated — as indicated in the list — while others are still available only in Ukrainian.

The project aims to showcase the richness and diversity of Ukrainian literature to both professional and general audiences worldwide, and to encourage the creation of new translations.

This is the second list compiled by Alessandro Achilli.



ОПА КУПІШ І ПЕСЬ КУРБАС
СВГЕН ПЛУЖНИК І МИХАЙЛО БОЙЧУК І МИКОЛА ЗЕРОВ
КОСТЬ БУРЕВІЙ І ОПЕГ

Alessandro Achilli is a literary scholar, university professor, and translator. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Milan with a dissertation on the poetry of Vasyl Stus and has taught Ukrainian language and culture at Monash University in Melbourne. He has held research fellowships at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University and at Trier University in Germany, and currently teaches at the University of Cagliari in Italy.

As a translator, he has co-translated (with Yaryna Grusha) an anthology of recent Ukrainian poetry featuring more than thirty poets. He has also translated prose works by Ivan Nechuy-Levytsky, Markiyan Kamysh, Oksana Zabuzhko, Oleksii Chupa, Vasyl Barka, and others.

*Mykhail
Semenko*

**Selected
poetry**

*Mykola
Khvylovyi*

**Povist' pro
sanatoriinu
zonu**

*(Tale of the Sanatorium
Zone) & Val'dshnepy
(Woodcocks)*

*Viktor Petrov-
Domontovych*

**Doctor
Seraficus**

*Yuriy
Yanovs'kyi*

**Maister
korablia**

*(The Master
of the Ship)*

*Bohdan Ihor
Antonych*

**Zelena
levanheliya**

*(The Green
Evangelium)*

Izdryk

Wozzeck

*Marianna
Kijanovska*

**Babyn Yar.
Holosamy**

(Babyn Yar. Voices)

*Mykola
Vorobiov*

**Selected
poetry**

Artem Chekh

Khto ty takyi

(Who are you?)

*Artem
Chapeye*

**Ne
narodzhenni
dlia viiny**

*(Ordinary People Don't
Carry Machine Guns)*

Mykhail Semenko

6



Genre: Poetry
Year of publications: 1913-1933
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: 20th century literature, Futurism, Stalinist terror, Ukrainian poetry of 20th century, Avant-garde, Modernism, Ukrainian studies.

While Italian and Russian Futurism are universally read and appreciated, Ukrainian Futurism remains unknown to most poetry lovers. Mykhail Semenko is the leading name of Ukrainian Futurism. His early poetry combines the style experimentation and the sassy gestures that one would expect from a first-class avantgarde writer with refreshing readability and abundant irony. Semenko's poetry is a testimony to Ukrainian culture's swift alignment with contemporary Ukrainian cultural trends once the suffocating restrictions to the use of the Ukrainian language in czarist Russia had been temporarily loosened.

Selected poetry

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1892-1937

Mykhail Semenko was an avant-garde poet and founder of Ukrainian Futurism. As editor and creator of the cultural magazine *Nova Generatsiia* (New Generation), he became a central figure in the artistic life of the 1920s. Semenko was part of the “Executed Renaissance” — a generation of Ukrainian writers and artists who were persecuted and executed by the Soviet regime in the 1930s. As a result, his name was suppressed and erased from Ukrainian literary history for many decades.

Mykola Khvylovyi

8



Genre: Novel

Year of publications: 1924, 1927

Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Expressionism,
Psychological fiction,
Modernism, Ukrainian
literature of the 1920s.

The mature prose of Mykola Khvylovyi is a must read for everyone interested in understanding the political, psychological and cultural entanglements and negotiations in early-Soviet Ukraine. With his expressionist, passionate style, Khvylovyi foregrounds the hopes and disappointments of a generation that believed in both a free and independent Ukraine and the communist utopia. Again, Khvylovyi's prose is a testimony to the fact that Ukrainian culture was a protagonist of the European cultural conversations of the period, as shown, for example, by the sanatory topos at the core of *Sanatoriina zona*. In *Val'dshnepy*, Khvylovyi draws on, and subverts, intertexts from Russian literature, showing Ukrainian literature's ability to play with the culture of the colonizing empire with freedom and autonomy.

Tale of the Sanatorium Zone

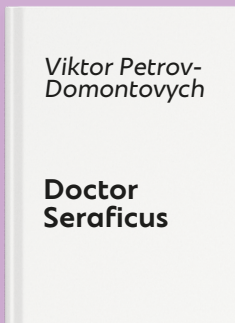
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1893-1933

Mykola Khvylovy was a Ukrainian novelist, poet, publicist, and political activist, one of the founders of post-revolutionary Ukrainian prose, and one of the most famous representatives of the Ukrainian Renaissance in literature of the 1920s–1930s.

Viktor Petrov-Domontovych

10



Genre: Novel

Years of publication: 1947

Language: Ukrainian

Key words: intellectual novel, Ukrainian modernism, philosophical fiction, experimental prose, Ukrainian avant-garde.

One of the first and most significant examples of Ukrainian modernist prose, this novel shows the intellectual refinement of Ukrainian culture of the 1920s. With its focus on the inner life of the protagonist and his relationship with the outer world, the novel combines subtle psychological analysis with stylistic sophistication, showing that its author took part in the same conversations that united the most renowned names of European modernist prose such as Joyce, Proust, and Musil.

Doctor Seraficus

11

1894-1969

Pen names: Viktor Domontovych, Viktor Ber.

He was a prominent Ukrainian writer. One of the founders of the Ukrainian intellectual novel. He wrote papers on archaeology, anthropology, history, philosophy and literature.

Translations:

1. V. Domontovych. On Shaky Ground. Translator Oksana Rosenblum, CEU Press Classics, 2024.

2. W. Petrow. W stronę krytycznej nowoczesności. Tom1-3. Translators: Katarzyna Kotyńska, Przemysław B. Tomanek. Universitas, 2023.

3. W. Domontowytsch. Das Mädchen mit dem Bären. Translators: Ganna Gnedkova & Peter Marius Huemer. Septime Verlag, 2022.

Yuriy Yanovs'kyi

12



Genre: Novel
Years of publication: 1928
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Modernism,
novel of 20th century,
Artist's journey, inner world,
Searching for meaning,
Ukrainian art world.

The first and most influential novel of one of the many names of Ukrainian literature of the 1920s is a modernist novel with elements of travel literature that offers several insights into the Ukrainian art world of the first Soviet years. Focusing on the development of Ukrainian film in the 1920s, *Maister korablia* is both a novel on Ukrainian culture and a more universal piece of literature that discusses ambition, passion, thirst for life and love. With his concrete and compelling style, Yanovs'kyi is often referred to as "the Ukrainian Hemingway."

The Master of the Ship

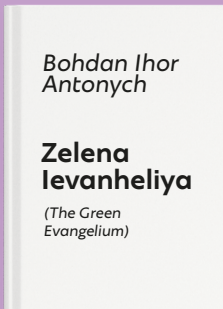
13

1902–1954

Yurii Yanovskyi, a Ukrainian prose writer, poet, and playwright, became one of the key voices of 20th-century Ukrainian literature. His works blended romanticism with modernist experimentation and were frequently subject to political censorship.

Bohdan Ihor Antonych

14



Genre: Poetry
Years of publication: 1938
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Unity of human and nature, Ecological theme, Lyric poetry, Impressionism and Expressionism, Symbolism, Modern Poetry.

Bohdan Ihor Antonych was a prominent Ukrainian poet, critic, and publicist. He co-edited the art journal *Karby* and the literary chronicle for the journal *Dazhboh*. Antonych is known for his unique blend of modernism, symbolism, and Ukrainian folk traditions. His work explores themes such as nature as a sacred force, human unity with the environment, and the cycles of life and death.

The Green Evangelium

15

1909–1937

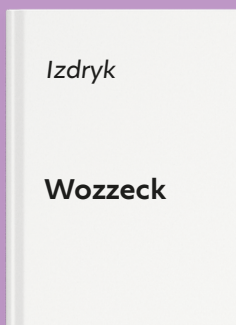
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Translations:

1. Bohdan Ihor Antonych. *The Essential Poetry of Bohdan Ihor Antonych: Ecstasies and Elegies*. Translator Michael M. Naydan. Bucknell University Press, 2024.
2. Bohdan Ihor Antonych. *The Grand Harmony*. Translator Michael M. Naydan. Glagoslav Publications B.V., 2017.
3. Bohdan Ihor Antonych. *Night Music*. Translator Stephen Komarnyckyj. Kalyna Language Press Ltd, 2016.

Izdryk

16



Genre: Novel
Years of publication: 1997
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Postmodernism, psychological fiction, Contemporary Ukrainian literature, Stream of consciousness, Art and illness, Search for meaning.

One of the masterpieces of Ukrainian postmodernism, *Wozzeck* is the story of a man whose self falls into pieces that have to be analyzed and understood. While title suggests the book's intellectual entanglement with the European tradition, from Georg Büchner to Alban Berg and beyond, its style and its subject matter show the fertile ground on which Western postmodern aesthetics fell when Ukrainian literature was free to experiment without restrictions after the fall of the Soviet Union. A book that has already been translated into English but that clearly deserves into other languages too.

Wozzeck

17

1962

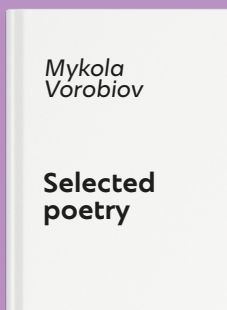
Yuri Izdryk is a Ukrainian prose writer, poet, musician, author, and editor of the conceptual magazine project Thursday. He is part of the so-called "Stanislau Phenomenon," a group of writers from the Ivano-Frankivsk region known for their postmodernist focus.

Translation:

1. Izdryk. Wozzeck. Translator Marko Pavlyshyn, CIUSPress, 2006.

Mykola Vorobiov

18



Genre: Poetry
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Postmodern
Ukrainian poetry, Intimate
lyrical writing, Philosophical
Poetry, Imagery and
symbolism, Surreal imagery.

While a significant portion of Ukrainian poetry from Taras Shevchenko to the present is concerned with the struggle of the nation, Vorobiov's poetry is one of the best examples of Ukrainian lyrical writing that one could define as pure. Written over a long period of time ranging from the 1960s to the new millennium, Vorobiov's poems defy the usual ways of contemplating the world, going back to its basics. His poetics is both philosophical and instinctively graspable. Two selections of Vorobiov's poetry have been published over the last thirty years, but translations into other languages are overdue.

Selected poetry

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1941

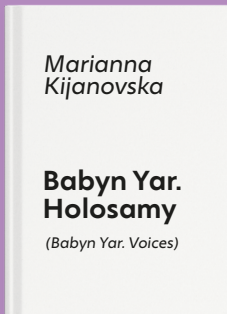
Mykola Vorobiov is a Ukrainian poet and artist, associated with the Kyiv and Lavra schools of poetry, and one of the leading figures of the 1970s underground movement. He is the author of 19 poetry collections.

Translation:

1. Mykola Vorobiov. Mountain and Flower.
Translated by Maria G Rewakowicz, Lost
Horse Press, 2020.

Marianna Kijanovska

20



Genre: Poetry
Years of publication: 2017
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Ukrainian poetry, Imagery of violence and survival, Massacre at Babyn Yar in Kyiv, Historical memory and collective loss, Poetic embodiment of victims' voices.

Already translated into English and German, *Babyn Yar. Holosamy* may be defined as a poetic account of the 1941 Nazi massacre that cost the life of tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews. In the book, the victims themselves are given back their voices. Reading *Babyn Yar. Holosamy* is an emotional journey that will leave no one indifferent. It's a strong and incredibly intense book that testifies to poetry's ability to convey feelings and emotions in a unique way. A reading that both rewards its readers through its literary excellence and acts as a reminder of one of the many dark pages of European history of the 20th century from a Ukrainian perspective.

Babyn Yar. Voices

21

1941

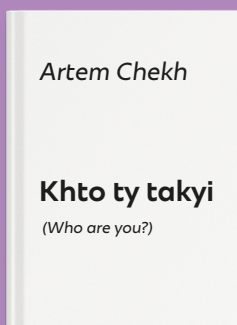
Marianna Kijanovska is a contemporary Ukrainian poet, writer, and translator. She is the author of poetry collections, short story collections, and numerous translations. She primarily translates poetry from Polish, Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Czech. Kijanovska is a laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine (2020), was named European Poet of Freedom in 2022, and won the Zbigniew Herbert Literary Prize in 2022. She is known for her poignant and lyrical exploration of memory, writing, loss, and identity.

Translations:

1. German: Marianna Kijanowska. *Babyn Jar. Stimmen*. Translated by Claudia Dathe. Suhrkamp Verlag, 2024.
2. English: Marianna Kijanowska. *The Voices of Babyn Yar*. Translated by Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky, 2022.
3. Polish: Marianna Kijanowska. *Babi Jar. Na głosy*. Translated by Adam Pomorski, 2021.

Artem Chekh

22



Genre: Novel

Years of publication: 2021

Language: Ukrainian

Key words: Contemporary Ukrainian literature, Memory and personal history, Family relationships, Post-Soviet reality, Trauma and reconciliation, Search for truth.

A coming-of-age story written by one of the most appreciated writers (and defenders) of today's Ukraine, *Khoto ty takyi* is also a window on the 1990s. Set in a suburb of Cherkasy, the book follows the young male protagonist's coming to terms with life in the context of Ukraine's own self-determination path after the demise of the Soviet project. As suggested by the book's title, identity is the central issue at stake in *Khoto ty takyi*, with the individual dimension organically blending with the collective one. As such, the book, which was later very successfully filmed, combines tradition — the quest for the self and care for the community — and modernity.

Who are you?

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1985

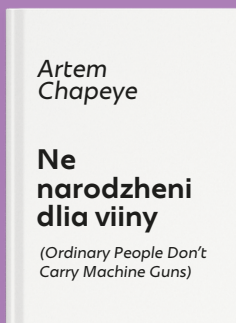
Artem Chekh is a Ukrainian writer and a soldier in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. He has participated in numerous military operations, including the Battle of Bakhmut. Chekh is the author of 16 novels, as well as documentary prose and non-fiction works. His books have been translated into multiple languages.

Translation:

1. Artem Chekh. *Rock, Paper, Grenade* (Kheto ty takyi). Translated by Olena Jennings and Oksana Rosenblum. Seven Stories Press, 2025.

Artem Chapeye

24



Genre: Novel
Years of publication: 2024
Language: Ukrainian

Key words: War and its impact, russian war against Ukraine, Raw and realistic prose, Contemporary Ukrainian war literature.

Artem Chapeye's latest book is a must read for everyone interested in understanding why Ukrainians are fighting Russian aggression through a personal story. A well-established writer, Chapeye writes of the first days of the full-scale war, explaining his decision to become a volunteer, and showing why it's natural for a pacifist to take up arms and defend his or her country when there's no other way to stop the invader. This short, readable, engaging book is a hymn to dignity, democracy, and freedom, values that should never be taken for granted.

Not born for war

25

1981

Artem Chapeye is a Ukrainian writer, translator, journalist, and soldier. Known for his creative nonfiction and fiction, his works explore contemporary Ukrainian life and politics. He has been serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine since enlisting after the 2022 Russian invasion. His work has been translated into seven languages.

Translation:

1. Artem Chapeye. *Ordinary People Don't Carry Machine Guns*. Translated by Zenia H. Tompkins, Seven Stories Press, 2025.

