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Launch of George S. N. Luckyj Ukrainian Literature Translation Prize

By Olena Wawryshyn

Translators of fiction, by the nature of their work, rarely see the limelight. Thus, it was truly pleasing to see two exceptional literary translators receive the attention that is their due at the first Toronto Ukrainian National Federation Library Dinner, which took place at the UNF Hall on June 3, 2009. During the event, sisters Roma Franko and the late Sonia Morris (née Stratychuk) were awarded the inaugural George S. N. Luckyj Ukrainian Literature Translation Prize by the Canadian Foundation for Ukrainian Studies (CFUS) for their efforts and achievements in translating Ukrainian literature into English.

The award was created to recognize the best translations of a Ukrainian literary work into English. It is named in honour of the late, former U of T professor George S.N. Luckyj, who devoted his intellectual energies to informing the English-speaking world about Ukrainian literature, civilization and cultural and political issues. The names of the award winners will be permanently displayed on a plaque in U of T's Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, where Professor Luckyj taught for 32 years.

In 1996, Franko, a former head of the Department of Slavic Studies, and of the Department of Modern Languages, at the University of Saskatchewan and Morris, who also held academic and senior administrative posts at the U of S, including Head of the Department of Educational Psychology and Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Programs, founded Language Lantern Publications, a publishing company focusing on English translation of Ukrainian literature. To date, they have published, using their own funds, 17 volumes translated by Franko and edited by Morris, who passed away in 2007. A further three volumes are in preparation.

Their publications include the six-volume series *Women's Voices in Ukrainian Literature*, a four-volume volume series of short stories by male writers, four volumes dedicated to Ivan Franko's works, volume featuring a children's tale by Yaroslav Stelmakh, stories by Anatoliy Dimarov and a volume of works about the Holodomor. In addition, they have donated copies of all of their books to more than 150 universities, some 80 public libraries, and over 60 institutions and organizations in North America, Ukraine and Australia.

"No one, ever, anywhere, has done as much as these two women to advance the cause of translating Ukrainian literature," said Professor Maxim Tarnawsky, of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto.

Tarnawsky, who was on the award selection committee, outlined ways in which Franko's and Morris' achievements have been outstanding. He noted that in terms of the quantity of output, their contribution has been substantial. "But the singular accomplishment of Roma Franko and Sonia Morris does not end with the mere translating of these works, they published them," he said. "Roma and Sonia saw the importance of literary translations and did something about it with their own skill, energy, and money, too."

"Another important factor in the awarding of the Luckyj prize to Roma and Sonia concerns the particulars of selecting material for translation," he said. Their translations "are aimed at expanding the repertoire of available translations, at introducing new possibilities in the teaching of Ukrainian literature." They consciously chose the "B" list of Ukrainian literature, said Tarnawsky, giving Libuov Ianovs'ka, Hrytsk'ko Hryhorenko and Ievhenia Iroshynsk'ka as examples. "The B-list is not inferior, literature, he said, "it's just well known." "Roma's and Sonia's books enable a whole range of new courses at Universities, a whole range of new research for scholars who are looking at Ukrainian literature from a non-specialist's perspective, a whole new dimension for readers who want to explore something that's a little off the beaten path."

"Many Canadians have at least heard about our three Ukrainian literary greats, Shevchenko, Ukrainka and Franko," said Franko after being called to speak. "But Sonia and I wanted to acquaint Anglophone readers with the many other talented authors in Ukrainian literature. We Ukrainians are well-known for the

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more visible components of our culture such as our masterful dancing and our beautiful pysanky, but our rich culture has so much more to offer,” she said.

Franko said she made her first forays into translating literature in the 1980s when she was introducing Ukrainian literature in translation classes at U of S and she became increasingly aware of the dearth of translations of Ukrainian literature. “Encouraged by the positive feedback from my students, Sonia and I chose to take early retirement and indulge our love of literature, a love that had been inculcated in us from childhood by our parents.” When the lonely and exacting task of translating seemed daunting, Franko said her sister would hearten her by saying: “these translations will be appreciated some day, maybe not in our lifetime. She would be absolutely delighted to see her words come true,” said Franko.

She also stated that the themes of the translated works reveal a wealth of information about the social outlooks and viewpoints in which the writers wrote. “How well-known is it that that Ukrainian female authors in the late nineteenth century were ardent feminists whose views were often far more advanced than those of their counterparts in Western European countries...or that male authors of that same period were addressing issues of male-female relationships in all their controversial aspects?” The themes of these writers’ stories make them worthy of translation, “for the messages that they convey are universal and transcend temporal geographical and linguistic boundaries,” she said.

In addition, Franko, on behalf of her late sister and herself thanked their families, her husband Stefan and her brother-in-law Barry and their respective children for their support. She added that she was “especially deeply touched that the award is named the George S.N. Luckyj award, for I was fortunate enough to have taken graduate courses from him when I embarked on my PhD studies.”

Franko also thanked the organizers of the dinner, emcee Daria Diakowsky and the UNF Toronto Branch, Resource Centre committee, who hosted the event, as well as the Canadian Foundation for Ukrainian Studies, which is a national non-profit charitable organization dedicated to securing funds to support the growth and development of Ukrainian studies in Canada and elsewhere. It is governed by a Board of directors drawn various regions of Canada. Since its creation in 1975 by the Ukrainian Canadian Professional and Business Federation, the Foundation has raised and contributed over 3 million dollars to grants for various publications, scholarly and educational research projects, annual scholarships, teaching of university-level courses and conferences pertaining to Ukraine or Ukrainians in Canada.

At the dinner event, CFUS President Olya Kuplowska delivered greetings and remarks on behalf of the Foundation and with award selection committee members presented the award to Franko. Roman Senkus, Secretary of CFUS, spoke about the life and contributions of Luckyj, calling him “a pioneering figure in post-war Ukrainian and Slavic Studies in the English-speaking world.” Senkus gave an overview of the key highlights in Luckyj’s life, from his birth in 1919 in the village of Yanchyn (now Ivanivka) in Peremyshliany county, Galicia to his studies at the University of Berlin, Cambridge University, University of Birmingham before serving in the British army to his career teaching English literature at the University of Saskatchewan, obtaining his doctorate at Columbia and finally his academic career at U of T, where he became a prolific translator of Ukrainian monographs and literature.

The evening also included presentations by several others speakers, including Ulana Plawuszczak, who delivered thoughts about Dr. Franko’s translation work from the vantage point of a translator; Andrij Makuch, research coordinator with the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies’ Kule Ukrainian Canadian Studies Centre, who spoke about the academic career of Roma Franko; Paul Cipywnyk, who provided a biography of his mother Sonia Morris; and Franko’s granddaughter, Marika, who gave a presentation on the life of the two sisters, from their early days growing up in Canora, Saskatchewan, before moving to Saskatoon where they raised their families and played active roles in the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

In addition, the evening included readings of excerpts from three of the translated works, read by Myroslav and Franko Diakowsky and Natalia Obal, and a musical interlude, featuring a performance by Franko’s granddaughters, Kalyna on cello and Lara and Ivanna playing a violin duo. The event concluded with an opportunity to purchase copies of Franko’s and Morris’s books and to have them signed by the translator.