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Ukrainian Brides, Tractors and Charade

The Challenge of Translating the Work of Marina Lewycka

As a daughter of Ukrainian migrants, Marina Lewycka was born in 1946 in a refugee camp in Kiel (Germany). Shortly after her birth, her family moved to England where Lewycka grew up and received secondary and tertiary education. Her debut novel *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* was published in 2005 and received international acclaim. Her book was translated into 35 languages and won a number of literary prizes, including the Wodehouse Prize for comic writing.

The novel is set in the Ukrainian community of Peterborough and tells the tale of Nikolai, a 84-old man who intends to marry Valentina, a much younger Ukrainian woman, whom he wants to save from a miserable existence in her home country. Concerned about Valentina's motives, Nikolai's daughters try to prevent the wedding, which their father attempts to conceal from them. Written in a humorous tone, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* presents a particular challenge to its translators. The novel is marked by a play with registers, switching between Standard English, colloquial language and faulty English pronounced with a strong Ukrainian accent. Furthermore, the book features numerous cultural references, not only to a specific Ukrainian migrant sub-culture in the UK but also to Ukrainian soviet history.

In this paper, I shall explore the English and German translation of Lewycka's book and analyse the different choices made by the translators. The task of translating references to a particular cultural environment is especially demanding when the latter does not exist in the same way in the culture of the target text. Thus, the translators have to turn into cultural mediators in order to communicate the hybrid culture of Ukrainian migrants living on the margins of British society to a Francophone and German-speaking readership.