

UKRAINIAN LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION: TWO NEW BOOKS

The six-volume series *Women's Voices in Ukrainian Literature* was published by Language Lanterns Publications between 1998 and 2000. Translated by Roma Franko and edited by Sonia Morris, these books introduced the short fiction of eight women writers (1880-1920) to the English-reading world.

Passion's Bitter Cup and *Riddles of the Heart*, companion anthologies of short fiction written during this period by male authors, continue to fill in "blank spots" in Ukrainian literature in translation by making stories with love and erotic themes accessible to readers of English. These two books, also translated by Roma Franko and edited by Sonia Morris, were printed in 2004 and released in July 2005. They are available from Ukrainian bookstores in Canada, Amazon.com, or the publisher for \$14.95 each.

Some of the short fiction in these companion volumes was deemed immoral or amoral, and its authors were censured by their more conservative peers. The works considered a threat to the social order were banned, and as was true of similar groundbreaking literature in Western Europe, did not become generally available to Ukrainian readers until several decades later.

The social issues that are addressed in these books are disturbing, and the philosophical positions espoused by a number of protagonists have not lost their capacity to elicit strong emotional reactions, but the stories themselves are literary in conception, and in sharp contrast to writing that is sexually explicit, deliberately titillating, or obscene, they are not offensive. The content that scandalized the reading public of the day has long since lost its shock value, and today's reader is likely to commend these authors for their exploration of morality and equity in male-female relationships and persistent social issues that some of us still prefer not to address.

The theme of *Passion's Bitter Cup* is the cost of living and loving passionately, be it a matter of temperament or conviction. Some of the stories are sentimental and romantic; others are hard-hitting depictions of rape, abortion, suicide, crimes of passion, prostitution, the plight of "fallen women," and the licentiousness of the upper classes. Several describe women's initial forays into the workplace and the sexual exploitation of working class women by privileged males.

The stories in *Riddles of the Heart* have one overarching motif: the age-old puzzle of physical attraction, sensuality, and desire, and the unfathomable course of passionate love. Some portray the histrionic reactions of adolescents to the vicissitudes of first love; others focus on the disastrous consequences, for women, of flouting social mores. Still others, however, depict women as Jezebels. Thus, in an extreme case of role reversal, a liberated woman callously takes advantage of a man's infatuation to attain her goal of motherhood unencumbered by marriage.

These anthologies provide a fascinating glimpse into life as it was lived in urban Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century—a time of social unrest, shifting mores, and heady affirmations of freedom of choice. Some of the content is simply human—universal, familiar, and predictable, and some of it is bound to a particular time and place, but taken together, the stories illuminate the social history of a part of the world that is still reaping the wild wind of its turbulent past.

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