

*Oksana WERETIUK, Iryna OLIYNYK*

***THREAD AND SELECTED NEW YORK POEMS***  
**VASYL MAKHNO**  
**TRANSLATED FROM THE UKRAINIAN BY OREST**  
**POPOVYCH,**  
**NEW YORK: MEETING EYES BINDERY, 2009, 129 PP.**

Vasyl Makhno (born in 1964 in Chortkiv, Ukraine) is a revered Ukrainian poet, essayist, translator and playwright who has been living in New York from 2000. He is also a literary scholar and an active member of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York. Since 1993, when his first collection of poetry, *Skhyma* was published in Ternopil, he has published seven collections of poetry, most recently *Cornelia Street Café: New and Selected Poems* (Kyiv, Fakt, 2007), a collection of translations of Zbigniew Herbert, *Struna svitla* (String of Light, 1996), Janusz Szuber, *Spiymanyi u sit'* (Under the Net, 2007) and compiled an anthology, *Deviatdesiatnyky: Antolohiia novoi ukrains'koi poezii* (Poets of the Nineties: An Anthology of New Ukrainian Poetry, 1998). Vasyl Makhno is also the author of a book of essays, *The Gertrude Stein Memorial Cultural and Recreation Park* (2006), two plays, *Coney Island* (2006) and *Bitch/Beach Generation* (2007), and a doctoral dissertation work *The Artistic World of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych* (1999), which he defended in 1995. He has presented his works at the international poetry festivals: "Port Wrocław 2006" (Poland, 2006), "Calicut International Literary" (India, 2007), „In a different light" (New York, USA, 2008), "XXXV-a a FESTIVALULUI INTERNAȚIONAL DE POEZIE de la Sighetu Marmăției" (Romania, 2008), 9<sup>th</sup> International literature festival – Berlin (Germany, 2009), as well as in NYC: Columbia University, Long Island University, Cornelia Street Café, Bowery Poetry Club, also in Philadelphia, Chicago etc.

His poems have been translated into Polish, Serbian, Russian, German, Armenian, Slovenian, Hungarian and Belarusian. In English, his works have appeared in *AGNI* and *Absinthe* in 2008. This bilingual edition contains a

selection of Makhno's poems and also a short introduction to poet's life and works by Michael Naydan, Woskob Family Professor of Ukrainian Studies at The Pennsylvania State University (*A Note on the Poetry of Vasyl Makhno*), and a short note concerning translation (*About the Translations*), written by Bohdan Rubchak, Professor-Emeritus, University of Illinois at Chicago, bilingual poet and literary critic.

The selected poems portray experiences ranging from New York concretes of his private life to deep meditations on human existence, using a vivid imagination, disarming humor, spotless honesty and hidden nobleness. The title poem, *Thread*, depicts pictorially a broad spectrum of existential moods of love, arising, death, and mystery of existence:

*like a woolen thread you slide  
through the tiny  
eye of a needle  
into this life [...]*

*[...] the eye of the needle is ever so narrowing  
– growing shorter –  
– thinner –  
this thread  
you search for the key  
with which to lock  
behind you the door  
from whatever you want to fence yourself off  
and you pinch the thread  
of life  
at first in order  
to pull your milk-tooth  
then  
to tie little knots  
so as not to forget things  
later you lose count  
of the little knots  
rosary beads  
transform into  
thick knots of losses  
and the thin woolen thread  
becomes a rope  
and every time there is less and less strength to pull it  
behind you  
with that rope*

*there is no way to pass through  
the eye of the needle  
like into a crammed  
bus  
and you are left at the bus stop  
alone  
the next bus  
as always is late.*

Translating modern Ukrainian poetry is not an easy task. It is even more complicated to translate Vasyl Makhno's poems. His distinct style of writing is intertwined with two cultural contexts, two points of view and two national traditions. Orest Popovych managed to complete the task successfully. His translations do not complicate the original ideas, but make them sound natural and thus can be easily perceived by English speaking readers. The translations are overt, vivid and deeply nourished with the original spirit. They are carried out with much attention and scrupulous attitude to the texture of poems. His short but very explicit remarks should be mentioned here, which cast light on the nationally-biased realities and personalities. The interpreter succeeded in preserving Makhno's vision without obtruding translator's points of view. One must admire his feeling for language: a mixture of Ukrainian and English words in the subcontexts of multilingual references. Remaining honest to the text (and the poet) Orest Popovych opens new dimensions of reception as he does not insert a word of his own. He listens to the text, to its spirit, and moves its author a step closer to those who read him in English. Only due to his rigorous work the originality is accurately transformed into perceptibility.

This edition marks the first book-length publication of Makhno's poetry in English, a good English version of poet's style and philosophical statement on perception and reality. The edition was prepared by Meeting Eyes Bindery, an imprint of Spuyten Duyvil, NYC.