

Як тебе не любити, Києве мій!

Some notes from the translator.

This project was inspired by the viral video of Yura Gorodetskiy, originally posted to TikTok on 1 March 2022. I wanted first to better understand the lyrics, and second to allow my village's singing group the opportunity to sing this. As English speakers, I wanted us to feel the poetry as well as the melody, so singing Ukrainian phonetically as non-Ukrainian speakers would just not work.

I must note I am not a fluent speaker of Ukrainian, or even moderately proficient at Ukrainian! My qualifications are degrees in linguistics, ethnomusicology, and library research, which when combined can yield what I hope here is a reasonable translation. (I am also fortunately reasonably proficient at reading the Cyrillic alphabet.)

I found only two English translations online, one on the English-language Wikipedia page for the song and one as on-screen captions to a YouTube video of singer Dmytro Hnatyuk. The latter also had German captions (which I did not use to inform my work). They were ... neither grammatical nor metrical, to put it lightly. I also used what Google Translate was able to provide; here I have included the most sensible translation of each line I could derive by feeding Google Translate both each line as a whole and individual words and phrases from the line (which sometimes yield different results).

I transcribed the melodic vocal line, guided by a piano score from MuseScore and the recording by Yura Gorodetskiy (TikTok), and then used this melody as the metrical framework for the lines of my translation. Links for all pages mentioned here can be found at the bottom of the main song page.

Comments from Ukrainian speakers are especially welcome!

I hope I have done well by your song.

Write me at will.quale ((at)) gmail ((dot)) com

FIRST STANZA

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Грає море зелене, / Тихий день догора.

plays the sea green / quiet day over

Green sea is playing / Quiet day is fading away

the green sea is trembling / the peaceful day is ending

The sea of leaves is at play in the / wind on a peaceful day

* treated the “sea of green” as a metaphor referring to the foliage/greenery, not to water (Dnieper)

* moved “green” to line 3 also describing the foliage

* inserted “wind”, implied by the playing leaves and filled out the line metrically

* the break between musical halves (the slash) of a line often falls somewhere other than the semantic break

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Дорогими для мене / Стали схили Дніпра,

dear to me / the slopes of Dnieper became

So dear have become for me / the sloping banks of Dnieper

the slopes of banks of Dnieper / became dear for me

The sloping banks of Dnieper / are so dear unto me

* straightforward, ended with “me” for rhyme with line 4 “мій”

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Де колишуться віти / Закоханих мрій...

where the branches sway / dreams in love

Where branches are swaying / of amorous dreams...

where branches sway / dreams of love...

Swaying branches of green over / our dreams of peace

* borrowed the description as “green” from line 1

* changed “love” to “peace” here to avoid the “love ... love” in lines 3 and 4

* overall, worked to get a soft rhyme through whole stanza “day / me / peace / мій”

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Як тебе не любити, / Києве мій!

How can I not love you / my Kyiv

How can one not not love you, / Kyiv, my dear!

How can I not love you, / My Kyiv

How can I not love you / Києве мій!

* tried several ideas, such as “dear Kyiv” or “my Kyiv” slant rhyming with “love” (stanza 1), “live” (2), “eve” (3)

* decided to keep these words in Ukrainian, as they fit the melody so much better and convey the reverence better

* also, this offered more flexibility for the other lines in each stanza, with the rhyme being for “мій” instead of “Kyiv”

SECOND STANZA

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

В очі дивляться канни, / Серце в них переллю.

cannas look into the eyes / I will pour out my heart in them

Into eyes cannas are gazing / My heart I will pour into them

cannas look in my eyes / I will pour out my heart in them

I will pour out my heart to / fields of cannas lily

- * changed the actor from the cannas lily doing the looking, if that was even correct in the rough translations
- * instead made the singer the actor for a more grammatical and metrical line
- * inserted “lily”, to clarify the line (“cannas” by itself is not a particularly familiar flower in English)
- * inserted “fields”, implied and filled out the line metrically

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Хай розкажуть коханій, / Як я вірно люблю.

let them tell their beloved / as I truly love

Let them tell to my beloved one / How I faithfully love

let them tell your beloved / how I really loves

Tell them how deep my love runs / for my dear city

- * changed the actor from the cannas lily doing the telling, if that was even correct in the rough translations
- * clarified Kyiv as the “beloved one” instead of a perhaps implied unidentified person, as this is a love song to the city
- * used “city” also for rhyme with line 4 “мій”
- * changed the phrasing to create a more grammatical and metrical line

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Буду мріяти й жити / На крилах надій...

I will dream and live / on the wings of hope

I will dream and live now / On wings of my hopes...

I will live and dream / on the wings of hope...

On the soft wings of hope, I will / live, I will dream

- * inserted “soft” to fill out the line metrically
- * overall again, worked to get a soft rhyme through the whole stanza “lily / city / dream / мій”

original

my translation for singing

Як тебе не любити, / Києве мій!

How can I not love you / Києве мій!

- * as above

THIRD STANZA

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Спить натомлене місто / Мирним, лагідним сном.

the tired city is asleep / peaceful, gentle sleep

Falling my weary city / in peaceful and gentle sleep

the tired city is asleep / a peaceful, gentle sleep

The tired city's at rest, a / peaceful, gentle sleep

* straightforward, used “at rest” for metricality and to avoid “asleep ... sleep”

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Ген вогні, як намисто, / Розцвіли над Дніпром.

lights like a necklace / blossomed over the Dnieper

There lights as a necklace / Have bloomed over Dnieper

lights shine like a necklace / blossomed over the Dnieper

Her lights shine like a necklace / gleaming over the Dniep'r

* inserted “her” for metricality, which genders the beloved “Kyiv” as feminine ... this might be questionable!

* changed “blossomed / bloomed” to “gleaming” for flow; also it semantically fits better with “lights” and “necklace”

* found “Dniep'r” allowed best metricality overall, gives slant rhyme with line 1 “sleep”, and gives overall soft rhyme

* used “Dniep'r” also as a close enough rhyme with line 4 “мій”

original

Google Translate

Wikipedia (En)

Dmytro Hnatyuk (En captions)

my translation for singing

Вечорів оксамити, / Мов щастя прибій...

velvet evenings / the language of happiness washes

Velvet of late afternoons / Is as euphoria surf

velvet evenings / like a coming of happiness

Happiness shall again come in / velvet ev'ning dreams

* changed the phrasing for better grammaticality and metricality

* inserted “dreams” for flow, metrical fill, and rhyme; sense implied by stanza’s “evening / gentle sleep / velvet”

* overall again, worked to get a soft rhyme through the whole stanza “sleep / Dniep'r / dreams / мій”

original

my translation for singing

Як тебе не любити, / Києве мій!

How can I not love you / Києве мій!

* as above