

Ukrajinská literatúra  
ako svedkyňa ruskej vojny  
proti Ukrajine

Ukrainian Literature as  
a Witness of the Russia's  
War against Ukraine

OLHA VOZNYUK  
KRISTINA VORONTSOVA  
(eds.)

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Institute of World Literature SAS

Dúbravská cesta 9

841 04 Bratislava

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E-mail usvlwlit@savba.sk

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OLHA VOZNYUK Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Czech Academy of Science, Prague, Czech Republic

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World Literature Studies is an open access and print scholarly journal published quarterly by Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences. ▪ It publishes original, double-blind peer reviewed scholarly articles and book reviews in the areas of literary theory and comparative literature studies and translation studies.

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Časopis je zaradený do databáz / The journal is indexed in

- Art & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI)
- Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL)
- Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (CEJSH)
- Current Contents / Arts & Humanities (CC/A&H)
- EBSCO
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World Literature Studies (Časopis pre výskum svetovej literatúry), ročník / volume 17, 2025, číslo / issue 3

Vydáva Ústav svetovej literatúry Slovenskej akadémie vied, v. v. i. / Published by the Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences. IČO / ID: 17 050 278

Číslo vyšlo v septembri 2025. / The issue was published in September 2025.

Návrh grafickej úpravy / Graphic design: Eva Kovačevičová-Fudala  
Zalomenie a príprava do tlače / Layout: Peter Zlatoš

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Evidenčné číslo / Registration number: EV 373/08

ISSN 1337-9275 (print)

E-ISSN 1337-9690 (online)

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**Distribúcia / Subscriptions: Slovak Academic Press, s. r. o.,  
Bazová 2, 821 08 Bratislava, [sap@sappress.sk](mailto:sap@sappress.sk)  
Ročné predplatné / Annual subscription: 40 €**

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## Ukrainian literature as a witness of Russia's war against Ukraine

OLHA VOZNYUK — KRISTINA VORONTSOVA

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The onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 profoundly impacted the development of Ukrainian culture and literature. Despite the common slogan "art beyond war", in Ukraine's case, culture became actively engaged in resistance, resilience, and documentation. As of 2025, a number of writers and artists are defending Ukraine as soldiers, while others are demonstrating the power of literature on the international stage. Ukrainian writer Halyna Kruk has claimed that these unprecedented processes of transformation will define the face of Ukrainian poetry for the coming decades. Thus, nowadays literature serves both as a means of revealing trauma and as a tool for documenting the social and cultural transformations experienced by society during times of crisis.

Therefore, the goal of the topic in this issue is to gather studies by Ukrainian scholars who analyze the war from an insider's perspective, focusing on the ongoing processes in literature and culture. It aims to foster a broader discussion on how contemporary Ukrainian literature has responded to these dramatic events. The authors analyze various strategies for reconstructing and consolidating national and cultural identity. Their articles present a body of scholarship that explores wartime experiences, giving voice to diverse narrative perspectives reflecting the intricate nature of both collective and individual trauma. They explore how in the face of catastrophe, literature becomes a space where personal experience and national memory intertwine, especially in the context of internally displaced and refugee women and their articulation of intimate and collective fears and responsibilities. The contributions also consider the role of comics in shaping collective memory and civic strength, the resistance of Ukraine's various ethnic communities, and the construction of a layered Ukrainian identity grounded in resilience and cultural continuity. Finally, the topic of this issue addresses how the war and its dramatic episodes are perceived and narrated across different contexts, including the academic environment, offering a multifaceted view of conflict, memory, and identity.



## Combatant prose as an important component of the contemporary Ukrainian literary process

MARYNA RIABCHENKO

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.1

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### Combatant prose as an important component of the contemporary Ukrainian literary process

Combatant Prose. Ego-document. New hero. Decolonization. Ukrainian literature.

Under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war, many texts on military themes have appeared in contemporary Ukrainian literature. An important part of these works is combatant prose, books written exclusively by battle participants. This article focuses on the structural features of this prose (genre diffusion and genre variations). Some stylistic characteristics are outlined (for example, the active use of comic forms). These texts are important ego-documents of the time. Modern combatant prose is rooted in the entire tradition of military literature and at the same time expands it with new problems and methods of text creation. In particular, this is a change of “colonized thinking” to “national thinking”, therefore decolonial discourse may be suggested.

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Maryna Riabchenko

Educational and Scientific Institute of Philology

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

Ukraine

marynariabchenko@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-9349-9784

The Russian-Ukrainian war, which has been going on for more than ten years, has significantly impacted the contemporary literary process. Not surprisingly, the most comprehensive catalog of books about this war to date, compiled by researcher Hanna Skorina, includes more than 1,500 titles (2023), and this list is constantly being expanded and supplemented, with the full-scale invasion causing a real “boom” in military-themed works.

Texts by male and female direct participants in the hostilities are an important part of this list, with more than 270 titles. This number gives grounds for discussing a separate literary segment in contemporary writing. Narratives of the military are more descriptively expressive and marked by the emotions they experienced, and therefore inspire greater reader trust because their authors do not need to invent or write down their feelings and sensations in someone else’s voice, and the events taking place in the realities of war often surpass any writer’s imagination. Therefore, in 2019, to specify and emphasize a wide range of works and to facilitate the signaling of the phenomenon, it was proposed to define this layer of texts as a separate subcategory and unite them with the term “combatant prose”:

Combatant prose – is a type of military prose, written exclusively by combatants who continue to fight or are in the military reserve after demobilization. These narratives are characterized by autobiographical nature, factual accuracy, and may contain elements of documentary or memoir writing. Such works belong to different prose genres (both fiction and nonfiction), but they always cover the author’s personal war experience.<sup>1</sup> (Riabchenko 2019, 63)

This distinction may also be relevant in relation to international literary studies, where the term “combatant literature” is occasionally used, for example, Leonard V. Smith (2001), Wood Jamie (2023) etc. Contemporary combatant prose has both traditional and new features, and it reflects important processes in the cultural and social space of Ukraine. This article focuses on its key points, and the generalized observations are based on the present author’s previous research (Riabchenko 2019).

## **COMBATANT PROSE FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The appearance of authors whose talent was revealed by war is not new to the Ukrainian literary process. The Ukrainian combatant prose of the 20th–21st centuries includes texts that appeared under the influence of the First and Second World Wars, the national liberation movement of 1917–1921 (it is essential to note that the authors were on different sides of the physical and ideological barricades, and therefore the reader has the opportunity to see events and reflections from different points of view). In the late 20th – early 21st centuries, Ukrainians often participated in foreign conflicts either unwillingly or as part of peacekeeping missions or volunteer groups, which expanded the geographical scope of this prose with descriptions of events in Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, Transnistria, Georgia, Chechnya, etc. A diachronic analysis of these works makes it possible to identify the main features of Ukrainian combatant literature, trace the common and distinctive features of such prose from different eras, and track its traditional and unique components.

For instance, the works of combatant writers of different times are characterized by the authenticity of the events depicted, reflections on their own war experiences and traumatic impressions, and descriptions of military camaraderie and real life in the trenches without embellishment. Combatants pay considerable attention to victimization, the moral insecurity of veterans in society, society's unwillingness to adequately accept a person with a military background, and the difficulties of returning to peaceful life in general. Many works express pain and fear that all the sacrifices may be in vain, and the heroic deeds of soldiers will be forgotten. It is worth noting that these components are not unique to Ukrainian combatant prose. All of the above is equally found in the texts of world-renowned authors participating in active warfare (e.g., Erich Maria Remarque, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and Kurt Vonnegut). Therefore, Ukrainian combatant prose (particularly contemporary) is a full-fledged part of the world literary process.

The distinctive features of Ukrainian combatant prose are caused by the actual time of writing. Thus, texts by participants in World War I are marked by fatalism and a lack of understanding of its meaning, since stateless Ukrainians had to fight for other people's interests. An exception is the prose of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, who saw the war as an opportunity to restore Ukraine's independence. The emergence of the active pro-Ukrainian battle and the subsequent national liberation movements 1917–1921 created the ground for the appearance of conscious fighters, and therefore the combatants of the World War II already had a clear goal and vision of the endpoint of their fight. However, this vision differed ideologically: the texts of Soviet Ukrainian soldiers are marked by Bolshevik dogmatism, and the writer himself (for example, Oles Honchar) did not always realize the antinomian nature of his views. On the other hand, representatives of nationalist Ukrainian non-Soviet military formations, such as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA) and the Galicia Division,<sup>2</sup> dreamed of an independent Ukraine and were prepared to do anything to bring this goal closer (Yevstakhii Zahachevskyi, Stepan Stebelskyi, Roman Lazurko, Oleksa Konopadskyi). Yevstakhii Zahachevskyi praised the valor of his congeners as follows: "Death burst into laughter! Yet her mad cackle did not frighten the divisionnaires. Even she, that bony monster, recoiled before the courage, the fervor, and the knightly spirit of the Ukrainian soldiers" (2019, 335).

The war unleashed by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan received a minor response in Ukrainian novels such as Vasyl Slapchuk's *Knyha zabuttia* (The book of oblivion, 2013) and Ihor Moiseenko's *Sektor obstrilu "Aisty"* (The sector of fire – "Storks", 2010), which are vivid examples of the colonial impact on a creative personality. In these works, Ukraine is conceived as a purely geographical marker, and neither national culture and history nor the military tradition have any influence on the main characters, who refer to their stay on foreign territory with the propagandist term "international duty". In contrast to the "Afghan" texts, the fiction-documentary books by UNA-UPSD (Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People's Self-Defence) volunteers (Valerii Palchyk, Volodymyr Ushchapovskyi, Valerii Bobrovych, Oleksandr Kaskader), who fought in Transnistria or the Caucasus,



have a clear vision of the enemy, an open national position, and a desire to preserve the integrity of Ukraine and prevent invaders from entering their land.

Thus, considering Ukraine's long history of subjugation, the primary theme of Ukrainian combat texts was the fight for the nation's unity and independence. Importantly, in many conflicts, Ukrainians have faced the same primary enemy – Russia.

### GENRE AND STYLE ASPECT

Today's military experience is differently comprehended in combatant texts. Obviously, documentary narratives are the first to respond to extreme events, apart from poetry, as there is a need to record the course of events, experiences, and feelings. Since 2016, there have been active publications of diaries written directly during military service: *Khronika odnoho batalionu* (Chronicle of one battalion, 2016) by Ihor Orel, *370 dniv u kamufliazhi: zapysky artylerysta* (370 days in camouflage: Artilleryman's notes, 2016) by Petro Soltys, *To ATO: Shchodennyk dobrovoltsia* (This is ATO: Volunteer diary, 2016) by Dmytro Yakornov, *Zhyttia PS* (PS life, 2016) by Valeria Burlakova, and others. If we use the terminology of Pierre Nora (2014), these texts should be described as important ego-documents because despite their self-descriptiveness and subjectivity, they contain historical facts. The main intentions of a combatant's diary are to record the memory of their personal and fellow soldiers' daily life, as well as to convey the truth of an eyewitness to avoid falsification in the future.

Often, warriors create diary notes in their phones while in the trenches, and organize them after demobilization. Such processing of the text leads to the combination of journalist and artistic styles of speech and a more expressive story (for example, *Voiennyi shchodennyk (2014–2015)* [War diary (2014–2015), 2019] by Oleksandr Mamalui). Moreover, it has an author's preface and epilogue that are not very typical for this genre. These parts of the book modify the temporal and spatial features of a traditional diary, characterized by the absence of retrospectives, as the recording is essentially immediate. Thus, the combatant diary combines features of different genres.

Many combatant documentary narratives belong to the genre of memoirs. For example: *Zvit za serpen '14* (Report from August '14, 2017) by Andrii Sova, *Savurmohyla. Viiskovi shchodennyky* (Savur-grave: War diaries, 2017) by Maksym Muzyka and Andrii Pal'val', *Ilovaiskyi shchodennyk* (Ilovaisk diary, 2016) by Roman Zinenko, etc. These texts have a particular temporality: unlike classical examples of the genre, which are characterized by a significant time distance between events and the moment of their written recording, the memoirs of today's fighters are created almost immediately after demobilization. The reasons include the aspiration to narrate the trauma, the desire to avoid distortions that may appear over time, and, perhaps most importantly, memorialize their brothers- and sisters-in-arms. Memoirs are also characterized by genre diffusion. Thus, in the foreword to the *Notatnyk mobilizovanoho* (Mobilized man's notebook, 2020) the author Nazar Rozlutskyi writes that he has combined journalistic reportage and personal reflections in the book. At the same time, the title refers to a "notebook", while the narrative structure is close to a diary. In addition, the material is divided into chapters, each with a poetic epigraph.

Apart from being a significant ego-document of the time, these texts fulfill another important function: they deprive society of the propagandistic Soviet perceptions of war that have been cultivated for a long time and are deeply rooted in the collective consciousness. Even after Ukraine regained its independence (and before the full-scale Russian invasion, neocolonial discourse was also quite significant in its area), old military mythologies had a significant impact on the perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Reliable descriptions of current events, aiming to be free of idealization or special embellishment of the story (including at the linguistic level), moralizing, pretentious patriotism, and didacticism, destroy these mythologies and allow the reader to see the true picture, to independently form a holistic view of the price of freedom from many stories, to get rid of the romanticization of the image of the defender and, accordingly, to be able to perceive and understand it in the future adequately.

No less significant and quantitatively filled is the segment of fiction. Combatants use smaller forms (short stories, novellas) and larger ones (novels) in almost equal measure. It is important to note that a significant part of these publications are works by combatant writers whose talent was revealed by the war because before this, they had not held professions related to fiction writing. Today such authors as Vitalii Zapeka, Martin Brest, Serhii Serhiiovych “Saigon”, Valerii Puzik, and Andrii Kyrychenko are well-known and recognizable in the contemporary literary space, and their works have won many literary awards.

Fiction by combatants is mostly a realistic narrative that describes lived experience. The authors may remove themselves from direct participation in the narrative, using the function of an omniscient extra-textual narrator, the characters in these works are often collective images, and the events did not necessarily happen to the writer personally, but are authentic (*Karateli* [The punishers, 2018] by Vlad Yakushev, *Liudy viiny* [People of war, 2018] by Borys Hoshko, *Monolit* [Monolith, 2019] by Valerii Puzik). The authors can also use first-person narrative, acting as the main character of the work. In this case, we can talk about the transformation of the classical genre of belles-lettres (novelized) biography into a romanticized, or rather fictionalized, autobiography: they are documentary in content but fictional in form (such as Pavlo Belyansky’s to *Bytys ne mozhna vidstupyty* [Fight cannot retreat, 2024], Martin Brest’s *Pikhota* [Infantry, 2017a], Vasyl Palamarchuk’s *Viiskovy nepotrib* [Military junk, 2019], etc.).

An important point in contemporary combatant prose is the comprehension of individual formation and the acquisition of a new self-awareness. An example is the novel *Slidy na dorozh* (Traces on the road, 2018) by Valerii Markus. This is a confessional and autobiographical narrative where the protagonist morally evolves from an indifferent person, who lived without a particular life goal and acted according to circumstances, to a Ukrainian warrior and citizen, who understands what he is fighting for. The easy and simple narrative style allows readers to directly try on such a soldier’s experience themselves, to correlate their own understandings with those of other people, because the process of national self-establishment does not only occur through direct participation in hostilities, it is characteristic of civilians as well.

Consequently, the symbolic integrity of public views and beliefs is created, regardless of where a person is. In this way, individual positions and experiences form a collective experience, which is very important in the conditions of defending the country's independence.

A distinctive feature of contemporary combatant prose is using a wide range of comic means. Such diversity and intensity were not observed in the texts of soldiers-writers in previous wars (both Ukrainians and writers of other countries). This includes a humorous depiction of military everyday life and various situations, irony and self-irony, satire and sarcasm. The intention of writing a work can be purely humorous (*ATO v Seredzemi* [ATO in the middle lands, 2017b] by Martin Brest) or a rehabilitation work exploring psychological and physical traumas (*Zhyttia pislia 16:30* [Life after 4:30, 2018] by Oleksandr Tereshchenko). Most often, however, the comic is interwoven into the overall narrative and is an integral part of it, along with other means of textual creation. It can be assumed that this humorous intensity is caused by a conscious or unconscious desire to narrativize traumatic experiences. After all, the works of many combatants in the past appeared much later than the events described in them. For example, Erich Maria Remarque's novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929; Eng. trans. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1929) was published only nine years after the end of the war. Today, this period is minimal.

There are also texts of combatant prose by women authors, although they are fewer in number than the narratives by men. According to the Ministry of Defense, there are currently almost 70,000 women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, including 47,200 servicewomen, and 4,000 on the front line (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine cited in Kalmykova 2024). The texts of female combatants often do not show a traditionally (or stereotypically) "feminine" viewpoint. For example, they are not marked by "greater intimacy" or "emotionality" than male texts, and do not focus on "women's issues" (one exception is Valeria Burlakova's book *Zhyttia PS*, which can be classified as a diary-requiem for a deceased beloved). Neither are they explicitly feminist, the themes of their struggle for equal rights are not the primary focus, and it is possible to speak more about their implicit presence. However, it is worth noting that a combination of nationalist and feminist tendencies is common in Ukrainian society. In particular, this is confirmed by the research of Marta Bohachevsky-Homyak (1995) and Tetiana Zhurzhenko (2011). As is the case for men in the military, for women fighters writing becomes both a therapeutic and commemorative practice, the main intention always being to record the memory of their brothers-in-arms (many of whom died), as well as an attempt to convey the truth about the war to the general public. These include *Pozyvnyi Cassandra. Lito 2014* (Call sign 'Cassandra': Summer 2014, 2019) by Oksana Chorna, *Shchodennyk nelehalnoho soldata* (Diary of an illegal soldier, 2020) by Olena Bilozerska, *Liubov na linii vohniu* (Love on the firing line, 2016) by Vasyliisa Mazurchuk (Trofymovych), and others.

## CONCLUSION

Combatant prose is an important component of today's Ukrainian literary process. We can talk about its affinity with the works of Ukrainian combatants of previ-

ous conflicts, while at the same time, contemporary works expand the militaristic tradition with new genre modifications. The short time distance between being at war and the publication of the book affects the stylistic characteristics of combatant texts (a significant share of humorous components). The presence of women's authors is also growing compared to previous years.

Combatant prose reveals important changes in the cultural space of Ukraine and in the minds of its citizens: colonized thinking is being replaced by civic and national awareness, and the image of the Ukrainian soldier is replacing the previously imposed image of the victim from the collective imagination. Therefore, we can speak of this prose as an important nation-building factor and part of the process of decolonization in Ukraine.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Ukrainian are by the present author.
- <sup>2</sup> When discussing the Galician Division, we cannot overlook the controversy surrounding its complex history as part of the German army during World War II (14. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS; see e.g. Khromeychuk 2015). For example, Timothy Snyder, in his book *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (2003), gives a negative assessment of some of the activities of the division soldiers. Not all historians in Ukraine approve of the glorification of the division (e.g., Dorobovich 2021). In my research, I rely on the conclusions of the Nuremberg Tribunal, on the findings of the Deschênes Commission in Canada (1987) and Sir Thomas Hetherington in Great Britain (1989).

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## Narrative and war: The experience of contemporary Ukrainian literature

**OLENA ROMANENKO**

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.2

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### Narrative and war: The experience of contemporary Ukrainian literature

Narrative. Media. Trauma. Memory. War. Ukrainian Literature.

This article aims to determine the transformations of verbal and non-verbal codes in works about the Russian-Ukrainian War. It claims that contemporary Ukrainian literature forms: 1) a new kind of story about the war – that of the strength of resilience of Ukrainians; 2) a new type of narrative that combines verbal and visual (or multimedia) components, which emphasize documentary authenticity and deep figurative meaning in the interpretation of the Russian-Ukrainian War. Such a narrative is focused on documentation and metaphorical understanding. It is a unique combination of individual and collective traumatic experiences in a coherent text about war written in times of disaster.

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Olena Romanenko

Department of History of Ukrainian Literature, Theory  
of Literature and Literary Creativity

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv  
Ukraine

[o.romanenko@knu.ua](mailto:o.romanenko@knu.ua)

ORCID: 0000-0003-0150-2494

Each war has its language; more precisely, each war nullifies language, forces it to be reinvented, creates it from fragments and splinters. Writers who write a war (not about a war, but specifically a war itself – these are different approaches) work out senses: they tell specific private “non-combat” stories and thus destroy the idea of war as an abstract, non-personalized evil. Every war requires its language.

Ganna Uliura: *Pysaty viinu: 2023* (2023, 9)

These words from the preface to Ganna Uliura’s essay collection *Pysaty viinu: 2023* (To write a war: 2023, 2023) are just one example of the discussions about how the Russian-Ukrainian War has changed language and writing, narrative and reading, as well as readership habits and book publishing in Ukraine. These discussions include the voices of such authors as Oleksandr Mykhed (*Pozyvnyi dlia Yova: Khroniky vtorhnennia* [Job’s call sign: Chronicles of the invasion], 2022, Eng. trans. *The Language of War*, 2024), who writes about the change of language during the war and the vulnerability of words in the face of evil, Oksana Zabuzhko (*Naidovsha podorozh* [The longest journey], 2022), whose essays contain reflections on the origins of the war, and Ganna Uliura (*Pysaty viinu: 2023*), who reflects on how war is written in other national literatures, among others.

Contemplating on the causes of the war includes a conversation about both whether the narrative in fiction about the war has changed, as well as how the presentation of the traumatic experience of the Ukrainians is changed by textual and public practices. The study of these issues may be done on a wide range of material, because since 2014 many poetry collections have been published in Ukraine,<sup>1</sup> collections of essays,<sup>2</sup> novels and short stories collections.<sup>3</sup> The general list, which has been kept by Hanna Skorina since 2014, includes more than 200 positions as of January 10, 2023 (2023). These works are written by different authors with various writing experience and the list is updated monthly. It is with the same monthly regularity that Olena Herasymiuk updates the list of names in her project *Nedopisani* (Unwritten), which collects works and memories of writers who died in the war. The experience of the Russian-Ukrainian War is essentially featured by changing memorial practices, forming a community of memory as a powerful space for remembering those who died in this war.

These two different but shared experiences are meant to capture the war in the artistic world and to record/preserve the memory of those killed in the war. The following issues are addressed in this research: 1) how the mechanisms of individual and collective memory of the war are transformed in works of art and public memorial practices, 2) how the narrative changes, and 3) how Ukrainian literature transforms the daily war experience of Ukrainians into an artistic text.

## PURPOSE AND METHODS

Trauma studies and memory studies, which enable to describe the mechanisms of transformation of testimony or memory into an artistic text or practice, form the

theoretical methodology of this article, which continues the discussions recorded in the volumes *War and Literary Studies* (Engberg-Pedersen and Ramsey 2023) and *Memory, Place, and Identity: Honouring and Remembrance of War and Conflict* (Drozdowski, De Nardi, and Waterton 2016). At the same time, this analysis is centered on the new experience of forming memorial practices in the public space of Ukraine via media, particularly social ones, media projects, artistic works, etc. It is worth noting the special connection between the collective memory of a traumatic event and an actual historical event, the place of the event. Contemporary Ukrainian literature is an exciting example of how the testimonies and observations of the participants in this tragic event are transformed from an individual experience into a collective one, and how a common language of symbolic images and plots is formed. This is presented in the examples of short stories built on the principle of combining documentary and fiction. In such short stories, facts that first appeared in social networks and mass media, due to the interpretation via visual images, are symbolized in the media space and become an integral part of the collective traumatic experience and social tragedy, expressed in the form of an author's narrative or a collective media project. This is a unique understanding of a traumatic event, according to the principle of the "historical present" (Nora 2014), at the time of the catastrophe, with the maximum use of facts and documentation. This trend has been recorded in modern Ukrainian literature (2014–2025) and memorial practice in Ukraine: facts, photographs, media, stories, social networks, and individual stories – all non-literary factors – are transforming literary genres.

### CHRONICLE VS. REFLECTION

Searching for a language and narrative that can express the traumatic experience of war, literature is forced to choose among recording events, witnessing, and reflecting on war and trauma. Witnessing is documenting what has been experienced and/or seen. The metaphorical nature of language and narrative authenticity are minimally revealed in it. Instead, truthfulness and realism are essential features of the type of narration inherent in documentary-artistic texts about war. Moreover, it requires extreme truthfulness and accuracy from the author and orients the reader to neorealism. To the contrary, reflection on war as a traumatic experience appeals to contemplation as a principle of narrative. In such narratives, figurative meaning, imagery, and symbolization of the lived experience prevail. In both types of narrative, authors' autobiographies can be manifested, as they complement their own memories or feelings with the realism of what is depicted.

In Ukrainian literature, these two types of writing – documental and fictional – have been transformed as the Russian-Ukrainian War has continued. Moreover, this is writing in times of disaster when both the author and the reader are maximally immersed in this experience and their vision is not distanced from it. However, it should be noted that from 2014 to 2022, involvement in the experience of war and traumatic experiences did not cover all of Ukraine. Actually, during this period, works written by combat participants or volunteers were prevalent (Artem Chekh's *Zero Point*, Borys Humenyuk's *Poems from War*, etc.), although occasionally there

were some written by writers without combat experience. After February 24, 2022, when the Russian-Ukrainian War covered a larger territory, a far greater number of Ukrainians became direct witnesses and participants in the hostilities. In addition, significantly more Ukrainians have experienced refugee status and/or migration from Ukraine. This was also caused by the spread of social networks and a new type of publicity inherent in contemporary society, the society of new media that focuses on the rapid dissemination of information, its maximum possible visualization, its symbolization in images and words, and a kind of “appropriation” of testimonies and impressions of an event, even if it is only read about. Yaryna Chornoguz describes this feeling as neo-existentialism:

Life in a combat zone, life while performing combat missions at the constant risk of death or survival, life in peace with war, life in spite of war, life intending to defeat the military genocide organized by the Russians, and to remain authentic, life in the end with the last views and belongings, [with] the last words of individual will – this is the basis of new Ukrainian existentialism.<sup>4</sup> (2024)

To clarify this concept, Ukrainian literature about the war formulates the principles and ideas of the narrative about the war. This is a unique formula in its way: life inside a disaster. This narrative model organically combines documental, neorealist, autobiographical and metaphorical narratives. In this narrative formula, tragedy co-exists with faith, and in the dramatic moments of war, resilience is formed as the only possible expression for survival. This approach is embodied through a combination of documentary and metaphorical elements: the authenticity of neorealist writing together with a philosophical, sometimes biblical, context.

In public spaces, this commitment is symbolized by several gestures: every day at nine o'clock in the morning, a moment of silence is held throughout the country to honor those who died in the war; a gesture of gratitude is made to all those who were killed in the war – civilians and soldiers (hand on heart); social advertising emphasizes resilience and support for Ukrainians; exhibitions in public spaces commemorate the events of the Russian-Ukrainian War; weekly actions support the captured soldiers of “Azov”; a space with yellow and blue flags is present on the Independence Square in the center of Kyiv. In addition, these practices have been linked to a shift in the military paradigm and memory strategies in Ukraine. This is reflected, in particular, in discussions about critical visual and semantic elements in military cemeteries (Drobovykh 2024) or ethical boundaries in commemorating the fallen (Kotubey-Herutska 2023), etc. In these practices and discussions, a key element is memory as a form of complicity, processing/talking about the traumatic event. It is essential that this provides an opportunity to combine individual and collective experience in the perception of the tragic events of the war, and most importantly, it forms solidarity in the perception and interpretation of the traumatic experience.

An essential role in both cases is played by the circumstances carefully analyzed by Serhii Plokhyy in the monograph *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (2023). The researcher singles out two essential features of the Russian-Ukrainian War: 1) it is “an old-fashioned imperial war waged by the Russian elites, who

consider themselves the inheritors of grandiose expansionist traditions” (20); 2) “the current war is taking place in a new environment defined by the spread of nuclear weapons, the collapse of the international order after the Cold War, and the unprecedented worldwide revival of populist nationalism, last seen in the 1930s” (2023, 22). The former sign highlights the existential nature of the Russian-Ukrainian War as a war not only for the territory of Ukraine but also a war directed against Ukrainian identity. The latter appeals to the new international order after World War II and must also consider the impact that digital technologies and social networks have on practices of textual and public memory in the current war.

## PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

The triad “personal – someone else’s – collective experience” in the Russian-Ukrainian War is undergoing a continuing transformation. February 24, 2022, became the date when complicity in the events of the war united all citizens of Ukraine. At the same time, personal experiences and testimonies were quickly made public on social networks and became a special form of support and resilience for Ukrainians. These messages about tragedies, sympathy, fear, and resistance can be marked as a new type of publicity in recording the testimony of the events of the war. This is an important change that testifies to important aesthetic changes taking place in contemporary Ukrainian literature, which is an instant recording of events in the media space. This is a special type of documentation: a direct testimony of the emotions of the witness or participant.

The media are forming a new landscape in the Russian-Ukrainian War – the event, which, as Pierre Nora writes, has a unique power to “bundle disparate values into a bunch” (2014, 36), the event, which, as well as to record a large number of testimonies and memories of Ukrainians.

The symbolism of this experience is recorded in the media project *Shcheodyn den: shchodennyky viiny* (Another day [or One more day]: War diaries) of the Ukrainian electronic media about the culture of reading and book publishing “Chytomo”.<sup>5</sup> These are 34 diaries of writers or artists along with ordinary people, which are posted on the Internet. This project includes comics, drawings, social network posts, and notebook entries, attesting to the transformation of autobiographical writing. Daily social media posts capture personal experiences and transform them from private to public. Moreover, with the help of a photo on Facebook, even handwritten diaries can greatly expand an individual’s history, as it happened with the records of Maksym Kasyanchuk from Mariupol.<sup>6</sup> *Another Day: War Diaries* from “Chytomo” testify to a new type of writing about war – a narrative in the public space, imbued with the soulfulness of both one person and a mass recipient. This is a collective documentary-artistic project with a verbal and visual component, based on the principles of a traumatic narrative about the shared experience of witnesses and participants of a traumatic event. The project describes the transformation of the narrators’ identity due to loss of home, displacement from home – and a reflection of the city’s and country’s experiences.



Another important digital project is *Unwritten*, founded by Olena Herasymiuk and Eugene Lir, honoring the memory of those whose creative careers were ended by the war. Unfortunately, the number of posts increases every week. The project captures the history, works, and memories of those who lost their lives and allows readers to hear their voices. Olena Herasymiuk comments on the idea of the *Unwritten* project:

It is the responsibility of writers of our generation to speak now with two voices. For myself and for someone else. Russia's goal is to silence us. However, we will try to do our bit for future generations so that we do not fade into history. To preserve the memory of as many of our contemporaries who were taken by the war as possible. To make it easier for our descendants so that they have no doubt about the price of Ukraine's freedom. (Horlach 2024, n.p.)

So far, the project has published excerpts from works or memories on the Instagram page, and the authors promise to expand the project. Both projects *Another Day: War Diaries* and *Unwritten* demonstrate society's demand for forming a new landscape of memory – one in the digital space. It is filled with new symbolic senses on another level: the value of an individual's view of the event and the importance of individual and collective memory of the deceased. Such formats combine the documentary and sensory experience of the audience, which receives information as well as experiencing new emotions. In the public space of Ukraine, such practices create a system of images and iconic symbols that fix the memory of the Russian-Ukrainian War, establish landmarks in the space of memory, fill it with symbolic meanings, and search for ways to transform memories into life practices.

### VERBAL VS. NONVERBAL

The principles of the narrative about the war in contemporary Ukrainian literature include both testimony, based on documentary evidence, and metaphorical understanding, symbolizing a traumatic experience. In *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999; Eng. trans. *Air War and Literature*), W. G. Sebald points out that

survivors' stories are usually characterized by a certain discontinuity, some special inconsistency, these stories are so incompatible with normal memories that they easily create the impression of fiction and complete nonsense. Some untruthfulness in eyewitness testimony also arises from the stereotypical expressions they often use. (2023, 37)

However, if we analyze the stories of survivors and witnesses of the tragedy of the war in Ukrainian literature, we can observe distinctive features. Narratives about the Russian-Ukrainian War symbolize the traumatic experience of the participants (witnesses) of the events. For example, in *Slovnyk viiny* (The dictionary of war, 2023), edited by Ostap Slyvinsky, the compiler relied on the thesis that the war “did not only fundamentally change the lives of those affected by it. It changes the meaning of words, and they must be carefully explained” (2023, n.p.). The book presents readers with 76 laconic story-reflections or “words” collected from 21 people, presented as dictionary entries. On the one hand, lyrical story associations are individual because they are written by specific individuals; on the other hand, they demonstrate the collective experience. The illustrations for *The Dictionary of War*

by Katerina Gordienko form the visual component that complements the stories of various Ukrainians who have lived through traumatic experiences. The strategies of such stories are primarily based on autobiographical narration combining the author's experience with a metaphorical and symbolic understanding of tragedies. Notably, readers often share the same experience as the author does.

Serhii Zhadan's short story collection *Arabesky* (Arabesques, 2024) includes twelve works that first appeared on the writer's Facebook page and then were published as a separate book, whose title alludes to Mykola Khvylovy's short story "Arabesky" (2024). However, the strength of the collection comes from its interweaving of episodes from the life of the city of Kharkiv and the lives of its inhabitants, the geometry of their meetings, and the broken lines of their destinies. The focus is on dialogues between characters, apt and concise urbanistic pictures of the city at war, and reflections in which the voice of the author-narrator and the character's voice merge. An essential component of the collection is comprised of the author's concise etudes-sketches, which provide the work with documentary authenticity, combining verbal (text itself) and non-verbal (painting) codes. As Sebald wrote, the text reveals the fragmentary nature of the memories of witnesses to a traumatic event. These are paintings in which

everything is visible behind the generous greenery, everything remains close, visible, but something is missing, is lacking, some emptiness stands out behind it all. Moreover, there is also emptiness, a kind of discontinuity, simplicity behind what he says. As if, he is talking about things that do not exist. He speaks convincingly, but things do not become more real because of this. (Zhadan 2024, 61)

These characters strive either to be silent or to speak out, but are united by silence:

She spoke out, sat, was silent, realizing that it was necessary to leave, that it was better for him to be alone, that all this, by and large, does not make sense: and her stories, and her flowers, and phone calls. [...] This does the darkness in him. The darkness she could not see but felt. She just physically felt it. That made sense. It moved him, it spoke with him. (70)

Notably, in all the short stories, although quietness and silence are key images, spoken, unspoken, and forgotten words are also emphasized – like those the priest pronounces in the church, eulogizing the deceased:

No one listens to words in particular. Something about mercy and memory, somehow – mercy and memory. That is what he is trying to voice, explain. Yes, so we all understand that all this has some meaning. His voice is quiet; next to this death, he completely fades and loses himself. Death is huge, it casts a cold heavy shadow and covers everyone with darkness and dampness. Everyone is standing, looking at the yellow face of the deceased, breathing the air in which melted wax smells of military pea coats, thinking about the sun in the yard, behind the wall, about the dry grass, about the empty tram tracks, thinking but not understanding anything at all – neither of mercy, nor of memory. (39–41)

This communication gap, when words are heard but do not fill the space, lose their original meanings, and people lose the ability to hear words, is one of the essential experiences of the war. The symbolic embodiment takes place primarily through

the concept of word/language/silence/narrative/quietness/remembrance/forgetting/memory. The symbolic embodiment of this war is manifested through the episode/moment as a duration that the traumatized memory of the narrator/reader can capture – mostly in the form of a short story: “War is when there is no other life except of this – a measured, cut off short piece. A heightened sense of mortality and understanding that it is no longer possible to live a postponed life that will come sometime later. There is no such thing as ‘sometime later’” (Mykhed 2023, 328). Obviously, this feeling affects the prose by making its syntax rhythmic, almost verse-like, and making chapters short and concise. Therefore, contemporary Ukrainian literature is dominated by collections of short stories (*Arabesques* by Zhadan, *Monolith*, *Hunters for Happiness* by Puzik, etc.) or novels in short stories (*Zero Point* by Chekh). The fragmentary nature of narratives about the war in Ukrainian prose is also revealed in works combining multimedia and textual discourse, which can be seen in two representative examples. The first one is Oleksandr Mykhed’s fairy tale, *Kotyky, Pivnyk, Shafka* (Cat, rooster, cupboard, 2022), which transforms media images into a therapeutic parable story, and Valeriy Puzik’s collection *Hunters for Happiness*, which links video into the text via QR codes.

Mykhed’s work *Cat, Rooster, Cupboard* features fairy-tale characters in a story about a family experiencing an invasion. The title comes from photographs released after the shelling of Borodianka in the Kyiv region (BBC Ukraine 2022) of a cat (Kotyky) who survived and a rooster-shaped jug which remained intact in a kitchen cabinet. These real images have become symbols of resilience and invincibility, and are also reproduced in the works of Oleksandr Grekhov and Olena Pavlova (Fig. 1 and 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

The key idea of this story is the power of resilience and the importance of realizing the origins of individual identity. Like the photo from Borodianka, which went viral in all media in Ukraine and became the subject of memes, posters, paintings, etc., it embodies the idea of resilience, unity of Ukrainians, and strength of spirit in the confrontation with the enemy. This educational and philosophical story has therapeutic

power (see also Romanenko 2023). In parable form, the author talks about the identity crisis of the characters, their loss of language, and overcoming fear and trauma, embodied in visual images and artistic text that complement each other. Such a synergy of visual and textual elements symbolizes a traumatic event in a broad context (Ukrainians can easily recognize the well-known media story in visual images) and as a collective experience of all recipients (in this case, the audience reads the symbolic meanings of the media narrative and the plot from Mykhed's story). Such a transformation is a typical example of how, as the author himself wrote in his monograph *Bachyty, shchob buty pobachenym: realiti-shou, realiti-roman ta revoliutsiia onlain* (Seeing to be seen: Reality show, reality novel, and online revolution? 2016): "facts of life undergo transformations and reincarnations in new media. [It is] [a]rt that distances and at the same time brings life and reality closer" (306). Moreover, as Mykhed states, this is a part of a broader phenomenon in modern creative practices: "Literary genres are transformed and adapted under the influence of extra-literary factors. Artists try to reflect the current situation, but modern art becomes obsolete almost instantly, and only a small part remains in history. Mass culture and the media grind the history of culture, subordinate it to their matrices" (337).

This conclusion captures the general converging tendency of media and artistic text, but it needs to be clarified in the context of those narrative practices that have changed in Ukrainian literature under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war. They are influenced by: 1) the situation when works about the war are written as the conflict continues; 2) fragmentation as a particular type of worldview in times of disasters; 3) peculiarities of the functioning of mechanisms of remembrance in artistic practices during wartime. These factors are united by an essential feature of contemporary Ukrainian literature – to record the atmosphere of the constant presence of Death and Life in the everyday lives of the whole society (soldiers, refugees, migrants, volunteers), the abyss of the Unspeakable (in feelings, emotions, observations), which arises from the daily contemplation of traumatic events. Between these two strategies, documenting and knowing the language that can express it, there unfold the relevant practices of text creation as reflected in Valeriy Puzik's collection of short stories *Hunters for Happiness*. The author is a Ukrainian artist, director, writer, and soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, whose stories are full of documentary accuracy and tender lyricism: "In the meantime, go and look: / at the smashed houses, / at the cars in the planted roadsides, / at the shoes scattered along the roads, / at the human bones gnawed by dogs, / at the graves in the gardens and yards, / at the unharvested crops, / at fire" (2024, 43–44).

The laconic syntax, individual lines that can be interpreted as rhymed prose, is complemented by QR codes incorporated into the text. Dmytro Zozulia concludes that the incorporation of such codes into an artistic text is aimed at "a well-thought-out strategy of additional influence on the recipient, and not just a kind of PR campaign to attract the attention of the modern reader, who is often in love with virtual space" (2024, 254). Thus, in the short story "Kherson Studies", Valeriy Puzik describes how he creates his paintings on boards made of shell crates and how he strives "not to paint war. To paint beauty. Birds, healing flowers, sky and earth, sky

and sea, giant fish, dawn and evening, dreams about home, dreams about Crimea, dreams... these are my motifs... and the war will be painted by other artists who live far from the front line, where a siren sounds like an air alarm signal” (2024, 28–29). As the author writes, this is his connection with home: “I love the road for the opportunity to escape from the everyday life of war. I love sending pictures because it is a connection to home. I paint, in particular, in order to feel this connection. All dreams here are about home and relatives” (34).

This is the textual finale of the short story “Kherson Studies”, but the multimedia finale is hidden behind the QR code, located after the quoted paragraph. This is a link to a separate essay about how the author creates paintings and to a gallery of his canvases created in the midst of the war, but not about the war. In addition, in other short stories, the writer also places QR-codes: either with the author reading passages from selected short stories (“Bezodnia” [The abyss], “Mizh troma kadramy brativ Liumieriv” [Between the three frames of the Lumière brothers]), or with his video about the character (“Buryi” [Brown]), in which the documentary video is supplemented by the author’s reading of the story. Such works are based on the combination of verbal, visual, musical and video codes, which not only emphasizes the interaction between different types of art but also enhances the recipient’s perception of the artwork.

Recent Ukrainian literature about the Russian-Ukrainian War is an example of how the testimonies and observations of the participants of this tragic event are transformed from individual into collective experience and how a common language is formed with symbolic images and plots. This is a particular type of understanding of a traumatic event – according to the principle of the “historical present” (Nora 2014), “here and now”, at the moment of the Catastrophe, with the maximum use of facts and documentary. All these examples, as well as works written about the war before February 24, 2022, are stories about the transformation of the identity of the characters through overcoming silence and creating (“voicing”) an individual story inscribed in a collective history.

This does not only allow conveying the dramatic and tragic reality of the Russian-Ukrainian War but also reveals how literary genres are transformed through all extra-literary factors like photos, media, stories, and social networks. This enables the emergence of original ways of telling about traumatic events and overcoming their consequences in order to express the space of recovery, in which there will be “a life that will keep the memory of evil alive. A life that will preserve the memory of goodness, love, and friendship” (Mykhed 2016, 306).

## CONCLUSIONS

Among the ways Ukrainian literature has dealt with the traumatic war experience are the development of the autobiographical narrative, the actualization of neorealism trends, the functioning of the literature of fact, the literature of the personal document as a method of self-knowledge and presenting the idea of personal transformation. Symbolization of trauma, autobiography, appeal to the collective experience, fragmented narrative, and combination of oral history and documentary



narration are some features recorded in works about the Russian-Ukrainian War. This does not only indicate a change in the type of narrative about traumatic events, but also demonstrates how the war is commemorated in the public space of Ukraine and in works of art. This research offers an interdisciplinary perspective on the study of works of art dedicated to the Russian-Ukrainian War and its memory in shaping everyday collective memories. At the same time, the article demonstrates fundamental changes that take place in creating works about war. They involve going beyond the text itself, creating semiotic complex multilevel constructions that combine verbal and non-verbal components. Verbal appeals to traditional text, non-verbal appeals to media text, video, images, digital technologies, etc. Such projects as *Another Day: War Diaries* and *Unwritten*, the works that contain QR-codes, intertextual references to media texts, etc., present a new type of narrative about the war – a complex hierarchical narrative with a non-linear order of verbal and visual (or multimedia) texts, which emphasize documentary authenticity and deep metaphorical meaning in the comprehension of the Russian-Ukrainian War.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Victoria Amelina *Svidchennia* (Testimonies, 2024), Maksym Kryvtsov *Virshi z biinytsi* (Poems from the loophole, 2024), Kateryna Kalytko *Liudy z diieslovamy* (People with verbs, 2022), Artur Dron *Tut buly my* (We were here, 2024), Serhii Zhadan *Zhyttia Marii* (Life of Mary, 2015), Yaryna Chornoguz *Yak vyhynaietsia voienne kolo* (How the war circle bends, 2020) and *[[dasein: oborona prysutnosti]]* ([[dasein: defense of presence]], 2023), Olena Herasymiuk *Tiuremna pisnia* (Prison song, 2020), Borys Humenyuk *Virshi z viiny* (Poems from war, 2014), etc.
- <sup>2</sup> Ostap Slyvynsky *Slovyk viiny* (Dictionary of war, 2023).
- <sup>3</sup> Tamara Horikha Zernya *Dotsia* (Daughter, 2019), Serhii Zhadan *Internat* (Boarding school, 2017) and *Arabesky* (Arabesques, 2024), Valeriy Puzik *Monolit* (Monolith, 2018) and *Myslyvti za shchtiem* (Hunters for happiness, 2024), Oleksandr Tereshchenko *Zhyttia pislia 16.30* (Life after 4:30 p.m., 2014), Artem Chekh *Tochka nul* (Zero point, 2017), Igor Mykhailiushyn *Fuha №119 v tonalnosti polonu* (Fugue No. 119 in the key of captivity, 2020), Vitaliy Zapeka *Tsutsyk Tsutsyk* (Puppy, 2019), etc.
- <sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Ukrainian are by the present author.
- <sup>5</sup> This editorial project was prepared in cooperation with the #ZMINA\_2\_0 program of the INSULATION fund and the financial support of the European Union.
- <sup>6</sup> The handwritten diary of Maksym Kasyanchuk from Mariupol covers the period from the first day of the escalation of the war to the day of the author's evacuation (April 18, 2022, day 53). In concentrated everyday observations and stories, through observations of the bombing, allusions to other disasters, the "transformation of the familiar world into ruin" is revealed.

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## Discourse on the traumatic experience of Ukrainian internally displaced and refugee women: *A Foe – A Friend – A Family* by Iryna Feofanova

SWITŁANA HAJDUK

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.3

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### Discourse on the traumatic experience of Ukrainian internally displaced and refugee women: *A Foe – A Friend – A Family* by Iryna Feofanova

War. Ukrainian women. Internally displaced women. Refugee. Traumatic experience.

The article deals with the discourse on the traumatic experience of Ukrainian internally displaced and refugee women in Iryna Feofanova's debut collection of short stories, *Chuzha-svoia-ridna* (A foe – a friend – a family, 2023). The analysis is rooted in the interdisciplinary fields of contemporary humanities and trauma studies, alongside approaches developed by feminist criticism. Feofanova's stories are structurally heterogeneous but interconnected in three dimensions: 1) the common theme of war, which the writer always presents as a reason for her characters' traumas; 2) the perception of war not only as a tragic problem of Ukrainian society as a whole, but also as a tragedy of a particular Ukrainian family or individual – a child, a woman, or a man; 3) the protagonist is a refugee or internally displaced woman who, regardless of the circumstances or location, draws on inner strength to cope with pain, despair, and anxiety.

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Switłana Hajduk  
Institute of Linguistics and Literary Studies  
University of Siedlce  
Poland  
switlana.hajduk@uws.edu.pl  
ORCID: 0000-0002-1012-6091

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, a growing number of artists, including writers, have addressed the implications of this war and its impact on all spheres of social, economic, and cultural development. They not only record and analyze the tragic events of the war, but also look for ideas and forms that can help people understand, at least on an emotional level, the ongoing crisis and how Ukrainians are experiencing these traumatic events. Unlike the initial hostilities in 2014, which were geographically localized and therefore relatively remote for a large part of the Ukrainian population, the new phase of the war is a profoundly different experience that has affected nearly every Ukrainian family.

Ukrainian researchers emphasize the significance of literary discourse in times of war. According to Oksana Pukhonska, war fiction "breaks with the traditional framework of its usual role and significance in the arts" because it is "functional literature, which often, at the cost of aesthetic and literary techniques, offers a cultural and analytical interpretation of a particular event in its present and historical dimensions"<sup>1</sup> (2022, 106). Interest in the relevant topics in Ukrainian prose is intensified by "the increase of nation-building processes and the sharpness of the national identity of Ukrainians against the background of Russia's current war of aggression against Ukraine" (Grebeniuk 2022, 110). Thus, literary works reveal the true face of the Russian-Ukrainian War by showing people in particular spaces, on or off the battlefield, thus demonstrating the nature of this conflict for millions of people around the world. Ukrainian and foreign writers have interpreted it in different ways, through fiction, reportage, memoir, fiction-documentary, satire, and irony. These include works such as *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* by Serhii Plokhyy (2023); *Shchodennyk viiny* by Yevgenia Belorusets (2022; Eng. trans. *War Diary*, 2023); *In the Hour of War: Poetry from Ukraine* edited by Carolyn Forché and Ilya Kaminsky (2023); *Invasion: The Inside Story of Russia's Bloody War and Ukraine's Fight for Survival* by Luke Harding (2022); *The War Came to Us: Life and Death in Ukraine* by Christopher Miller (2023); and others. These works are filled with personal stories that bring the human side of the war experience closer for international readers. Thus the literary portrayal of the Russian-Ukrainian War reveals not only national, but also individual traumas, which are metonymically projected onto social problems in the stories of the characters. It is crucial to examine the representations of Ukrainian women, whose roles as wives, mothers, and daughters have been transformed into those of warriors, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

The focus of this study is Iryna Feofanova's debut collection of short stories *Chuzha-svoia-ridna* (A foe – a friend – a family, 2023), which examines topics such as forced displacement and refugeeism, national identification, and the peculiarities of Ukrainian women's lives before and after the start of the war. It also portrays their adaptation to the traumatic reality brought about by Russia's military aggression. These texts feature realistic descriptions and dialogues that organically combine personal experiences with the shared experiences of Ukrainian women. However, the author has emphasized during numerous presentations that her texts are not based on actual events, but on real women's thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

Each short story is full of pain and tears, and the rare moments of light humor can be seen as “a transition to a new level of understanding the events of the turbulent times” (Kotsarev 2015). This article aims to analyze the discourse on the traumatic experience of internally displaced Ukrainian women and refugees and their views on the Russian-Ukrainian War in the collection.

### THE COMPLEXITY OF THE CONCEPT OF TRAUMA

The following analysis is rooted in the interdisciplinary fields of contemporary humanities and trauma studies, alongside approaches developed by feminist criticism. There are several types of trauma as well as varying definitions of the concept of trauma. The phenomenon of trauma and the factors that determine it are currently the focus of research by scholars, namely Michelle Balaev (2008; 2018), Magdolna Balogh (2023), Jeffrey H. Hartman (1995), Tetiana Grebeniuk (2022), Tamara Hundorova (2014), Cathy Caruth (1995; 1996), Bessel Van der Kolk (2014), Dominick LaCapra (1999), Renos K. Papadopoulos (2021), Yaroslav Polishchuk (2016; 2018), Oksana Pukhonska (2022; 2023), Eric Wertheimer and Monica J. Casper (2016), and others.

The complexity and impossibility of finding a generally accepted understanding of the concept of trauma even within a single discipline is described by Renos K. Papadopoulos in *Involuntary Dislocation: Home, Trauma, Resilience, and Adversity-Activated Development* (2021). The primary meaning of the term trauma, which originates from the Greek language, means a wound inflicted on the body. However, in later usage, particularly in medical and psychological literature, and mainly in the works of Sigmund Freud, trauma is understood as a wound inflicted on the mind ([1920] 1955). For Cathy Caruth, trauma is more than a pathology; trauma is “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (1996, 4). As she states, “the traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (1995, 5). Michelle Balaev defines trauma as “a severely disruptive experience that profoundly affects the self’s emotional organisation and perception of the external world” (2018, 360).

Dominick LaCapra views traumas as events raising “the problematic question of identity”, which call for “more critical ways of coming to terms with both [a person’s – S. H.] legacy and problems such as absence and loss” (1999, 724). LaCapra emphasizes two approaches to dealing with trauma: acting out trauma, which is melancholic and destructive, and working through trauma, which entails a critical analysis of trauma in the context of the past, present, and future. In this second approach, following critical analysis, the traumatized person undergoes constructive grief, which further mitigates the trauma (1999, 716–717).

The Ukrainian literary scholar Tamara Hundorova argues that “trauma means not so much the painful event as its transmission – its echo, its transmission through generations, and other places, and other times” (2014, 31). According to Caruth, Freud also focuses on the delayed traumatic moment, emphasizing that trauma is neither simple nor a one-time experience of events, but rather that these traumat-



ic events gain power precisely in their temporal delay (1995, 9). The same opinion is shared by Jeffrey H. Hartman, who argues that knowledge about trauma, or derived from trauma, consists of two contradictory elements: first, the traumatic event, which is not so much experienced as it is registered, entering the psyche directly, and second, the memory of the traumatic event, which is in the form of a constant experience (1995, 537). In other words, traumatic experiences do not disappear without a trace, but instead remain in our minds in the form of “scars”, affecting our emotions, our lives, and our ability to perceive ourselves and coexist with others.

While analyzing a wide range of extreme situations (including war, earthquake, violence, and famine) and equally diverse individual and collective reactions to these situations, the above-mentioned researchers have expanded the concept of trauma, which can now be seen simultaneously as “a socio-political event, a psychophysiological process, a physical and emotional experience, and a narrative theme to explain individual and societal suffering” (Balogh 2023, 87); “an image that evokes a host of emotional responses”, “a phenomenon with manifold contributing factors and consequences” or as “a normal response to abnormal circumstances” (Papadopoulos 2021, 210–211); and as “a cultural object” or as “a product of history and politics, subject to reinterpretation, contestation, and intervention” (Wertheimer and Casper 2016, 3). In other words, the focus of trauma studies is shifting from the psychiatric and biomedical fields to the humanities and social sciences.

## THE SHOCK OF THE WAR EXPERIENCE

Iryna Feofanova’s *Chuzha-svoia-ridna* (2023) consists of eight short stories that differ in style as well as in length; the story “Heshtalty” (“Gestalts”) is four pages long, while “Viina, kukhnia i 8 vypadkovykh liudei” (“War, kitchen and eight strangers”) is 41 pages. The stories are presented in various narrative forms such as monologues, descriptions, dialogues, diary entries, and WhatsApp correspondence. The plots also vary, with some stories ending happily and others more somberly. However, all the stories are united by a single theme – the painful experience of war and forced displacement and refugee status of Ukrainian women. Their trauma is caused by a single factor: the war, which draws a line dividing the characters’ lives into *before* and *after*. This divide demonstrates a breakdown and change in how the characters perceive their future, sometimes leading to confusion due to an inability to navigate war demands. The stories also illustrate the opposition of happy/unhappy, light/dark, and calm/restless.

Analyzing Feofanova’s collection, three factors that underlie the trauma of Ukrainian women refugees and internally displaced persons can be considered. Firstly, all the above-mentioned representatives of trauma studies mention the shock of the experience, which causes intense and specific emotional reactions. The stories convey the shock of the war experience when the protagonists and their children have to spend nights in the cold basements of Kharkiv, Odesa, Kherson, Bucha, and other cities. This shock has a particularly tragic impact on the behavior of Maryna, the protagonist of the short story “Chuzhesranka” (whose title, a vulgar pun on the word “foreigner”, is explained below). While Maryna is fleeing from the iconic city

of Bucha with her children, she keeps hugging them and “repeating like a mantra: ‘Now everything will be fine, as before’” (6). Moreover, for her six-year-old son Mark and four-year-old daughter Zlata, any loud noise, such as a plate falling to the floor, causes not only trepidation but an unusual reaction: “Mark and Zlata were frightened and immediately fell to the floor, covering their heads with their hands, just like their mother taught them in Bucha” (13). Maryna’s aunt Olha from the village of Kalynivka, who is providing shelter and long-awaited peace for the family, is repeatedly frightened because she sees “so much pain in those children’s eyes, God only knows what they saw in Bucha” (14). The Russian-Ukrainian War changes people not only externally but also internally.

“Trauma produces actual physiological changes” states Bessel Van der Kolk in the book *The Body Keeps Score: How to Leave Trauma in the Past* (2023, 14). Bodily conditions play an important role in revealing the crisis states of the characters’ consciousness after they experience shock. Feofanova emphasizes both the soreness of her characters after 24 February, and their inadequate physiological reactions to external stimuli. Readers are introduced to the specific physiological reactions to the first explosions and the news of the outbreak of war. “Chervoni dni” (Red days) is written in the form of a short diary, with the first entry dated “24 February 2022, Thursday” (2023, 48). The protagonist refers to her menstruation as the “red days”, the beginning of which she felt with her whole body on 24 February, but which will only begin on 8 April, when she crosses the border to Poland and feels safe for the first time. In the collection, physical and mental illnesses are another negative consequence of the war, adding to the many stories of Ukrainian women about the loss of material possessions. All these stories of Ukrainian refugee women can be seen as a search for self-therapy, “when the stories of others become an echo of your feelings and experiences” (Pukhonska 2023, 149).

The short story “Hoida, Hoida-Hoi” (“Rock-a-bye Baby”), whose title is taken from a Ukrainian folk lullaby, is a continuous narrative about the lives of Ukrainian refugee women in Romania who display physical, embodied expressions of trauma. The protagonist, listening to the stories of other refugees from Ukraine, says: “We are all traumatized” (79). For example, after the outbreak of war, a young girl from Chernihiv develops a nervous tic, an adult woman from Ivano-Frankivsk has periodic amnesia, and a woman from Kherson has the first epileptic seizure of her life. The protagonist, a mother of five-year-old twins from Odesa, suffers from anxiety attacks, depression, and nightmares, which are exacerbated by watching news from Ukraine. For the protagonist, “war is not stories in books; war is Russian missiles that kill little children” (82). The news becomes a trigger for her traumatic memories because “traumatized people simultaneously remember too little and too much [...] these [traumatic] memories are not subject to the ‘wearing away process’ of normal memories but ‘persist for a long time with astonishing freshness’. Nor can traumatized people control when they will emerge” (Van der Kolk 2023, 196, 198). The protagonist understands that “these [nightmares] are the cries of my soul. The pain that breaks through” (Feofanova 2023, 84). It supports Freud’s view that when a traumatic experience is constantly imposed on a person, even in a dream, it serves as “a proof

of the strength of that experience”, and one can say that the traumatized person is “fixed to his trauma” ([1920] 1955, 13). Like the protagonists of Feofanova’s other short stories, the young mother of twins is an example of how, for most internally displaced persons or refugees, physical distance from Ukraine does not mean informational distance. Keeping up with the news creates the illusion of involvement and closeness to Ukraine.

### THE LOSS OF HOME

Drawing on LaCapra’s theory, the second factor that becomes a precondition for trauma is loss. In Feofanova’s stories, the loss of home goes beyond the loss of a physical space such as a house or apartment. For the characters, home is also a container shrouded in complex and historically layered relationships, lived memories, and intangible elements that are dear and valuable to them, often beyond material possessions. All of the characters remember their homes with pain, and the trauma of losing their memory artifacts is quite acute. Fifteen-year-old Mila, in love with her boyfriend Dania, writes in a worried message on WhatsApp: “Dania, our block of flats in Mykolaiv... was raided by Russians. [...] We have nowhere to go back to. My mother is crying – there was an album with old photos in the apartment, she is crying for that album. For her, it is a symbol of her past life. A life that will never exist again” (2023, 69). A loss such as these photographs “condemns a person to a memory crisis” (Pukhonska 2024, 7). For Mila’s mother, the absence of photographs is a painful experience associated with the recollection of the prewar past, which contrasts sharply with the shock of the war.

Some protagonists in Feofanova’s stories not only describe their abandoned apartments or houses in detail, but idealize the images of their homes, neglecting the realities. For example, the protagonist of the story “Viina, kukhnia i 8 vypadkovykh liudei” sighs as she recalls her quiet yard, her house, and the old renovation that she had been constantly complaining about, but which now all seem far away and desirable. This paradox confirms Papadopoulos’s views about the home as “one of the most potent archetypes that impacts human beings” (2021, 113). Some of the short stories’ protagonists even ignore the fact that the homes they have left behind are not only geographically distant but remain in the past, to which there is no return. The tragedy is that they continue to believe in the illusion that their homes still exist and remain unchanged. For example, after Russian missiles reduce Valia’s apartment to a hole in the ground, she still imagines her home as “somewhere in that hole, on the fifth floor” (Feofanova 2023, 89–90).

### THE DEVALUATION OF WOMEN’S LIVES IN THE WAR AND A COLLAPSE OF THEIR WORLDVIEW

The third factor that underlies the trauma of Feofanova’s protagonists and divides their life into *before* and *after* is the devaluation of their lives in the war and a collapse of their worldview, which manifests itself as uncertainty and confusion about the present and the future, because “trauma radically changes people: in fact they no longer are ‘themselves’” (Van der Kolk 2023, 254–255). Maryna,

the internally displaced person from Bucha, fears for the present and future of her children. She is considered a “stranger” by most residents of Kalynivka village in the Kyiv region. For example, to demonstrate her disgust, contempt, and hatred for Maryna, Pysanchykha distorts the word “chuzhestranka” (foreigner) by omitting a letter “t” and calling the internally displaced woman “chuzhesranka”, a vulgar wordplay that, in Ukrainian, loosely translates to “foreign shithhead”. Furthermore, Pysanchykha’s drunken son Valik threatens Maryna and her children with a gun, leaving Maryna anxious about the future because she does not know where she can flee to next.

For the heroine of “Chervoni dni”, every day that follows is filled with anxiety for the future in anticipation of the “red days”: anxiety for her husband, who has gone to war; for her native Kharkiv, which brings disturbing news; and for the whole of Ukraine, because on 26 March, Lviv was bombed. But most of all, the protagonist worries about the future of her family, because she wants to have children. She is afraid to take away her husband’s greatest hope: his hope of returning home alive and having children.

It is not the protagonist’s anxiety, but instead the reader’s anxiety about the protagonist’s future in the war that is evoked by the plot of the shortest story in the collection, which has an eloquent title: “Heshtalty”. Until the last sentence or even the last word, the reader does not know where in Ukraine the unnamed female protagonist lives. In this way, Feofanova emphasizes the universality of the described experience for many women in Ukraine. In “Heshtalty”, several factors increase the reader’s anxiety about the protagonist’s future in wartime. Firstly, she is young, pregnant, and divorced. Secondly, she considers hotels and maternity hospitals in Lviv or Ivano-Frankivsk (western regional centers of Ukraine) as possible places of refuge and salvation for herself and her unborn child. She keeps a printed list of these places in her “anxious suitcase”, which offers clues about her current location. The heroine has a “clear plan of action, packed suitcases, closed gestalts” in case of trouble. However, on 24 February, due to the lack of fuel in the car, she is forced to return to her apartment with the hope that she will go to western Ukraine later: “She will have time. There is no way that she will not have time to leave Mariupol” (Feofanova 2023, 47).

## THE INEFFABILITY OF TRAUMA

One of the challenges with Feofanova’s discourse on the traumatic experience of internally displaced and refugee Ukrainian women is the problem of the ineffability of trauma when its very circumstances and consequences become the object of silence or unspoken taboo, because trauma is “an extremely complex object of verbal representation” (Grebeniuk 2022, 107). Analyzing the embodiment of trauma in fiction, Ukrainian and foreign scholars emphasize that the speaking or telling about the experience is “the way to recovery” (Balaev 2008, 151), because “silence reinforces the godforsaken isolation of trauma” (Van der Kolk 2023, 357). Moreover, an untold trauma becomes “an obsessive nightmare that does not let go of its grip” (Polishchuk 2016, 97).

The problem of the ineffability of trauma is encountered in the short story “Dizhonska hirschysia” (“Dijon Mustard”), where none of the protagonists break the silence on the most sensitive topic – the death of neighbors with children who were hit by a mine while fleeing Borodianka by car.<sup>2</sup> This silence about trauma that “cries out” (Caruth 1995) only deepens the emotional pain of the character Valia, who wants to talk about the experience or simply to scream, as she sometimes does in the shower: “Hot water on full blast, tears streaming down her cheeks”, as she lets out “a scream from the depths of her heart, which was even hotter than water” (Feofanova 2023, 86). After the aforementioned traumatic event, Valia’s husband Borys, who until 24 February was the most famous toastmaster in Borodianka, stops talking. This “shutdown” (Van der Kolk 2023) indicates a deep trauma from the stress and shock he has experienced, which takes away Borys’s ability to speak. His reaction is not only based on the phenomenon of “conspiracy of silence”, which refers to a taboo that applies to any narrative or even question about trauma (Grebeniuk 2022, 107). In fact, these are the traumatic memories that are not verbalized but are present in Borys’s memory, which negatively affect not only his life but also those of his family, particularly his wife. Despite the gender stereotypes that prevail in society, Feofanova shows the collapse of the ideals of male steadfastness and endurance during the war. Borys manifests a disrupted sense of gender identity, as he is unable to fulfil his traditional paternal duty to protect and support his family in a crisis. In contrast, Valia tries to adapt to a difficult life in a foreign country, accepts all the challenges of life that befall her after 24 February 2022, and insists that she will return to Ukraine at any cost. Nevertheless, despite her civic position and longing for her native land, the protagonist remains loyal to her family, not daring to leave it. The status and responsibilities of a woman as a wife and mother determine her final choice. The readers perceive Valia as a keeper of the family hearth, who, to quote the feminist author Solomiia Pavlychko can be called “disenfranchised but nationally conscious” (2002, 61).

## NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Language is a matter of principle for the protagonist of the story “Hoida-Hoida-hoi” after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The mentality of this native of Odesa undergoes radical changes under the influence of the war. As the mother of two young twins, she becomes conscious of her Ukrainian identity when discussing the war with her children: “Russians came to peaceful Ukraine and want to destroy us all. That is why we fled to Romania. And that is why we cannot speak Russian” (Feofanova 2023, 76). She is ashamed that before the war, while holding a Ukrainian passport, wearing an embroidered shirt, and singing the Ukrainian lullaby “Hoida, Hoida-hoi” that she remembers from her grandmother, she spoke Russian, listened to Russian pop, and read Russian books to her children at night. The war became the reason to “evaluate not only the mistakes of the present but also the misjudgement of the past” (Polishchuk 2018, 14). The character’s national identification is strengthened abroad, where she begins to appreciate things she previously overlooked.

The women in the story “Viina, kukhnia i 8 vypadkovykh liudei” are complex and realistic. They occasionally quarrel over a “cup with sunflowers on it”, “pots”, “tea mushroom”, or “just hide in silence”, but they also exemplify a strong sense of national consciousness. However, it takes them time to fully comprehend and “work through” (LaCapra 1999) their traumatic experience. Only after reliving the experience do the characters realize that they were mistakenly becoming irritated and angry with each other, rather than understanding that it was the Russians whom they should hate, since it was the Russian soldiers who destroyed their homes and cities, tore them out of their lives, and erased everything they had achieved and dreamed of. Thus, developing national consciousness helps the characters become a close-knit group of internally displaced persons, despite some misunderstanding in the past, which in turn helps them to cope with their trauma together.

In her feminist reflections on the portrayal of women in artistic discourse at the beginning of the millennium, Pavlychko argues that representations of men have usually outnumbered representations of women, largely because of the unwillingness to portray a woman as “a self-sufficient person filled with her independent ideas” (2002, 174). Nevertheless, Feofanova confidently works as a feminist author whose short stories reimagine the image of women and their traditional role in Ukrainian society during the war. The reader encounters the images of traumatized, sometimes uncertain, but courageous internally displaced and refugee women who, despite all the difficulties associated with their status, do their best to save their born and unborn children, protect their families, and support the victorious defense of their homeland. They also inform the world about the tragedies caused by the war, and find, if not *kinship*, then at least *belonging* in the places where they have found temporary refuge.

## CONCLUSION

Feofanova, drawing on her own experience and the experiences of other Ukrainian women, offers realistic perspectives on the challenges that the Russian-Ukrainian War poses to modern humans. All of her short stories attempt to analyze the condition and fate of internally displaced persons and refugees, which is also described in numerous studies by psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and literary critics (Kristeva 2002; Papadopoulos 2021; Polishchuk 2016, 2018; Said 1994, and others). The characters’ condition is especially acute abroad, in the world outside the war, in the new “organized spatial sphere” (Lotman 2000), where the surrounding space and environment seem devoid of any signs of violence, fear, and restrictions. Despite their new geographical reality, all of the characters in Feofanova’s short stories have traumatic memories. Three factors underlie their traumas: the shock of the war experience, which produces actual physiological changes and diseases; the loss of home, which has impacts beyond the loss of a physical space; and the devaluation of their lives in the war and a collapse of their worldview, which manifests itself as uncertainty and confusion about the present and the future. However, the characters dismantle stereotypes and transform their experiences.



Like other war narratives written by women, Feofanova's fiction demonstrates a different perspective on the portrayal of war from the mainstream masculine discourse because "when women's experience becomes central, the traumatic nature of war, rather than the heroic one, comes to the forefront of the story" (Krupka 2022, 490). All of the stories in her collection are structurally heterogeneous but interconnected in three dimensions: 1) the common theme of war, which the writer always presents as a reason for her characters' traumas; 2) the perception of war not only as a tragic problem of Ukrainian society as a whole, but also as a tragedy of a particular Ukrainian family or individual; 3) the focus on a refugee or internally displaced woman protagonist who draws on her inner strength to cope with pain, despair, and anxiety, not only to survive but to live fully, regardless of the circumstances or location.

The writer presents images of modern Ukrainian women as: a tender and caring mother, a faithful and devoted wife, an intelligent, purposeful, and reliable worker, and most importantly, a patriot of her country, committed to Ukrainian beliefs and traditions. By narrating the fate of contemporary Ukrainian internally displaced and refugee women in a sincere, compassionate, and individualized tone, Iryna Feofanova's short stories contribute to the war narrative and migration discourse from a Ukrainian perspective.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted all translations from Ukrainian are by the present author.

<sup>2</sup> Borodianka was bombed extensively and devastated on 7 April 2022.

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# The motif of orphanhood in the narrative of trauma and healing: Volodymyr Rafeyenko's fiction about Russia's war against Ukraine

TETIANA GREBENIUK

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.4

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## The motif of orphanhood in the narrative of trauma and healing: Volodymyr Rafeyenko's fiction about Russia's war against Ukraine

Fiction about Russia's war against Ukraine. Volodymyr Rafeyenko. War trauma. Traumatic writing. Motif of orphanhood.

This article examines the narrative of trauma and healing in wartime fiction by the Ukrainian writer Volodymyr Rafeyenko, namely, in the works *Dovhi chasy (miska balada)* (2017; Eng. trans. *The Length of Days: An Urban Ballad*, 2023), *Mondegreen: Pisni pro smert' i lyubov* (2019; Eng. trans. *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love*, 2022), and others. The focus of the study is the discovery of the protagonist's identity in the context of remediation and premediation processes as components of cultural memory. The narratives are interpreted through the prism of the motif of orphanhood, considered in two ways: as a political metaphor and as one of the real manifestations of the war trauma. The methodological tools of this article include Astrid Erll's interpretation of the role of remediation and premediation in the dynamics of cultural memory, and Tamara Hundorova's interpretation of the maternal and paternal images in the Ukrainian post-Soviet novel.

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Tetiana Grebeniuk  
Institute of Ukrainian Studies  
Faculty of Applied Linguistics  
The University of Warsaw  
Poland  
t.grebeniuk@uw.edu.pl  
ORCID: 0000-0003-1910-5411

The life path of Volodymyr Rafeyenko, originally a Russian-speaking writer from Donetsk who moved to Kyiv after the Russian invasion of Donbas in 2014, mastered the Ukrainian language and started writing works of fiction in Ukrainian, is a living example of how actual encounters with genocidal practices make a person re-evaluate their life, linking together inherited traumatic experiences and their own vision of the future in the context of undergoing changes to their individual and collective identity.

The works of Rafeyenko represent all stages of Russia's war against Ukraine until the present time. The novel *Dovhi chasy (miska balada)* (2017; Eng. trans. *The Length of Days: An Urban Ballad*, 2023a) shows the coexistence of the local population and occupants in the half-fantastical chronotope of the city of Z (easily recognized as Donetsk) immediately after the beginning of the Russian aggression in 2014. The novel *Mondegreen: Pisni pro smert' i lyubov* (2019; Eng. trans. *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love*, 2022), whose protagonist is Haba Habinsky, an intellectual from Donetsk who is traumatized by the war, describes his life in Kyiv and his path to rediscovering his familial and national identities that were suppressed during the Soviet (and later Russian) attempts to colonize the region. The play *Mobilni khvyli buttia* (Mobile waves of being, 2023b) represents tragic events in the life of several families from Kyiv, who were caught by the Russian occupation at their village cottages, and therefore were condemned to die. Rafeyenko's most recent novel *Petrychor – zapakh zemli pislia doshchu* (Petrichor, the smell of ground after the rain, 2023c) portrays the protagonist's escape from the full-scale war – as a traumatized person of unsound mind, he refuses to accept the reality of his wife's death but somehow finds the strength to do so. Taking a holistic approach to Rafeyenko's fiction as a single text, we can trace the protagonists' path toward their own existential, national, and familial identity and the author's gradual alienation from the influence of Russian language and culture.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the narrative of trauma and healing of Rafeyenko's protagonist and the discovery of his own identity in the context of remediation and premediation processes as components of cultural memory. The key to the interpretation of the narrative is the motif of orphanhood, interpreted by Rafeyenko in two ways: as a political metaphor and as one of the real manifestations of the war trauma. The methodological approach of this analysis includes Astrid Erll's (2009) interpretation of the role of remediation and premediation in the dynamics of cultural memory, and Tamara Hundorova's (2024) interpretation of maternal and paternal images in the Ukrainian post-Soviet novel.

## WORKS OF FICTION IN THE SYSTEM OF CULTURAL MEMORY: REMEDICATION AND PREMEDIATION

When analyzing Rafeyenko's works of the war period, it is worth remembering that like the works of many other writers, they function as a means of mass communication, exerting influence on the audience.<sup>1</sup> As a rule, the tangibility of this influence directly correlates with the writer's "popularity" or fame in the widest possible circles. And here it should be noted that, given the publicly resonant, media-covered

transition of Rafeyenko to the Ukrainian language, attention to his works is now quite high. Moreover, the artistic value of the writer's works guarantees lasting interest from readers.

Therefore, given the high level of influence of Rafeyenko's works, special attention can be paid to their remediation and premediation significance, in particular within Astrid Erll's framework of dynamics of cultural memory, which interprets remediation as a form of cultural memory existence, "the repeated mediation of memory matter, across time and space" (2019, 242). This includes rewriting, translation, adaptation, commentary, performances, canonization, institutionalization, editing, and "other possible forms of 'mediating again'" (242–245). In fact, cultural memory does not exist without various forms of remediation. If the vector of remediation is directed to the past, then the essence of premediation is to provide the audience with "schemata for new experience and its representation" by the media that circulate in a given society (2009, 111). Erll notes that the reactivation of past experiences (i.e., remediation) can also serve as premediation, such as medial representations of World War I, which were at hand as a model for understanding World War II. In other words, by assimilating mediatised past experience, society forms niches within the framework of premediation which will be filled by subsequent events. According to Erll, mediation is not the prerogative of the mass media alone: "Media that belong to more distant cultural spheres, such as art, mythology, religion or law, can exert great power as mediators, too" (111). That is, the consideration of fiction in the system of remediation-premediation diachrony is quite legitimate. Given the fact that many phenomena of Ukraine's past, previously silenced for political reasons, have recently entered the sphere of cultural memory, we must admit that the remediation of traumatic experiences of the past and the premediation of current military events have been concentrated in Ukrainian life in a very short period of time. The representation of Ukraine's past genocidal experiences in fiction adds to the arsenal of premediation tools that help Ukrainians better understand the nature of the current Russian aggression and find the strength to confront the enemy. As Oksana Pukhonska comments on the continuity of historical memory reproduced in contemporary literature, "the war in eastern Ukraine is a metaphor for the confrontation between the past and the future, that is, between what and how we should remember, and how it should/could shape our national identity"<sup>2</sup> (2019, 247). This article considers Rafeyenko's works written in the period of the Russian-Ukrainian war (i.e., since 2014) as the media through which he exercises remedial and premedial influence on the audience.

Rafeyenko clearly records the lack of proper remediation, the silencing of past historical traumas of Ukrainians in Soviet times, and the removal of this taboo with the onset of the era of Independence. In particular, he recalls the moment after the collapse of the USSR when "[his] mother's mother, [his] own grandmother, sat [him] down and told [him] about her life, how it was going", in particular, that giving up her native language was her release from peer bullying at school and a pass to her prestigious job in the space industry (Rafeyenko 2020, 317). Rafeyenko's reminiscences published by Oleksandr Mykhed about what he personally saw from

the Donetsk bell tower, where he was ringing the bells at the moment that thousands of armed militants entered the city, can be considered a remediation for events that were closer in time. His realization that people wearing masks and running into the cathedral carrying bats is a sign that “hope for the best is over”, that changes are coming, and the struggle against this force will not be short or easy, is already a premeditation (319).

In Rafeyenko's wartime prose, remediation is observed on two levels: 1) the protagonist's awareness of the traumas and genocidal experiences of the 20th century, and 2) the comprehension of the outbreak of the war in 2014 in all its causality and teleology. On the basis of this understanding of the previous colonial-totalitarian past, the writer – consciously or unconsciously – uses his writing to examine the prospects for Ukraine and to leave at least a grain of hope at the end of even the gloomiest narrative. In particular, the novels *The Length of Days* and *Mondegreen* can be considered as premediation of the next full-scale aggression and the spiritual preparation of Ukrainians who are already aware of their own past for a difficult confrontation, which the artist associates with the mythical motif of the metaphysical battle between good and evil. As Iryna Tarku writes about this feature of Rafeyenko's writing, embodied in *Mondegreen*: “Even though the war is fundamentally destructive, it reveals remarkable creative potential and encourages the interest of Ukrainians in their own history and cultural memory” (2023, 210).

## THE MOTIF OF ORPHANHOOD IN THE ARTISTIC WORLD OF RAFEYENKO'S WORKS

Rafeyenko's fiction written during the Russian-Ukrainian war is undoubtedly an example of traumatic writing. Focusing on the question of which traumas underlie these works and how they are represented, we can notice a certain dynamic, starting from his depiction of the horrors of war in *The Length of Days*, which is ironic (in the inserted stories) or grotesque (in the main text). In *Mondegreen*, the author moves towards explicitly disclosing the trauma of the protagonist's forced relocation as the background for the conditional and veiled representation (due to his mental instability) of the trauma of the loss of his beloved, and his killing of those responsible for this crime. In fact, in the fictional world of this work, there is always uncertainty as to whether the tragic events described really happened in the novel's diegesis or whether they are Haba's delusions. Rafeyenko continues this series of traumatic texts with an openly tragic portrayal of the entire set of war traumas in their most acute manifestations in the play *Mobile Waves of Being* and the novel *Petrichor*. The main traumatic factors in these works are the loss of loved ones and, in *Petrichor*, the murder of enemies by a highly moral protagonist in self-defense. The motif of the characters' mental instability is also present in this novel, but here, this instability is presented as their attempt to hide themselves from the terrible reality. By the end of the work, both of its protagonists, Viktor and Maria, find the strength to admit that the tragedies of losing their loved ones really happened, and that even having admitted this, they will still somehow survive. Viktor, who at the beginning of the work “hears” from every cat and dog the painful question that



he is actually asking himself: “Why did you kill them? First two, and then two more?” (Rafeyenko 2023c, 11), finally finds strength to tell others why he did it, which was to take revenge on the aggressors for the brutal rape of his wife.

It is important that in Rafeyenko’s works written after the beginning of the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, the style of narration about the horrors of war changes. Analyzing the scenes of violence in *The Length of Days*, Uilleam Blacker resorts to the term “parapoleemics” coined by Kate McLoughlin, meaning the focus on the periphery of conflict, to avoid direct representation of violence and death (Blacker 2022, 17). For this work, Blacker’s observation seems legitimate, but Rafeyenko’s subsequent texts, *Mobile Waves of Being* and *Petrichor*, contain not only parapoleemics, but also direct descriptions of violence that shock the reader. Eventually after reading these scenes, it becomes clear why the protagonists have acquired irreversible mental damage.

The characteristic feature of Rafeyenko’s works is that, despite the diversity of characters, chronotopes, and stylistic dominants,<sup>3</sup> they have many cross-cutting, unifying motifs and images, through which the remediative and premeditative functions of the author’s writing are carried out. Some of these motifs, from work to work, testify to certain changes, including those of identity, experienced by the characters as well as, probably, by the author and the reader at each of the specific stages of the war. When analyzing the writer’s narrative of trauma and healing, we focus on the motif of orphanhood, which is extremely representative and important for understanding of the processes of remediation and premediation in the semiosphere of Rafeyenko’s fiction.

Despite the fact that the background absence of one or both of the characters’ parents (a sort of incompleteness) is a factor of the perception of their minds as potentially vulnerable, and the event of losing parents is marked as a psychological trauma, in Rafeyenko’s works we can distinguish two different interpretations of this phenomenon: orphanhood as a political metaphor, which to some extent explains the specifics of Donbas identity, and orphanhood as a trauma that causes irreparable damage to the psyche of the traumatized person, and in some cases is the realization of the mythologeme of sacrifice. The first, metaphorical, interpretation of orphanhood is embodied in *The Length of Days*. Undoubtedly, the narrative of orphanhood in this work evokes the reader’s empathy, but the story of the absence or loss of parents is not overly psychologized here, because the external, political connotations seem more important. In addition, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the motif of orphanhood becomes one of the many manifestations of the aggressor’s extreme violence, such as the motif of mortality among children in the occupied territories, which Olha Voznyuk draws attention to in her research (2023, 108).

In *The Length of Days*, orphanhood serves as a metaphor for the rupture of transgenerational memory transmission, a sign of an identity crisis due to the lack of proper remediation of the past traumas in pre-war Donbas (for more details, see Grebeniuk 2024). Kolya Veresaiev, one of the three main protagonists of the novel (along with Sokrat Gredis and Lisa-Eleonora), metaphorically formulates the orphan’s deep resentment towards the Ukrainian government, the living father of Donbas (personified in the image of the President) who does not care when the mother is in trouble:

Why shouldn't, given all this, you know, why shouldn't our Supreme Leader go out to the podium [...] to shout out for the whole world to hear: how are you doing there, folks? How are you doing in your fucking Z? [...] Hang in there, people, we haven't forgotten about you [...]. Children, women, old men and old women, hang in there!<sup>4</sup> (Rafeyenko 2023a, 41–42)

In addition, Rafeyenko associates the state of orphanhood with the status of a refugee, putting an intertextually charged complaint into Kolya's mouth: "*It's hard, so hard to live/Like a motherless child*. So you and I, Sokrat Ivanovich, are Z-orphans! Migrants!" (2023a, 270).

Tamara Hundorova, in her article "Transgenerational Trauma and Maternal Criticism in a Decolonial Perspective", notes that in the post-Soviet Ukrainian novel, the conflict between parents and children reflects both dissatisfaction with the authority of the father, associated with the former colonial power, and disappointment in maternal support, associated with the nation (Motherland) which had become the object of colonization. Among the examples Hundorova (2024) discusses is the protagonist's criticism and rejection of her own mother in Oksana Zabuzhko's *Poliiovi Doslidzhennia z Ukrajins'koho Seksu* (1996; Eng. trans. *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, 2011). It can be said that Rafeyenko's wartime works embody the next stage of this post-colonial syndrome, which is particularly represented in texts where the mother is completely absent, and most often has died. This fact metaphorically reflects the violent loss of the Motherland as a result of Russian expansion.

In *The Length of Days*, the motifs of orphanhood and the loss of a mother (the Motherland, the nation) are very significant. Lisa, a mentally ill orphan girl Lisa, is adopted by Sokrat's daughter Anna before her own death, leaving Lisa doubly orphaned (which, however, turns out not to be a real death, but a transition to a real, spiritual Ukraine). Another orphan is Sashka, a character in the inserted story "Someone Else's Apartment", who tries to comprehend the essence of events, but having no parents, he lacks the basic system of values, which people usually receive in the family. Therefore, he does not find his place and meaning in a world that is deformed by the war – we are informed that he has had "a second heart attack" (2023a, 224).

In the novel *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love*, the motif of orphanhood as a factor of the intergenerational gap is realized primarily in the retrospectively narrated murder of the parents of Haba's grandfather, Olexii Yehorovych, by the Soviet authorities. Little Olexii, along with his brother and sisters, were forced to remain silent about this murder, which they witnessed (undoubtedly remaining a lifelong trauma for them), so as not to be branded as "children of enemies of the people" and to have the opportunity to arrange their fates under the totalitarian regime. It was this fact that put into effect the "canon of ignorance" that had been formed in Haba since his childhood and that was, in fact, a manifestation of the conspiracy of silence, which always extended to all stories about trauma, especially in the context of the country's Communist past. The self-preservation instinct of Haba's ancestors and their generation was the main reason for this "silence", meaning the lack of remediation of the past, as cherishing ancient traditions and remembering traumas was dangerous during times of repression.

Interestingly, Haba Habinskyj learns about these family facts, hidden for decades, in a metaphysical way<sup>5</sup> – through a connection to otherworldly knowledge, which is personified in his imagination by a fairytale character, the Mare's Head.<sup>6</sup> The trigger for the appearance of the Mare's Head is the beginning of Haba's study of Ukrainian – the forgotten and repressed language of his ancestors, in which his grandmother had told him bedtime stories. Although the protagonist's immersion in the language, which is for him not only a means of communication, but also the center of his ancestral identity, harms his mental health (see Andryczyk, 2022), it helps him to find his true self and embark on the path of remediation. Iryna Tarku characterizes the integrative impact of the awareness of family traumas on the protagonist's psyche: "The main character accepts the horrible past of his grandfather, and in this way he 'wakes up.' This awakening liberates Haba from any craving for revenge, and it gives him a feeling of lightness and wholeness" (2023, 217).

We can summarize that an adequate "rereading" of the past, awareness of the reasons for the russification and mental enslavement of Habinskyj's parents, acts as a practice of remediation of cultural traumas for the reader of Rafeyenko's work and carries within itself the schemata of the future unfolding of events, that is, it has a premeditative nature.

In Rafeyenko's subsequent works – the play *Mobile Waves of Being* and the novel *Petrichor, the Smell of Ground after the Rain* – the motif of orphanhood gradually changes its character. This can be attributed to the fact that the writer, gradually defining himself with his national identity and eventually adhering to the need for a "rigid" opposition of Russian and Ukrainian identities, catalyzed by the war, endows his characters with knowledge of their family (ancestral) roots. Metaphorical orphanhood as the initial state of the inhabitants of Donbas is transformed in his works into orphanhood as a literal loss of one's closest relatives in the tragedy and trauma of war.

The play *Mobile Waves of Being* is based on the concept of a strong interpersonal connection, mostly through family: the residents of the village of dachas (summer cottages) "Blyzhni Sady" (The nearby gardens), trapped there by the Russian offensive, constantly try to contact their loved ones by phone. The characters here are not orphans in the metaphorical sense, that is, separated from the identity of their ancestors and nation. The protagonist Vasia Tsvit, on the contrary, communicates in a metaphysical way with his pro-Russian parents who remained in Donetsk, and also finds the ancestral identity lost by his family in Soviet times: since the beginning of the war, his deceased grandfather Danylo Andriyovych, an intellectual who suffered from the Soviet regime all his life as a result of not renouncing his Ukrainian identity, has been communicating with him.

In the play, connection with the family is a force that prevents the characters from falling into despair. But as the action develops, the recipient observes the gradual destruction of families, whose members – both the village residents themselves and their relatives – die as a result of Russian aggression. For example, on the first day of the full-scale invasion, in Kyiv, Mariana's parents are killed by a rocket attack. The Kyiv resident Artem dies at the hands of the Russians while trying to take his

wife Eleonora (who could not have children for a long time and finally got pregnant after a trip to Jerusalem) from the dacha. The story of this family is a contemporary version of the biblical story of Christ's conception. However, Eleonora sees the Virgin Mary crying in the sky above her, because her child is doomed to be born an orphan (if Eleonora herself manages to survive under the occupation). It should also be noted that even an unborn child is endowed with a clear identity in the text: "Somewhere inside me now lives a little Ukrainian man or maybe a Ukrainian woman", Eleonora tells her husband in their last telephone conversation (Rafeyenko 2023b, 35).

The motif of orphanhood becomes even more tragic and less of a political metaphor in *Petrichor, the Smell of Ground after the Rain*. The protagonists Viktor, Maria, and her son Petro, who are immigrants from Donbas, are aware of their origin, identity, and political affiliation.<sup>7</sup> Patriotic but traumatized by the war, they move away from it, sometimes accepting the prejudiced attitude of residents of western Ukrainian regions towards them as a given. The central character of the work is Petro (or Petrchor, as he calls himself), whose father Oleksandr (Sashko) was a dancer from western Ukraine, who died in the war. Here, as in *Mobile Waves of Being*, we again see the updating of the conception, birth, and in this case, childhood of the son of God. Roxana Kharchuk sees the trio of protagonists as "a kind of reincarnation of the holy family in the coordinates of love, death, and immortality" (2023, n.p.). It is difficult to disagree with this, because the allusions to the birth of God are numerous here: the name Maria, Petro's birth from a "godlike" father (it is not for nothing that in Maria's psychonarration Sashko is constantly likened to the image of the dancing Vishnu), as well as his extremely early adulthood, exceptional wisdom, and prophetic gift. Especially since here, as in the Gospel cycle, there are connotations of a redemptive sacrifice that must be made for the sake of a better future.

The future is essentially blocked for Viktor and Maria, because their mental state makes it impossible for them to adequately perceive reality. Both experience the same trauma: the loss of a loved one in the war and the fact that as a result of circumstances they themselves become murderers. They both refuse to believe in the death of their beloved, and Maria also "confuses the dead with the living": she considers her son Petro dead, and her beloved Sashko alive. The boy takes responsibility for saving his mother and returning her to the world of reality and feels that her future fate is connected with Viktor, so Petro sets out together with his accomplices, the toys Hedgehog, Pink Monkey and Hare, to save both adults.

Petro's healing of traumatized adults in the structure of the novel plot involves two components: 1) recognition and narrativization of the trauma by the traumatized; 2) Petro's sacrifice (his suicidal leap out of the window) to refute his mother's picture of the world and prove that, while he was alive, Sashko was still dead, and the mother must come to terms with the death of her husband and live on. Finally, such inverted logic of sacrifice (after all, in times of war, adults mostly die so that children can survive) completely resonates with the Christological myth and aims to bring at least a particle of hope and optimism into the vision of the future of the characters and readers: "War is a time when children die so that their parents can live. We will definitely meet again someday. But now, Maria, I will lift you up" (Rafeyenko 2023c,

220). Petrichor, as the incarnation of an orphaned child of God, performs a ritual of atonement for the sake of saving his loved ones and – on a symbolic level – a world drowning in violence.

## CONCLUSION

The representation of trauma and its healing in Volodymyr Rafeyenko's wartime works has a certain logic, presumably due to the author's own worldview changes. In his novel from the beginning of the war (*The Length of Days*), the writer primarily reflects on the trauma of his forced relocation, resorting to the motif of orphanhood as a metaphor for Ukraine's rejection of Donbas. Rafeyenko demonstrates the lack of proper remediation of past traumas of Ukrainians in the cultural memory of the region, and the rupture of the connection between generations as a result of the policies of the Soviet and local post-Soviet regimes.

In the writer's subsequent works (*Mondegreen: Songs of Death and Love, Mobile Waves of Being*, and *Petrichor, the Smell of the Earth after the Rain*), we observe the gradual restoration of the lost connection and the launch of the remediation process, under the conditions of which cultural memory begins to function properly, to become a guarantee of the resilience of Ukrainians in the ongoing war. However, Rafeyenko's writing in this period acquires a more pronounced traumatic style. In his wartime prose, Rafeyenko, like most other Ukrainian writers, conveys much more sharply connection of the past and future as explication of remediations and premediations. At the same time the writer records the material of memory extracted from a mysterious hiding place and looks into the future, marked by this memory. It is natural that as a result of the traumas experienced (his own and those of his ancestors) and the foreseeable events, the writer's protagonists constantly balance on a fine line between normality and madness. Precisely because of this, however, they resolve fundamentally unsolvable problems, thus giving the reader hope.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan considers fiction as a component of the media system, defining the latter as 1) a channel or system of information, communication, or entertainment; and 2) the material or technical means of artistic expression (2004, 16).
- <sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Ukrainian and Russian language are by present author.
- <sup>3</sup> If the novel *The Length of Days* still has a palpable postmodernist playful element, akin to the style of the writer's previous Russian-language works (such as *Demon Dekarta* [Descartes' Demon, 2014], *Moskovkij divertisment* [Moscow Divertimento, 2011]), then the artist's subsequent Ukrainian-language works are distinctly metamodernist – both in worldview and style. See Grebeniuk 2023, 49–53.
- <sup>4</sup> As Yaroslav Polishchuk aptly observed regarding these characters, “[a]ll three are exponents of mixed identities: Gredis is a “Lithuanian who has never been to Lithuania”, spent his entire life in Z and was completely assimilated, Veresaiev is a Russian, but with an atypical pedigree, Liza is a Jewish woman by origin, raised in a foster family in Moscow” (2018, 9). That is, in the novel *The Length of Days*, Rafeyenko is still trying to undermine the idea of “rigid identities.”
- <sup>5</sup> It is not for nothing that researchers of the novel *Mondegreen* pay special attention to the name of the protagonist, because the biblical angel Gabriel has the function of connecting the profane world and

the afterlife (this significance of Haba's name is pointed out, in particular, by Andryczyk 2022; Tarku 2023, and others works).

- <sup>6</sup> Olena Romanenko considers this image to be rooted in totemistic ideas, that is, symbolic for the protagonist as the personification of his lineage (2022, 181).
- <sup>7</sup> Yaroslav Polishchuk draws attention to the fact that the older protagonists of the work represent the "last Soviet generation" (2024, 117), which needs a radical change in identity and affirmation in it.

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## Narratives of war in the poetry of Svitlana Povaliayeva and Yuliya Musakovska

OLHA VOZNYUK

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.5

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### Narratives of war in the poetry of Svitlana Povaliayeva and Yuliya Musakovska

War literature. Women. Russia's war against Ukraine. Narrative. Trauma.  
Poetry.

The beginning of Russia's full-scale invasive war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, shifted the focus of contemporary Ukrainian literature by placing the issue of war at its core, and the number of women authors writing about the war significantly increased. The female perspective on war represents a social trauma, since a lot of women are taking care of their children and close relatives while their husbands and other family members, among them also female relatives, are defending Ukraine on the front line. This article traces Ukrainian women's war narratives, based on the poetry of authors with various social roles. The poetry collections by the well-established Ukrainian writers Svitlana Povaliayeva and Yuliya Musakovska will be examined under the narrative topics and problematics. The focus of this research lies in revealing the changes of cultural and societal values during wartime and the representation of the war trauma narrative in contemporary Ukrainian poetry.

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Olha Voznyuk  
Institute of Slavonic Studies  
Czech Academy of Sciences  
Prague  
Czech Republic  
olha.voznyuk@slu.cas.cz  
ORCID: 0000-0003-3548-3682

From the earliest days of the full-scale invasion, when shock was still widespread in Ukrainian society, women actively participated in volunteering, and many joined the defense of the country. Their social roles have undergone a significant transformation due to the dramatic circumstances of war, and this shift has immediately begun to be reflected in women's poetry. On the other hand, the trauma of war has been rooted in Ukrainian society since 2014 and is not new to contemporary Ukrainian literature.<sup>1</sup> Since the beginning of the *velyka viina*<sup>2</sup> (big war), Ukrainian women writers, like millions of other Ukrainians, have undergone profound changes in their lifestyles and life priorities. Ukrainian literature (particularly poetry) actively reflects these societal changes, as evidenced by the growing number of publications. Unlike prose, which typically requires more time for creation and publication, poetry possesses the unique ability to convey immediate responses to unfolding events and emotions. A notable feature of Ukrainian wartime poetry is the widespread use of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, where many authors publish their new works in real time.<sup>3</sup> These platforms also facilitate immediate interaction between readers, poets, and publishing houses that enable the publishing of poems. With the time, such kind of publications resulted in poetry books published nowadays in Ukraine that will be analyzed in this article and this issue as well.

As Russia's war against Ukraine demonstrates, the role of writers, and especially poets, has become increasingly valuable in contemporary Ukrainian culture, particularly due to the rising number of book readers in Ukraine during the war.<sup>4</sup> As the scholar Andrii Krawchuk has claimed, "Working through horrific moments of the war, creative people are shouldering the trauma of others and serving, in a sense, as first responders of the spirit, whether on the front or in concert halls" (2024,191). This also highlights the role of writers as symbols of inspiration in the resilience and resistance of society against the aggressor. The writers emphasize the unique role of culture in Ukrainian society's fight for its rights and freedom. This tendency to value culture, and especially literature, is further reflected in the statistical increase in the number of books published following Russia's invasive war. Thus, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communication of Ukraine in 2023, 270 new publishing houses were registered, and book output increased by 73% compared to the previous year.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, women's experience of war, as presented in contemporary literature, seeks its legitimate position within the modern discourse of war in Ukrainian culture. This female perspective offers a new vision of life during the ongoing conflict, shifting the focus from the traditionally male-dominated perspective to a feminine narrative of war.

This article will investigate female poetry through narrative and cultural-historical approaches, focusing on the works of Ukrainian authors who depict life during and through the war. The goal of this study is to examine the societal changes brought about by the war and identify the narrative motifs of trauma present in contemporary Ukrainian war poetry. This analysis will focus on two prominent Ukrainian poets, Yuliya Musakovska and Svitlana Povaliayeva, who have dedicated their works to portraying the most sensitive aspects of war trauma within Ukrainian society and culture.

Svitlana Povaliayeva's poetry collection *Minlyva chmarnist' z proiasnenniam*<sup>6</sup> (Partly cloudy with clearing, 2022) was nominated in Ukraine for the Taras Shevchenko national prize in 2025 and is devoted to depicting the feelings of people in their daily life in wartime. Yuliya Musakovska's book *Kaminnia i tsviachy* (Stones and nails, 2024) represents and documents the time shifts between the epochs before Russia's full-scale invasive war against Ukraine and in its aftermath.

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Although war has been traditionally portrayed in literature from a masculine perspective and focused on the male experience, researchers like Margot Norris (2023) argue that it cannot be fully understood without including the female perspective. However, Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick argues that women's writing during both world wars was undervalued in the war anthologies of the time, and asserts that much work remains to be done to incorporate women's wartime narratives into the context of war trauma (2011, 4). In wartime, women are actively engaged as servicewomen, despite being mostly placed in roles behind the front lines of battle, as Snizhanna Zhyhun claims (2022, 21). Also, the perception of women as "passive, innocent, and beautiful" (Włodkowska 2023, 158) echoes the common stereotype that "war is not women's business". Thus, in the case of Ukraine, the active role of women in defending the country against Russia's invasion, as well as their involvement in volunteering and shaping cultural production during the war, challenges these stereotypes. During Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, Ukrainian literature actively represents women's experiences of war, as noted by Iryna Nikolaichuk, co-founder of the *Creative Woman Publishing* reveals the perception of war from the female perspective, giving voice and space to women authors who narrate the war not only as witnesses and volunteers, but also as soldiers (Nikolaichuk and Kovaliova 2023). Therefore, Ukrainian literature has become a vital instrument for documenting the profound social transformations brought by the war. In this context, women writers have assumed an increasingly active role in shaping the narrative of these cultural and social changes in Ukrainian society. Through their works, they offer unique perspectives that challenge traditional representations of war and enrich contemporary Ukrainian readership and world literary discourse.

## LANGUAGE OF RESILIENCE

Olha Dubchak argues that the Ukrainian language has undergone significant changes since 2014, reflecting broader sociopolitical transformations in the country, and has become "our weapon, which at the end of February 2022 was taken up by all" (2023, 17). Russia's occupation of Crimea and the onset of its war in the Donbas region led to a marked increase in interest in reading in the Ukrainian language.<sup>7</sup> In the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasive war in 2022, the Ukrainian language has also transformed into both a symbolic shield and a weapon. Volodymyr Kulyk argues that "the main reason is the ongoing war against neo-imperialist Russia striving to subjugate Ukrainians and deprive them of their distinct identity" (2024, 14). In the context of war, the choice to use and promote the Ukrainian language has

become both a cultural and political act, reflecting resistance to aggression and a re-affirmation of national identity.

At the same time, Ukrainian literature has gained an additional role in documenting collective war trauma. The importance of narrating war experiences and trauma is evident in the poetry of Yuliya Musakovska, particularly in her recent book *Kaminnia i tsviachy*. She emphasizes the enduring strength of words during the ongoing war:

Who said that words have no value now? [...]  
Our words, hard and swollen with rage,  
black from grief,  
like the concrete covering of an old bomb shelter.  
There is nothing more durable,  
nothing less fleeting.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, the function of language extends beyond communication and becomes a means of defense and survival, conveying a message to society and future generations. Musakovska highlights how the essence of language shifts in response to the horrific realities of war, with words bearing the weight of resistance. In her preface, the poet refers to the old tradition of driving nails into stone to anchor a house, a practice that symbolized its structural unity. By using this metaphor of words as nails, she emphasizes the role of narration and language in keeping the life going on in spite of the war (Musakovska 2024, 54–55).

However, it requires courage to pronounce words, and only poets have the ability to do so in this protective way. In spite of a common tendency to become speechless from the atrocities of war, as people cannot accept the scale of tragedy and loss. This fact is also traced in the composition of *Kaminnia i tsviachy* that consists of two parts “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*”. This division refers to a world that will always be divided into “before” and “after” the war, and only words are able to hold it together. From the current perspective, the part “*a priori*” seems to be a mythical illusion, due to the wartime situation. In contrast, the part “*a posteriori*” shows that the world is inexplicable, and the uncertainty about how long anyone can survive due to the ongoing shelling underlines the temporality of life. The poet also presents the idea of a time gap with “*a priori*”, where the narrative of the poems is focused on the premonition of something bad about to happen, versus “*a posteriori*”, which reflects life after the war begins, emphasizing the significance of time in the aftermath of the invasion. A key feature is that each poem is dated, thereby contributing to the sense of documenting the emotions and events experienced on a daily basis. That implementation of a “different tone of poetry” according to Illia Rudiiko (2024) gives the feeling of the “materiality” of time. The passage of time during the war necessitates the recording and documentation of each episode of life, every moment, and each fragment of history.

The title of Povaliyeva’s *Minlyva chmarnist’ z proiasnenniam* also revokes the feeling of temporality. Unlike Musakovska, Povaliyeva does not date her poems; instead, she divides the space of narration. The structure of her book is organized into several zones or lines that correspond to positions on the battlefield, catego-

alized as the “second line”, the “first line”, and the “zero line”. This technique of spatial division also reflects the gradation of the complex issues addressed in the poetry collection. Hanna Ovsianyts’ka calls this technique the *poetics of boundaries* (2024, 85), which corresponds to the situation of the border-balance between life and death during the war. For instance, the “second line” consists in poems that reflect a way of life distant from the immediate battlefield, but even in these more removed spaces, the war leaves its indelible marks. In contrast, the “first line” section intensifies the emotional and thematic focus, bringing the reader closer to the battle between life and death. This shift is evident in the stanzas that document Russia’s missile attacks on Ukrainian civilian buildings, illustrating the war’s disruptive reach even in the heart of everyday existence:

The boy didn’t survive.  
The boy, I say, passed away.  
They’re still resuscitating the girl,  
maybe they’ll save her.<sup>9</sup>  
(Povaliayeva 2022, 16)

In this context, the narrative of a child’s death is particularly harrowing, as children embody not only innocence but also the nation’s future. Their loss signifies more than personal tragedy, it represents an assault on the generational transmission of identity, heritage, and collective hope. Such imagery underscores the war’s capacity to fracture both the present and the future of Ukrainian society.

Musakovska also addresses the theme of children being killed during the war, revealing the daily tragedies endured by Ukrainians who live under the constant threat of shelling. Particularly poignant is the depiction of the shelling of Ukrainian children as the most vulnerable members of society. This theme is explicitly referenced in one of her poems, where she confronts the emotional and ethical weight of such loss:

The sky shatters the scepter of the empire,  
that is dying,  
aiming one last time at the most precious,  
the most defenseless: the word “children” as a literal  
target marker.<sup>10</sup>  
(Musakovska 2024, 51)

Here reference to the word “‘children’ as a literal target marker” recalls Russia’s army bombing of Mariupol’s theater in March 2022, which resulted in the tragic deaths of hundreds of people, including many children, despite the fact that the word “children” was written on the square before the theater and was visible from the sky. Yet Russian children remain safe and well, and have the privilege of using goods looted from Ukraine by their fathers, as mentioned in Povaliayeva’s poem “Katsapy”<sup>11</sup>:

Their daughter, they call her “daugh”,  
is going to school in sneakers,  
which her dad took off a Ukrainian girl  
who was killed in Irpin.<sup>12</sup>  
(Povaliayeva 2022, 18)



## SAFETY DURING THE WAR

The war has transformed cultural and societal values in Ukraine, with the evolution of life values becoming evident in everyday language. To illustrate this, one need only consider the neutral and commonplace question “How are you?” (in Ukrainian, “як ти/iak ty?”), which has been transformed from a polite greeting to a way of expressing concern for others and gently wishing for their survival. The phrase #як ти? (iak ty?), which became a hashtag phenomenon in Ukraine in 2022, unfortunately remains relevant to this day. The fact that the section “*a posteriori*” in Musakovska’s collection starts with the poem “Bezpechne misce” (Safe place) highlights the problem of safety during the war as well:

How are you?  
Are you in a safe place?  
This is the prayer we repeat over and over,  
since February 24, 2022, to our loved ones and friends.<sup>13</sup>  
(2024, 48)

The author repeatedly raises the existential questions of what safety means during wartime, and whether a truly safe space can exist when even the soul and heart are no longer protected. This pervasive sense of vulnerability is powerfully conveyed in the poetry of Musakovska, who underscores the impossibility of feeling secure in the context of war. Her work reveals a psychological landscape marked by constant threat, where the notion of safety becomes both fragile and abstract:

Can I be in a safe place,  
when my friends are under constant shelling in Kharkiv,  
Sumy, Irpin, Bucha,  
with no way to escape?<sup>14</sup>  
(2024, 48)

The cities mentioned in the stanzas refer to locations in Ukraine that have become enduring symbols of Russian military’s acts of genocide against civilians. These geographic references function not only as markers of physical devastation but also as sites of collective trauma that will remain embedded in the cultural and historical memory of Ukrainian society for generations to come.

## POETRY AS COMMEMORATION

Another crucial function of language is its role in ensuring that the lives of those who perished are not forgotten. In this context, poetry safeguards the stories of those who died in the struggle for freedom and embeds their narratives in the collective consciousness. Through the power of words, Musakovska emphasizes the necessity of sustaining this memory, preventing the erasure of voices silenced by war:

I wish to die, but I have to speak  
with a mouth full of stones and nails,  
a mouth full of blood.  
To say words instead of those  
whose soul has been taken out.<sup>15</sup>  
(2024, 62)

In this context, the poet assumes the role of a custodian of collective memory, commemorating those who were shelled and killed while defending their fundamental right to live in their own country, a right violently stripped from them. Among those whose voices have been silenced, and who now must be represented within the Ukrainian cultural memory, is the writer Victoria Amelina, whose death, caused by a Russian missile strike on Kramatorsk in 2023, is a poignant example of the irreplaceable losses suffered by Ukraine's intellectual community. In her poem "Zalyshyla(s)" (Left/Stayed), Musakovska commemorates Amelina with the stanza "only your unpresent presence remains" (88), pointing out Amelina's voluntary engagement to documenting the atrocities of war. Here the writer also mourns the loss of another Ukrainian poet and soldier, Maksym Kryvtsov, who died on the frontlines in 2024. His posthumously published collection *Virshi z bijnytsi* (Poems from the battlement, 2023) has been recognized as one of the most significant literary works of the year,<sup>16</sup> serving both as a poetic testament from within the war and as a cultural artifact that bridges artistic expression and lived combat experience.<sup>17</sup>

Following this, Svitlana Povaliayeva's book constitutes a poignant example of poetic commemoration dedicated to the fallen soldiers who defended Ukraine. More specifically, this poetry collection functions as a symbolic tribute to her son, Roman Ratushnyi.<sup>18</sup> This biographical context perspective of a mother grieving her soldier-son introduces an intimate, personal dimension that significantly shapes the interpretation of the work through the lens of private loss, simultaneously framing the text as an act of mourning. As Povaliayeva mentions in her preface to the publication:

Let people remember you  
in this way as well –  
when they open this book<sup>19</sup>  
(2022, 5)

In this context, poetry functions not only as a testament of the collective trauma of war but also as an intimate tribute to personal loss. Conversely, the mere survival of a loved one emerges as the ultimate source of joy in wartime. The poet powerfully conveys this emotional polarity in her stanzas:

No one has died yet in the war for her,  
and not even  
anyone has passed away  
among her classmates,  
relatives, friends, or acquaintances<sup>20</sup>  
(2022, 157)

The author underscores the inexpressible value of moments when a loved one returns alive from the front, which are redefined in the context of war as charged with emotional intensity and symbolic meaning:

Because your son has returned from the war,  
and this is above everything that one could pray for,  
above all prayers –

gratitude to your comrades...<sup>21</sup>  
(2022, 116)

These stanzas portray the brutal reality of war; the mere survival of loved ones is a source of profound gratitude. At the same time, the reader is confronted with a contrast between the normality of peacetime and the pervasive sense of loss in wartime, where it becomes increasingly rare to encounter anyone untouched by grief. In this context, life itself becomes a fragile yet immeasurable good whose worth is amplified by its precarity, but death is prevalent, and commemoration has become an unbearably difficult duty due to the enormous number of deaths:

Each news of death,  
a broken fate,  
a destroyed home –  
is like a hole in the body,  
quickly covered with a metal patch.  
Soon, there will be no living place left there.<sup>22</sup>  
(2022, 50)

War does not stop life or the journey toward resilience, so holidays remain on the calendar, though they are now different from what they were before the war:

Christmas in the midst of war.  
A bright holiday in dark times.  
The hum of generators, muffled voices.  
Each person carries their own loss,  
hidden under their coat.<sup>23</sup>  
(2022, 75)

Here the stark contrast between the traditional warmth and joy associated with Christmas and the grim reality of life during wartime is poignantly illuminated. In place of festive music and carol singing, the mechanical hum of generators fills the air, necessitated by the bombing of Ukraine's power infrastructure and underscoring the disruption of everyday life. Each individual loss constitutes a deeply personal trauma, often hidden from public view due to its intimate nature, yet collectively mirrored in the silent grief of others.

### **WAITING FROM THE WAR**

According to traditional stereotypes, the role of women during wartime has been portrayed as one of waiting and enduring uncertainty as they hope for the return of their loved ones from the front. Povaliayeva powerfully underscores the emotional toll of this experience, revealing that the act of waiting itself becomes one of the most harrowing aspects of war:

It is impossible, intolerably, fiercely,  
indifferently, drunkenly,  
hysterically waiting,  
waiting for someone to return  
from war or for war to come.<sup>24</sup>  
(2024, 82)

The experience of waiting for a soldier's return inevitably evokes the question of whether he will return alive at all. This suspended state of hope and fear is often mediated through the exchange of messages between the front and home, where language becomes both a lifeline and a fragile conduit of emotion. In this context, the act of communication acquires heightened significance:

At first, he wrote,  
Then he only replied,  
Then he just read...  
Then the undelivered messages devoured  
his vision with a white circle,  
Eventually, they turned gray like snow...  
Suddenly, the messages stopped...  
The last one read...<sup>25</sup>  
(2024, 12)

Today's social media and technology play a crucial role not only as a mean of communication but also as a way of confirming whether someone is still alive or not. In this context, messages are telling the story without words, simply by changing the status of reception of a message – whether it has been delivered, received, read, not yet read, or will never be read. This gradation of message delivery and status represents the struggle of waiting and, at the same time, the fear of losing a loved one on the frontline. That also shows how electronic symbols take on new meanings in telling the stories of life or death without words.

In both poetry collections, despite the pervasive presence of war, loss, and the constant threat of missile and drone attacks, one of the central themes remains resilience and the unwavering inspiration to fight for freedom in the face of overwhelming adversity. The works of both authors are notably devoid of despair or hopelessness; instead, they offer powerful affirmations of collective strength and resolve. Povalia-yeva, in particular, underscores in her poetry that, despite the devastation, Ukrainians must continue to fight:

We are the salt of the earth, our tears – steel.  
Our hearts are of a strange shape, because our hearts are a map,  
our hands – swords!  
Are you crying silently? Complain aloud!  
But strike – do not be silent!<sup>26</sup>  
(2022, 15)

The vision of Ukrainians is now as a strong people, who have become one with their native land. Their hands are metaphorically transformed into swords that will always defend the land. In the last sentence, the author uses the vulgar expression “iibash”, which can be translated as “kill” in this context. This reflects a shift in language use during the war, when the standard language is perceived as insufficient to convey the intensity of the sentiment, leading to the use of stronger, more vulgar expressions. The importance of action and words is emphasized in the last stanza, where the poet demands: “do not be silent”, as, otherwise, the silence will bring

death from the Russian side. Povaliayeva shows the power of defending the land through stanzas that show her faith in victory:

Cursed pestilence of the enemy,  
I will destroy you to the last remnant.  
And I, Ukraine,  
will remain in the universe forever!<sup>27</sup>  
(2022, 19)

The personification of Ukraine as an almost cosmic entity underscores the idea that nothing can extinguish the spirit of people fighting for freedom and the right to live in their own land. Musakovska also engages with the moral incomprehensibility of the invasion, seeking meaning in the face of senseless violence. In one of her poems, she writes: “God, how cramped the world is, / where they kill for / daring to live”<sup>28</sup> (2024, 70). This reflection captures the injustice of war and expresses the feeling of staying strong:

We will emerge, scorched,  
eternal like this land,  
do you hear, the grain mourns  
God’s little child?<sup>29</sup>  
(2022, 67)

Thus, by referring to a grain and soil as symbols of Ukrainian culture, the poet demonstrates the unity of the people and the land.

Both authors appeal to God as the ultimate source of justice, but these appeals reflect the desire to seek justice, rather than divine intervention. This also conveys a deep sense of disappointment, as the poets search for an explanation for the injustice of the war: “How the harsh God of the Old Testament temporarily replaces Jesus Christ”<sup>30</sup> (Musakovska 2024, 64). The poets raise the theological question: where was God while soldiers sacrificed their lives on the battlefield in defense of their homeland and freedom? This inquiry reflects a deep spiritual disillusionment and challenges the compatibility of war with Christian philosophy. Their verses express not only the incomprehensibility of such violence, but also a quiet indictment of divine silence in the face of human suffering and moral catastrophe. At the same time, there is an understanding that freedom is not something granted, but something earned and won through the blood and lives of thousands.

### “CONCERNED EUROPE”

In the poetry of both authors, a shared sense of disappointment emerges regarding Europe’s initial response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This sentiment is visible in the ironic expression “concerned Europe”, now widely used within Ukrainian political and cultural discourse as a critique of the perceived passivity and delay in concrete action. In her poem “Dyvylysia” (They looked), Musakovska underscores this frustration by portraying the detached gaze of European observers, reflecting the indifference and hesitation that characterized early political responses.

Her verses highlight the emotional and moral weight of inaction in the face of unfolding atrocity:

They loudly mourned and cheered her on,  
amazed that she was still alive.  
They admired her resilience  
and bravery.<sup>31</sup>  
(2024, 56)

In the same poem, she underlines the unwillingness of Europe as political unity to defend Ukraine militarily, due to the fear and risk of being involved:

A whole crowd gathered,  
people fully armed,  
but no one pulled the trigger,  
afraid it might suddenly shake them  
with the recoil...<sup>32</sup>  
(2024, 57)

Here, the poet reflects the public opinion in Ukraine, naming the European politicians as “spectators of the theater of war”<sup>33</sup> (59) and, in another poem, she ironically apologizes for those “uncomfortable questions” of Ukrainian society that are “[s]uch uncomfortable, such terrifying poems, full of rage, so politically incorrect”<sup>34</sup> (58). Povaliyeva’s poem “Pryvit, harna u tebe suknia” (Hello, you have a beautiful dress; 175) raises the problem of Europe’s understanding of Ukraine. The lyrical heroine, representing Ukraine, is perceived by the lyrical hero-foreigner through the lens of common stereotypes, where Ukrainians are often indifferently and mistakenly conflated with Russians:

Aaa Ukraine – o-o-o, it’s power, such a wild power!  
How do you say...  
Shevchenko, Tolstoy,  
Slavs, it doesn’t matter...<sup>35</sup>  
(2022, 175)

These examples illustrate a profound lack of understanding of Ukrainian history and identity, as they adhere to the imperial Russian cultural narrative of “brother nations”. This perspective diminishes Ukraine’s unique cultural, historical, and political identity by portraying it as an inseparable part of Russia, effectively erasing centuries of Ukrainian independence, struggle, and national development. The poet emphasizes that without a deep understanding of a nation’s culture and society, it is impossible to comprehend the essence of that country. Such ignorance not only distorts historical events, but also jeopardizes the recognition and respect for the Ukrainian nation’s sovereignty and self-determination.

## CONCLUSION

Svitlana Povaliyeva and Yuliya Musakovska, who are witnessing and suffering from the everyday realities of life in wartime, powerfully express their social roles through their poetry. Among the recurring themes in their works is the act of com-



memorating relatives and loved ones lost in the conflict, which extends beyond its central theme of remembrance; it also involves giving voice to the memory of fallen heroes, both soldiers and civilians. Additionally, documenting the war through literature, especially poetry, is a fundamental aspect of their work, aligning with the broader efforts of contemporary Ukrainian writers. This documentation is intricately tied to the depiction of daily life amidst the war's upheaval.

Both writers delineate time and space into two distinct periods – before and after the war. Musakovska intensifies this division by dating each poem, thereby grounding the experience of war in specific moments of time and place. Both vividly portray the atrocities that resulted in the loss of countless lives. A particularly poignant theme is the death of children during the conflict, as they symbolize not only the next generation but also the very memory of Ukraine. These themes deeply shape the tone of their poetry, making it both sensitive and profound within the broader narrative of trauma. Consequently, the women's war narrative emerges with a deeply embedded message of resilience, and serves as a form of documentation of Ukraine's struggle for freedom against Russia.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See more about combatant literature in Riabchenko 2025.
- <sup>2</sup> The term “*velyka viina*”/ “big war” has been used in Ukraine since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, distinguishing it from the initial phase of Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in 2014.
- <sup>3</sup> See Facebook and Instagram accounts of Yaryna Chornohus, Halyna Kruk, Iya Kiva, Yuliya Musakovksa, Yuliia Iliukha, Svitlana Povaliyayeva and many others.
- <sup>4</sup> See further official results of reading interests in Shurenkova and Prochukhanova 2024.
- <sup>5</sup> See the results here: “Protyahom 2023 roku v Ukrayini zareyestruvalosya 270 novykh vydavtsiv, a vypusk knyzhkovoyi produktsiyi zbilshyvsvya na 73%.” [https://mcsc.gov.ua/news/protyahom-2023-roku-v-ukrayini-zareyestruvalosya-270-novykh-vydavcziv-a-vypusk-knyzhkovo-yi-produkcziyi-zbilshyvsvya-na-73/?fbclid=IwAR3bRfBI-0DROvf7x6\\_Xio-0ZJuNnTuLUNuCJIN04QH9rsv4kYgYhSDEVQ](https://mcsc.gov.ua/news/protyahom-2023-roku-v-ukrayini-zareyestruvalosya-270-novykh-vydavcziv-a-vypusk-knyzhkovo-yi-produkcziyi-zbilshyvsvya-na-73/?fbclid=IwAR3bRfBI-0DROvf7x6_Xio-0ZJuNnTuLUNuCJIN04QH9rsv4kYgYhSDEVQ).
- <sup>6</sup> The transliteration from Ukrainian to English in this article was done by the author following the Library of Congress guidelines (<https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/ukrainia.pdf>).
- <sup>7</sup> The bill 2309-IX from June 19, 2022 prohibits the distribution and import of published materials from Russia and Belarus, and also restricts publishing in the Russian language in Ukraine. See further <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2309-20#Text>.
- <sup>8</sup> The fragment of the poem “Words” translated by Ella Yevtushenko and Olena Jennings in <http://www.verseville.org/poems-by-yuliya-musakovska.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> “Хлопчик не вижив. / Хлопчик, кажу, пішов. / Дівчинку ще качають, / може, спасуть.”
- <sup>10</sup> “Небо проламує скінетр імперії, / що помирає, / цілячи наостанок у найдорожче, / у найбеззахисніше: напис «діти» – як буквальна / позначка мішені”
- <sup>11</sup> *Katsapy* is a Ukrainian ethnic slur historically used to refer to Russians, often carrying connotations of aggression, backwardness, or imperialist attitudes associated with them.
- <sup>12</sup> “Їхня доця, вони звуть її «доча», / йде до школи в кросівках, / Які тато зняв / з убитої в Ірпені української / дівчинки”
- <sup>13</sup> “Як ти? / Чи ти в безпечному місці? / Так звучить молитва, / яку повторюємо знову і знову / з 24 лютого 2022 року близьким і друзям”

- <sup>14</sup> “Чи можу я бути в безпечному місці, / коли мої друзі – під постійними обстрілами в Харкові, / Сумах, Ірпені, Бучі, / без можливості виїхати?”
- <sup>15</sup> “Хочеться вмерти, але доводиться говорити / ротом, повним каміння і цвяхів, / ротом повним крові. / Вимовляти слова замість тих, / із кого вийнято душу?”
- <sup>16</sup> See further about Maksym Kryvtsov PEN Ukraine 2024.
- <sup>17</sup> The Ukrainian PEN has launched a project to commemorate cultural figures killed in the war. It seeks to preserve the memory of what I call it as the “missiled generation”, living under Russia’s relentless shelling of Ukraine. See further about this commemorating project here <https://theukrainians.org/spec/peopleofculture/>.
- <sup>18</sup> Roman Ratushnyi was a well-known Ukrainian journalist and public activist. He died in June 2022 at the age of 24 while serving as a soldier defending Ukraine. His brother Vasyl Ratushnyi also was killed on the frontline in 2025, aged 28.
- <sup>19</sup> “нехай люди пам’ятають тебе / ще у такий спосіб – / коли відкриватимуть цю книжку.”
- <sup>20</sup> “у неї ніхто ще на війні не загинув / і навіть іще не помер / ніхто з однокласників, / родичів, друзів, знайомих”
- <sup>21</sup> “Бо твій син повернувся з війни / і це понад усім, за що можна було б молитися, / понад усіма молитвами – / вдячність твоїм побратимам...”
- <sup>22</sup> “Кожна звістка про смерть, / зламану долю, / зруйнований дім – / наче дірка в тілі, / швидко закрита металевою латкою. / Скоро там не залишиться / живого місця.”
- <sup>23</sup> “Різдово посеред війни. / Світле свято в темні часи. / Музика генераторів, приглушені голоси. / В кожного своя втрата, схована під пальтом.”
- <sup>24</sup> “неможливо нестерпно люто / байдуcho п’яно / істерично чекати / чекати із війни або на війну.”
- <sup>25</sup> “Спочатку писав, / Потім відповідав лише, / Потім тільки прочитував... / Потім недоставлені повідомлення виїдали / зір білим кружальцем, / Врешті сіріли як сніг... / Раптом повідомлення припинялися... / Останнє прочитане...”
- <sup>26</sup> “Ми – сізь землі, наші сльози – сталь. / Наше серце дивної форми, бо наше серце – мапа, / наші руки – мечі! / Плачеш мовчки? Жалійся вголос! / Але їбаш – не мовчи!”
- <sup>27</sup> “Проклята пошесть ворожа, / Я тебе знищу до останньої рештки / І перебуду у Всесвіті вічно / Я, Україна!”
- <sup>28</sup> “Боже, як тісно у світі, / де убивають за те, / що насмілюся жити”
- <sup>29</sup> “вийдемо обгорілі / вічні як ця земля / чуєш протяжно квилить / збіжжя боже маля?”
- <sup>30</sup> “як тимчасово підміняє Христа / суворий бог Старого Заповіту”
- <sup>31</sup> “Гучно вболівали і підбадьорювали, / дивувалися, що ще жива. / Захоплювалися стійкістю / і хоробрістю.”
- <sup>32</sup> “Зібрався цілий натовп / людей при повному озброєнні, / але ніхто не натиснув на пусковий гачок, / аби його раптом не струснуло / віддачею”
- <sup>33</sup> “глядачі театру війни”
- <sup>34</sup> “такі незручні, такі страшні вірші, повні люті, такі неполіткоректні”
- <sup>35</sup> “А Україна – о-о-о, це сила, така дика сила! / Як це у Вас... / Шевченко, Толстой, / слов’яни, не має значення...”

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## Poetic reflections of war in contemporary Ukrainian literature as the poetry of metaphysical perspectives

TETIANA RIAZANTSEVA – YEVHENIIA KANCHURA

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.6

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### Poetic reflections of war in contemporary Ukrainian literature as the poetry of metaphysical perspectives

Metaphysical poetry. Women's poetry. Mythological imagery. Coping strategies. War in literature.

Metaphysical poetry emerges in transitional historical periods marked by radical change, as exemplified by wars. Defined by unique ideological and stylistic traits, it explores human existence as a drama, focusing on complex experiences. This poetry expresses a catastrophic worldview, merging thought and feeling to capture life's paradoxical nature. This article examines how contemporary Ukrainian poetry reinterprets metaphysical themes, emphasizing sacred time, a new view of death, and mystical elements, demonstrating thematic kinship despite limited use of traditional metaphysical techniques.

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Tetiana Riazantseva  
Shevchenko Institute of Literature  
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine  
Kyiv  
Ukraine  
tari1602@ukr.net  
ORCID: 0000-0003-2581-5866

---

Yevheniia Kanchura  
Theoretical and Applied Linguistics Department  
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University  
Ukraine  
kim\_keo@ztu.edu.ua  
ORCID: 0000-0003-1232-1920

For many Ukrainians, one of the initial coping strategies during the early days of the full-scale Russian invasion was to reflect poetically on events that defied rational understanding. Mykhailo Nazarenko argues that poetry is the most precise and fitting tool to express human feelings in wartime: “It serves as a direct expression, achieving the highest level of generalization, merging the universal with the deeply personal – capturing both absolute specificity (what I or my characters experience) and the collective experience of the community as a whole” (Babel’ 2024, 51st min.). Since February 24, 2022, seeking out and collecting fragments of poetry became a coping strategy for one of the authors of this article. When we were silenced by shock, these poems gave voice to our personal feelings. The research material was gathered in real time as poems appeared on social networks; but, while our reading is naturally limited by intellectual “filter bubbles”, the selected poems rapidly transcended these boundaries, achieving nationwide recognition. Thus, in the paper, we cite them by linking to their initial Facebook publications indicating the precise date (day and month) and omitting the year. From today’s perspective, these poems reveal certain common elements in worldview, themes and style that allow their consideration within the paradigm of metaphysical poetry, guiding our choice of methods. The present research material focuses on poems that circulated on social networks from February 25 to March 23, 2022, a period marked by the most intense shock. Poems that appeared later, in April, contain more generalized imagery and reflect a different emotional state of their authors. Notably, the poems collected during that period were written by women, who, unwillingly found themselves in the roles of observers or supporters for the main actors (the military forces) and protectors for their home and children. The peculiarity of the material considered in the article is defined by the space of the network, where these poems were emerging alongside the news of the first mass shelling, destruction, and entry of enemy reconnaissance groups into cities. The phenomenon of social networks ensures the fastest possible distribution of poetry, an instant response from readers, free access for widespread sharing, and feedback that fuels further interpretations through recitation, song or video clips. Some of the analyzed poems were later included in printed editions.

Meanwhile, the interaction of the authors and the audience, both sharing the same experiences, was a significant asset of the poems written and collected in the first month of the invasion. If we consider these poems from the standpoint of their impact on audiences, perception, and distribution, it is essential to recognize the resonance of the imagery and expressions offered by the poets. This selection reflects a unanimous response to total catastrophe. Notably, these poems reveal the search for and discovery of protection and support that made it possible to survive and endure the first month, resulting in generalizations and channeling their focused spiritual and physical resilience.

We offer an interpretation of the poetry from the first month of the full-scale war through the lens of metaphysical poetry, understood broadly as a recurrent literary phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

## **METAPHYSICAL POETRY AS A RECURRENT LITERARY PHENOMENON: CREATIVE TECHNIQUES OF THE TREND**

The term metaphysical poetry was initially used to define the works of John Donne and other British writers of the 17th century, but over time its meaning has expanded considerably. In the 20th century, this poetry was reconsidered as a supranational and recurrent literary phenomenon associated with “high points of civilization” (Smith 1974, 278) – historical periods marked by radical changes and catastrophes, particularly large-scale wars. A distinct set of features regarding ideology, central themes, poetics, and style positions metaphysical poetry as an independent trend in European literature, genetically connected to the Baroque period yet not limited to it. The works of Francisco de Quevedo (Spain), Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński (Poland), Andreas Gryphius (Germany), and Łazarz Baranowicz (Ukraine) represent metaphysical poetry in European literatures of the 17th century. This paradigm persisted into the 20th century through writers such as Henry Treece (UK), Dámaso Alonso (Spain), and Oleksa Stefanowych (Ukraine – USA).

Given its association with transitional periods in history, metaphysical poetry has developed a catastrophic worldview that perceives the universe as chaotic and human life as inherently suffering. It seeks to understand and emotionally grasp the paradoxical unity of the transient and the stable within the dynamic process of existence. The Greek prefix “meta” (after, above, beyond) in its name suggests that metaphysical poetry strives to transcend the boundaries of the physical world. In its pursuit “to grasp reality” (Smith 1974, 276), its primary themes explore complex, dynamic phenomena that encompass both the spiritual and material dimensions of individual existence (death and time, religion, love and beauty, loneliness), focusing on conflicting emotions and states of mind. The tragic recognition of life’s transience and the desire for an intimate connection with the divine are among its leading motifs. In the context of our research, it is worth noting that the dramatic tension in metaphysical poetry often stems from personal experiences of living through historical catastrophes.

Ukrainian women’s poetry created at the end of February 2022 has not yet been considered within the metaphysical poetry paradigm or even thoroughly analyzed. To date, only Taras Pastukh’s brief overview highlights the relevant themes, motifs, and emotional tones in poetry written by women at the outset of the war (2022), and Tetiana Belimova’s article positions Ukrainian women’s poetry as a means of expressing traumatic experiences and preserving memory (2023). Yoshinari Harada’s review explores creative approaches to translating these poems and outlines their emotional resonance with a foreign audience (2024).

Our article, dedicated to the time-limited yet emotionally powerful literary material, aims to be the first step toward filling this gap. For our analysis, we selected eighteen poems by Ukrainian women poets, whose texts convey deeply personal experiences of the first thirty days of the war. The analysis primarily focuses on the works of Yuliia Batkilina, Liudmyla Gorova, Nastka Fedchenko, Tetiana Vlasova, Oksana Osmolovska, Natalka Fursa, Larysa Palamarchuk, and Maryna Muliar, whose poems were initially created and published on social media in February and March 2022.



The creative techniques of metaphysical poetry are rooted in an understanding of life as paradox. Its central trope is a distinctive kind of metaphor known as the “metaphysical conceit” (Smith 1974, 272). This conceit can be described as a fusion of two seemingly opposing concepts that form a new, indivisible whole, while each retains its individual, contradictory characteristics (Riazantseva 2014, 37–38). In Baroque poetry, for instance, Quevedo exemplifies this technique with the oxymoronic image of life as “living death”. In the 20th century, Stefanovych employs the same type of metaphor to describe painful spiritual renewal as a “resurrective perdition” (1975, 152).

The texts analyzed in our article cannot be strictly classified as metaphysical poetry, as the main stylistic marker of this literary trend appears in them only sporadically. Although thematically and emotionally aligned with metaphysical poetry, these texts rarely feature oxymoronic imagery. Metaphors resembling metaphysical conceits appear only in the works of Batkilina (“kind fury” [“лють [...] добра”] to denote righteous anger; February 25) and Fursa (“a blossoming stone” [“розквітлий камінь”], “a hard black fire” [“чорний твердий вогонь”] as images of a person spiritually strengthened by hardships of war; March 23). However, the authors also employ other metaphysical poetry techniques: to create a heightened level of dramatic tension, they rely on contrasts and grammatical devices, particularly in the use of tenses.

## PARADOXES OF TIME

For our research, both traditional and innovative elements in the interpretation of key themes of metaphysical poetry within contemporary Ukrainian poetry are identified and described. Despite the limited use of metaphysical conceits, the poems written in the early days of the invasion can be closely linked to metaphysical poetry through their shared worldview, thematic focus, and emotional intensity.

### Ukrainian metaphysical poetry of the 20th century

Employing descriptive, comparative, and close reading approaches, and building on the observations of Yevgeniy Golovakha and Aleksandr Kronik (1984) regarding shifts in individual perceptions of time, as well as recent research in this area (Dawson and Sleek 2018), we highlight new semantic nuances in the interpretations of themes like Time (Death) and Religion. The emerging features in the interpretation of these themes and the new aspects of religious and mystical experience conceptualize war and its traumatic events as a sacred time, in line with Roger Cailliois’s explanation in *Man and the Sacred*:

War, no less than the festival, seems like the time of the sacred, the period of the divine epiphany. It introduces man to an intoxicating world in which the presence of death makes him shiver and confers a superior value upon his various actions. He believes that he will acquire a psychic vigor – just as through the descent to the inferno in ancient initiations – out of proportion to mundane experiences. ([1950] 1959, 173)

The association with pivotal historical moments significantly influences the interpretation of time in metaphysical poetry. In the 20th century, this interpretation

reflects the experience of the two world wars, conceiving time as “an individual time within history [...] when a person clearly understands that the historical process is unfolding in their own time and space” (Golovakha and Kronik 1984, 8). Stefanovych’s poetic cycle *Kintsyevitnie* (The world’s ending, 1975) exemplifies the Ukrainian version of it. Without claiming a direct genetic link between this cycle and the poems we analyze, we highlight their common elements in time and space interpretation:

1) Framed within a Doomsday context, Ukraine is portrayed as a space of sacred war, existing simultaneously in historical and sacred time, as: “a zone of contact between God and a human being” (Assmann 2012, 322), a place of “miracles, atonement, healing, and spiritual renewal” (324). Thus, World War II and the Ukrainian liberation struggle are represented as mysterious ordeals in line with Caillois’s conclusions (1959, 173).

2) The cyclic movement of Time in Ukraine is demonstrated through the recurrence of sacred events.

3) The combination of Apocalyptic and folklore imagery conveys a compression of the present, which brings the past and future into a sense of immediate proximity (Golovakha and Kronik 1984, 95) and positions future as “a time which is actually happening” (97).

### **Ukrainian poetry of March 2022**

The interpretation of time in the works of Ukrainian women poets, written at the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion – the first conflict of such magnitude in Europe in the past eighty years – shows notable developments of the features listed above.

The poems selected for our analysis primarily portray time as either stopped or extended, reflecting a psychological effect typical of intensely stressful personal situations (Golovakha and Kronik 1984, 8, 99). These poems often focus on experiencing a particular day or even a single moment within it, so time in these texts paradoxically conveys both static and dynamic qualities.

Time appears static because the focal point rests within the present moment, where all of life seems concentrated, yet the flow of events and emotions filling this moment reveals its dynamic nature. This dual interpretation is effectively conveyed through the cyclic structure of poems (Batkilina, Fedchenko, Vlasova), the use of anaphora and enumeration, and the grammatical support of verbs in the present tense, or by contrasting present with past and future tenses.

The present tense dominates even in Muliar’s poems, where the time of an air raid feels frozen. The marked absence of events (“Everything is postponed, even the most pressing matters” [“Відкладено все, навіть найневідкладніші справи”]) and the lack of visual markers of time (“The overripe information boards in the subway swell with zeros” [“В метро перестиглі табло налилися нулями”]); March) symbolically suspends time, capturing the tension of waiting on the threshold between life and death.

The depiction of war as both a deeply personal experience and a matter of national significance illustrates the historical scale of experiencing time. A central narrative

moment is a private life event that simultaneously belongs to the narrator's national history. The authors acknowledge the immense scale of catastrophe and the potential brevity of their existence, but this recognition does not lead to despair. Rather, this emphasis on hope for the future – combined with a catastrophic understanding of the present and a strong connection to the past – introduces a significant innovation in metaphysical poetry perspective. It signals a shift in worldview, which becomes not entirely catastrophic. Additionally, an acute awareness of the repetition of significant historical events creates an impression of time's cyclic movement, resonating with 20th-century Ukrainian metaphysical poetry. For example, in depicting Ukraine at war, Fedchenko invokes the same historical parallels as Stefanovych (1975, 80–81, 93–94), referencing the destruction of Kyiv during the Mongol invasion of the 13th century and the 1918 Battle of Kruty during the Ukrainian-Soviet War:

The horde is coming [...]  
I am Kruty  
There was a mighty battle with Russians again  
And Ukrainians managed well to take their revenge<sup>2</sup>  
(Fedchenko March 5)

### **THE LONGING FOR AN INDIVIDUAL CONTACT WITH THE DEITY: CHRISTIAN IMAGERY**

Another central motif of metaphysical poetry which becomes obvious here is the longing for personal contact with the divine, though it appears only in fragments. None of these poems is explicitly a prayer in verse, yet many of them contain Biblical allusions, Christian imagery, either explicit or implicit, and direct appeals to heavenly powers.

The tone of these appeals reflects both the preservation and development of attitudes established in 20th-century metaphysical poetry. Here, the human being is seen foremost as a spiritual creature, as expressed in the line: “in the body of a person who fights there's more spirit than body” (“в тілі людини, що бореться, духу більше, як тіла”; Mikhalitsyna March 14). For the poets, dialogues with God take the form of conversations among equals. They consider Him a friend, openly challenge Him, question His wisdom, or even voice demands, as seen in Fedchenko's poem: “Lord, the enemies will burn in hell for everyone! [...] / God, admit it, when you were settling these monsters on earth / You were very tired, cross and just switched off the ratio (“Господи, вороги ж горітимуть у пеклі за кожного! [...] / Боже, визнай, коли ти селив на землі цих почвар, / то був дуже втомлений, злий і зовсім вимкнув рацію”, March 5). The informal tone of these appeals to the Lord enables a reinterpretation of well-known Biblical symbols with military connotations, such as the image of the trumpet, which in the Bible brings down city walls. In Fursa's poem “A cellar is my hiding place for today...” (“Сьогодні схованка в льоху...”), the sound of a wall vibrating due to explosions during an air raid is described as “the trumpet of Jericho telling you to f.k off” (“труба ерихонська, яка посилає на...”; March 18). This irreverent and sarcastic image of the wall mocking

the enemy contrasts with the poem's otherwise serious tone. Here, the image symbolizes resilience and protection, marking the moment of highest dramatic tension and, simultaneously, its release – a pivotal point in the narrative that signifies a shift from uncertainty to hope.

Even in the most extreme circumstances (“One thanks the Lord, while the other curses Him.” [“Хтось Боженьці дякує, хтось – кляне.”]; March 18), when the meaning of prayers slips from memory (“I don’t remember what [...] we were praying about” [“не пам’ятаю [...] про що молились”]; Vlasova March 14), the majority of these Ukrainian poets do not feel emotionally disconnected from God – an enduring trait of Ukrainian metaphysical poetry. The sense of desolation, however, is conveyed in Osmolovska’s poem “blessed apostle judas thaddaeus...” (“благословенний апостоле юдо тадею”; March 18), where the narrator expresses clear uncertainty about divine support.

Fursa’s poem “And then I turn into stone...” (“А потім я кам’янію...”) illustrates how traumatic experiences can catalyze spiritual transformation, aligning with Caillois’s assertion that war can serve as a tragic initiation, granting “a psychic vigor [...] out of proportion to mundane experiences” (1959, 173). In Fursa’s work, this vigor manifests as a transformative connection with God. This complex internal process is expressed through a metaphor grounded in a Gospel reference: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). This vivid image of a person as both a flame and a rock on which “the Lord’s temple will stand till the Judgment day” serves as an extended metaphysical conceit. The underlying principle of this metaphor is the contrast between the transient and the stable – one of the defining features of metaphysical imagery – which is depicted as an ongoing transformation: from tranquility to movement, from material to spiritual, from death to immortality. In this process, a human becomes first a stone, then a living being, then pure energy, ultimately achieving a mysterious dynamic stability as a “hard black flame”. This final form embodies a new entity, combining movement and stillness, grounded in the concepts of strength and eternal endurance:

That’s what a stone is for: it will endure everything,  
It will soar, it will fall into the pit, it will kneel, and grow into the soil.  
It will cover itself with moss, then blossom from within,  
With an unfading flower,  
With an ever-burning glow,  
With a hard black flame  
On which the Lord’s temple will stand until Doomsday.  
My enemy, when I am like this,  
No weapon of yours can harm me.<sup>3</sup>  
(Fursa March 23)

An intimate connection with the deity in moments of crisis is sometimes depicted from a reverse perspective. For example, Mikhalitsyna in her “anatomy/Mariupol” (“анатомія/Маріуполь”) introduces an image of Our Lady cutting her heart into pieces and giving them to the slain children. This powerful dynamic image visualizes

grief through its literal interpretation of Ukrainian idiom “to cut a heart into pieces”, which means “to suffer, to experience grief”:

The Virgin in the heavenly sacristy  
Is cutting her heart into pieces:  
To each hungry one,  
A piece to their mouth,  
To each perished one  
A way out of the gate of this world<sup>4</sup>  
(March 14)

This technique chosen to portray a spiritual process, such as grieving, reflects a revival of the creative practices of Baroque metaphysical poetry in the works of contemporary Ukrainian poets.

### THE POETICS OF SHELTER: MYTHOLOGICAL AND SACRED IMAGES

The unbreakable connection with the sacred powers gains a new dimension through the reinterpretation of the underground space as a space of safety. The open sky carries a threat:

The open sky is like a book  
like the telephone book of the city of Mariupol  
which gradually turns into a notebook  
with blank pages<sup>5</sup>  
(Osmolovska March 18)

The sky stands in contrast to the dungeon, an unfamiliar, enclosed, hidden space that saves lives (the underground, a cellar, a basement). This binary opposition evokes another level of sacredness: folkloric and mythological, where the underground space is not set against the sky but inseparably paired with it. When the open space and the sky become threatening, a person turns to the closed underground (chthonic) space, to the belly of the earth. Heaven is in need of protection and support: “the sky does not fall, the sky is kept fast” (“небо не падає, небо тримають міцно”; Batkilina February 25).

The next example is an appeal to the saints – Apostle Judas Thaddeus, the Virgin Mary, and God: “cover the sky over Ukraine” (“закрий небо над Україною”; Osmolovska March 18). The capitalization plays a specific role in this line: the names of saints and God are written with a lowercase letter, while only “Ukraine” is capitalized, elevating it as the highest, most sacred value. The alarmed sky is defenseless, prompting people to create their own shelter. The poet covers a lamp with a “piece of old cloth” (“рядниною”) because “there isn’t any shelter nearby” (“поблизу немає ніякого укриття”). The words “cover” (закривати) and “shelter” (укриття) in Ukrainian are of the same root meaning “covering, hiding, sheltering and protecting”.

Creating one’s own darkness, retreating to dungeons, to uninhabited spaces: the “wet cellar” (“мокий погріб”; Palamarchuk) becomes a sacred act of life protection – a “lurking-space in a cellar” (“схованка в льоху”; Fursa). This space also

becomes a place of life creation: “and a woman gave birth in agony in the basement, in the metro” (“а жінка ж родила он в муках в підваі, в метро”; Mikhalitsyna March 2); “I am Ukraine. [...] I am a mother in labor lying in a bomb shelter, hearing the first cry of my son” (“Я – Україна [...] Я – породілля, яка лежить у бомбосховищі і чує перший крик сина”; Fedchenko March 5). The imagery in Fedchenko’s and Mikhalitsyna’s poems is rooted in a real event, serving as both literal and apocalyptic vision. Here, the child emerging from the mother’s womb symbolically enters the Earth’s womb, sheltered in the safety of a chthonic space that has gained new sacredness as a place that preserves life.

Palamarchuk discerns runes (sacred signs) in the patterns of mold on the wet walls of the cellar. Muliar combines the theme of the Earth’s womb with that of death (“a rocket hit the cemetery” [“ракета у цвинтар прийшла”]) and with the concept of time (see above). Here, people try to comprehend the incomprehensible: death brought by enemies strikes those who are already dead, while midnight becomes a “timeless time” on the digital clock in the metro. In Ukrainian poetry, the topos of the dungeon broadens the sphere of interaction with the sacred, giving new resonance to the motif of seeking intimate contact with higher powers – a characteristic of metaphysical poetry.

The polyvalence of chthonic motifs, deeply rooted in folklore worldviews, emerges through the portrayal of enemies as monsters. The enemy is depicted in three distinct ways:

1) Impersonal references using third-person plural constructions, such as “they’ve fired” (“обстріляли”), “they’ve broken” (“розбили”). This depersonalization of the threat is reinforced through metonymic substitutions: the siren, originally a warning of danger, becomes synonymous with the danger itself. The sound of the siren takes on the characteristics of a monster’s voice, reviving its ancient association with mortal threat. A siren’s voice is potentially deadly, it “chokes and howls” (“сирена, аж захлинається, виє”; Fedchenko). Other examples include the bitterly ironic “gift” (“подарунок”; Palamarchuk) to name enemy missiles, and “tanks with bloody inscriptions” (“танки з кривавими написами”; Vlasova March 14) symbolizing the faceless enemy through weapon.

2) Metaphors such as “In every village, monsters cough up with blood” (“В кожному селищі чудища кров’ю харкають”; Batkilina February 25), “the vipers that taught you to fear” (“гаддя, що вчило тебе боятись”; Gorova February 25), “horde” (“орда”), and “monsters” (“почвари”; Fedchenko). These terms evoke folkloric imagery underscoring the enemy’s inhumanity.

3) Direct naming of the enemy, as in “Russian occupiers” (“російські окупанти”), used only by Fedchenko. The poet uniquely combines chthonic monster imagery with explicit naming of the enemy within a single text, linking folklore symbolism with direct identification.

In the first days following the Russian invasion, an overwhelming sense of unity between people and land emerges, captured in the image of the city as a sentient, living entity (Batkilina, Fedchenko). The personified land responds to the invasion by rallying its people with a forceful presence: “The city does not sleep, the city



calls its people” (“Місто не спить, місто скликає своїх”; Batkilina February 25). The first phrase, initially perceived as a metonymy, gains direct meaning in the personified image of the city: “the city calls its people / with a quiet song, with trumpets, with swearing / [...] Cries of frightened babies” (“місто скликає своїх / тихою пісню, сурмами, матюками / [...] Криками розтривожених немовлят”). These voices are tangible: “a stone is swearing” (“матюкається камінь”). The city acquires a human-like form as a holistic organism with “hundred throats” (“сто горлянок”), and its body – a “cobblestone” (“бруківка”) – feels pain and roars like a great beast. Though unnamed, this city embodies the spirit of all cities – “Kyiv, Kherson, or Kharkiv” – sharing the same experience and state of being. Kyiv toponyms in Gorova’s poem (February 25) resonate with layers of mythic consciousness: in “In Troya and Obolon” (“На Трої та Оболоні”) echoes of an ancient besieged city, while each reader recognizes the Kyiv district Troyeshchyna (Troy [Troya]).

Batkilina’s poem intertwines the image of the city with a mother’s lullaby, soothing a “frightened baby”: “Sleep, my little one, / sleep, lullaby-lullaby-ly, / how I now hate and I love...” (“Спи, моя крихітко, / спи, люлі-люлі-лю, / як я тепер ненавиджу і люблю...”; February 25). The mother, as a part of the living city, by protecting her child protects life itself, and is filled with powerful, contrasting emotions: hatred and love.

At the beginning of the war, a mother speaking to a child also tries to make sense of what is incomprehensible. The unity of opposites as a means of emphasis is an instrument of metaphysical poetry: “Do not fear, my child, these are tanks” (“Не бійся, дитино, це танки”; Gorova), the same is the contrasting unity of hate and love (Batkilina). These lines respond to the absurdity of the situation, capturing the resilience required of an adult who, amid extreme danger, must protect the life and peace of their child:

And these tanks are ours, daughter [...]  
Do you see a man waving?  
You can greet him too.  
He is going to kill vipers that taught you to fear.<sup>6</sup>  
(Gorova February 25)

The mother finds strength within herself, just as Ukraine finds its inner resilience.

While Mikhalitsyna “reads her son a shabby book” (“сину читає розхристану книжечку”; March 3), and Batkilina addresses a “frightened baby”, one of millions of voices from the embattled city, “sleep, my little one” (“спи, моя крихітко”), Gorova reassures her child: “So don’t close your eyes, don’t be afraid, just don’t” (“Тож ти не заплющуй очі, Годі боятись, годі”). The mother gains an understanding of a new reality, passing this awareness and the gift of life to her child. Vlasova writes about these transitions of war, “By taking our children out of the country, / by giving birth to our children in the country” (“Вивозячи із країни своїх дітей, / народжуючи у країні своїх дітей”). Children are born “in the country” (“у країні”) which sounds almost identical to “for Ukraine” (“Україні”; March 22). The theme of children becomes an integral part of the motif of transition: as people traverse the wounded land, roads, bridges, and cities, they imbue it with spirit and revive it.

Life itself acquires the highest value. In Gorova's poem (March 2), an old woman cares for a sick baby goat: "but now it's war, let everything live" ("але ж тепер – війна, хай би усе жило"), as the lives of all her kin, pets, and cattle become precious. Other examples convey this reverence for life: "only light masking remains for me / it works while I'm alive" ("мені лишається тільки світломаскування / воно діє поки я жива"; Osmolovska), or "There is only one sign left of me, the main one: I'm alive" ("Од мене лишилась ознака одна, головна: жива"; Fursa March 18). Life is the core value and essence of each person.

Despite the terrifying reality that petrifies everything, and the fear that transforms into rage, life resurfaces and strengthens, gaining an unprecedented, concentrated power rooted in self-awareness through memory and language. As Vlasova writes, "and my memory will be restored only on the victory day" ("і моя пам'ять відновиться тільки в день перемоги"; March 14) and "we are switching to Ukrainian" ("ми переходимо на українську"; March 22). Her poem metaphorically captures the essence of transitions – crossing destroyed bridges and traversing the roads represent switching to the mother tongue. All these meanings converge in the same Ukrainian verb for "to transit" (переходити). The interplay of meanings – a semantic layering that intensifies dramatic tension – is a characteristic technique of metaphysical poetry. Self-awareness emerging in moments of crisis, becomes both a sign and a source of strength. Palamarchuk captures this transformation, calling herself a woman in Ukrainian ("ти жінка") instead of Russian ("не жінщина") she concludes: "Break the ice of impotence" ("ламай кригу безсилля"; February 27).

## CONCLUSION

The first month of the war inspired spontaneous poetic responses that intertwined mystical insights with mythological consciousness. Through its presence on the Internet this poetry helped shape Ukraine's collective mental landscape by enabling poets and their audiences to articulate their emotions and experiences. Our analysis demonstrates that the poetic reflections of the onset of Russia's war against Ukraine can be situated within the framework of metaphysical poetics. Although Ukrainian authors employ the central tropes of metaphysical poetry only sporadically their texts are thematically and emotionally aligned with this tradition. At the same time, they introduce significant ideological innovations, such as the articulation of hope and an expanded conception of the divine. This body of poetry reconfigures elements of cultural tradition, historical allusions, and personal trauma into a poetics of resilience, functioning simultaneously as a creative practice and a symbolic act of resistance.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All poetry quotes in this research are presented in interlinear translations provided by the authors of the article, with the original lines added in the endnotes.

<sup>2</sup> "суне орда [...] / Я — Крути / Ось знову була з росіянами потужна заруба. / Й українцям вдалося дуже добре помститися"

- <sup>3</sup> “[...] А камінь на те і камінь – він витримає усе: / угору злетить, у вирву впаде, улякне, в землю вросе, / укриється мохом, а потім зсередини зацвіте – / цвітом невянучим, / сяйвом негаснучим, / чорним твердим вогнем, / на якому Господній храм аж до Сѹду встоїть. / Вбóроже, для отакої мене / у тебе немає зброї.”
- <sup>4</sup> “Діва в небесній ризниці / серце своє розкроює: / кожному зголодалому – / по кусенцю до рота, / кожному відстраждалому – / шлях за мирські ворота.”
- <sup>5</sup> “Небо відкрите як книга / як телефонна книга міста Маріуполя / яка поступово перетворюється на записник / з чистими аркушами”
- <sup>6</sup> “І танки ці — наші, доню [...] / Он, бачиш, махає дядя? / Ти теж можеш привітатись. / Він їде нищити гаддя, / Що вчило тебе боятись.”

## PRIMARY SOURCES

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## Mission accomplished? Ukrainian superhero comics in times of war

SVITLANA PIDOPRYGORA

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.7

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### Mission accomplished? Ukrainian superhero comics in times of war

Superheroes. Comics. Ukraine. War. National identity.

This article examines the emergence and development of the Ukrainian superhero genre, analyzing its origins, creators, and target audience. It focuses on key Ukrainian superhero comics, including Lesia Vroniuk's *Ukrainski Superheroi* (Ukrainian superheroes, 2015), Vadym Nazarov's *Patriot* (2014, 2016, 2018), Leonid Krasnopolskyi's *Okhorontsi Krainy* (Guardians of Country, 2018), and Yaroslav Udodenko's *Svitnok Heroiv: Kharkiv* (Dawn of heroes: Kharkiv, 2023). The article explores how these comics integrate global superhero conventions with the construction of Ukrainian national identity, particularly in the context of the ongoing war. This research also investigates the visual and narrative strategies used to depict national superheroes and supervillains and examines how these figures embody Ukraine's cultural and historical legacy while addressing contemporary challenges. Additionally, it considers the role of Ukrainian superhero comics in wartime, exploring their function as a means of cultural reflection, a tool for fostering national resilience, and an expression of contemporary societal narratives shaped by public sentiment rather than state directives.

This article has been prepared within the framework of the MSCA4Ukraine fellowship, which is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the European Research Executive Agency or the MSCA4Ukraine Consortium. Neither the European Union nor the European Research Executive Agency, nor the MSCA4Ukraine Consortium as a whole nor any individual member institutions of the MSCA4Ukraine Consortium can be held responsible for them.

Svitlana Pidoprygora  
MSCA4Ukraine Fellow  
Department of Slavic Studies  
University of Innsbruck  
Austria  
svitlana.pidoprygora@uibk.ac.at  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8891-7910

## FRAMING UKRAINIAN SUPERHERO COMICS IN THE GLOBAL GENRE CONTEXT

The superhero genre, deeply embedded in cultural narratives and myth-making since its origins in the USA in the late 1930s, has firmly established itself as a significant cultural phenomenon worldwide. A superhero can be defined as a fictional character – typically from comics, film, or related media – who possesses extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or exceptional skills and uses them to protect society. The inception of the superhero archetype in comic books coincided with a period of significant social anxiety and upheaval and was not merely for entertainment; rather, it was a response to a palpable societal need for stability and moral clarity during trying times. Superheroes were conceived during the Great Depression and the looming threat of global conflict, times when the fabric of society seemed most fragile. The emergence of characters like Superman in 1938, followed by Batman and others, symbolized the embodiment of societal aspirations – heroes who could overcome insurmountable odds and restore justice in a world teetering on the brink of chaos. Captain America, introduced in 1941 by Marvel Comics creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, became an iconic anti-Nazi patriotic hero. In Europe, particularly in Central and Western despite strong American influence, local variants emerged, adapting superhero narratives to regional contexts, such as *Astérix* (France), *Diabolik* (Italy), and Captain Britain (UK).

The development of the superhero genre in Eastern European comics presents a distinct trajectory, largely shaped by several countries' membership in the Soviet Union (e.g., Ukraine) or their long-standing Soviet influence as part of the socialist bloc (e.g., Poland). During the Soviet era, the comic genre was largely dismissed in Ukraine as a capitalist element, with little development in this field. However, images similar to comic strips did appear in satirical and children's magazines, often taking the form of illustrated stories.<sup>1</sup> It is also important to mention the work of Anatolii Vasylenko.<sup>2</sup>

With the weakening and eventual collapse of Soviet power (1991), Eastern European and post-Soviet states gained creative freedom and exposure to international influences, especially the Western superhero genre. This global genre had evolved significantly – from hero glorification to anti-heroic narratives and psychological complexity. The Polish comic *Likwidator*, created by Ryszard Dąbrowski, illustrates this hybridization, blending local socio-political realities of the 1990s and 2000s with a darker, anarchistic twist on the superhero tradition. In the case of Ukrainian comics, the first attempts that appeared in the 1990s, drawing on the image of the Cossacks<sup>3</sup> as *proto-superheroes*. These comics were largely individual initiatives by artists responding to newfound creative freedoms. Kostiantyn Sulyma, the author of the comic *Buyviter* (1995), explains his turn to the comic genre as follows: “This was an artistic reaction to the ‘tsunami’ of new information about Ukraine’s history and the new forms of Western mass media that entered our cultural space. [...] There was no publisher or client, and the work was created ‘on speculation’”<sup>4</sup> (Kobza Films 2023).



The full-color adventure comic *Daohopak* (Prasolov, Chebykin, and Kolov 2012, 2014, 2016) also deals with Cossack themes. The authors aim to make a “blockbuster comic novel”, testing out Western comic and manga styles. In these comics, the Cossack myth is reinterpreted as a key element of national identity, contributing to its restoration and reinforcement in the postcolonial context of Ukraine’s first two decades of independence.<sup>5</sup>

The significant shift in Ukrainian superhero comics occurred with Russia’s war against Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale invasion in 2022. However, it is still not accurate to state that comics are as widespread or popular in Ukraine as they are in the United States or Western Europe, or even in Poland, but they remain a vital part of the modern Ukrainian cultural space.<sup>6</sup>

Ukrainians first encountered superheroes through DC and Marvel film adaptations and translated foreign comics. The emergence of Ukrainian superheroes was driven by war and political turbulence, fueling the demand for cultural narratives of national strength and heroism. This aligns with comic writer Mark Millar’s observation that superhero stories become particularly relevant during turbulent periods marked by social unrest (cited in DiPaolo 2011, 1).

The aim of this article is to analyze the emergence and development of the Ukrainian superhero genre, focusing on how it integrates global superhero conventions with the construction of Ukrainian national narratives. A particular focus is placed on key Ukrainian superhero comics, in which the central conflict clearly alludes to the ongoing war in Ukraine, such as Lesia Voroniuk’s *Ukrainski superheroi* (Ukrainian superheroes), published in 2015; Vadym Nazarov’s *Patriot*, released in 2014, 2016, and 2018; the series *Okhorontsi Krainy* (Guardians of Country) by Leonid Krasnopolskyi, published in 2018; and *Svitanok heroiv: Kharkiv* (Dawn of heroes: Kharkiv), which came out in 2023 by Yaroslav Udodenko. This analysis investigates the visual and narrative strategies used to depict national superheroes and supervillains, examining how these figures reflect Ukraine’s cultural and historical legacy, and considers the role of Ukrainian superhero comics in wartime.<sup>7</sup>

To explore the superhero genre, a historical approach is applied that situates these comics within broader societal shifts and examines the creators’ backgrounds and publishing contexts. The qualitative analysis focuses on style, themes, symbols, and narrative structures to understand how meaning is constructed. These comics also operate within a postcolonial lens, reinterpreting Ukraine’s colonial past to reclaim national identity.

The superhero genre has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis, with researchers exploring its evolution, thematic depth, and cultural significance. Key works include Mila Bongco’s *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books* (2000), Geoff Klock’s *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002), Peter Coogan’s *The Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006), Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith’s *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture* (2009), Marco Arnaudo’s *The Myth of the Superhero* (2013), and Chris Gavalier’s *Superhero Comics* (2017). There is also a substantial body of scholarly work that examines the genre within political discourse (DiPaolo 2011; Goodnow and Kimble

2017), gender questions (Madrid 2009), postcolonial and decolonial perspectives (Nama 2011; Fawaz 2016).

Although the global academic community has extensively studied the superhero genre, Ukrainian contributions have received little focused attention due to their relatively recent emergence, limited international visibility, and lack of translations. Ukrainian comics studies are still developing, primarily engaging broadly rather than analyzing national superhero narratives specifically (Haiduk 2020; Derkachova 2022; Hudoshnyk 2022; Pidoprygora 2024a; Hudoshnyk 2025). My recent articles have examined Ukrainian superheroes within historical and wartime contexts (2022, 2024b), though not yet in detail with regard to the *Okhorontsi Krainy* and *Svitanok Heroiv: Kharkiv* series. This article aims to further develop the exploration of Ukrainian superhero comics by integrating the global discussions with the insights provided by local researchers, enriching the understanding of how superheroes can embody and reflect the ongoing war.

### FROM CHILDREN'S COLORING BOOKS TO 17+ COMIC NARRATIVES

*Ukrainski superheroi*, a comic series by Lesia Voroniuk and illustrated by Sofia Rozumenko,<sup>8</sup> was launched in 2015 and published by Bukrek in Chernivtsi. Although only two of the planned ten issues were released, they already demonstrated the genre's potential for education and cultural preservation (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Cover of the comic *Ukrainski superheroi. Vriatuvaty zhaivoronka. Vyp. 1* (To save the lark, Issue 1, 2015)

As Voroniuk explained, the goal of the series was to ensure that Ukrainian children had superheroes they could identify with and admire, while also learning about

Ukrainian traditions and history. In an interview, the author noted that choosing the superhero genre was partly a response to Russian military aggression (Rozumenko 2016). Though fictional, the storylines clearly reference real events, with Ukrainian heroes opposing Russian forces. Some characters are based on real prototypes – for example, Kiborg is modeled after a soldier killed defending Donetsk Airport, and Kobzar draws inspiration from Oleksandr Yarmola, the lead singer of the band *Haydamaky*. At the same time each hero is crafted as a composite of real individuals and cultural archetypes. One notable feature of the comics is their interactivity: the panels are designed for children to color, merging the superhero format with that of a coloring book and offering a tactile connection to the story. While the narratives are made accessible to young readers, the creators emphasize the importance of adult guidance during reading.

The three issues of *Patriot – Ataka kloniv* (Attack of the clones) and two volumes of *Renegat* – were entirely created and self-published by Vadym Nazarov. The comic stands out as an alternative superhero comic. The black-and-white first issue, in particular, offers an ironic and kitschy take on Ukrainian reality, blending post-Soviet and postcolonial critique with sharp social commentary and political caricature. Its 15+/17+ rating and playful disclaimer highlight its appeal to a young adult and adult audience.

The first issue of *Patriot* is described by the author as a “sarcastic-humorous tale with elements of dark humor” (Tretia parallel 2016). It revisits the theme of extraterrestrial threats – an idea that had already intrigued Nazarov in his earlier comic *Salo v kosmosi*<sup>9</sup> (Fat in the space, 2005–2006), published on comics.com.ua.<sup>10</sup> In that earlier work, Cossacks battle robot and animal-like invaders over the magical resource Salo, while the hero Ostap – visually reminiscent of Patriot – emerges as a central figure in the resistance, seeking to reclaim his home planet from demonic forces. This continuity is underscored in *Patriot* by the naming of the space mission Salo in space. The action unfolds aboard a spaceship orbiting Earth, where the main villain, a clone of Putin named Utin, plans to conquer Ukraine and dominate the world with help from clones of Stalin and Lenin. The comic also plays with conspiracy theories, suggesting that aliens have long provoked human wars. As they withdraw, they leave behind a high-tech suit of armor for a morally pure Ukrainian sergeant, enabling him to stop the villains’ global conquest.

*Patriot* engages in a form of carnivalization, where oppressive structures – such as Russian imperialism and Soviet totalitarianism – are deconstructed through humor, parody, and grotesque exaggeration. The blending of epochs, the deliberate anachronisms, and the absurd portrayal of historical and contemporary figures reflect a post-Soviet reality that has not yet fully come to terms with its past (Fig. 2). Despite the comic’s playful and ironic elements, its title *Patriot* seems to have been chosen deliberately. The name likely alludes to the Patriot of Ukraine, a Ukrainian ultranationalist semi-military organization founded in 2006 and active until 2014. Such parallels appear intentional, as later issues incorporate symbols associated with this organization. In the author’s final comic remark, Nazarov explicitly references the death of Sashko Bilyi.<sup>11</sup> This provides a stark contrast to the comic’s humor and

satire, reinforcing its deeper engagement with real historical events. The second and third issues, in full color, form a more serious and structured narrative, marking a shift in both content and artistic quality. The story takes place in eastern Ukraine, with clear references to the ongoing war.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 2: Scene from the comic *Patriot. Ataka kloniv* (2014)

The creation of *Okhorontsi Krainy* series (7 issues) was initiated by Leonid Krasnopolskyi and published with the support of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine. At the presentation of the comic series, the author emphasized its dedication to the ongoing war in and the struggle for the de-occupation of Crimea. The superheroes are inspired by real-life figures, including Yuriy Kyslyak, the commander of an armored battery of the 25th Airborne Brigade (Ukrinform 2019). The primary goal of the comic, as stated, is educational – to convey a fictional story in a way that is accessible to children and teenagers, while drawing on real events. The story in each issue ends on a cliffhanger, linking it to the narrative of the next installment. Even the seventh issue concludes with the promise of “to be continued”. However, no further issues were published due to Krasnopolskyi’s tragic death.

The comic’s fictional locations clearly allude to real-world places: Kraina represents Ukraine, FOK (Federatsiia Obiednanykh Komun [Federation of united communes]) stands in for the Russian Federation, Zaokeania refers to the USA, and Kerem symbolizes Crimea. The central conflict centers on FOK’s occupation of Kerem and the need to defend the country. The fast-paced storyline follows heroes in constant motion, with multiple plotlines unfolding across shifting locations. As Oksana Hudoshnyk observes, the characters and plot increasingly surpass the original educational purpose (2022, 55). Consequently, the comic leans more into entertainment, while weaving historical, political, and mythological elements to reinforce national identity.

The first issue of *Svitanok Heroiv: Kharkiv*, written by Yaroslav Udodenko and illustrated by Marina Marchuk, was published in 2023 by Avangard Production (Fig. 3).

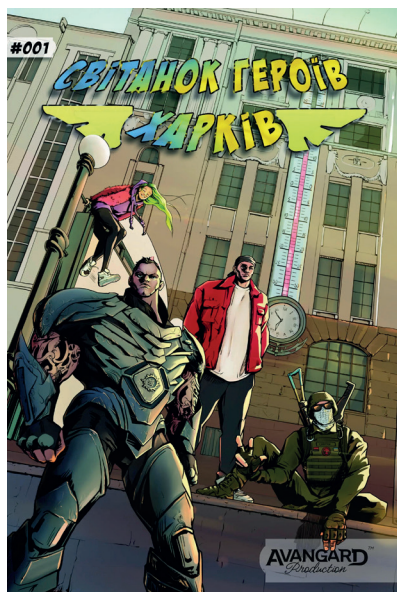


Figure 3: Cover of the comic *Svitanok heroiv: Kharkiv* (2023)

Drawing on the Silver Age superhero tradition in both narrative and visual design, this debut serves primarily as an introduction to the series. The story links the emergence of the main superheroes to the onset of the full-scale war, shifting the action to Kharkiv – connected in the plot to the ancient city of Sharukan<sup>13</sup> and a hidden mythical force. The narrative merges Ukrainian pagan mythology, Slavic gods, and a magical artifact in a classic battle between Good and ancient Evil. While the comic quickly immerses readers in the story, additional context is available on the publisher's website and Instagram (Avangard Production).

### UKRAINIAN SUPERMEN AND SUPERWOMEN AGAINST SUPERVILLAINS

In discussing the distinct traits of Ukrainian superheroes, my previous article argues that they diverge from the framework of Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith (2009), who have described the superhero as a positive figure with superpowers, a recognizable costume, and a secret identity; their Ukrainian counterparts lack hidden identities or separate ordinary lives, and their powers, costumes, and names are rooted in national cultural codes (Pidoprygora 2024b). The current article expands that analysis by examining *Okhorontsi Krainy* and *Svitanok Heroiv: Kharkiv*, and by offering additional insights into the representation of Ukrainian superheroes.

It is worth noting that the superheroes in Ukrainian comics are introduced directly in action, with little to no backstory explaining their origins or how they acquired



their abilities. This absence is likely due to the fact that none of these series have yet developed into fully structured narratives. One striking pattern across all series, except for *Patriot*, is that the superheroes function as a team of four with men forming the majority. In *Ukrainski superheroi*, male characters are shown actively engaging in battle, while the only female character, Vira, takes on a more observational role. This portrayal likely reflects her role as a character inspired by the collective image of female volunteers who are not engaged in active combat. The male superheroes in *Ukrainski superheroi*, as well as in *Patriot*, are depicted with an emphasis on physical strength, adhering to the traditional representation of superheroes as powerful and imposing figures.

In *Okhorontsi Krainy* national identity is distinctly marked, tying the heroes to the legacy of Kyivan Rus and the legendary foundation of Kyiv by giving them the names Lybid, Kyi, Shchek, and Khoryv.<sup>14</sup> By establishing this connection, the comic presents the symbolic continuation of a long-standing historical tradition. The heroes of this series also do not have dual identities, they do not hide their abilities, nor are they depicted in everyday life – throughout the story, they are always engaged in combat missions. Lybid is a master of combat, wielding scythe-like weapons, Kyi has the ability to see past events by touching objects, and Shchek, a talented programmer, can extract classified information and, despite his frail appearance, possesses extraordinary strength, while Khoryv's abilities remain undisclosed – he is the leader of military operations and the oldest among the guardians. The Crimean Tatars also play a key role in the story, which is the first instance of Crimean Tatars being portrayed as superheroes in a comic book.<sup>15</sup> While on a mission on Kerem, the team is joined by local residents, the siblings Asker and Janike, who have the ability of teleportation, and later their father Mustafa Dzhemil<sup>16</sup> enters the story.

The costumes of Ukrainian superheroes in *Okhorontsi Krainy* do not carry significant symbolic or ideological meaning (Fig. 4). In contrast, the attire of the Crimean Tatar characters has elements of traditional Crimean Tatar clothing. A small emblem, reminiscent of *tamga* (coat of arms), marks them as the defenders of Kerem. Additionally, the female character wears a yellow-and-blue ribbon bracelet on her wrist, subtly reinforcing her connection to Ukraine (Fig. 5). Beyond visual symbolism, the authors use Crimean Tatar characters to voice strong ideological messages, reinforcing the idea that Kerem is part of Kraina, which can be interpreted as affirming that Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine. Women here take on active roles as skilled warriors, standing on equal footing with their male counterparts in battle.

The comic *Svitanok Heroiv: Kharkiv* brings together the ancient warrior Shynn, the military mercenary Sabotazh, the teenage girl Kharkivianka, and the young man Ekso. Notably, both Kharkivianka and Ekso acquire their powers during the shelling of Kharkiv, tying their transformation directly to the realities of war. Sabotazh's role remains ambiguous – rather than being a soldier of the Ukrainian army, he appears to be a volunteer who independently decides whom to help and what actions to take, operating outside formal military structures. Like Vira in *Ukrainski superheroi*, Kharkivianka possesses a form of soft power – the ability to sense and reflect harm. Unlike other superheroes, there are no nationally marked costumes. Instead, they



wear context-driven attire – Sabotazh in military fatigues, Shynn in medieval armor, and others in casual clothing. The absence of national symbols in their outfits shifts the focus to their mission. This could suggest that by 2023, the need to explicitly mark clothing with national symbols has diminished, as national identity has no longer requires constant reaffirmation in the face of external threats or colonial narratives.

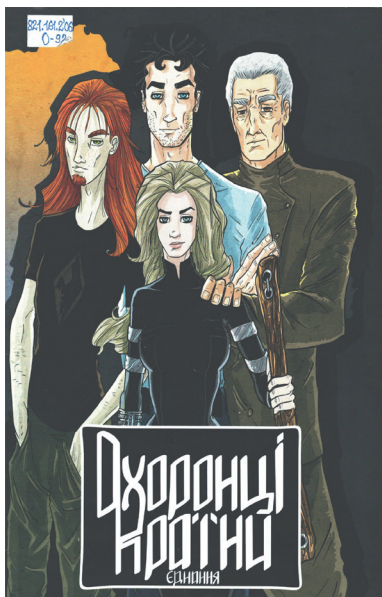


Figure 4: Cover of the comic *Okhorontsi Krainy. Lednannia* (Guardians of Country. Unity, 2018)



Figure 5: Scene from the comic *Okhorontsi Krainy. Pochatok* (Guardians of Country. Beginning, 2018)

The comic *Patriot* stands out from the previously mentioned works as it focuses solely on a single superhero and embraces a playful, carnivalesque aesthetic. Sergeant Vidirvenko, wears the Patriot armor, gaining extraordinary strength and embodying the traditional depiction of a hyper-masculine superhero. The comic deliberately emphasizes his physical prowess. He is portrayed as an almost mythical figure, capable of hunting a wild boar with his bare hands in the first issue. His exaggerated masculinity is further reinforced through frequent shirtless depictions, often in contexts that seem more symbolic than practical, purely to showcase his physical dominance (Fig. 6).

The comic also draws on classic superhero imagery – just as Superman’s strength is famously introduced through the act of lifting a car, Patriot features a similar scene to underscore his power. However, beyond his physical abilities, Patriot is an over-the-top embodiment of patriotism. His entire persona is saturated with national symbols: he sports tattoos of Taras Shevchenko and the *tryzub* (trident), wears the traditional Cossack hairstyle, and appears in a *vyshyvanka* (embroidered shirt) during military briefings – all infused with a sense of humor and self-awareness. His armor is adorned with multiple *tryzub* symbols and reflects Ukraine’s national colors, re-

inforcing his strong patriotic identity. Even his weapons carry symbolic meaning – the “Stinging Trident” sniper rifle is shaped like Ukraine’s national emblem, while his billhook resembles the *kolovorot* (spinning wheel). My initial interpretation of this imagery was as a reference to Ukraine’s historical legacy, particularly its connection to Kyivan Rus<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 7).

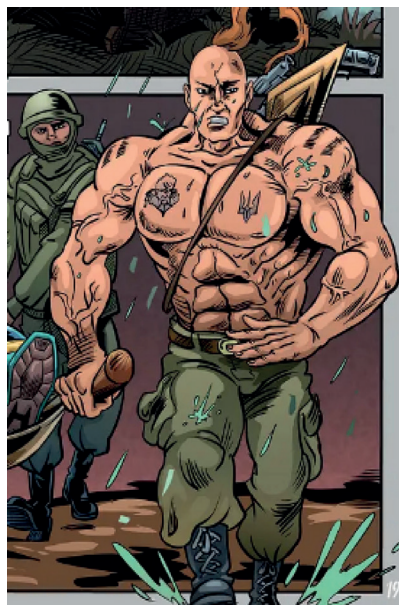


Figure 6: Scene from the comic *Patriot. Renegat. 3* (2018)



Figure 7: Cover of the comic *Patriot. Renegat. 3* (2018)

However, the symbolism of the *kolovorot* is not without controversy, as it has also been associated with far-right movements. The external reviewers of my initial manuscript pointed out an interpretation I had not considered, noting in private correspondence that “the Kolovorot refers to an ultra-nationalist symbol at best, but more probably to a straightforward Neo-Pagan/Neo-Nazi-associated imagery of the eight-armed right-handed version of the Swastika” (Schmäing 2023). This observation has some basis, as I had previously written that the title *Patriot* seems to evoke associations with the nationalistic organization and the *kolovorot* is a variation of the Black Sun. However, within the Ukrainian context, it seems unlikely that the author intended to invoke neo-Nazi symbolism. The emphasis appears to be on national power rather than extremist ideology – a particularly relevant distinction in the context of a former colonial state (see Törnquist-Plewa and Yurchuk 2017).

The world of superheroes is inseparable from that of supervillains, who, in the context of the ongoing war on Ukraine, are unmistakably linked to the Russian Empire, the USSR, or the Russian Federation. In line with global genre conventions, the enemies are often dehumanized – portrayed as monsters, demons, robots, or

aliens – to underscore the inhumanity of their motives and actions. In *Okhorontsi Krainy*, the superheroes battle a force led by Taigan. His key subordinates include Dr. Chornolis; “hospodin” Felix; and Horinych, a ruthless commander overseeing an army of “oprychnyky”.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Chornolis conducts experiments on people, turning them into iron soldiers. These transformed beings – iron-limbed, iron-foreheaded, iron-brained – are not individual characters but soulless tools of destruction, reinforcing the idea of a dehumanization. In *Patriot*, the main villains are Utin in the first issue and Pu in the second and third. The author deliberately emphasizes their connection to the Soviet past, incorporating references to the KGB, the USSR, and Soviet symbolism, such as an inverted hammer and sickle. Pu is depicted as a robotic caricature of Putin, ruling over monsters. His advisors visually resemble Kremlin figures like Lavrov and Peskov, reinforcing the comic’s satirical tone (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Scene from the comic *Patriot. Renegat. 3* (2018)

Regarding the portrayal of supervillains in *Svitanok Heroiv: Kharkiv*, the first issue does not introduce any distinct antagonist figures – only masked enemy soldiers – and it is likely that the central supervillain will appear in subsequent issues.

The portrayal of villains across all the series is further reinforced by the use of Russian rendered in Ukrainian transliteration. In doing so, the comics transform language into a site of resistance, reducing the imperial aggressor to a subject of phonetic parody. In this satirical mode, linguistic distortion not only signals otherness but also symbolically strips the enemy of authority – suggesting that a foe who sounds ridiculous cannot be truly powerful. At the same time, Ukrainian emerges not merely as the default language of narration, but as a marker of cultural legitimacy and ideological agency – reclaiming its space after centuries of linguis-

tic subordination. This dynamic forms part of a broader postcolonial narrative, in which the reassertion of the Ukrainian language functions as an act of symbolic decolonization and cultural empowerment. An exception to this approach appears in *Okhorontsi Krainy* – Russian here coexists with Ukrainian and is presented without distortion, reflecting the region's linguistic diversity. It is spoken not only by enemies but also by one of the superheroes, Shchek, and by the residents of Kerem.

## CONCLUSION

So, can we say that the mission of Ukrainian superheroes has been accomplished? In many ways, Ukrainian superhero comics have made impressive progress since 2014. They craft fantastical worlds that nevertheless echo the ongoing war – so that fiction and reality coexist in clear dialogue. Heroes often bear visual resemblances to real figures, and place-names subtly reference actual locations. A political dimension is unavoidable, but it is driven by artists' own creativity rather than by top-down propaganda. Although some titles have received institutional support, Ukrainian superhero comics have not been systematically co-opted by state policy. Instead, they stand as grassroots cultural responses to the war, led by writers and artists who shape them into instruments for strengthening identity and uniting readers in a shared sense of purpose. However, the lack of sustained funding – whether from the state or civil institutions – and the absence of an established reader base (since Ukrainian society is still developing a comic-reading culture) have directly impeded the completion of planned issues and limited the number of installments released in the series analyzed.

By drawing on Ukrainian cultural traditions, history, and the broader context of resistance against the Russian Empire, Soviet rule, and the modern Russian Federation, these comics assert a strong postcolonial national identity that no longer needs overt symbols to prove its self-sufficiency. Unlike Western superheroes, Ukrainian ones fully embody their heroic roles, do not maintain secret identities, and usually carry out their missions together rather than solo. Gender roles remain largely traditional, with male superheroes associated with physical strength, while female characters embody intuition and moral authority.

Ukrainian superhero comics address readers of all ages – from children's coloring-book-style issues to Silver Age-inspired adventures and to titles grounded in underground comic traditions aimed at teens and adults. Their tones range from earnest to satirical, often using humor and exaggeration to ridicule and dehumanize the enemy – unmistakably Russia – both visually and verbally.

Yet the story of Ukrainian superhero comics is far from over. With the war still unfolding and Ukrainian society continually adapting, these comics remain a work in progress. New issues continue to respond to fresh challenges, mirroring and shaping the national narrative while bolstering public morale.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Notable examples include the magazines *Veselyie Kartinki*, *Krokodil* and *Perets*, which were popular in the Soviet Union and also in Soviet Ukraine for their illustrated content.
- <sup>2</sup> Anatolii Vasylenko: *Pryhody kota Chornolapenka* (The adventures of the Black-pawed cat, 1983, picture book), *Petryk v kosmosi* (Petryk in space, 1970), *Dobryi robot* (The good robot, 1971), *Smishynky v kartynkakh* (Funny moments in pictures, 1983), *Kraina charivnykiv: Pryhody v komiksakh* (The land of wizards: Adventures in comics, 1992).
- <sup>3</sup> Cossacks were members of semi-military communities, primarily located in the territories of present-day Ukraine, known for their self-governance, martial traditions, and significant role in defending Ukrainian territories from foreign invasions from the 15th to 18th centuries. In the Ukrainian cultural context, they are often portrayed as symbols of freedom, bravery, and national identity.
- <sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Ukrainian are by the present author.
- <sup>5</sup> For more on this, see Stupak 2024.
- <sup>6</sup> Moreover, comics featuring Ukrainian heroes are not well-known among international audiences, largely because they were specifically designed for a Ukrainian context and have not been translated into foreign languages. Currently, only a few have been translated.
- <sup>7</sup> The comic *Ukrmen: Pochatok* (Ukrmen: The beginning, 2018) is not included in this analysis due to the authors' stated intention of keeping the comic free from themes of war, politics, and religion, as clarified in my private talk with Anatolii Tiahur (March 20, 2025) and requires separate research. While I acknowledge the existence of other comics that incorporate elements of the superhero genre along with other elements such as cyberpunk, alternative history, detective, fantasy, and fairy-tale components (e.g. *Volia: The Will*, 2017, 2018); *Peremoha* (Victory, 2022) they are not the focus of this study as they also require separate and detailed research.
- <sup>8</sup> For the second issue, artist Vadym Batrak joined the team.
- <sup>9</sup> Salo – a traditional Ukrainian cured pork fat often associated with national culinary identity – has become a cultural stereotype in both domestic and foreign representations of Ukrainians. Nazarov ironically reimagines it as a valuable cosmic resource, playing with familiar clichés to subvert expectations and infuse national symbolism into a satirical sci-fi setting.
- <sup>10</sup> The platform (2003–2010), which catered to cartoonists and enthusiasts, allowed users to explore new releases and publish their work.
- <sup>11</sup> Sashko Bilyi (Oleksandr Muzychko) was a Ukrainian nationalist and Right Sector member known for his militant activism during the Euromaidan protests. In March 2014, he was killed in a controversial police operation, with some viewing it as an extrajudicial killing. His death became symbolic among nationalist circles, and was seen as part of broader political repression.
- <sup>12</sup> For more on this, see Pidoprygora 2024b.
- <sup>13</sup> Sharukan was a real historical city founded by the Alans and later controlled by the Cumans (Polovtsians) in the second half of the 11th century. Renamed after the Cuman Khan Sharukan, it was located near present-day Kharkiv. In the comic, the authors link Sharukan to Kharkiv's mythic past, anchoring the narrative in local history and collective memory.
- <sup>14</sup> According to legend, Kyiv was established by three brothers, Kyi, Shchek, and Khoryv, along with their sister Lybid, who are believed to have settled on the hills near the Dnipro river, giving rise to a city that later became the heart of Kyivan Rus.
- <sup>15</sup> Since the occupation of Crimea in 2014, the Ukrainian cultural space has increasingly focused on artistic and literary works that highlight the history, resilience, and contributions of the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine's development.
- <sup>16</sup> His name serves as an allusion to Mustafa Dzhemilev – a Crimean Tatar politician, human rights activist, and former head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (1991–2013). A Soviet-era dissident, he spent 15 years in prisons and labor camps for advocating the rights of Crimean Tatars. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, he became a key voice in defending Crimean Tatar rights and Ukraine's sovereignty.
- <sup>17</sup> Kyivan Rus was a state in Eastern and Northern Europe that existed from the 9th to the 13th century.

- <sup>18</sup> The supervillain names in the comic are ideologically and symbolically charged, drawing on mythology, history, and collective memory. “Dr. Chornolis” (black forest) evokes associations with Chornoboh, the Slavic god of misfortune and destruction. “Oprychniki” reference Ivan the Terrible’s brutal enforcers, rooting the villainous army in a tradition of Russian state terror. “Hospodin Felix” alludes to Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Soviet secret police, with the archaic title “Hospodin” reinforcing authoritarian hierarchy. “Horynych” invokes Zmey Gorynych, a multi-headed dragon from Russian folklore, often defeated by the noble hero.

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## National identity and resistance in Mykola Akhbash's original and translated Rumeika-language poetry

YULIIA LABETSKA – MARIIA NIKOLCHENKO

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.8

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### National identity and resistance in Mykola Akhbash's original and translated Rumeika-language poetry

Mykola Akhbash. Ukrainian literature of resistance. Literature in minority language. Rumeika. Identity.

The work of the Ukrainian poet Mykola Akhbash, who writes in Rumeika, exemplifies resistance literature of a national minority in response to Russia's full-scale invasion. His poems reflect author's deep concern for the fate of Mariupol, initial confusion followed by resilience, and an appeal to the transcendent. These form the thematic core of his wartime verse. The author employs a range of perspectives, yet his values remain rooted in both the Ukrainian nation and the Azov Greek community. Writing in Rumeika and using ethno-cultural symbols, translating Ukrainian classics, and employing Ukrainian transcription, Akhbash articulates the identity and historical legacy of the North Azovian Greeks within a broader Ukrainian context.

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Yuliia Labetska  
Department of Greek Philology  
Mariupol State University  
Ukraine  
y.labetska@mu.edu.ua  
ORCID: 0000-0002-9202-7731

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Mariia Nikolchenko  
Department of Ukrainian Philology  
Mariupol State University  
Ukraine  
m.nikolchenko@mu.edu.ua  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6325-1259

## UKRAINIAN LITERARY DISCOURSE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

The Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in 2014, has served as a powerful catalyst for the emergence of numerous artistic reflections in Ukrainian literature. Russia's violent invasion of Ukrainian territory on February 24, 2022 marked a significant turning point in the life of the Ukrainian state, dividing it into a "before" and "after". The war has led to destroyed cities, shattered lives, and thousands of dead and wounded. In the contemporary Ukrainian literary landscape, a phenomenon known as war literature has emerged, that is also seen as resistance literature. It reflects the experiences and observations of those who have lived through the war, including writers, soldiers, police officers, volunteers, medics, journalists, and ordinary civilians, whose works contain authentic testimonies about the brutality of war and its tragic aftermath. Trauma caused by the loss of loved ones, homes, and forced displacement drives authors to transform their pain, grief, and anger into powerful narratives that challenge oppression, expose injustices, and inspire resilience.

The Russo-Ukrainian War literature has sparked a wave of studies on this literary phenomenon. Notable works by Larysa Horbolis (2016), Olena Bondareva (2022), Mykola Zhulynskyi (2024), Mykola Ivanov (2015), Bohdan Pastukh (2016), Yaroslav Polishchuk (2016), Maryna Riabchenko (2019),<sup>1</sup> and others explore the specific features of war and resistance literature. Analyzing literature created since the beginning of the war, Mykola Zhulynskyi emphasizes that "Ukrainian literature, especially poetry, has embodied the full spectrum of people's anger and resistance in a variety of genres. It turns out, that in times of the greatest trials, poetry turns to the spiritual foundations of the nation"<sup>2</sup> (2024, 3). During the war, the use of biblical motifs, images of Ukrainian prophetic figures, and references to past liberation struggles became especially prominent. This highlights the need for Ukrainians to interpret contemporary events within the context of their long-standing fight for independence. Thus, turning to spiritual foundations not only helps preserve identity in difficult times but also makes literature a powerful instrument for its reinforcement.

Ukraine is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Europe. The Azov Greeks are a national minority numbering around 100,000 people, making them the third-largest ethnic group in the Donetsk region. They have predominantly resided in compact communities on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Azov since their relocation from Crimea at the end of the 18th century, ordered by Empress Catherine II. Linguistically, the Azov Greeks are divided into two groups: one part speaks Rumeika, a variety closely related to Modern Greek, while the other speaks a Turkic variety. The assertion of Ukrainian national identity during wartime also influences the self-awareness of ethnic minorities, particularly the Azov Greeks. This process can be seen from several perspectives: the shared experience of war, the role of culture and language in preserving identity, the interaction between Ukrainian and Azov Greek identities, and the process of decolonization.

One of the representatives of contemporary resistance literature is Mykola Akhbash (born in 1996) from the small village of Yalta (named after the famous city in Crimea) near the currently-occupied Mariupol. As a student, Akhbash developed

an interest in the history, culture, and language of his ancestors, Crimean Greeks who were relocated to the Azov region in 1778. Since then, he has learned from the elders of his village, who preserved the Rumeika language in their communication, and now he does his best to keep the ancestral language alive. He publishes his works using both the Ukrainian and Greek alphabets, providing literal translations into Ukrainian. This not only allows his followers who do not speak Rumeika to understand the texts but also serves as bilingual educational material. His mission is to preserve and pass on to his contemporaries the historical memory, traditions, and experiences of his ancestors, with language being the most important element, as it embodies the “ethnic code”.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF RESISTANCE LITERATURE IN THE AZOV GREEK COMMUNITY**

The emergence of poetic works in the Azov Greek community that can be classified as resistance literature can be seen as a consequence of socio-cultural processes within the community, driven by external circumstances. The formation of this distinct community in Ukraine occurred under political oppression, both in Crimea and later in the Azov region. Researchers studying the ethnogenesis of the Azov Greeks note that they “are descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Crimea (Taurida), who developed in isolation from their historical homeland under conditions of national, cultural, and religious oppression by the Crimean Tatars” (Yakubova 1999, 11). According to the official narrative accepted in Russian and later Soviet historiography, the relocation from Crimea to the Azov region was portrayed as an act of assistance by the Russian government in the national, cultural, and religious liberation of the Greeks of Taurida (11). However, recent archival data indicate that the situation of the Greeks in Crimea was not dire enough for them to willingly agree to relocation, which was “extremely beneficial for the Russian Empire for economic and political reasons” (Hedo and Aradzhyni 2019, 36). Consequently, significant psychological pressure and economic incentives were applied to the Greeks (37).

During the Soviet era, the Greeks of the Azov region, also known as the Mariupol Greeks, suffered during the so-called “Greek Operation” of 1937–1938: 4,938 individuals were arrested on fabricated charges, 4,237 of whom were executed (Džuha<sup>3</sup> 2017, 31). In this way, “economically strong and culturally organized, and therefore ‘dangerous’ and unacceptable for the creation of a homogeneously unified Soviet society, national minorities were liquidated” (Hedo and Gridina 2019, 25). The great cynicism of Soviet leaders lay in the fact that, in their efforts to gain the loyalty of the elite from various ethnic groups, they initially pursued a policy of “indigenization” (from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s), which encouraged the national and cultural development of minorities. However, later, during the mass repressions of 1937–1938, they destroyed the most talented and active members of these communities.

During the period of indigenization, the Rumeika-speaking Azov Greeks laid the foundation for literature in their native language, developed theater and print-

ing, published their own newspapers and magazines, and introduced Greek language studies in schools. However, after the repressions, their voice was silenced for 25 years. It was only after the rehabilitation of the founder of Rumeika literature, Heorhii Kostoprav, in 1962 that national consciousness began to awaken again among the Azov Greek intelligentsia, allowing them to reconnect with the creative achievements of the previous generation.

Since the official Soviet policy of the time did not encourage national cultural expression, the promotion of Rumeika literature at the state level was not possible. Instead, Rumeika writers prepared self-published collections, with twelve produced between 1964 and 1986 (Kutna 2014, 46). The liberalization of society in the late 1980s and Ukraine's subsequent independence in 1991 created conditions that allowed for the publication of Rumeika folklore collections and numerous authored works. Most Rumeika literary works, primarily poetry, were published in the 1990s, but this process slowed in the 2000s. The older generation had published all they had accumulated during the period of prohibition, while the younger generation was not ready to absorb it. For many young people, the Rumeika language had become difficult to understand, and interest shifted towards learning Modern Greek, the language of their ancestral homeland. Currently, Rumeika is considered an endangered language (Chernukhin 2018) and is used only in limited contexts. Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, much of the area where the Greeks of the Azov region live compactly is under occupation, making the situation with the language critical.

### **MYKOLA AKHBASH AS A POET AND LANGUAGE ACTIVIST FOR THE MARIUPOL GREEK COMMUNITY**

Mykola Akhbash studied law and now works as a police officer. He left Mariupol before the occupation and spent a year serving on the frontline in Avdiivka, where he was wounded. After surgery and rehabilitation, he resumed his service while continuing to write poems in Rumeika. His most productive creative period was in the spring of 2022, during the tragic events in his hometown of Mariupol: airstrikes, destruction of homes, and thousands of civilian deaths. Akhbash wrote poems at night, unable to sleep – Avdiivka was never quiet, with shelling hitting both residents' homes and the police station. Akhbash deeply feels the tragedy of the war in Ukraine, and mourns for his native village Yalta, which cannot return to due to the Russian occupation. He sees Ukraine as his homeland, which he has vowed to defend, like tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens from different ethnic backgrounds.

Akhbash primarily shares his original and self-translated works and his translations of the poems by other Ukrainian poets through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Telegram. In addition to poetry, he posts about local history, introducing his followers to various elements of the everyday life and rituals of the Azov Greeks. He creates thematic vocabulary lists in Rumeika and expresses his views on the self-identification of the Azov Greeks, their ethnogenesis, cultural orientations, and ideological beliefs. The name of his Telegram channel, "FOS",<sup>4</sup> which means

“light” in Rumeika, is symbolic. The author sees himself as an educator; an attentive observer might liken him to the mythological Prometheus, bringing light to others.

Akhbash’s first poems in Rumeika were published starting in 2018 in the newspaper *Elliny Ukrainy* (The Greeks of Ukraine). In an interview with a Mariupol news site, he explains:

Gradually, I began to understand that this is part of my people and thus a part of me. However, even researching it was difficult, as much of our cultural heritage was gradually disappearing with the oldest bearers of the culture. Each subsequent generation had less knowledge of the ancestral language and culture. [...] I only began writing in Rumeika, the language of my family, at the age of 22. In school, I studied Modern Greek, which is grammatically similar to Rumeika, so I already had an understanding of how it works. (Anonymous 2024)

Assuming an ideological and educational role, and considering the political controversies surrounding the use of the Russian language in Ukraine, Akhbash proposed replacing the tradition established since the 1970s of using Russian characters to write in Rumeika (Beleckij 1969) with writing practices in the Ukrainian alphabet. Since 2022, he and other language activists have actively used the Ukrainian alphabet in their publications. Additionally, Akhbash compiled and recorded a poetic Rumeika video alphabet, which was presented in Kyiv in 2023 and can be found on YouTube (Rumeku hlosa::Rumeiska mova::Roumean 2023).

According to Ivana Hostová, “when a text is translated from a small language into a dominant language, the source text changes its status – it becomes more important, sometimes even canonical” (Bassnett et al. 2022, 12). For Akhbash, Ukrainian is the dominant language, reflecting its elevated status in Donetsk Oblast – a region that had long been predominantly Russian-speaking – especially after the outbreak of hostilities in 2014 and the proclamation of the Donetsk People’s Republic. Figures like Akhbash are driving changes in the region’s linguistic landscape. In an interview he points out, “I feel a certain responsibility for what I do, so I will continue my work. I believe that we will return to our native Azov and once again revive and develop Greek culture. Because I cannot imagine it without Ukrainian Mariupol” (Donetska 2022).

The poems “Da yirísúm” (We will be back) and “Pirmién mas” (Keep waiting for us) were written in April 2022, after the first humanitarian convoys began evacuating people from Mariupol, weakened by hunger, cold, and the horrors they had endured. People outside the city began to grasp the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe, while inside, fighting continued with artillery shelling and airstrikes. These poems are imbued with a deep sense of anxiety for the fate of Mariupol, which was among the first cities targeted by the invaders. The refrain “We will be back, we will surely be back” is repeated like a mantra. This collective “we” represents inhabitants forced to leave their hometown. As Mariupol was being ravaged by the invaders, the poet, speaking on behalf of its residents, pleads with the city to hold on and wait for liberation: “We beg you, darling: [...] Hold on!.. Take care!.. Keep waiting for us!..” (“Siéna parakalíhum, kardúla: [...] Na vastáks!.. Na filáks!.. Pirmién mas!..”, Akhbash 2022). In both poems, the city is personified.



The poem “Kíiv ti Mariúpol” (Kyiv and Mariupol, April 2022) presents a touching and emotional dialogue between a wise old man (Kyiv) and his granddaughter (Mariupol). This perspective allows the events in Mariupol to be seen in the context of Ukrainian history, comparing the invasion by the eastern neighbor to the Mongol-Tatar and Nazi invasions. The grandfather comforts his granddaughter with visions of a peaceful “paradise-like” life that will be possible after Ukrainians and Greeks return. Until then, everything happening is just a deep sleep.

In “Lialí” (Tulip, April 2022), Akhbash gives a red tulip a voice and knowledge of the truth. The poem’s protagonist, whose mixed feelings are stirred by the sight of a red flower amidst a burned village, reflects on the objective reality of war, where weapons and rage are necessary. However, the sight of this flower unsettles him, prompting a dialogue with it. The tulip, possessing ancient wisdom, explains that only the body dies, while the soul is eternal, offering true solace. This knowledge transforms even the possibility of death from an enemy bullet into a liberation of the soul from its earthly body, reuniting it with God. The poet poetically reinterprets the phrase “Heroes do not die!” (first used during the farewell to the “Heavenly Hundred”<sup>5</sup> on Maidan and now continuing to honor fallen defenders of Ukraine), emphasizing eternal remembrance for the defenders of their homeland.

In “Piniéshuk t pikrútsik tsigárka” (I smoke a bitter cigarette, December 2022), Akhbash describes a gloomy landscape to convey the concentrated and anxious mood of the protagonist, who watches the enemy’s advance. The cigarette, a traditional solace for soldiers, reflects the bitterness of the hero’s emotions. The events – the invasion by the “brotherly” neighboring state – resemble an absurd theater, with clouds forming a black curtain. The gusts of wind are likened to the sound of a bell tolling in warning, but that same wind also serves as a voice from heaven, reminding of an ancient truth: “Aftós akh t spathí vríshyt t thánat-t, / Tys míia siukón tu spathí-t!” (Rumeika for biblical “for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” [Matthew 26:52]).

In Mykola Akhbash’s poetry, nature serves as a powerful means of representing the emotions and feelings experienced by the lyrical protagonist. In “Katakhniía” (Fog, December 2022), written in the tenth month of the war, fog symbolizes despair and doubt. The lyrical hero observes the dense fog through the window, comparing it to a wave, a white fur coat, or a cloud that obscures the truth from him. The questions what is good and what is evil, reminiscent of the existential questions posed by Giorgos Seferis’ character in the poem “Helen”, when he doubts the boundary between truth and falsehood. However, the poem concludes with the hero’s determination to find his own inner light and to be a beacon for others. In “Vrushý” (Rain, February 2023), the anticipation of rain creates a symbolic image of cleansing the land from evil. The protagonist, exhausted by waiting, calls upon the heavens to purify the earth, embodying his hope for the triumph of good over evil.

In the poem “Thiélma” (Desire, December 2022), the poet addresses Saint Basil, a traditional figure in New Year carols within the culture of the Azov Greeks,<sup>6</sup>

with a single wish: for the weapons to fall silent and for peace to come. The simplicity and sincerity of this plea reflect the hero's deep longing for peace.

Akhbash's poetry often delves into ethnocultural themes. In the poem "Chulí Kharón" (Steppe Charon, January 2023), he reimagines the figure of Charon from ancient Greek mythology, adapting him to the local context of the Azov steppes. In this version, Charon travels not by river but across the steppe, using a cart pulled by an ox instead of a boat. This imagery resonates with the history of the deportation of Greeks from Crimea in the 18th century and the ritual sacrifices of oxen during local festivals. The poem is rich in symbols of ancestry, historical memory, and tradition, making it particularly poignant during wartime, as Charon becomes the ferryman for the souls of fallen soldiers.

The poem "Dos-m t sher-s" (Give me your hand, May 2023) tells the story of a romantic dream of a nighttime walk along the seashore that the lyrical hero longs to share with a loved one. The sea, to which the poet feels a deep connection, symbolizes dreaminess and detachment, as this journey occurs only in dreams, not in reality. The following excerpt highlights the poem's rich imagery:

Come now, my dear, come walk with me!  
Let us go down to the shore.  
I will show you this evening's sunset:  
How the sun bathes its rays in the sea,  
When the shining day comes to its close, And night  
Spills its black paint everywhere.<sup>7</sup>

The poem "Simá t Salhýr Yení Salá" (Near Velykyi Yanisol, May 2024) is written from the perspective of a soldier, an ethnic Greek, who perished defending his native village. The lyrical hero lovingly describes the nature of his homeland, which has become his final resting place. The village Velykyi Yanisol (historically known as Salhýr Yení Sala), the Mokri Yaly River, and the Murza burial mound are all topographical references, but the landscape painted by the author broadly represents the Azov steppes:

There, where the slow current of Mokri Yaly  
Carries its green blood away,  
A steppe-born artery it seems to be,  
There, at morning, I was slain –  
By the Murza mound I stretched myself,  
Upon the trampled emerald carpet.<sup>8</sup>

This excerpt fuses the beauty of the native steppe with the memory of sacrifice. The river Mokri Yaly, described as carrying "green blood", transforms the landscape into a living organism. The image of the Murza mound and the "trampled emerald carpet" conveys both natural beauty and violence, turning the land into a witness of loss and historical trauma. Similar to Rumeika folk songs, where the deceased hero asks birds to deliver news of his death to loved ones, the hero of this poem commands the wind to carry the bitter news back to his native village.

## TRANSLATING UKRAINIAN WRITERS INTO RUMEIKA AS RESISTANCE

On his Telegram channel, Akhbash shares his own Rumeika translations of the works of classic Ukrainian poets. These are primarily centered on the writings of Taras Shevchenko and Lesya Ukrainka, whose lives, artistic legacies, and civic engagement have come to symbolize, both in Ukraine and abroad, a deep patriotism and the enduring struggle to affirm and preserve Ukrainian national identity. Each poem is presented in four versions: in Rumeika (using the Yalta-Urzuf dialect) in Ukrainian transliteration, in Greek transliteration, a literal retranslation into Ukrainian (Akhbash's goal is merely educational: the parallel texts may serve as a resource for those interested in studying Rumeika), and alongside the original Ukrainian version. For many works, Akhbash includes audio recordings in which he reads his translations aloud. Notably, while listening to these recordings, one can hear a similar rhythm and melody between the original and translated versions.

During these challenging times, Ukrainian culture serves as a source of inspiration, support, and solace for the poet. Akhbash finds beauty in the Ukrainian word, searching for shared motifs and symbols that help him endure the “dark” times and navigate the trials faced by his contemporaries. The first publication on his Telegram channel, dated April 2022, is a translation of Shevchenko's poem “Reve ta stohne Dnipro shyrokyi...” (“Roaring and Groaning Rolls the Dnipro”;<sup>9</sup> 1837). The choice of this poem for translation is clear: the turbulent times in the country evoke a sense of unrest in society and a fervent desire to fight against threats, stop the enemy, and liberate the homeland. The mood of anxiety and resistance resonates throughout the poem. Akhbash seeks precise words to convey the mood and preserve the style of the original.

In July 2024, Akhbash translated Shevchenko's poems “Mynaiut dni, mynaiut nochii...” (“From Day to Day, From Night to Night...”;<sup>10</sup> 1845) and “Sadok vyshnevyi kolo khaty” (“Beside the House, the Cherry's Flowering”, 1847). In the former, the author reflects on his harsh fate and the hardships faced by an oppressed people. The translator effectively conveys the stance of the poet as a fighter who calls on readers to take active steps for the benefit of their people and their country. Rhetorical questions and addresses present a call for resistance and the destruction of chains. In the latter, he praises the beauty of Ukrainian nature and admires the simple, natural rhythm of a hardworking person's life, alternating between labor and rest. Akhbash adheres to the oral poetic style of the work, creating the impression of a folk song.

In April 2022, Akhbash published a translation of Hryhorii Skovoroda's poem “De Libertate”;<sup>11</sup> which calls for resistance against enslavement and oppression. The young poet shares Skovoroda's perception of freedom as the most valuable treasure in a person's life, incomparable to any material wealth.

On Akhbash's channel, civic poetry dominates, particularly in his translations of Lesya Ukrainka. For example, in his April 2022 translation of Ukrainka's poem “Slovo, chomu ty ne tvrdaia krytsia...” (“Why are my words not like steel...”;<sup>12</sup> 1896), Akhbash addresses the power of words as a mighty weapon in human hands, capable

of punishing oppressors. The two poets use personification, addressing the word as a living being, striving to refine this unique weapon and pass it on to “strong avengers”. Precise rhetorical questions incite action, resistance, and struggle, reinforcing faith in the immortality and power of the word. The translation of Ukrainka’s poem “Skriz plach, i stohin, i rydannia” (“Vain Tears”, 1890) in September 2022 carries powerful symbolic meaning. Both the original author and Akhbash appear to denounce passivity, criticizing those who expect change from others. In today’s context, Akhbash’s translation becomes a call to action, urging everyone to join the struggle against the aggressor, as no one has the moral right to stand aside when their nation’s fate is at stake. In April 2022, Akhbash also translated Ukrainka’s philosophical poem “Contra spem spero!” (1890). This poem conveys a life-affirming mood, expressing hope for a better future and rejecting pessimism. Similarly, Akhbash seeks to believe in goodness and holds out hope for peace and tranquility.

The motifs of hope and longing for his native Ukraine are evident in Akhbash’s translation of Ukrainka’s poem “Nadiia” (“Hope”, 1880). The lyrical hero is far from home, yearning to return, much like thousands of modern refugees displaced by war. They dream of coming home, returning to their land. Akhbash’s translation of the poem “Kinets podorozhi” (“The end of travel”,<sup>13</sup> 1888) describes the road home, using diminutives to express intimacy. Similar symbolism and motifs can be found in his translations of poems like “Sonechko vstalo, prokynulos yasne” (“The sun has risen, bright and clear”, 1888), “Velykeie misto. Budyntyky vysoki” (“Great city. Tall buildings”, 1888), and “Proshchai Volyn!” (“Farewell, Volyn!”, 1888). In his translations of “Dali, vse dali” (“Further, ever further!”, 1888), “Kraso Ukrainy, Podollia!” (“The beauty of Ukraine, Podollia!”, 1888), and “Bakhchysarai” (1891) that belong to landscape poetry, we see a deep admiration for Ukraine’s landscapes. Akhbash conveys his spiritual identity in the context of space that he depicts both in his original and translated poetry.

## TYPES OF NATIONALISM IN MYKOLA AKHBASH’S POETRY

Ukraine’s national identity has been shaped by historical and political dynamics, particularly after the Maidan revolution and Russia’s subsequent actions: “In Ukraine distinct regional identities overlapped with competing views of international identification: with Russia or with Europe. [...] Paradoxically, this resulted in a stronger consensus in the rest of Ukraine for a new, civic national identity outside the Russian sphere of influence” (Rutland 2023, 24). This shift parallels Akhbash’s literary expression, integrating his ethnic heritage into Ukraine’s broader civic identity. His poetry reflects this synthesis, reinforcing unity while celebrating diversity.

Akhbash’s work transcends ethnic expression, intertwining the North Azovian Greek community’s identity with the Ukrainian national struggle. His dual focus – preserving Rumeika as a cultural treasure while embedding it in a common Ukrainian framework – embodies a civic and polyethnic vision of nationalism. By using the Ukrainian alphabet for Rumeika and translating Ukrainian classics, Akhbash bridges ethnic heritage and national belonging, showing the compatibility of diverse cultural traditions within a shared identity. His translations of Shevchenko

and Ukrainka not only preserve their ethos but also reinterpret it through a Greek-Ukrainian lens.

Through these artistic choices, Akhbash presents nationalism as a dynamic and inclusive force. His works show how ethnic diversity enriches Ukraine's cultural fabric, with literature serving as a powerful means to foster unity in diversity.

## CONCLUSION

The Russian invasion has caused anger, indignation, and confusion among Ukrainians. However, poets have their own coping mechanism, channeling their experiences into creativity through poetic practice. Mykola Akhbash's original Rumeika poetry and translation work exemplifies the emergence of resistance literature within a national minority in Ukraine, responding to the aggressive actions of a neighboring state. This new form of literature can be seen as an outcome of the socio-cultural dynamics within the Azov Greek community, shaped by the impact of external events. The use of Ukrainian alphabet for Rumeika despite the tradition of usage of Russian alphabet is a symbolic step, bringing together the ethnic with the national. In his original poetry Akhbash turns to Rumeika ethno-cultural symbols that reveal the identity of his people, and by translating his Rumeika poems into Ukrainian, he builds bridges with the dominant Ukrainian linguistic and cultural tradition. Similarly, when translating the works of Ukrainian classics into Rumeika, Akhbash reinforces these connections and integrates a Ukrainian national code into Rumeika discourse. By preserving Rumeika while embracing Ukrainian cultural symbols, his literary work demonstrates that national identity in Ukraine is not monolithic, but enriched by its multicultural heritage.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Transliteration of Ukrainian from Cyrillic alphabet is based on norm of CMU Resolution No. 55 of 27 January, 2010 "On Streamlining the Transliteration of the Ukrainian alphabet in Latin".
- <sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Ukrainian are by the present authors, the translations from Rumeika are by Y. L.
- <sup>3</sup> Transliteration of Russian from Cyrillic alphabet is based on the norm of ISO 9 transliteration system.
- <sup>4</sup> Transliteration of Rumeika from Cyrillic alphabet is based on norm of CMU Resolution No. 55 of January 27, 2010 "On streamlining the transliteration of the Ukrainian alphabet in Latin", while conventional letter combinations дъ, тъ are regarded as Greek letters δ, θ and are transliterated according to Greek – ISO 843 transliteration system.
- <sup>5</sup> On February 2014, over 100 Ukrainians were murdered on the Maidan (Independence Square) in the center of Kyiv. In Ukrainian public discourse, they were called the Heavenly Hundred and stand as an eternal example of courage.
- <sup>6</sup> As many Hellenists note, the mentality and culture of the Crimean (Azov) Greeks were shaped by Christianity, which served as a core element of their ethnic identity. However, their worldview also included a blend of beliefs and superstitions, forming a unique culture at the crossroads of Hellenic and Slavic worlds (Yakubova 2010, 197).
- <sup>7</sup> "Ády, dzhián-m, adáma-m! / As paiénum atóra st yalo'! / Da sie diks t yilvasílma apópsa: / Týha yíls luz t akhtýds s ta nirá, / Ódy miéra labró koft / Ti níkhta / Tiunón t mávur buiá apadú."

- <sup>8</sup> “Atí, pu fiérin t prásiun yéma-t / Arhó Sylákh Yalýtyk riéma, / Damár chulýtyk týha yen, / Atí ho tu birnó skutótha – / Simá t Murzá ubá aplótha / Pas t khularó tilím patmién.”
- <sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Ukrainian classics’ works into English are by Vera Rich.
- <sup>10</sup> Translated into English by Ethel Lilian Voynich.
- <sup>11</sup> Translated into English by S. P. Scherer.
- <sup>12</sup> Translated into English by P. Tempest.
- <sup>13</sup> The titles of this and further poems of Ukrainka are translated by the present authors.

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## The topos of Mariupol in Ukrainian and Italian military literature: Comparative aspects

OLEZIA VEKLYCH

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.9

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Slovak Academy of Sciences

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### The topos of Mariupol in Ukrainian and Italian military literature: Comparative aspects

Italian literature. Ukrainian literature. Diary. Russian aggression. Novel.

This article examines the depiction of military events in Mariupol at the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion, comparing Italian and Ukrainian literary narratives. The analysis focuses on two texts: *L'assedio: Il romanzo di Mariupol* (The siege: A novel about Mariupol, 2022) by Andrea Nicastro and *#Mariupol'Nadiia* (*#Mariupol#Hope*, 2023) by Nadiia Sukhorukova. Both authors are journalists and eyewitnesses to the events they describe. The research explores how these narratives diverge in their stylistic features, character typologies, and linguistic choices, reflecting broader cultural and societal contexts in Italy and Ukraine.

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Olesia Veklych

Mykola Zerov Department of Theory and Practice of Translation  
from Romance Languages

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv  
Ukraine

olesyaveklych@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-6651-4969

The theme of war has always been present in world literature and unfortunately, war-related themes remain highly relevant today. The topic of the war in Ukraine has not disappeared from the media since 2014, after the Russian annexation of the Crimea caused destructions in many spheres of life and became the impetus for social and cultural changes. The beginning of the full-scale war brought Ukraine to the center of the world's attention, and its authors have created texts that serve as evidence of war crimes and function as diaries that document events and convey people's emotions and feelings at the time. Notably, most of these texts dedicated to the war in Ukraine are written by non-professional authors – volunteers, soldiers, doctors, and others – as well as journalists who capture in their work the time, events, and places they experienced, whether physically or emotionally (Sydorenko 2021). One place that became a symbol of Russian aggression and war crimes is the city of Mariupol, which was almost completely destroyed in 2022. The books that form the basis of this article, *L'assedio: Il romanzo di Mariupol* (The siege: A novel about Mariupol, 2022) by Andrea Nicastro and *#Mariupol' #Nadiia* (*#Mariupol' #Hope*, 2023) by Nadiia Sukhorukova, describe the beginning of the full-scale war in Mariupol. Given the similarities between the two texts, a comparative analysis can be made of how places, events, and key concepts are depicted in both books. The primary aim of this article is to explore the differing depictions of the military events in Mariupol in Italian and Ukrainian literature, and to determine how social and literary processes interact. Despite a growing number of literary and discourse studies, comparative analyses of Ukrainian military literature remain limited, and the majority of such research is produced by Ukrainian scholars (Chornyĭ and Malins'ka 2023). While studies on the war in Ukraine also exist internationally – including in Italy – most focus on historical, social, or political dimensions rather than on literary representation (Melotti, Villano and Pivetti 2024). Notably, this research also refers to statistical studies that examine Italian citizens' perceptions of the war in Ukraine (Isernia, Cozzi Fucili and Martini 2023).

As for the methodology of the research, the following analysis employs several methodological approaches: generalization and systematization to identify common stylistic and thematic features in the texts; linguistic cultural analysis (Betsenko 2019) to contextualize literary tendencies within broader sociocultural frameworks; comparative analysis to elucidate stylistic and ideological differences between the two national literatures.

## NARRATIVE FORMS

At first glance, the books *L'assedio: Il romanzo di Mariupol* and *#Mariupol' #Nadiia* share numerous similarities. For instance, both texts can be partially classified as diaries, as both Sukhorukova and Nicastro spent the initial days of the full-scale war in Mariupol and documented either firsthand experiences or stories recounted by those they interacted with. This observation corresponds with the analysis presented by Olha Sheliukh, who notes that Ukrainian military literature is frequently structured in the form of diaries or memoirs (Sheliukh and Lehka 2021).

For the Ukrainian reader, the diary is an obvious choice of genre – almost everyone has had some experience of living through war, hearing the sounds of explosions or being forced to leave home. Such works can also be therapeutic for the reader (Chornyi and Tereshchenko 2024), who could have had similar experiences to the author's. Unlike Soviet fiction on World War II, which was designed to form a heroic cult of the victorious state, modern literature resorts to a commemorative understanding of the war. In it, the priority is not heroism or victory, but rather the traumatic consequences at the level of specific spaces, generations, individuals, and entire nations (Pukhons'ka 2022).

The title of Sukhorukova's book is symbolic: "Hope" in Ukrainian is *Nadiia*, which is also the author's name. It is based on notes originally published as multiple posts on Facebook, initially intended for family and friends, which eventually reached a wider audience. As a result, the short texts were compiled into a book, which later served as the basis for a documentary film by Maks Lytvynov (Telekanal STB 2023), highlighting the cultural significance of Sukhorukova's work in contemporary Ukraine.

In contrast, Nicastro's book is a novel based on real events. Such fiction with documentary details can seem more convenient and fuller (Polishchuk 2016). Nicastro writes in the preface: "Before letting you read these pages, I have cleaned them of the crudest news because I realize that believing in reality is more difficult than believing in what we create with our imagination. The first displaces us, the second, daughter of experience, we know how to recognize in some way"<sup>1</sup> (2022, 7).

The Italian reader is distant from Ukrainian context, and a detailed description of military events may seem too hard to perceive and may look biased, so the main goal of the author is to make reader believe him. As a result, Nicastro creates a completely new story. His approach reveals a key difference in the target audience: while Ukrainian literature speaks from within the trauma, Italian literature seeks to translate that trauma for an external, less involved readership.

## TOPOS OF MARIUPOL

Despite some differences in the writing formats of Sukhorukova and Nicastro, several key concepts, images, and places were selected, the descriptions of which are found in both texts and pertain to the topos of Mariupol.

It is logical to start the analysis with the image of the city of Mariupol itself, which is the main setting. For the Italian readers, Nicastro tries to describe the city as a casual observer, with the aim of giving a realistic picture with a historical background:

After the Cossack time, after the era of the tsars, Mariupol became ugly, polluted, inhabited by the servants of the Soviets. A city of workers dirty with coal and with short lives like those of the Cossacks, but not at all free. The inhabitants died not from battles, but from diseases that spread in the factory. In Mariupol they set science fiction films, when they had to show a planet destroyed by the greed of man. (2023, 73)

In this description reader can percept rather a negative view of city. Nicastro calls the city "ugly" and compares it to a planet, destroyed by the greed of men.

At the same time, Sukhorukova offers an intimate, nostalgic portrayal of her hometown. She asks her city that she will never be able to see for forgiveness for everything, and at the same time, she accepts it with all the its natural features:

My beautiful, my unique, my different, my most favorite city. Forgive us. We took you for granted, and you were a great happiness. We walked through your streets and almost did not notice how beautiful you are, what a light and bright character you have. In autumn, you covered everything around with colorful leaves, in winter it snowed, in summer it was decorated with greenery, and in spring it bloomed with tulips and lilacs. (2023, 16)

Probably, the average residents of Mariupol could see all of the disadvantages of their city, but of course, the loss of home causes great pain. The author speaks to Mariupol as to a living creature. There is one more quotation that can describe the relationship between a person and a city: “Many do not like the gentle nickname Marik. The man sometimes asked: ‘What kind of Marik? Where did you get this word?’ And my adult nephew Danylo calls the city only that way. This nickname was given to Mariupol by those closest to it. Its inhabitants” (28).

The cited passage, referring to the city’s affectionate nickname “Marik”, demonstrates the verbalization of the conceptual opposition of “own” versus “the other” in relation to the city of Mariupol. Such an opposition may manifest through possessive relationships, particularly in terms of belonging/non-belonging and spiritual affinity/difference (Dubchak 2009). By employing this nickname, the author distinguishes the residents of Mariupol as those who share a unique spiritual connection with the city, thereby identifying them as “own”. Such a conceptual opposition is not observed in the Italian book.

Another oppositional concept is the concept of home. Sukhorukova once again reveals her emotional attachment to the city by using the phrase “I want to go home” (2023, 152) at the end of the work, following her descriptions of destruction. Nicastro says in one of the paragraphs, that there is no Mariupol to get back: “‘Do you hope to return to Mariupol one day?’ ‘Mariupol no longer exists’” (2023, 254). All of Sukhorukova’s characters dream of returning to their homes, as shown in Maks Lytvynov’s documentary film, while Nicastro’s characters demonstrate the acceptance of the situation. As in the previous example, Nicastro’s writing does not contain emotional coloring and demonstration of attachment to a specific geographical space.

In fact, the emotionality of the narrative is also decisive for determining the role of the author. Although both authors have witnessed the city firsthand, the difference in their roles is evident. According to Alina Chervinchuk (2020), Ukrainian military literature distinguishes between two types of authors: the author-participant (a soldier or combatant) and the author-observer (a journalist or non-combatant). While Chervinchuk classifies journalists as observers, in this case, Sukhorukova can be regarded as a participant, as the city is portrayed through the lens of her personal experience.

The observer’s perspective is evident in Nicastro’s writing, particularly when he compares the military actions in Ukraine to events such as those in Baghdad or the September 11 attacks: “‘They’re treating us like the Twin Towers employees,’ Ivan observed. ‘Don’t panic, just stay at your desks and wait for instructions.’ Until

everything collapses” (2023, 63). For the Italian reader, these events are likely to be perceived from a distance – as a spectator rather than a participant. In contrast, Sukhorukova draws parallels between current events and World War II, a historical trauma still remembered by the older generation in Ukraine.

### REPRESENTATION OF RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN CHARACTERS

The next aspect to be analyzed is the representation of Russian and Ukrainian individuals who encounter and confront each other in Mariupol. It is important to note that the Italian perception of these two nationalities – and, more broadly, of the war in Ukraine – remains ambiguous. According to the research of Pierangelo Isernia, Claudio Cozzi Fucili, and Sergio Martini (2023), 80% of Italians in 2022 condemn the Russian attack and 47% of those interviewed blame Putin and Russia for the conflict, but at the same time, 38% thought that Ukraine should surrender. The majority of Italians were against sending weapons to Ukraine, with percentages of those in favor rarely exceeding 45%, and this opposition has remained stable over time. Moreover, according to the article of Gianino Melotti, Paola Villano, and Monica Pivetti, over the last few years, Italian populist parties have had links to the Putin regime, even if the situation changed after the beginning of the full-scale war (2024). As a result, although most Italians express support for the Ukrainians, a part of them tend to sympathize with the Russians at the same time.

The perception of Russian soldiers in the two books can be compared in the depiction of similar events, particularly in describing the moment of leaving Mariupol. The Italian author describes the Russians as surprisingly gentle people:

Olga, her ex-husband, her father-in-law Panos, and their children Angelika and Misha walked all day and left Mariupol towards the West, not towards Russia. They did not encounter any checkpoints of the defenders of the city, but only of Russian troops. They passed three checkpoints on foot. The soldiers who besieged them read their documents, asked the husband and father-in-law to undress to check whether they had hidden weapons, Nazi tattoos, but they did not ask for money, did not threaten and even gave them water, energy bars and pieces of bread. They were kind, all in all. (Nicastro 2023, 249)

In this passage, Nicastro offers a realistic yet neutral depiction of the checkpoint control process, presented in a manner that is easily accessible to an Italian reader. In contrast, Sukhorukova describes a similar scene in a markedly different way. Russian soldiers are portrayed as entirely negative figures – a perspective that is also emphasized in the corresponding documentary film, which highlights their hypocrisy:

But the occupiers at the checkpoints were tired and angry. They only glanced at their passports, quickly checked their phones, and barely spoke. [...] We were driving in a wrecked car, with no windows and bullet holes. Everyone was shocked and prayed to get to the place we were going to, to survive. The occupiers stopped us and asked us questions that sounded like abuse. “Aren’t your children cold in a car with broken glass?” “Cover the windows with something, because the children will catch a cold.” “What caring creatures.” They launch rockets at residential areas, bomb shelters with women and children, and now they are worried that the children of Mariupol do not get colds! Everything turned upside down in me. Just like from gunshots. (2023, 95)



As shown here, the lexical choices in the two books differ significantly. The Italian book is written in a neutral tone characteristic of contemporary European media. In contrast, the Ukrainian author makes deliberate use of profanity and slang to convey the emotional depth of the individual and national pain experienced during the war. It is important to note that, according to Iryna Tsariova (2023), following the onset of the full-scale invasion, the use of obscene language has become normalized in Ukrainian speech and can be regarded as a distinctive feature of contemporary Ukrainian military discourse. In addition, the Ukrainian author decides to describe the consequences of the shelling to emphasize the consequences of the actions of the Russian soldiers.

Nicastro chose another strategy of writing. During the presentation of the Ukrainian translation of his book in Lviv, he stated:

We all know, even if it's difficult to say, but we all know that not all the Russians are monsters. We all know, that it's difficult to say here in this moment of history but it's true and in the book, there are Russian characters as well with their own conviction that might be wrong that are subjected to the decision of an authority that does not allow them to decide. But there are Russians that have human feelings as well. And there are Ukrainians who are on the right side of history that behave improperly, behave in a rough and illegal way, because life is like that. Because life does not mean that since you are a country that has been invaded all the citizens are saints. Unfortunately, it's not true. So, describing the reality, it means to put lots of grain in the picture. Because we know who is right and who is wrong, but inside the picture each person has his own free will and he can decide either to be a good guy or behave like a criminal and could be on the two sides of the barricade. (Biblioteka na Rynku 2023)

In contemporary Ukrainian literature, journalism, and social media, the Russian nation is often portrayed in a highly negative light. In contrast, Italian cultural discourse tends to adopt a more neutral stance, frequently seeking to highlight positive traits even among Russian characters. As Nicastro noted in an interview, he depicts Russians as ordinary, well-meaning individuals – an approach consistent with the tone of modern Italian social media. This reflects a broader sentiment in Europe, where as in Ukraine, there is growing fatigue with the ongoing war. The following citation from his interview further illustrates this perspective:

I am quite rude, so I'll tell you the truth. The perception of the Ukrainian war in the western environment was very attentive, very passionate and people actually felt a great degree of empathy and sympathy for the Ukrainian struggle. These things are changing. These feelings are changing and changing for political reason, for economical reason and maybe for natural reason because people are tired. Tired like you are tired, but you are forced to fight even if you are tired, instead abroad they have a choice or they think to have a choice. So yes, the attention is decreased. (Biblioteka na Rynku 2023)

In response to the requests of his audience – who appear fatigued by constant attention to Ukraine and the persistent condemnation of Russia – Nicastro introduces Russian characters into his novel. One of the protagonists, Pavel, is a Russian man whose story is told from the perspective of an ordinary individual living under the influence of propaganda and convinced that the Ukrainian government supports

a Nazi regime. The narrative also includes the character of Ylenia, a Ukrainian woman who chooses to collaborate with the enemy. Through these portrayals, Nicastro illustrates that individuals on both sides of the conflict can embody both good and bad qualities. In this way, the author does not distinguish between “own” and “the other” among the characters. However, while it may seem that, unlike Sukhorukova, Nicastro offers a more sympathetic view of Russians, the novel’s final line reveals the author’s deeper stance. The question “Pavel, what have you done?” (2023, 317) appears as a direct response to Pavel’s boast about torturing Ukrainian soldiers. Natasha, Pavel’s girlfriend – who initially supports him – ultimately expresses disappointment and condemnation by the end of the narrative.

In Sukhorukova’s texts, Ukrainians are mostly depicted as victims. But as in *L’assedio: Il romanzo di Mariupol* as in *#Mariupol’#Nadiia* there is a similar scene, where Ukrainians living outside of Mariupol ask for large amounts of money for essentials, such as food and transport.

### THE IMAGE OF A CHILD

Another important aspect to consider is the representation of children, who are often portrayed in media discourse as the first and most vulnerable victims of war. Nicastro depicts them as helpless bystanders who suffer the consequences of the conflict:

I hope, I pray that the children really didn’t realize. Angelica says that the greatest pain was the death of the cat. And then she adds that even leaving her princess fur coat was sad. Misha instead regrets his drone with four propellers and the bedroom that is no longer there. Burned. I really wish that this was all that remained of the siege, but I can’t believe it. I know that they suffered, that they saw their grandmother die, carried like a sack of potatoes in the rain, condemned by the absurdity of no longer having a bed. These children walked in a war, with parents, incapable of defending themselves and soldiers ready to kill. How can they be left with only the nostalgia for the cat? (2023, 237)

This detailed portrayal of naïve children conveys the fear and brutality of war, in which adults themselves become “infantilized” – they are no longer able to protect their children, revealing a broader sense of helplessness.

Sukhorukova also expresses her deep sorrow for children, describing the changes in typical childlike behavior: “I felt very sorry for the children. They hardly spoke. But no one spoke, everyone listened to the planes” (2023, 82). Nevertheless, the child is contrasted with the adult in terms of worldview – during the war, both adults and children suffer and behave in strikingly similar ways. Furthermore, the child can also be depicted as a figure of strength, someone who offers hope amidst despair: “Mykyta seems to sense the shelling. A few minutes before it starts, he sobs in a baby bass voice, and then they immediately start shooting. Mykyta warns us. We lie down on the sofa, cover our heads with pillows, and listen to the roar of the plane” (36).

Cultural and literary studies often conceptualize an entire nation as either a child or an adult depending on the contexts. According to Ol’ha Sydorenko (2022), the Revolution of Dignity marked a pivotal moment of mental transformation for the Ukrainian people. The researcher characterizes this shift as “*deinfantilization*” –

a process through which Ukrainians began to view themselves not as passive objects of history but as active creators of it. This strategy of deinfantilization aligns with the role of the author-participant in Sukhorukova's work. In her book, all characters are held accountable for their actions. For instance, the author herself expresses regret for leaving her cat behind in Mariupol out of fear of missing her transportation. Nonetheless, the Russian soldiers are depicted as responsible for the atrocities committed. Nicastro, on the other hand, adopts an entirely different strategy – his discourse is neutral, with both soldiers and civilians relying more on their government than on their personal agency. Thus, the contrasting strategies of infantilization and deinfantilization emerge as a key difference between the two texts, influencing the authors' choices at various levels, including lexicon, imagery, and characterization. Another important distinction, as noted above, lies in the introduction of "own" and "the other" characters in Ukrainian literature, which aligns with the role of author-participant.

## CONCLUSION

Both texts examined in this article possess considerable cultural significance. Each plays a distinct role in documenting the events and social dynamics of the war, shaped by the differing perspectives of their intended audiences – the Italian reader as an observer, and the Ukrainian reader as a participant. Furthermore, both books can be regarded as documentary testimony to wartime atrocities and potential war crimes. Future research could expand the corpus to include a wider range of texts, including poetry or literature from other countries, thereby enriching the comparative framework and deepening the understanding of transnational representations of war.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian and Ukrainian are by the present author.

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## Beyond the market: Translation and cultural resistance in Slovak periodicals

IVANA HOSTOVÁ – EVA SPIŠIAKOVÁ –  
MARIANNA BACHLEDOVÁ – NATÁLIA TYŠŠ RONDZIKOVÁ –  
IGOR TYŠŠ – RÓBERT NOVOTNÝ – RICHARD GRAMANICH  
ŠTROMAJER

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.10

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Marianna Bachledová, Natália Tyšš Rondziková,

Igor Tyšš, Róbert Novotný, Richard Gramanich Štromajer 2025

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### Beyond the market: Translation and cultural resistance in Slovak periodicals

Big translation history. Periodical studies. Translation studies. Source language distribution. Linguistic power dynamics. Cultural resistance. Slovak culture.

This article contributes to the framework of big translation history, conceptualized by Diana Roig-Sanz and Laura Fólica in 2021, by analyzing medium-sized datasets of translations published in four Slovak periodicals, assembled by the authorial team in 2024, and applying data-driven methods to uncover broader historical and cultural patterns. The analytical lens used in this study is the source language, treated as a cultural good with varying degrees of symbolic capital within the ecosystem of world languages. An analysis of the literary periodical *Revue svetovej literatúry*, alongside data on the Slovak book market from 1995 to 2015, reveals that *Revue* – as a translation-focused periodical with a strong editorial direction and supported by cultural subsidies – can subvert dominant linguistic power relations by significantly diminishing the prominence of English as a source language. Moreover, a comparison of the choice and distribution of source languages in two periodicals from the late 1990s and two from the early 2020s allows for an exploration of questions such as the changing role of German as a language mediating international discourse and current knowledge, both in the years following the fall of the iron curtain and in the decades that followed.

This work was supported by EU – NextGenerationEU through the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia under the project No 09I03-03-V04-00667 “Information flows and zones of resistance: Translation in Slovak cultural and literary periodicals since the 1990s”<sup>1</sup>

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Ivana Hostová  
Department of Translation Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Constantine the Philosopher University  
in Nitra  
Slovakia  
ihostova@ukf.sk  
ORCID: 0000-0003-0901-3759

---

Eva Spišiaková  
Department of Translation Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Constantine the Philosopher University  
in Nitra  
Slovakia  
espisiakova@ukf.sk  
ORCID: 0000-0002-8691-5601

---

Natália Tyšš Rondziková  
Institute of World Literature  
Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Bratislava  
Slovakia  
natalia.rondzikova@savba.sk  
ORCID: 0000-0002-1743-5508

---

Róbert Novotný  
Independent Researcher  
novotnr0@gmail.com  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8261-8194

---

Marianna Bachledová  
Department of English and American  
Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica  
Slovakia  
marianna.bachledova@umb.sk  
ORCID: 0000-0002-5048-0343

---

Igor Tyšš  
Institute of World Literature  
Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Bratislava  
Slovakia  
igor.tyss@savba.sk  
ORCID: 0000-0002-3172-9369

---

Richard Gramanich Štromajer  
Department of English and American  
Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica  
Slovakia  
richard.stromajer@umb.sk  
ORCID: 0009-0000-4895-9999



TRANSLATIONS IN SLOVAK PERIODICALS  
FROM THE TRANSFORMATIVE 1990S TO THE PRESENT

In an era of intensified global information flows, curated periodicals run by engaged actors represent essential sites of intellectual and activist spaces that resist the unproblematic influx of profit-driven and consumerist content into a cultural-linguistic space. The analysis employs quantitative methods, alongside interpretation grounded in the political and economic context, to examine the flow of cultural-ideological goods, focusing on four non-mainstream Slovak-language print periodicals featuring translations. Through the examination of source languages in two publication outlets chosen to represent the 1990s and their two contemporary counterparts, the article aims to contribute to the understanding of societal changes, recent history, and the mechanisms of cultural resistance in a small Central European country marked by its “distinctive historical experiences” (Mälkssoo 2009, 657) and the complex dynamics shaping perceptions of both history (Bakuła 2020, 42) and present identity.

This study focuses on the geographical and linguistic-cultural space of the Slovak Republic from shortly after its establishment in 1993 to the present. The datasets, assembled in 2024 (Hostová et al. 2024a–d), contain information on translations published in four periodicals selected to provide a robust basis for comparing the non-commercial, non-mainstream cultural landscape during the period in question. Two of these periodicals – the literary magazine *Revue svetovej literatúry* (Review of world literature, hereafter *Revue*) and the feminist-cultural journal *Aspekt* (Aspect) – contribute primarily to an understanding of the final decade of the 20th century, a time when post-totalitarian Slovakia was navigating its path toward democracy (cf., e.g., Henderson 2004). The other two, the political-cultural *Kapitál* (Capital) and the literary *Verzia* (Version) shape – and are shaped by – the contemporary Slovak cultural landscape (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. Basic overview of the studied periodicals

Periodical type	1990s periodicals	2020s periodicals
Literary	<i>Revue svetovej literatúry</i> (covered in the dataset: 1995–2015)	<i>Verzia</i> (published since 2020, covered until 2024)
Cultural-political	<i>Aspekt</i> (published and covered: 1993–2004)	<i>Kapitál</i> (published since 2017, covered until 2024)

It can be hypothesized that the curated and subsidized periodicals – unlike mainstream print media which are largely motivated by profit – display distinct patterns in their choice of source languages and based on the assembled data, an answer is sought to the question of how the distribution of source languages differs between these two types of publications. To do that, the distribution of source languages for *Revue* and for translated books (Pliešovská and Popovcová Glowacky 2020) published between 1995 and 2015 is compared. The choice of source language is

closely tied to the extent to how far the publication platform aligns with the use of hegemonic English as a vehicle for cultural and informational imports after the fall of socialism and is also inevitably shaped by structural factors such as school language curricula and the linguistic competences of individual actors.

In the second analytical section, distant reading (Moretti 2000) of data on source languages in the four periodicals is employed to shed light on the broader cultural and social conditions of the temporal and spatial context under examination, and observe how periodicals, as actors and networks, actively shape public discourse.<sup>2</sup> To examine diachronic changes, two five-year periods were chosen during which the two sets of periodicals were in circulation: 1) 1995–1999 for *Revue* and *Aspekt* and 2) 2020–2024 for *Kapitál* and *Verzia*. The introductory sections of the article briefly outline the current state of research at the intersection of periodical and translation studies, with a particular focus on Slovak-related scholarship in this area. This is followed by a concise overview of the data collection methodology, leading into the analytical sections of the study.

## TRANSLATION STUDIES AND PERIODICAL STUDIES

Periodicals, as a loosely defined category encompassing any media with a serialized or (semi)regular appearance, include everything from newspapers and academic journals to zines and trade magazines; as such, they occupy an interesting position as a locus of scholarly research. Laura Fóllica, Diana Roig-Sanz, and Stefania Caristia highlight their programmatic nature, the importance of their visual presentation, and their strong embeddedness in the time and place of their creation (2020a, 3). Their ephemerality, relative ease of publication, and porousness in absorbing new ideas make them an ideal vehicle for closely observing historical and societal shifts, as well as the evolution of print culture and literary landscapes.

Although periodicals have been a well-established component of research in fields such as literary criticism and history since the late 19th century, periodical studies as a distinct research field began to emerge in the 1980s. A shift from primarily author-centric studies to considerations of broader publishing networks, along with questions of power structures, materiality, and interdisciplinarity, opened the field to a variety of new approaches and laid the foundation for possibilities enabled by the digital turn. An influential article by Sean Latham and Robert Scholes (2006) provided the field with clear contours for the 21st century, arguing for the perception of periodicals as primary texts and dynamic cultural artifacts that require their own methodological approaches. The field was further solidified by periodical-focused societies, such as ESPRit (founded in 2009; see also Stead et al. 2024), and the establishment of the *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* in 2010 (see Collier 2015 for an overview of the journal's first five years).

The intersection of periodical studies and translation studies initially emerged from the subfield of translation in media and journalism (van Doorslaer 2010, Bielsa and Bassnett 2009), but later expanded to include literary, cultural, and historical perspectives, developing into a distinctive and well-established subfield of translation studies. One of the most notable large-scale efforts to integrate periodical stud-

ies into translation research was the ERC project led by Roig-Sanz, *Social Networks of the Past: Mapping Hispanic and Lusophone Literary Modernity, 1898–1959*, which focused on Hispanic and Lusophone periodicals (CORDIS 2018). More recent research showcases the breadth of historical and geographical zones of inquiry for translated periodicals, ranging from 19th-century Texas (González Núñez 2023) and early 20th-century Estonia (Möldre 2024) to socialist Hungary (Sohár 2025) and present-day China (Xu and von Flotow 2024). Efforts to synthesize these various strands into an established branch of translation studies have resulted in several key publications, most notably the special issue of *Translation and Interpreting* titled “Translation and/in Periodical Publications”, edited by Constanza Guzmán (2019), as well as the edited volumes *Literary Translation in Periodicals: Methodological Challenges for a Transnational Approach* (Fólica, Roig-Sanz, and Caristia 2020b) and *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Media* (Bielsa 2022). The recent conference Translation and the Periodical, organized in September 2023 by Ghent University, further contributed to expanding global and local perspectives in this area.

The methods employed at the intersection of these two fields draw on tools from both disciplines and broadly apply a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative research, which relies on discourse analysis, paratextual studies, and the exploration of publishing and reception histories – including interviews with translators and editors – helps uncover linguistic and national power relations, ideological influences, and broader trends shaping the creation of periodicals. Quantitative research utilizes content analysis, bibliometric studies, and circulation data, which can then be employed in network analyses to trace the connections underpinning the flow of ideas across languages and cultures. Combining these in a mixed-methods study allows for cross-referencing numerical data with textual evidence, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of various trends in translated periodicals. Both approaches rely heavily on digital tools, which Latham and Scholes identify as a key driver of the rise of periodical studies (2006, 517).

However, this synthesis of two fields naturally also results in methodological challenges. Issues commonly associated with periodical research – such as the heterogeneity of the medium, the unsystematic categorization of different types of periodicals, and inconsistencies in digitization – are further complicated by the frequent lack of information regarding the authorship of translations, their source texts, and potential relay languages. In many cases, translations are not acknowledged at all, posing additional obstacles to systematic study.

## **SLOVAK RESEARCH ON TRANSLATION IN PERIODICALS**

Slovak literary and cultural periodicals, i.e., periodicals dedicated to literature and culture, emerged somewhat late, in the second half of the 19th century. Their profiles were shaped by national oppression, the need to defend the fledgling nation, readership’s low level of education, underdeveloped distribution limiting social impact, and the cultural lag of the Hungarian-ruled territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Consequently, most contemporary literary translations also appeared in periodicals. Until Czechoslovakia’s establishment in 1918, the Slovak cultural space heavily relied

on a network of periodicals that gradually established itself across readership strata and ideological orientations. Thus, in Slovak literary studies, researching periodical reception of literary works and authors became fundamental for obtaining information, confronting views, and contextualizing phenomena in the literary and cultural life of the period.

Although present since its inception, scholarly reflection on translation in Slovak literary periodicals began later. The first comprehensive work, a case study of magazine translations during the *Matica slovenská* period (1863–1875), appeared in 1961. Its author, Anton Popovič, using aesthetic norms and concepts of literary taste in his literary-historical analyses of Russian literature translations in that era's magazines, outlined the contemporary reception situation. Translation significantly contributed to this formation, considerably reconfiguring Slovak literature's stylistic, aesthetic, and thematic repertoire. This groundbreaking work offered a novel perspective on translation, allowing Popovič to pioneer new research into translation's role in Slovak literature.

Following Popovič and his understanding of translation as part of cultural history (Kusá 2005), analyses of foreign literature reception in periodicals have been integral to translation and reception history studies at the Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences (regardless of its institutional form) since the 1970s. Periodical reception was reflected in global monographic studies, like *Stručné dejiny umeleckého prekladu na Slovensku* (A brief history of literary translation in Slovakia). Researchers based at the Institute also authored specific case studies on foreign literary and non-literary works in literary magazines of the 1960s and 1970s (Truhlářová 1997, Bžoch 2011, Kusá 2011, Vajdová 2020).

After 2010, two new research types of translation in periodicals emerged: firstly, surveys as annotated bibliographies of socialist literary journal translations (Prišćová 2016, Varačková 2016, Mikleová 2018), and secondly, specific reception case studies. For instance, Natália Rondžiková (2020) discussed Russian journal translations in *Slovenské pohľady*. Additionally, Ľubica Pliešovská (2016) studied the Slovak reception of American literature (1945–1968), and Matej Laš (2019) examined translation criticism in Slovakia. These studies commonly integrate reception case study methodology with bibliographic research and historical contextualization, often with varying statistical evaluation.

Another line of research on literary and cultural periodicals includes smaller (Popovič 1965, Žemberová 1994) and larger syntheses (Timura 1998), as well as synthesizing-cataloguing works (Darovec and Barborík 1996) on literary magazines in Slovak literary history's turning points. While not primarily focused on translation, their renown highlights their substantial contribution to understanding 20th-century literary magazines' social and cultural roles. This line of research also includes (non-academic) memoir texts by translators who edited and collaborated with important 20th-century literary magazines, shedding light on periodical operations and translation practices (e.g., Feldek 2007, Passia and Magová 2015).

The last line of research focuses on translation in literary journals themselves, displaying two views: emphasis on the literary magazine as a historically specific

arena for translation (Tyšš 2017), overlapping with historiography (Rundle 2012); or a more traditional, receptive emphasis on translation including historical contextualization (Jánošíková 2016, Varačková 2018, Laš 2022).

In conclusion, research on literary and cultural periodicals has been present in Slovak translation studies since the 1960s. After 2015, studies increasingly focus on journal material itself, evident in bibliographic surveys and reception-bibliographic syntheses.

## METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION

Some metadata on translations in Slovak periodicals are accessible through the *kis3g.sk* portal<sup>3</sup> and, upon request, from the Slovak National Library.<sup>4</sup> However, the catalogs include only articles published up to 2012, and the metadata are neither exhaustive (e.g., lacking information on source languages in *Revue*) nor always accurate. For *Revue*, a bibliography covering the years 1965–2004 exists (Kerlik 2005) and was consulted in preparing the dataset. Nevertheless, extensive surface reading proved necessary.<sup>5</sup> This approach also enabled a more precise definition of the nature of the collected data (for example, by including very short translations scattered through some of the magazines or abstracts of papers written in Slovak translated into foreign languages) and helped avoid various biases present in existing databases (cf. Popea 2023, 347). During the data assembly process, each issue of the four periodicals (cf. Table 1) was examined to identify the translated content. Data were then entered into structured spreadsheets, verified, and cross-referenced with original sources (when possible).<sup>6</sup> As indicated by the labels, translators were treated as target text authors.<sup>7</sup> The methodology of data collection was aimed at being as detailed as possible and individual texts, regardless of their size, have separate entries. Data analysis was made based on the number of entries, not text length.

## OBSTACLES TO DATA COLLECTION

The challenges in data collection related to *Revue* stemmed from bibliographical inconsistencies, with source information either missing or irregularly placed within the paratexts. In some cases, paratexts included author biographies without providing any details about the translated text. Poetry translations in the periodical were particularly arduous, with translators frequently failing to quote the source materials which made it very hard to trace the sources. Non-Latin scripts caused additional problems in *Revue* and required secondary translation verification. Instances of indirect translations further complicated the accuracy of data.

In the context of *Aspekt*, the introduction of feminist thought into Slovak entailed significant translation challenges. Without established translations of key vocabulary, editors intervened heavily, blurring lines between editor and translator. Composite metatexts – such as commented translated fragments that blended original and translated material – further complicated the process, as did missing bibliographic data, including original titles and translator names. Interviews posed a distinct challenge: the multilingual participants often made it difficult to determine the source language.

*Kapitál*, as a primarily non-literary medium encompassing a diverse range of text types – including academic articles, essays, political manifestos, and personal blog posts – presented a distinct set of obstacles to data collection, primarily related to the lack of source text information. While individual articles in *Kapitál* typically provide brief bibliographical details about the author and the translator, references to the original source materials are rarely included, necessitating a manual search with varying degrees of success. This issue was further exacerbated by uncredited and unacknowledged editorial interventions, as many texts were abridged or condensed into fragments of the original. A further complication arose from the absence of information regarding source languages, which significantly hindered the manual search for sources and proved particularly challenging in the case of interviews, as was also observed in *Aspekt*. These interviews are frequently conducted with non-Slovak speakers; however, details concerning the languages in which they were conducted, as well as the identities of their translators, are consistently omitted.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, *Verzia* as the most recent publication with a strong emphasis on translated literature, presented comparatively fewer challenges in the data collection. Nevertheless, the magazine's inconsistent approach to source attribution necessitated manual tracing. As with *Revue*, poetry translations proved particularly problematic, as they frequently lacked official titles or information regarding their origins, rendering some texts untraceable.

#### FOUR SLOVAK PERIODICALS: PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS

*Revue svetovej literatúry* was a Slovak literary magazine devoted exclusively to translated literature. Established in 1965 and following the examples of such magazines as *Internatsional'naia literatura* (International literature, est. 1933) and *Inostrannaia literatura* (Foreign literature, est. 1955) in the USSR (see also Sherry 2015) or the Czech *Světová literatura* (World literature, est. 1956), it provided an important platform for introducing foreign literatures to Slovak readers. The magazine, primarily focusing on 20th-century authors, featured translations of prose, poetry, and drama and published original essays, reviews, and cultural journalism pieces. From its inception, it was published for three decades by the major state-owned publishing house Slovenský spisovateľ (Slovak writer). During the political and economic transformation in Slovakia following the fall of state socialism in 1989, the large formerly state-owned publishers experienced difficulties in adjusting to the market economy, as was the case of Slovenský spisovateľ. In 1995, it ceased publishing *Revue* for economic reasons and the magazine's publication was then taken over by the Slovenská spoločnosť prekladateľov umeleckej literatúry (SSPUL, Slovak literary translators' society), a translators' association established in 1990, which effectively saved the periodical (Šrank 2015, 50). The publishing was later subsidized by the Pro Slovakia cultural fund established by the Ministry of Culture in 1991. In 1995, Jarmila Samcová, a translator from English, Serbian, and Croatian, became the magazine's longtime editor-in-chief.

*Revue* played a crucial role in enriching the Slovak cultural space by providing access to diverse global literary voices (Magová and Passia 2015) such as international



networking through featuring translations of essays previously published in foreign periodicals – although this was true only for the more liberal 1960s (Bujačková 2020, 15).<sup>9</sup> After 2010, as the SSPUL struggled to attract new generations of translators and its leadership failed to respond to the needs of younger professionals, its activities declined. After Samcová passed away in 2017, she was succeeded as editor-in-chief by Gabriela Magová (1976), a translator from Hungarian. The periodical's unstable economic situation, however, offered no viable means of continuation, and its last issue was published in 2018.

After a two-year gap without a Slovak-language periodical specializing in translated literature, the newly formed civic association of literary translators DoSlov – mainly comprising the younger generation – launched *Verzia*, a magazine featuring translations of literary works, interviews with translators and experts on foreign literature, articles on translated literature, and reviews.<sup>10</sup>

*Verzia*, which was founded with Gabriela Magová as chief editor, collaborates with both established and emerging translators, providing the latter with the opportunity to work with experienced editors. The first issue of *Verzia* was published in 2020 on 30 September, International Translation Day. Initially available only in digital format, the magazine has since expanded to print editions, thanks to funding received from the Slovak Arts Council.

*Aspekt* was a Slovak feminist cultural journal first published in 1993.<sup>11</sup> It was founded by a working collective that, to serve as the legal and financial entity for the magazine's publication, established a non-profit organization of the same name. This non-profit – the first feminist association in Slovakia – was created to “encourage the development of the woman's self-awareness, educational opportunities, and her independent self-fulfillment” (Stanovy... 1993). It continues to operate as an educational and publishing organization focused on gender awareness and women's rights, organizing regular cultural and educational events. The establishment of the journal was partly a response to the rising nationalism in public and political life which also gave rise to the culture wars unfolding in Slovakia in 1992 and 1993, when the populist government of the newly founded Slovak Republic controlled cultural funding. Support was primarily directed toward cultural actors affiliated with the ruling parties – or at least those who did not openly criticize state cultural policies or promote values perceived as subversive or provocative. One of the key cultural battles was fought over *Slovenské pohľady*, the oldest Slovak literary and cultural periodical, which was taken over in 1993 by the nationalist institution Matica slovenská. As a result, deputy editor-in-chief Jana Juráňová (also a translator from English and Russian), together with all other members of the editorial team, was removed from her position. Later that same year, she and Jana Cviková, a literary critic and doctoral candidate at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, became founding members and editors-in-chief of the journal *Aspekt*.<sup>12</sup> The first issue states that contributors worked without compensation (ASPEKT... 1993, 1). The printing of the inaugural issue, and later also the overall production of the journal was financially supported by international foundations (Frauen-Anstiftung, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Pro Helvetia). In 2004 it transitioned to an online-only format.

Table 2. Number of issues and pages per publication platform per year

	Average No. of issues per year	Approximate No. of pages per year*	No. of years followed
<i>Revue svetovej literatúry</i>	4	800	20
<i>Aspekt</i>	3	600	12
<i>Kapitál</i>	12	400	8
<i>Verzia</i>	4	400	5

\* The calculations for the number of printed pages are rough estimates.

Table 3. Number of translation entries per publication platform (entire datasets)

	No. of entries*
<i>Revue svetovej literatúry</i> (1995–2015)	5,164
<i>Aspekt</i>	931
<i>Kapitál</i>	239
<i>Verzia</i>	206

\* The size of the entry may vary greatly (cf. Hostová et al. 2024e).

Table 4. Number of source languages

	No. of source languages
<i>Revue svetovej literatúry</i>	58
<i>Aspekt</i>	27
<i>Kapitál</i>	12
<i>Verzia</i>	20

Table 5. Number of source text and target text authors and an average number of source text authors translated by one target text author

	No. of source text authors	No. of target text authors	Average No. of source text authors translated by one target text author
<i>Revue svetovej literatúry</i>	1,659	432	4
<i>Aspekt</i>	639	214	3
<i>Kapitál</i>	266	100	3
<i>Verzia</i>	155	117	1

The journal was established as a “Slovak-Czech” periodical (ASPEKT 1993, 1) aiming to introduce and promote feminist discourse in the Slovak and Czech cultural contexts, deliberately broadening its pool of contributors to include both Slovak and Czech authors and publishing in both languages – even in defiance of the State Language Act then in force. Between 1993 and 2004, 21 issues were published and in 1996, ASPEKT also started its own book series, which is still running. The journal featured both originals and translations of literary and academic texts, practical educational handbooks, and theoretical works by seminal feminist thinkers, including works by Naomi Wolf and Judith Butler, thus making feminist literature accessible to Slovak readers for the first time. *Aspekt* has played a crucial role in analyzing and critiquing Slovakia’s political, social, and cultural history from a feminist perspective, addressing the complexities of women’s emancipation during and after socialism.

*Kapitál* is a Slovak critical cultural and political magazine that began publication in 2017 and is published by the not-for-profit organization KPTL, chaired by Tomáš Hučko, a publicist, editor, and translator from English. Initially released as a monthly print edition, it transitioned to an online-only platform in 2024. The magazine offers commentaries, columns, reports, essays, and interviews on political, social, and cultural phenomena. It emphasizes social justice and equality, providing a platform for voices often underrepresented in mainstream media. Its publication and the development of other media produced under the label (webpage, podcast, events) have been financially supported by various funds.<sup>13</sup> *Kapitál* addresses global environmental, feminist, and postcolonial topics, as well as local economic, social, and cultural issues. It strives to foster discussion within the new left in Slovakia and features translations of various works, including literature, essays, and articles; however, to a much lesser extent than the feminist journal published two decades earlier.

## DATASETS OVERVIEW

With approximately 800 printed pages published annually (Table 2), *Revue* – which was tracked for a 20-year period, and which is exclusively dedicated to translated literature – contains the highest number of translation entries, totaling over 5,000 (Table 3). *Aspekt* comes second in this regard, with over 900 entries, and *Kapitál* and *Verzia* contain slightly more than 200 entries each. Of the four periodicals, *Revue*, was the one with the highest proportion of literary texts – 95% (Figure 1) and *Kapitál* contained the highest proportion of translations of non-literary entries (81%).

*Revue* also covered the greatest number of languages – almost 60 (Table 4). The diversity of languages was lowest in *Kapitál*, which, as will be shown in the next section, most heavily relied on English as the language of international communication. Regarding the number of source text and target text authors, as well as the average number of source text authors translated by target text authors (Table 5), *Revue* exhibits a pattern indicative of repeated collaboration with a relatively small pool of translators. This might be a result of several factors including the large number of translated texts and a limited openness to new collaborations.

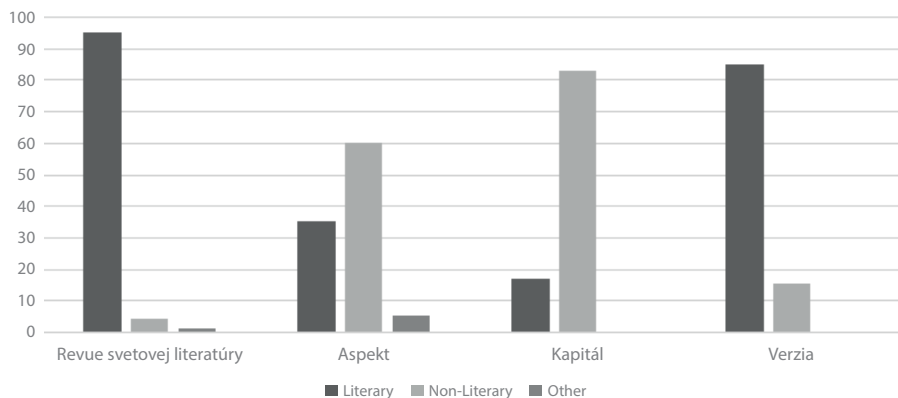


Figure 1. Percentage of literary versus non-literary entries

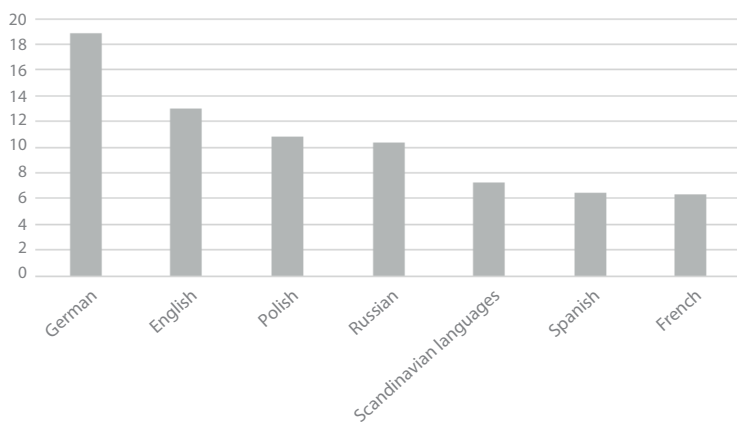


Figure 2. Languages of translated texts in *Revue svetovej literatúry* (1995–2015), based on data from Hostová et al. (2024b), highlighting the seven most frequently translated languages<sup>15</sup>

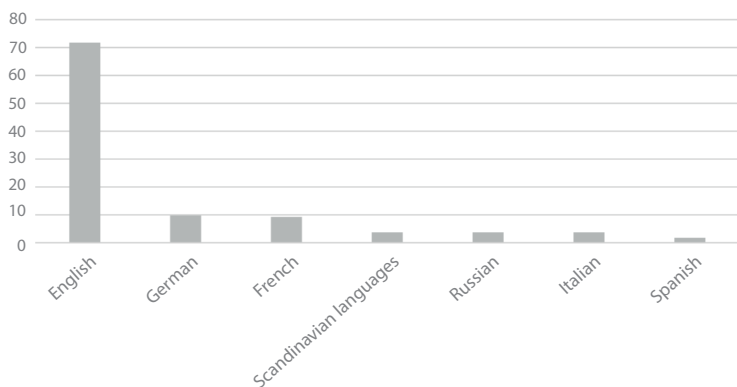


Figure 3. Languages of literary book translations into Slovak (1995–2015), based on data from Pliešovská and Popovcová Glowacký (2020)

## SOURCE LANGUAGE DISTRIBUTION IN CURATED AND MARKET-DRIVEN TRANSLATIONS IN SLOVAKIA (1995–2015)

This section compares the distribution of source languages in one of the periodicals – *Revue svetovej literatúry* (Figure 2) – with that in book production (Figure 3) over the period of 1995–2015, aiming to highlight contrasting patterns between the predominantly profit-driven and the mainly subsidized sections in the field of literary translation.<sup>14</sup> For book translations, data published by Pliešovská and Popovcová Glowacký (2020) were referenced, even though the authors did not focus specifically on commercial translations. Their data remain relevant for the present analysis because book production by small, subsidized presses represents only a negligible percentage (cf. e.g., Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov 2015), making the dataset suitable for this purpose.

The comparison between primarily market-driven choices in book publishing and the curated content in *Revue* reveals not only differences in preferred source languages, but also a significantly more balanced distribution of languages in the periodical. From the most translated languages not represented in book translation, Polish as the source language of more than 10% of entries in the periodical is most interesting. Significantly, German rather than English was the most frequent source language in the magazine – even though the editor-in-chief Jarmila Samcová was herself a translator from English. This might reflect not only the fact that the editorial board drew on different pools of source texts, but also that highly skilled (and respected) translators were less frequently working from English, which was rarely taught during state socialism, *Revue* built on the tradition of translation as an art form (Levý 1963, Vilikovský 1984), which held a prestigious status in the Slovak cultural landscape and valued experienced translators, which influenced both the linguistic composition and the age of the translators collaborating with the periodical. The comparison shows the ways in which a curated and subsidized publication platform diverged from the composition of book production mostly focused on creating profit. Editors, translators, funding bodies, and other actors within *Revue*'s network created a platform that promoted literatures written in languages beyond those favored by the market – by then fully integrated into the global flow of literary goods – and conveying messages distinct from those of mainstream publications.

## SOURCE LANGUAGES IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE: THE 1990S AND TODAY

The selection of periodicals for this study, along with the collected data (Hostová et al. 2024a–d), enables the identification of patterns relevant to cultural, social, and historical research. To examine shifts in the cultural and social climate over the observed period, two five-year spans were selected for each of the two translation datasets, drawing on information from the following sources: 1) *Revue svetovej literatúry* (1995–1999), 2) *Aspekt* (1995–1999), 3) *Kapitál* (2020–2024), and 4) *Verzia* (2020–2024). Figures 4–7 show the percentage of entries translated from the ten most frequently represented source languages in each periodical during the respec-

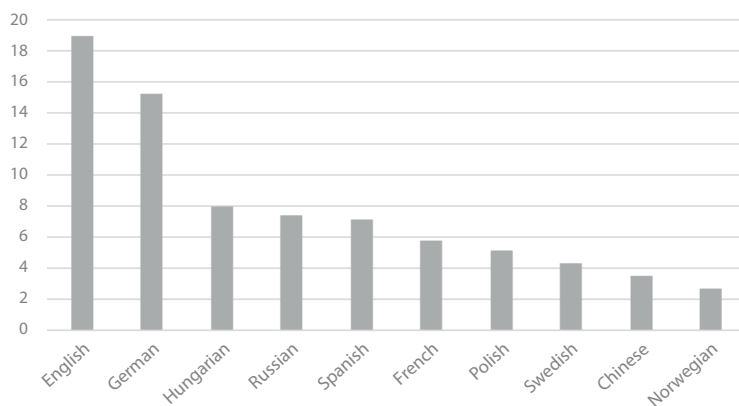


Figure 4. Ten most frequently translated languages in *Revue* (1995–1999)

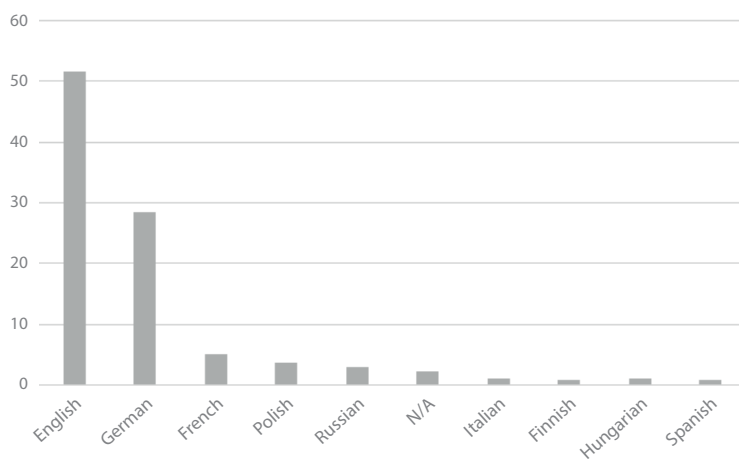


Figure 5. Ten most frequently translated languages in *Aspekt* (1995–1999)

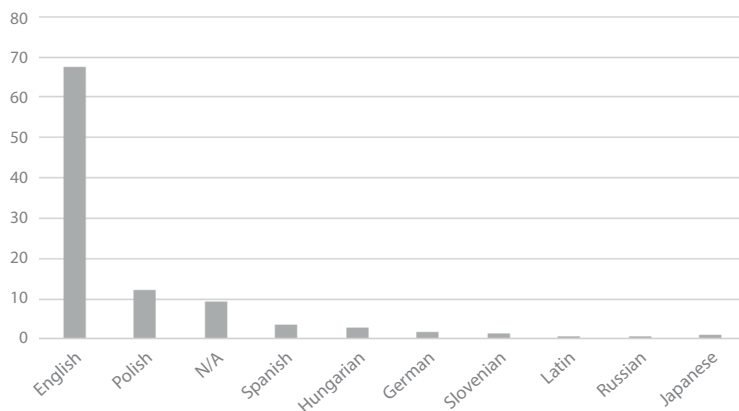


Figure 6. Ten most frequently translated languages in *Kapitál* (2020–2024)



tive time frames. Differences in source languages – both in terms of the specific languages represented and their overall distribution – can be observed across the timeline and between the two types of periodicals.

### PERIODICAL TYPE

With literary texts forming only 38% and 19% of translated entries in *Aspekt* and *Kapitál* respectively (Figure 1), the primary focus of these periodicals – *Aspekt* in the past and *Kapitál* currently – has been on presenting content related to current events and novel theoretical and critical approaches regarding sociological, cultural, and political thought with which the Slovak cultural space had limited prior engagement. *Aspekt* and *Kapitál* were focused on providing conceptual tools for analysis and the formation of political opinions and values among the public, placing less emphasis on diversifying source languages. As such, they have significantly drawn on internationalized content mediated through English (51% of all entries in *Aspekt* and more than 67% of entries in *Kapitál*).

With a small number of languages dominating the translation outputs, the distribution of source languages in these political-cultural outlets is significantly unequal. In both periodicals, two languages – English and German for *Aspekt* and English and Polish for *Kapitál* – account for about 80% of translation entries. This distribution approximately follows the Pareto principle – a distribution found in non-regulated environments. The remaining languages with few translation entries form a long tail and just *survive* (Pareto 2014, 194). *Revue* and *Verzia*, as periodicals systematically focused on translation and the representation of cultural others, and promoting linguistic diversity, on the other hand, consciously focus on diversifying the source literatures, cultures, and languages, and their distribution of source language, as can be seen in Figures 4 and 7, are significantly more balanced.

### DIACHRONIC VIEW

The temporal shift in connection with political-cultural periodicals is reflected in the significantly strengthened position of English as the source language in *Kapitál* (cf. Figure 8 for a comparative overview). The relatively high percentage of texts translated from German in *Aspekt* (28%) is a result of a combination of factors springing from geopolitical circumstances. German has historically been the mediator of new ideas for the Czech context, and the Slovak context has traditionally drawn on both Czech-language and German-language sources for intellectual and cultural influence. In the period before Slovakia fully entered global capitalist modernity (Osborne 2013, 2018) and started using English, German was a frequently studied Western language.

Other contributing factors include the fact that one of the editors-in-chief, Jana Cviková, is a translator from German; that funding institutions from German-language cultures – such as Switzerland and Germany – played a key role in supporting the periodical (e.g. Frauen-Anstiftung, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Pro Helvetia), and that *Aspekt*'s editors, translators, and collaborators engaged in repeated interactions with actors using the German language as the primary means of commu-

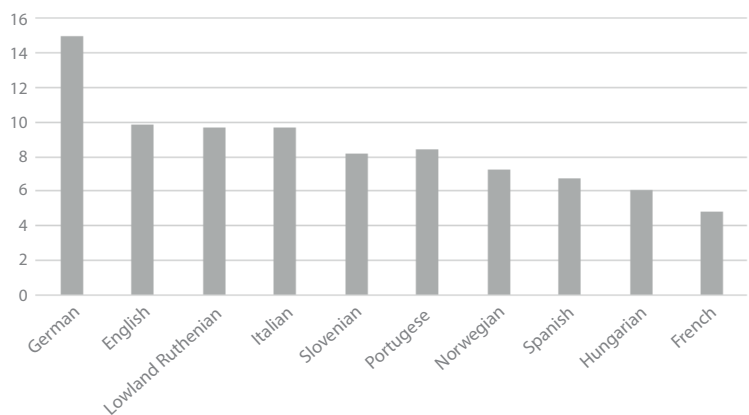


Figure 7. Ten most frequently translated languages in *Verzia* (2020–2024)

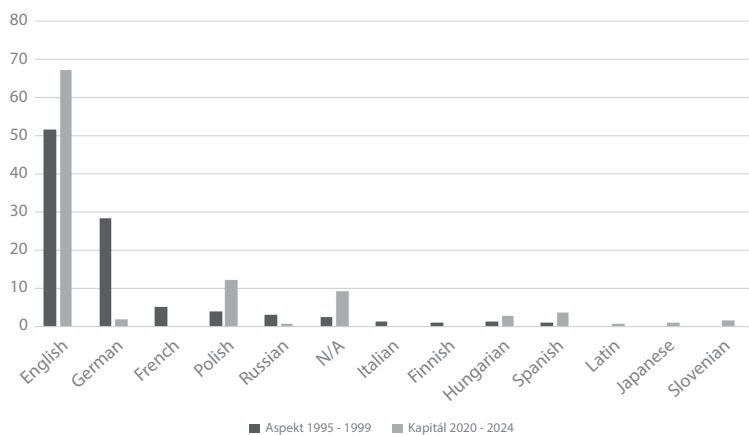


Figure 8. Diachronic comparison of source languages in *Aspekt* and *Kapitál*

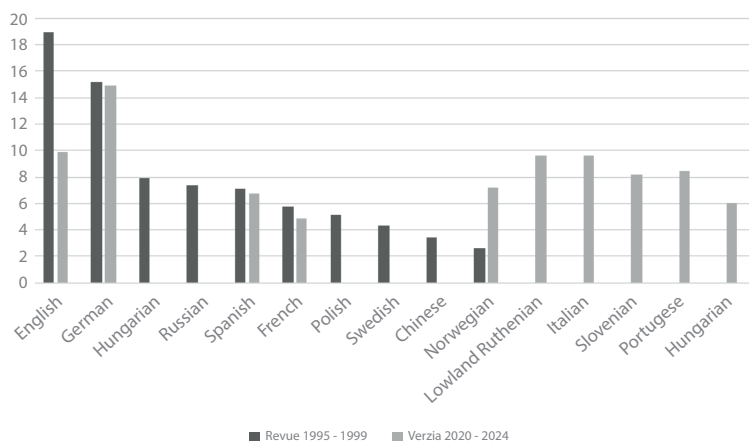


Figure 9. Diachronic comparison of source languages in *Revue* and *Verzia*

nication. The decline of German as a significant vehicle for new information, as observed in *Kapitál*, springs from the generational shift: the actors who founded and ran the outlet were educated almost entirely after the fall of state socialism and would typically use English as their second language.

The two literary periodicals share six source languages among their most translated ones (cf. Figure 9 for a comparative overview). Four of them – English, German, French, Spanish – are major world languages with substantial symbolic capital. Another is Hungarian – the language of Slovakia’s largest minority. The sixth is Norwegian: in *Revue*, its prominence was the result of cooperation with the translator Milan Richter who contributed a significant number of poetry translations; in *Verzia*, the high number of entries from this language sprang from Norway being the guest of honour at the 2023 Central European literary festival Authors’ Reading Month. *Verzia* dedicated its first issue in 2024 to Norwegian literature. The four differing languages – Russian, Polish, Chinese, and Swedish in *Revue*, and Lowland Ruthenian, Italian, Slovenian, and Portuguese in *Verzia* – reflect both the respective missions of the periodicals (such as a focus on minority cultures) and the composition of their contributor networks. The most exclusive of *Verzia*’s source languages is surely Lowland Ruthenian, spoken by a Ruthenian diaspora in Vojvodina, Serbia, with historical ties to the eastern parts of Slovakia from which the translator Maroš Volovár originates. The high proportion of translations in this language partly reflects our methodology: since the entries were poems, we treated each poem as a separate item.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The above data was approached through the analytical prism of the source language – a cultural good possessing varying degrees of symbolic capital in the ecosystem of other languages. The value of capital is not fixed or stable; it varies over time and is contingent on the cultural and linguistic framework within which it is assessed. Attitudes towards a source language relate to, among other factors, values, beliefs, personal trajectories, and can also vary greatly between individuals and groups of actors. Looking into distribution of source language in time therefore offers insights into such issues as current geopolitical constellations and mechanisms underpinning cultural resistance – particularly in an era when many regions are under the lasting effect of English linguistic colonialism. Significant differences were found in the ways periodicals handle the globally hegemonic English language with literary magazines significantly shifting the balance towards a more even distribution of source languages. The political-cultural outlets viewed source languages primarily as instruments for the mediation of the contents which they aimed to spread and so accentuated their diversity to a much lesser degree.

Although literary histories often tend to “relegate periodicals to the periphery, underestimating their contributions and function in structuring the transnational literary field” (Fólica, Roig-Sanz, and Caristia 2020a, 3), focusing on periodicals in the study of translation – even on those with limited circulation – enables researchers to uncover patterns obscured by grand historical narratives and to illuminate

the overlooked elements that have shaped the fabric of the social. This research shows that the deliberate selection of source languages by the literary magazines *Revue* and *Verzia* in Slovakia in the 1990s and 2020s offered a corrective to the highly uneven distribution of source languages observed in the book market where hegemonic English dominates. Moreover, a shift in the use of language as the mediator of novel ideas in Slovakia was identified. Whereas in the 1990s, political-cultural outlets relied not only on English, but also on German as conduits of new content, by the 2020s they had shifted to the almost exclusive use of English.

Data which was generated to investigate the issues discussed here (Hostová et al. 2024a–d) not only open further questions concerning the cultural, economic, and political changes in Slovakia over the past three decades, but also offer potential for broader, large-scale analysis. They also provide opportunities for researching the history of translation as both the history of trends in translating texts and the history of a region as seen through the lens of translation. Additional methodologies that can be fruitfully employed to such big data include social network analysis which can “unearth cultural mediators who were overshadowed by mainstream history and may appear in the center of the network showing a more significant role. Or, quite the contrary, a network science approach can show the peripheral position of well-known authors in cultural mediating processes” (Roig-Sanz, Cardillo, and Ikoff 2024, 183). The open data here invites further exploration of the region, but also enables comparative analysis and, through its potential inclusion in larger data sets, aims to contribute to a better understanding of global flows of ideas.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The authors contributed to this work as follows: Ivana Hostová was responsible for conceptualization, methodology development, writing, data collection, and funding acquisition. Eva Spišiaková contributed through writing and data collection. Marianna Bachledová and Natália Tyšš Rondziková also assisted with writing and data collection. Róbert Novotný oversaw data curation and conducted quantitative analysis. Igor Tyšš contributed to writing and Richard Gramanich Štromajer assisted with data collection. Following “Guidelines for ethical use and acknowledgement of large language models in academic writing” (Porsdam Mann et al. 2024), we declare that any use of generative AI in this manuscript adheres to ethical guidelines for use and acknowledgement of generative AI in academic research. AI was used for proofreading and at some places as a tool for enhancing the style. Each author has made a substantial contribution to the work, which has been thoroughly vetted for accuracy, and assumes responsibility for the integrity of their contributions. The final manuscript was proofread by a human proofreader, Jonathan Eddy. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Slovak into English were made by the authors.
- <sup>2</sup> The understanding of the functioning of the social in this work draws on actor-network theory (ANT) in which the “task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst” (Latour 2005, 23) – in other words, in which the social forms in ad hoc and repeated, interactions and is to be observed empirically, not made to fit preexisting categories. In ANT, actors are “semiotic spaces in which the different elements that are involved are both defined and stabilized by their relationships to other entities in the web” (Vicsek, Király, and Konya 2016). Networks consist of human (translators, editors, authors) and non-human actors (funding institutions, computers, distribution companies, printers or the editorial office) and all actors are also networks and vice versa.

- <sup>3</sup> Gathering metadata from the portal [kis3g.sk](http://kis3g.sk) can be carried out by first searching for the desired record(s), adding them to the research list (either individually via “Add to research” or collectively via “Add page/all to research”), accessing the research list from the top menu, selecting the relevant records (or applying the operation to all), and finally exporting them in MARC or MARCXML format to generate a downloadable file.
- <sup>4</sup> The Slovak National Library hosts a specialized National Bibliography department, including the Department of Authorities and Metadata Strategy, which can be contacted to provide metadata for research purposes (Národná bibliografia 2024).
- <sup>5</sup> Surface reading is a method between close and distant reading (Collier 2015, 107) or reading for patterns (Cohen 2009, 59) which allows researchers to make “the most of the rich, abundant, and understudied data provided by periodicals and will inevitably enhance our understanding of literary history” (Popea 2023, 43).
- <sup>6</sup> Partial datasets were published in Hostová et al. (2024a–d) as open access and include the following fields: “Year”, “Number”, “Location”, “Source Text Author(s)”, “Source Text Author(s) Gender (Assigned at Birth)”, “Target Text Author(s)”, “Target Text Author(s) Gender (Assigned at Birth)”, “Target Text Title”, “Source Text Language”, “Target Text Language”, “Text Type”. Comprehensive documentation was published in Hostová et al. (2024e). Where some information was unavailable, “N/A” was entered in the corresponding cell. In the analysis presented here, this data is grouped under “Other” along with a few additional categories, such as instances where “Gender Assigned at Birth” was not entered into the spreadsheet (for details on gender labelling and its limitations, see Hostová et al. 2024e).
- <sup>7</sup> This responds to appeals such as Kate Briggs’s: “I am a translator and a writer, or so I claim, when asked what I do, professionally speaking. As a way of making the writing part clear – in case it were not already obvious” (2017, 197).
- <sup>8</sup> Later interviews with editors revealed that the interviewer was also the translator. Published bibliographies, however, relied solely on the metadata provided in the periodicals.
- <sup>9</sup> The international cooperation of *Revue* in the 1960s was so widespread that it featured parts of foreign journals and even kept foreign correspondents (like Edward Lucie-Smith in the UK). However, international contacts were cut when the magazine was “normalized” in the 1970s (cf. Jánošíková 2016).
- <sup>10</sup> The civic organization DoSlov is part of CEATL – European Council of Literary Translators’ Associations and was founded by Barbara Sigmundová (1987), a translator from Spanish and English; Lucia Halová (1979), who translates from Portuguese and English; Gabriela Magová (1976), a translator from Hungarian, Natália Tyšš Rondziková (1992), a translator from English, Spanish, and Russian, and Linda Magáthová (1988), who translates from German and English. It focuses on making translators visible, builds community through activities on social networks and organizing regular live gatherings for members and non-members (festivals, presentations, community picnics). Part of their mission is educational (workshops, webinars) and they also monitor the working conditions of literary translators and the situation on the market. At the same time, it helps raise awareness among literary translators and editors about their rights and advocates for decent working conditions for translators and editors of fiction and poetry. Apart from the founding members of DoSlov, Igor Tyšš (1989), a translation scholar and translator from English, also helped launch the periodical *Verzia*.
- <sup>11</sup> Currently, it functions in online form as ASPEKTin feministický webzín on the website <https://www.aspekt.sk/aspektin/vsetko>.
- <sup>12</sup> Cvíková and Juránová, with a network of other scholars, translators, writers, artists, and activists, have been creating transnational networks (also by translating and publishing expatriate Slovak writers) and introducing feminist and gender theory into the Slovak context (cf. Cvíková 2010, 2014).
- <sup>13</sup> These include the Slovak Arts Council, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung representation in the Czech Republic, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and Bratislava City Foundation.
- <sup>14</sup> For discussions of the different ways subsidizing literary translation shifts the market, see Hedberg and Vimr (2022a) and the special issue of *Perspectives* (Hedberg and Vimr 2022b).
- <sup>15</sup> While Pliešovská and Popovcová Glowacký (2020) group data according to national literatures, this analysis is based on languages. The data for the group of Scandinavian languages was calculated by

summing entries for translations from Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic, and Faroese. Other Scandinavian languages did not appear as source texts in translations published in *Revue svetovej literatúry*. To enable comparison, data related to English and American literature in Pliešovská and Popovcová Glowacký were also combined and treated as a single category: the English language.

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## ***The Many Languages of Comparative Literature:* A valuable contribution to discussions of world literature**

**MILOŠ ZELENKA — KLAUDIA KLAMÁROVÁ**

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.11

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### ***The Many Languages of Comparative Literature: A valuable contribution to discussions of world literature***

Congress of the ICLA/AILC. Comparative literature. World literature.

Translation studies. Achim Hölder. Language diversity.

This study examines papers and discussions from the 2016 XXI International Congress of ICLA/AILC in Vienna *The Many Languages of Comparative Literature*, which have recently been published in a five-volume collection (2020–2024) edited by the Austrian comparatist Achim Hölder. The individual contributions explore the many ways in which language shapes the character of national and world literature, and the discipline of comparative literary studies itself. For the comparatist, language shapes the concentrated marketplace of world literature whose globalization provides a limited choice of languages and thus encourages discourse in world languages. It turns out that world literature from the perspective of “language” can be understood in two ways: 1) as a diversified set of plural or parallel “voices” in “big” or “small” languages, and 2) as a canon of literary texts whose multicultural sources are reciprocated exclusively through the filter of translation and the economic market. According to Hölder, this situation can be countered by “two turns”: epistemological reflection and a greater knowledge of disciplinary history. Finally, a “comparative laboratory of concepts” of world literature is needed to take a more intensive account of the large register of languages and local traditions.

Miloš Zelenka  
Institute of Central European Languages  
and Cultures  
Faculty of Central European Studies  
Constantine the Philosopher University  
in Nitra  
Slovak Republic  
mzelenka@ukf.sk  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4049-3263

Klaudia Klamárová  
Institute of Central European Languages  
and Cultures  
Faculty of Central European Studies  
Constantine the Philosopher University  
in Nitra  
Slovak Republic  
klaudia.klamarova@ukf.sk  
ORCID: 0009-0007-1672-7123

From the 2013 ICLA/AILC World Congress in Paris to the present (Vienna 2016, Macau 2019, Tbilisi 2022, and Soul 2025), discussions among comparativists have focused on the question of world literature as a variable and problematic, yet relevant phenomenon that influences the overall conception of literature in all its intrinsic and extrinsic contexts. This thematic axis anticipated the now-established view that world literature – despite its abstractness and “invisibility” – cannot be dismissed, even if its status and subsequent interpretation does not correlate with a particular discourse (Gáfrík – Zelenka 2022, 2–4). Here, the American concept based on an experiential mode of reading created in our minds by the reception of translated literary texts clashed with the European tradition that approached world literature as an ambiguous category, from a variety of local and temporal perspectives yet also as a theoretically understandable category within an epistemological framework – whether the canon, the inter-literary network, the world literary republic, or a set of regulative ideas and value reflections linked by the aspect of comparing. With a certain degree of simplification, we can state that world literature in the last two decades has been understood as a dynamic system that (through the interaction between different literary domains and through translation) shapes the determinants of an inter-literary process in which circulating texts are permanently established in cultures outside their home environment. A trio of contemporary scholars (Pascalle Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti) have emphasized the materialization of cultural power as a logical consequence not only of intellectual but also of economic and political globalization. This context was later relativized by the idea of viewing world literature from its “periphery”, allowing literary production to attain global aesthetic consumption through “consecration” (Juvan 2019).

In 2024, the Austrian comparatists who organized the XXI International Congress of the ICLA/AILC in Vienna in 2016 under the title *The Many Languages of Comparative Literature* edited a five-volume set under the same title: *The Many Languages of Comparative Literature / La littérature comparée: multiples langues, multiples langages / Die vielen Sprachen der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft* (Hölter 2020–2024).

The editor-in-chief Achim Hölter and the other editors of the volumes have collected and carefully selected some 230 relevant studies that explore the many ways in which language shapes the character not only of national literature, but especially of world literature and the discipline of comparative literary studies itself. Though the congress featured more than 1500 papers, including parallel thematic panels (A. The arts as universal code, B. Language: The essence of world literature, C. Many cultures, many idioms, D. The language of thematics, and E. Comparatists at work: Professional communication), the published proceedings presented less than a fifth of the papers. Nevertheless, this representative sample of texts comments on the nature and contemporary forms of worldliness and world literature. It is therefore logical that these issues, treated in diverse contexts and levels, organically permeate all five volumes, which the editors have made available online in open access format. The first volume, *The Languages of World Literature* (Hölter 2024a), which was completed last, is the most thought-provoking, and comprehensive one.

The second volume is *Literary Translation, Reception, and Transfer* (Bachleitner 2020); the third volume, *Discourses on Nations and Identities* (Srovy 2021a), brings together comparative discourses on nations and their identities, while the fourth volume, *The Rhetoric of Topics and Forms* (Zocco 2021), returns to thematology and narratology, to the rhetoric of symbols, poetic codes, and forms; the final volume, *Dialogues between Media* (Ferstl 2021), concludes the set, focusing on the disciplinary dialogue between media in time and space with an emphasis on transparently acceptable terminology. The connecting idea becomes the multilingualism and internal differentiation of literary texts, which determines both the subject of comparative study and the professional way of expressing it, that is, the metalanguage. A related question is how language used by different ethnic and social groups enters literary texts published in different cultural and methodological discourses, such as postcolonial, gender, or imagological studies, and how language refers metaphorically to literary forms, styles, and genres.

This return to language and to literary texts can be understood as a response to the sometimes thematically boundless interdisciplinary overlaps into physics, biology, psychology, as was the case at the XX ICLA/AILC Congress in Paris 2013 (Zelenka 2013, 241–243). At the same time, it is a matter of emphasizing the current continuity with the tradition of the discipline, which permanently moves between theoretical and literary-historical grasp. It is natural that this Central European approach, highlighted by the venue of Vienna as the former center of the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy, evokes a metonymic inter-literary mode of artistic communication in general: a number of ethnicities, confessions, and poetics coexisting side by side in a small territory, articulated in languages that are both similar and typologically different. As the main editor Achim Hölter points out in the “Introduction” (2024b, 3–28), for the comparatist, language (whether oral or written) is shaped above all by the concentrated market of world literature whose globalization brings a small selection of languages and thus tends, despite the efforts of polyglot scholars, towards the standard use of English. This situation can be avoided, however, by consciously making language visible in different contexts and meanings (8–9): 1) language as the “national” idiom in which the initial verbal text is written; 2) language as the target language in the process of literary translation; and 3) language as the “concentrate” of those literary concepts that in their totality mark “world literature”. It must be admitted, however, that the scientific metalanguage with which we write or speak about literary texts of the humanities (including literary studies) strives for exclusivity and more for elegance and playfulness than for precision achieved at the cost of a certain uniformity of expression and also of thought. The ideal of linguistic-ideological neutrality espoused by philosophical-analytical literary scholarship seems to be at odds with the efforts of comparative literary scholars who pride themselves on a heightened sensitivity to linguistic “otherness” or peripherality. According to Hölter, the above typology is undoubtedly reflected in discussions of world literature, which, from the perspective of “language”, can be conceived as 1) an internally diversified set of plural or “parallel” voices realized by various “big” and “small” languages; 2) a canon of literary texts whose sources, though multicultural, are exclusively recip-



roated through the filter of world language (translation) and the economic market constituted by it (9).

Since our article cannot cover all of the texts included, we have selected only those that raise the question of world literature and worldliness.

### THE FIRST VOLUME: THE LANGUAGES OF WORLD LITERATURE

As editor of the first volume, Hölter has incorporated the central theme of languages and world literature into all the thematic blocks. The unifying feature of these contributions becomes a comparative analysis of acts of writing and the different functions of speech acts: in general, how literary language can cope with, for example, traumas of the past and the present and how the multitude of voices of multilingual modern society constitutes the phenomenon of world literature. This approach was reflected in the opening paper of the “Communities of Fate: Magical Writing and Contemporary Fabulism” by Marina Warner (2024, 31–50), who explores the functions and transfers of so-called magical writing in contemporary literature, namely the possibility of using archetypal ancient myths, prophecies, and rhetorical formulas. The time arc thus updates a timeless tradition and thereby stamps a stamp of universality. Similarly, Hendrik Birus, in his article “Zur Übersetzbarkeit literarischer Namen” (2024, 51–64), deals with the “translatability” of literary names, especially proper nouns, which help translators to play an expressive game of hidden resonances and allusions. The worldliness of Central European literature is demonstrated by Vladimir Biti in “Past Empire(s), Post-Empire(s), and Narratives of Disaster: Joseph Roth’s *The Radetzky March* and Ivo Andrić’s *The Bridge over the Drina*” (65–84) on a comparison of Roth’s and Andrić’s “catastrophic narratives”, which show individual and collective traumas by depicting historical fractures through the parallel of a disintegrating family and a decaying empire. Peter V. Zima’s article “Ähnlichkeit und Differenz in der Komparatistik. Der Vergleich als Begriffsbestimmung” (173–199) returns to the subject of comparative literature which should treat not only corresponding elements but also bridge differences in time and space with its theoretical apparatus. The traditional paradigm of world literature derived from printed canonized texts is disrupted by Joep Leerssen, who concludes in “Literary History Outside the Gutenberg Comfort Zone” (103–126) that literature, including world literature, does not always have to take the form of printed texts and that to think outside this framework here is to respect the process of writing by hand as a form of open work in semantic flux. E. V. Ramakrishnan, in “From Reception to Resistance: Multiple Languages of Indian Modernism” (127–147), explains how the literary languages of India mediated contact with Western civilization during British colonization, particularly at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, which gradually led to the development of new genres and scholarly terminology. This “symbolic assimilation” was then followed by a phase of critical rejection motivated by political independence. Likewise, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz’s “The Confluence of Ethnic Voices in Urban America” (149–172), using John Dos Passos’s modernist novels as an example, shows not only linguistic but also ethnic polyphony in American literature, drawing on emigration and the coexistence of parallel poetics.

The joint opening of the congress also included a panel discussion, which attracted a great deal of media interest under the title *The Theory of World Literature and the Politics of Translations*, between American comparatists David Damrosch and Emily Apter, moderated by German scholar Christian Moser (Vajdová 2016, 109–110). This discussion documented that world literature has become a global scholarly problem that remains unresolved due to numerous communication misunderstandings. Damrosch understood world literature as a phenomenon “detached” from the country, time, and language of its origin and disseminated through translation, while Apter (referring to Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova) considered the study of world literature as an unsolvable problem in the context of contemporary literary scholarship. Like Apter’s skepticism, Damrosch’s elliptical refraction of national literatures, characterized by an ignorance of Central European and especially Slavic comparative scholarship, indirectly confirms the fact that a discussion conducted from one perspective cannot capture all the nuances of this term, which we should not reject as an object of future research. Róbert Gáfrik’s observation that “theoretical and methodological discourse takes place in different languages and in diverse power relations” (Gáfrik 2016, 112) applies here, and that these studies need to be carried not only from the dominant “centre” but also from the neglected “margins” (Juvan 2023, 70–77). One can agree with Achim Hölder that old concepts are returning to current thinking about world literature as a conscious “prefiguration” that can better illuminate the pluralistic world of comparative literature. He speaks of its advantage, which is precisely the multiplicity of languages and literatures: “One of the real tasks of the new discipline is to explore the epiphenomenes of linguistic diversity, which is one of the features of European identity” (2024, 684). One cannot only regret that a textual transcript of this discussion, significantly illustrating the “American” view of world literature, did not appear in the book set.

The first volume also contains contributions in which the worldliness of literature emerges in connection with the issue of emigration, most often from Central /Eastern Europe, and with questions of translation. They show that this emigrant literature continues to attract attention because of its epochal turn before the collapse of socialism, whose emphasis on a hybrid “displaced” existence led to the destruction of traditional identity. Cristina Săndru’s “Post-Cold War Literature of Migration: East-Central European Consciousness between Exile and Diaspora” (241–252) draws attention to the difference between exile and diasporic writing, while John M. Kopper’s “Alternative Émigré Places: Berberova, Makine, and the Russian Escape from Paris” (341–352) refines the differences and correspondences between past and present Russian emigration. Similarly, Elge Segelcke’s paper “Okzident und Orient: ‘Poetik der Bewegung’ im Werk Zafer Şenocaks” (253–264) cannot be treated in the category of national literature. Eva Miriam Simon’s “Komparatistik als Provokation: August Wilhelm Schlegels *La Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d’Euripide* (*Vergleichung der Phädra des Racine mit der des Euripides*)” (393–403) is devoted to Schlegel’s interpretation of two treatments of the *Phaedra* theme by Euripides and Racine. Miloš Zelenka’s chapter, “Ein tschechoslowakischer Beitrag zur Theorie der Weltliteratur” (611–621), compares the Slovak theorist Dionýz Ďurišin’s approach

with that of the Czech Slavist Frank Wollman, whose morphological conception of world literature as a set of timeless and supra-local forms is based on the aesthetic reception of texts through translation and rereading. Finally, Haun Saussy's paper "My Idiolect, If I Have One': Translation in a Single Language" (591–597) addresses the question of the shifting boundary between linguistic and national identity, in which comparatists should aim at understanding the inherent diversity of cultural contexts.

## THE SECOND VOLUME: LITERARY TRANSLATION, RECEPTION, AND TRANSFER

The volume *Literary Translation, Reception, and Transfer* was edited by Norbert Bachleitner (2020), who has divided the contributions into six thematic sections 1. Translation Criticism: Studies on Individual Authors; 2. Modes and Strategies of Translation; 3. Influence and Comparisons Between Authors; 4. Genres of Motifs; 5. Transfer Between Literatures and Digital Globalization; 6. "We are translated men": Hybrid Identities and Regionalism. The three concepts reflected in the title – translation, reception, and transfer – are based on similarities related to the literary form of "circulation" and following or "imitation" of whole works, genres, forms, motifs, etc. Of the three, transfer, which encompasses all types and modes of such circulation, aspires to the widest scope. The process of communication begins with the initial text embedded in a specific cultural circle, then emphasizes its mediation by a series of individual and collective factors (critic, translator, publisher, library network, etc.), and ends with its integration into the target culture. From this point of view, translation is the main tool for the dissemination of literature through linguistic and cultural barriers; it is a key factor for integration into the canon of world literature. Galina Alekseyeva's paper "Constance Garnett's Translation of Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is within You*" (17–30), for example, explores the influence of Russian émigrés in London at the end of the 19th century on Garnett, who translated seminal works of Tolstoy and numerous other writers into English. It is worth noting that the notion of influence was widely discussed by Slovak scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it is unfortunate that Ďurišin's rejection of it as the "domination" of one literature over another is not mentioned here (1979, 331–353).

As Daniel Syrový notes in "The Originals of *Don Quixote*: Translation and Pseudo-translation in the *Spanish Libros de Caballerías*" (97–107), influence in the first half of the 20th century marked the sphere of direct and mediated relations between author and literature from the 1960s onwards. This shift can be demonstrated by comparing the titles of two monographs by Lawrence Marsden Price, *English-German Literary Influences* (1920) and *The Reception of United States Literature in Germany* (1966). In his conference paper, Syrový also reveals the neglected forms of translation, which as a meta-linguistic transfer, includes references and allusions to fictional originals. Using the example of the pseudo-translation of the Spanish *Libros de Caballerías* as the alleged main source of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, he analyzes these complex metafictional and meta-narrative strategies. Krystyna Wierzbicka-Trwoga's "The Birth of the Novel in Renaissance Poland through the Medium of German:

Translations of Medieval Narratives in Sixteenth-Century Poland” (267–279) studies the influence of German and French chivalric prose on the Polish Renaissance of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Polish literature is also revisited by Marta Skwara, who demonstrates the worldliness of the second largest Slavic literature in “How to Cross Cultural Borders While Discussing National Literature Internationally” (329–343), through the multilingual intertextual links between Polish texts and world literature. For example, if Joseph Conrad and Czesław Miłosz wrote in English, Stanisław Przybyszewski in German, and Witold Gombrowicz in Spanish, the boundary between the source language and the language that can become “foreign” due to the environment is relativized here.

A new thematic area of translational studies under the title “ocean studies” is presented in a pair of papers by Jean Marc Moura and Margarita Alfaro, who depict the Atlantic as a space of material and genre migration between Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanic, Russophone, and Dutch literatures, that is, the literatures of nations with a colonial past. We can recall here the obvious analogy with the so-called inter-literary network interpreted in the 1990s by Dionýz Ďurišin and the Italian comparatist Armando Gnisci (2000). Moura’s article “Des voyages au féminin dans l’Atlantique au XXe siècle” (281–289) demonstrates transatlantic literary history on a theoretical level, using feminist discourse (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous) to reject traditional Western European bipolarity. Alfaro’s essay on Italian-Argentine novels, “Les voyages de l’immigration et de l’exil entre l’Amérique latine et l’Europe: Griselda Gambaro et Laura Alcoba” (291–301), understands the Atlantic as a symbolic and intercultural border that intervenes in family fates and collective memory as a metaphor of death and rebirth. The joint article by Norbert Bachleitner and Julian Werner, “Österreichische Periodika in französischer Sprache als Medien des Literaturtransfers (1750–1850)” (345–356), analyzes Austrian periodicals published in French using the field of sociology of translation.

### THE THIRD VOLUME: DISCOURSES ON NATIONS AND IDENTITIES

The third volume *Discourses on Nations and Identities* (Syrový 2021a) reflects on literary languages from a socio-economic perspective, namely from the position of cultural capital (literary conventions, norms, expectations of the reading public, and market demands). The concepts of nation and identity are viewed through the lens of language through such approaches as discourse analysis, cultural memory, narratology, biography, literary sociology, critical reading, and others. Comparative literary scholarship is interested in the authorial motivation in the question of the strategic choice of language in changing national identity, showing that language divides rather than unites. Writers either “abandon” one language in favor of another or create hybrids that transform the receiving literature, yet with the linguistic patronage of the mother tongue. The introduction by the volume editor Daniel Syrový (2021b, 1–14) cites the translation of Jhumpa Lahiri, who around 2014 decided to become an Italian writer after a series of successful English-language novels: “abandoning” the language was not forced by the demands of exile or economic interest,

but by a certain conscious choice – a risk as an opportunity to gain a new creative impulse in the form of an expanded vocabulary or expressive syntax. This strategy, as the English theorist Kate Briggs argues in her monograph *The Little Art* (2013), also applies to translation understood as a commercial aspect of professional writing practice. The change of language in literary communication thus hovers between craft and creativity. However, the motivation can also be patriotic and nationalistic, as shown by the linguistic and literary situation of the 19th-century Apennine Peninsula, divided between the Habsburg monarchy, the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Holy See and other entities (3–4). However, the nation-state must define itself on the basis of a national monolithic language and abandon the hybridity of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). Clearly, these trends are confirmed by the formation of written Italian, which in Alessandro Manzoni’s novels did not derive from Cicero and the usages of humanistic Latin, but from modern Tuscan.

Among the many contributions, we can highlight Eri Ohashi’s article “L’évolution des consciences grâce à la langue, vue au prisme du voyage, de la colonisation, et de l’émigration” (69–82) on the trans-cultural clashes of language and national identity in the works of Pierre Loti written in Japan, Marguerite Duras in French Indochina, and Isaac Bashevis Singer in the US. Similarly, Elisabetta Vinci reflects on linguistic hybridity as an aspect of modern Yugoslav and German identity in “Marica Bodrožić: Hybridity, Language, and Cultural Identity” (197–207), while Esra Canpalat focuses on the multicultural area of Istanbul in “Multikulturalität und Hybridität als identitätsstiftendes Moment in Orhan Pamuks *İstanbul*. Hatıralar ve Şehir und Elif Shafaks *The Bastard of Istanbul*” (209–222). Luísa Alfonso Soares approaches linguistic hybridity and national identity transformations from a similar angle in “Imagining Transcultural Identities in Turkish German Literature and Cinema” (249–258), which discusses the formation of so-called post-migration identities in Turkish-German literature and cinema in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Also returning to the question of so-called unity and internal heterogeneity is Tina Hartmann’s paper “Deutsch als Literaturheimat. Warum Literatur multilingualer Autorinnen und Autoren einfach deutsche Literatur ist” (355–369), which justifies the functionality of the notion of a “literary home” (*Literaturheimat*) by privileging biographical over aesthetic criteria. The topic of literature in exile is dealt with by Alexandra Vranceanu-Pagliardini, whose article “Transnational Writers and Double Literary History in Communist Romania” (399–408) takes into account texts by Romanian authors written in English and French. The same applies to the article by Shuko-Tanaka Rauber, who in her study “Le choix linguistique et l’identité des écrivains transfrontaliers – autour de la tentative de Milan Kundera” (409–422) compares Kundera’s works in the context of the transformations of national identity, which remained “Czech” despite the adoption of the French cultural tradition.

#### THE FOURTH VOLUME: THE RHETORIC OF TOPICS AND FORMS

The volume *The Rhetoric of Topics and Forms*, edited by Gianna Zocco (2021), focuses on the complementarity or dichotomy of these elements in the internal construction of a literary work. While we traditionally classify the study of motifs, sym-



bols, images, myth, topoi, and discourse as “content” components, we consider the analysis of style, structure, language, and rhetorical devices as internal “formal” and “signifying” matters. Thus, thematology has been labeled by structuralist conceptions as a positivist discipline outside of real literary history. Theodor Wolpers points to the organic inseparability of these two components, arguing that the study of a single motif in literary texts remains a crucial, if complicated task of literary history (1993, 80–91). Here, despite René Wellek’s critique of traditional *Stoffgeschichte* (1959, 149–159), we can include imagology. According to Leerssen, this approach understands literary imagery as articulated discourse constructs whose natural circulation forms the basis of our national identification (2006, 560). In this context, Zocco recalls the founding significance of the German literary scholar Ernst Robert Curtius, who in his book *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948) defined topoi as minimal stylistic and thematic units that allow for a new perception of the inner coherence of European literature and that contribute to emphasizing its threatened humanistic unity (2021, 2–3). In his evaluation of individual contributions, Zocco points to the continuing tendency of so-called “undeclared thematology” (Sollors 2002, 219–220), that is, the reluctance to develop a methodology and to use its terminology.

The papers include studies on the role of emotions as complex affective states in literature. For example, Kathrin Betke’s chapter “Emotion Metaphors and Literary Texts: The Case of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*” (15–27) studies these difficult-to-express emotions “in the relationship between language and love in Shakespeare’s sonnets, while Nina Tolkstdorf’s article “Zu Kafkas Sprachen der Scham” (39–49) observes the elusive expression of shame, sadness, and feelings of worthlessness in Kafka’s vocabulary. The motifs of love and eroticism in the context of autofiction and political ideology are treated in Stefan Kutzenberger’s “Enden der Liebe, Enden des Texts. Der Alltag der Liebe bei Navid Kermani und Karl Ove Knausgård” (87–102) and Gianna Zocco’s “Love and Propaganda in W. E. B. Du Bois’s Novel *Dark Princess*” (115–126). Philip Wagner’s essay “You är ju även du. Englisch als Mittel zur ‚Selbst‘-Reflexion in Aino Trosells *En egen strand* (2013)” (209–220) presents the multilingualism of the contemporary Swedish novel, in which the use of English is intertextually linked to the reflection of colonial privileges and the feminist criticism of society. The imagological methodology is invoked in Tone Smolej’s paper “La thématologie et les actualisations des figures mythiques – le cas d’Antigone” (309–318), which reflects on the transfer of ancient themes such as the story of Antigone in post-textual updates.

## THE FIFTH VOLUME: DIALOGUES BETWEEN MEDIA

The last volume *Dialogues between Media*, edited by Paul Ferstl (2021), does not fit at first sight into the discourse of literary languages and national identities that evoke reflections on world literature. Specialized contributions dealing with the relationship between media and inter-arts studies are present, as well as essays oriented towards comics studies, including interdisciplinary analyses of the graphic novel. Yet, here too, issues of worldliness and world literature are contextualized in the adaptation of literary texts in various target media such as film, television series, opera, and



theater. This has been particularly due to Kai Mikkonen from Finland and Stefan Buchenberger from Austria, whose paper “The ICLA Research Committee on Comics Studies and Graphic Narrative: Introduction” (13–18) presents the development of comics in the 20th and 21st centuries in a broad historical-anthropological perspective, and who founded the Research Committee on Comic Studies and Graphic Narrative at the 2004 ICLA/AILC World Congress in Hong Kong. In doing so, they contributed to the incorporation of comics studies into comparative literary scholarship, and even established comparativists have begun to reflect on classical literature in comics adaptations: for example, German researcher Monika Schmitz-Emans in her paper “Dante-Comics zwischen Kanon-und Populärkultur: Spielformen der Hybridisierung und Strategien der Selbstreferenz” (235–250) focuses on comic book adaptations of *Divine Comedy*.

## CONCLUSION

Returning to methodological issues (found at the end of the first volume of *The Languages of World Literature*), Achim Hölder’s study “Comparative Literature in Europe” (2024c, 683–687) argues for a greater knowledge of the field’s history by taking two turns: towards epistemological self-reflection and towards praxeological to empirical description, and thus towards understanding what has been positively and beneficially realized in this tradition (686). He recommends systematizing comparative collections of translations into third languages, since no library captures translations other than from the source language into the language of the respective country. This eliminates the broader cultural-historical horizon of contemporary translation through so-called intermediaries, whose importance was pointed out a century ago by Paul van Tieghem. There has been no effort to compile dictionaries of comparative terminology that would contribute to a general awareness of the much-needed “unity in multiplicity”. This includes, according to Hölder, the highly debated concept of world literature. Its semantic potential is allegedly not yet fully exploited because different approaches are territorially bound, as can be seen, for example, by a cursory confrontation of the American version of specific reading with the Slavic or Russian morphologically conceived “mirovoj literary”. Hölder’s call for a kind of “comparative laboratory of theories” comes from a natural respect for the large register of languages, and in our view also reflects the current discourse on world literature, which can be understood typologically either as an internally differentiated set of voices or as a canon of texts, with a multicultural background but only reciprocated by the globalized “filter” of a world language and its economic market power.

The notion of world literature was discussed in a number of sessions, among which were the contribution from the Czech and Slovak Association of Comparative Literature, Old and New Concept of Comparative Literature in the Globalized World. Particularly noteworthy in the published summary of the roundtables (Hölder 2024c, 665–682) is the panel “Language: The Essence of World Literature”, which included the participants Hans Bertens, Ipshita Chanda, Adams Bodomo and Sandra Bermann, moderated by Achim Hölder. This panel, whose subtext embedded

an implicit polemic with Damrosch's emphasis on the power of English-language literature, sought to bring together two major aspects of contemporary comparative studies: the relationship between the greatness and extension of universal language and the aspiration to worldliness. According to Hölter, the fact that some languages had reached the level of world languages was reflected in their global and communicative hegemony in literary circulation, which contributed to the disregard of so-called small languages. Their visibility has been aided by translation, which is, however, market-driven and therefore simultaneously on the rise and contested (669). The imaginary boundary between "big" and "small" language is thus both overcome and constantly made more present. Likewise, Chanda, referring to Ďurišin's conceptualization of dialogical reception of metropolitan models, points out that definitions of world literature are negatively determined by the possibility of translation and its eventual dissemination. We still have as a false model the monolingual, monocultural nation and its literature, which is taken from 19th-century Western European nationalist discourse (669). The example of contemporary India with its with over twenty official languages, whose writing has historically been marked by alterity and plurality as an existential condition, is proof that world literature must reflect "a world formed through contactual relations" rather than the "circulation and translation of national language literatures" (670).

Adams Bodomo symbolically argues with Damrosch that multilingualism must become an important aspect of comparative literature, pointing to the growing importance of African languages. He sees the way out of the existence of multiple languages in the production of so-called parallel texts written by African authors striving for worldliness (670). A parallel text is defined as a set of texts in which literary expressions are mediated through translation at different levels, that is, a text produced in parallel in several languages such as English and African dialects. For Hans Bertens, world literature (which must not be understood as a canon) demands a kind of literary justice, since it implies a moral imperative to perceive all texts regardless of place and language (671). Sandra Bermann relates the "globality" of English not only to era of colonialism, but also to the 20th century when this hegemony was shaped through media, politics, and publishing, and she challenges the perception of American literature as monolingually English, arguing that more than 400 languages are spoken and written in the US, most of which are local creole or hybrid dialects (672).

The terminological and semantic delineation of world literature in relation to the affinities and complementarities between comparative literature and cultural studies was also explored in a panel entitled "Many Cultures, Many Idioms", characteristically subtitled "Has Comparatism Turned into Worldwide Cultural Studies?", which featured Isabel Capeloa Gil, Longxi Zhang, and discussion leader Dorothy Figueira. The latter opened the panel with a historical excursus into the development of comparative literature and cultural studies: prior to the formation of ICLA/AILC in 1955, world literature was a broader term in terms of content, with the ambition of extending literary scholarship to include "non-Western" literatures and thus modifying its scope to the study of cross-cultural reception (673). It was not until the late

20th century that the discipline of General Literature emerged in the US as a discipline focused on the reading of texts in translation, with the aim of incorporating literatures that are not taught in the original language. In practice, however, their teaching was carried out exclusively within English departments. Cultural studies, which has its origins in the UK in the 1960s, merely creates a “simulacrum of the social sciences” (674), deconstructing comparative literature into postcolonial studies of identity theory, gender studies, etc. The parallel between world literature and cultural studies is that both fields lack a strict methodological structure and freely borrow theories, methods, and principles from other fields. In this regard, Figueira argues somewhat starkly that world literature is essentially the latest version of a “theory and pedagogy of otherness” that has adopted cultural studies’ commitment to sociocultural intervention (674). But if Isabel Capella Gil shares the concern about the politicization of cultural studies which has aggressively overstepped its interdisciplinary horizon (675), Longxi Zhang places the perspectives of world literature studies exclusively outside the Anglo-Saxon context. While for cultural studies, literary texts are merely a means to understand culture itself, comparative literature, including reflection on world literature, should be concerned with the circulation of the text and its use towards understanding the workings of the text itself. Although these fields are metonymically related, they are not inherently interchangeable (676).

As Longxi Zhang pointed out in the panel discussion, the study of world literature must not dissolve into cultural studies or the field of General Literature (676). With some optimism, world literature must be understood as a project that promotes the circulation of literatures that are less well-known in the Western world (676–677). Although the search for ideal forms of world literature will be difficult to realize the “partner language of reciprocity”, the study of world literature revived at the XX ICLA/AILC Congress in Paris 2013 and the XXI ICLA/AILC Congress in Vienna 2016 has its justification and a realistic research perspective. At the same time, this search once again raises questions about whether world literature is knowable and whether we want to know primarily the world that we sense and not the secondary world that literature generates through its texts and in which our observing and influencing subject finds itself. Despite this justified skepticism and hesitation between an emphasis on the world or literature itself, we believe that it is in fact possible to have a serious dialogue about world literature in theoretical discourse through concepts that, despite their semantic variability, navigate their local connotations within a particular epistemological framework. As shown by the following ICLA/AILC congresses in Macao 2019 (on world literature as the main subject of a new discipline) and Tbilisi 2022 (on world literature from the perspective of the “margins”), neither world literature nor “the world of literatures” or worldliness can be associated with one universal language or commercially successful translation into a “big” language.

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**JULIE HANSEN: Reading Novels Translingually: Twenty-First-Century Case Studies**

Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2024. 206 pp. ISBN 9781644698778

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.12

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Translingual writing has gained increasing attention from both readers and literary scholars in recent years. In the summer of 2024, the *New York Times* released its list of the best novels of the 21st century, and several of these novels, like Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017) and Junot Diaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), were by translingual authors. In Russian writing, the past century of revolution and upheaval forced writers like Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky into voluntary or involuntary exile, and caused them to choose between their mother tongue or their audience. Partially because of his bilingualism, Nabokov switched to English for his creative output, and in the novel *Pnin* (1957), he portrays a Russian émigré professor who has his teeth removed, symbolizing not just Russian dentistry but also his linguistic identity. Unlike Nabokov, Brodsky continued to write mainly in Russian in the US, where, as he writes in the poem "1972", he was "losing gradually / hair, teeth, consonants, verbs, and suffixes". Elsewhere in the poem he discusses the great sacrifices made for "the sake of his native tongue and letters". Despite their different choices, both are predecessors of the current generation of translingual Russian-language writers.

Julie Hansen's *Reading Novels Translingually* is an essential and significant contribution to scholarship on translingual literature by Russian-speaking writers, but it also goes beyond this cohort. Hansen's work can be considered a continuation of Adrian Wanner's *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New*

*Translingual Diaspora*, in which Wanner identified the concept of translingualism as paramount to the creative output of "hybrid writers". While Wanner had also looked at Andrei Makine and Olga Grushin in his work, Hansen goes far beyond these writers in her analysis. Most of the writers Hansen addresses are bilingual Russian-speaking authors, some of whom are writing in the language of the countries they had immigrated to: English, French, German, and Swedish. Two of the writers whose work she examines exhibit translingualism in their native Russian: Lev Tolstoy included long passages of untranslated French in his novels, while Eugene Vodolazkin in his novel *Laurus* (2012) switches between modern language and archaic medieval language. Yet, there are some unexpected outliers in her work, including a novel by Rabih Alameddine, a French and Arabic-speaking Lebanese-American writing in English, and a Swedish thriller by Andreas Norman. *Reading Novels Translingually* discusses multiple literary devices such as transmesis, code-switching, code-mixing, and heterographics, and focuses on some of the important questions and themes of translingual literature, particularly focusing on characters who are translators or interpreters.

Following the theoretical overview of translingual reading in the first chapter, Hansen's second chapter discusses Olga Grushin's novel *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* (2005), which is written in English, but is about Grushin's city of origin, Moscow. Grushin uses various Russian expressions, greetings, and food names and retains the original Rus-



sian casting these words or phrases in italics while using the Latin alphabet. Hansen probes the possible audience for Grushin's text: one is a bilingual reader and a second an Anglophone reader for whom the Russian phrases create an effect of *ostranennie*. In this chapter Hansen focuses on wordplay in the novel, specifically translingual wordplay – playing with Russian in English, she also focuses on Grushin's use of proper names and diminutives in the novel, and looks at cultural allusions, puns, and other idioms. She also analyzes the translation of *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* into Russian by Elena Petrova, and how those idioms that were clarified for English language readers are turned back into Russian where they no longer need elucidation.

The third chapter of Hansen's work examines three works by Russian-speaking writers: Andrei Makine's *Le testament français* (1995), Michael Idov's *Ground Up* (2009), and Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012). The focus of this chapter is an examination of the theme of translation and interpretation in multiple translingual novels by Russian-speaking authors in French, English, and German, which often refer to translation as a form of trickery. Mirroring Makine's own experience of publishing in French, Makine's protagonist Alyosha M. originally writes a novel in French but it elicits no interest from publishers until he creates a story that has been translated from Russian. Idov's protagonist Mark, a Russian speaker, masquerades as a speaker of Slovenian to interpret for a client in court. Grjasnowa's heroine Maria Kogan is also an interpreter, and translation is important to her identity.

The fourth chapter focuses on the Russian writer Zinaida Lindén's Swedish-language novel *För många länder sedan* (Many countries ago, 2013). Hansen examines the fact that Lindén chose to write in a language that has a significantly smaller readership than that of her native language. This would seem to go against the logic dictated by the great émigré writers like Brodsky and

Nabokov who chose to either sacrifice for their native language even if they no longer lived in their country of origin or abandon it in favor of a language that had an even greater readership.

Hansen's next two chapters move away from the translingual context of Russian émigré writers, placing a greater focus on languages such as French and Arabic. The fifth chapter deals with Rabih Alameddine's novel *An Unnecessary Woman* (2014) about an unpublished translator. Alameddine's narrator uses references and allusions to various literary works of high modernism, but she is also strongly influenced by a French translation of Dostoevsky, which she compares favorably to Constance Garnett's famous English version. In the next chapter, Hansen moves on to look at translingualism in the popular genre of Nordic fiction through an analysis of the Swedish writer Andreas Norman's thriller *En rasande eld* (2013; Eng. trans. *Into a Raging Blaze*, 2014), in which the protagonist becomes suspected of involvement in a terrorist network. In her final chapter, Hansen returns to contemporary Russian writing in her discussion of Eugene Vodolazkin's *Laurus* and its inclusion of poli-linguistic heritage in ancient Slavic.

In addition to its seven chapters, *Reading Novels Translingually* contains a comprehensive introduction and a conclusion, as well as thorough footnotes and a useful bibliography. Some chapters are much longer than others; a few of the chapters are continuations of articles the author has previously published. Hansen has written an important study examining a major trend in world literature, and she identifies the terms of translingual literature, paving the way for future scholars to approach the subject critically.

ANNA KATSNELSON  
Harriman Institute  
Columbia University  
New York  
USA

anna.katsnelson@gmail.com  
ORCID: 0009-0008-0204-0993

**ZUZANA FONIOKOVÁ: Od autobiografie k autofikci. Narativní strategie vyprávění o vlastním životě** [From autobiography to autofiction: Narrative strategies of life stories]

Brno – Praha: Host – Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2024. 280 s. ISBN 978-80-275-2266-8; ISBN 978-80-7658-103-6

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.13

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Vysokú úroveň českého literárnovedného výskumu zameraného na oblasť autobiografického písania reprezentujú v poslednom období dve systematické práce. V roku 2021 publikovala Klára Soukupová monografiu *Vyprávět sám sebe: Teorie autobiografie* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova); autorka sa v nej sústredila na identifikáciu podmienok realizácie poetiky autobiografického naratívu a na rekonštrukciu možností teoretického uchopenia žánru autobiografie s dôrazom na uplatnenie konceptu pozicionality v teórii autobiografie (10). Soukupová prezentuje autobiografiu ako autonómny a svojbytný literárny nefikčný žáner, ktorý oproti fikčným textom umožňuje (okrem mnohého iného) verifikovať informácie podávané autorom diela (pozri 23 – 24). V teoretickom prístupe k žánru autobiografie je zároveň podľa autorky potrebné zohľadňovať skutočnosť, že tematická i kompozičná výstavba autobiografií je ovplyvnená nielen tradíciou tohto žánru, ale tiež rétorikou iných nefikčných textov, napríklad denníkov, korešpondencie, súdnym či politickým diskurzom (31), a v tomto zmysle je nutné autobiografie uchopovať ako určité verbálne konštrukty podliehajúce najrôznejším lingvistickým, literárnym, naratívny i kultúrnym normám (47). Soukupovej monografia sa potom v celom svojom interpretačnom geste snaží rešpektovať skutočnosť, že autobiografie „sice vychádzajú z konkrétného života, ale do literárnej podoby jsou zpracovávány na základě vlivných žánrových modelů. Autobiografický text tedy

není výsostně subjektivní záležitost, protože žánrové konvence a žánrová očekávání formují individuální vzpomínání, realizované v textu“ (30).

Pokiaľ výskum Kláry Soukupovej sa vyznačuje snahou (aspoň relatívne) stabilizovať profil autobiografie ako žánru nefikčnej literárnej produkcie, a to predvedením literárnovednej interpretácie tých diel, ktoré sa podieľajú na upevňovaní povedomia o žánrových normách autobiografie (28), Zuzana Fonioková rozvíja výskumný model, ktorého jadrom je mapovanie takých naratívov, ktoré zo žánru autobiografie vychádzajú, no zároveň jej genologický profil systémovo deformujú, „striktne kladená kritéria porušujú a svou autobiografičnosť zprostředkovávají více či méně nekonvenčními a inovativními postupy“ (2024, 29). V tomto zmysle platí, že názov Foniokovej monografie *Od autobiografie k autofikci* nemá signalizovať rekonštrukciu priamočiareho, lineárneho radu foriem literárnych reprezentácií „od nejvíce k nejméně faktualní, ani od nejtradičnejší k neinovativnější“ (29 – 30). Zámerom takto nazvanej monografie je zachytiť, pomenovať a opísať tie rôzne formy naratívov o vlastnom živote, ktoré sa „pohybují na kontinuu faktualní a fikční narace“ (29).

Metodologickým prostriedkom napĺňania takto formulovaných zámerov sa stávajú viaceré interdisciplinárne spolupracujúce pozície. Fonioková sa prirodzene opiera o metódy literárnej vedy (predovšetkým naratológie), tento základ však dopĺňa a prehľ-

buje poznatkami z oblasti konštruktivismu, kognitívnej, naratívnej a kultúrnej psychológie, v interpretačno-analytických komentároch sa odráža aj autorkou postulovaný vplyv feministických a postkoloniálnych teórií. Zapojením poznatkov z týchto disciplín dáva zároveň najavo, že v jej monografii nepôjde len o tematizáciu modelov autobiografického písania. Foniokovej výskum v tomto kontexte uvádza a hlbkovo rieši zložité otázky týkajúce sa problému identity, interpretácie či fikcionalizácie samého seba, sebautvárania, spomienky a spomínania, kultúrnej a individuálnej pamäti a podobne. Tieto problémy sú pre ňu kľúčové do takej miery, že svoju monografiu neidentifikuje ako knihu o autobiografickom písaní, ale ako knihu, ktorá má „svědčit o centrálním postavení problému identity v současném myšlení“ (233).

Interdisciplinárny presah, ktorý Fonioková vo svojej monografii ponúka, je teda enormný, treba však zdôrazniť, že autorka sa vždy vráti k jeho textovo-literárnym implikáciám. A práve v tomto zmysle sa v jej novej monografii ukážu bytostné súvzťažnosti medzi žánrovými variáciami textov autobiografického písania a dynamickými premenami myslenia o probléme identity. Klasická autobiografia s jej tradičnými postupmi, alethetickými efektmi či očakávaniami už nemôže vyhovieť súčasnému mysleniu o identite, v zásade – vzhľadom na premeny vnímania problému identity od modernizmu cez postmodernu až po súčasnú digitálnu dobu a „kultúru selfie“ – začína pôsobiť neautenticky (233 – 234), preto „čím dál rozšířenější jsou [...] autobiografické a autofikční texty, v nichž inovativní narativní strategie i otevřeně fikční (smyšlené) prvky autorům slouží k efektivnějšímu sdělení pocíťované pravdy o sobě samých, o vlastním životě či o společnosti, v níž žijí“ (234).

Široký tematicko-problémový záber autorka koncentruje do štyroch centrálnych kapitol. V prvej kapitole sa zaoberá prejavmi previazanosti narativity a osobnej identity z perspektívy konštruktivismu a naratívnej psychológie. Problematika naratívnej identity je tu exponovaná predovšetkým na príkla-

de prózy Maxa Frischa *Montauk* (1975; čes. 2000) – ide o autobiografickú prózu s prvkami autofikcie, ktorá demonštruje nemožnosť „konstruovat vlastní život bezprostředně a popsat vlastní zkušenost bez určitého stupně fikcionalizace a konstrukce z perspektivy současnosti“ (46, pozri tiež 37). Na tomto základe je Frischovo dielo predstavené ako experimentálna autobiografia, ktorá sa oproti klasickej autobiografii (s týmto rozlíšením Fonioková pracuje systémovo) vyznačuje vehementným upozorňovaním na proces naratívnej konštrukcie identity. Priebeh tohto procesu i jeho teoretickú reflexiu detailne opisuje v pomerne rozsiahlej pasáži venovanej uchopeniu problému identity z pohľadu naratívnej psychológie. Z tejto skutočne dôsledne spísanej prezentácie zásadných koncepcií z danej oblasti okrem iného vyplýva, že „každá (re)konstrukce vlastního života je nerozlučně spjata s interpretací minulosti, přičemž tato interpretace spolu s požadavkem koherence ovlivňuje nejen způsob zobrazení faktů a udalostí, ale také jejich výběr“ (93).

Iným významným faktorom, ktorý ovplyvňuje profil naratívnej identity, je kultúra. Fonioková otvára druhú kapitolu pripomenutím skutočnosti, že „individuální způsoby prožívání, vzpomínání a vyprávění nelze vydělit z kolektivních, kulturně sdílených vzorců“ (93). Vychádzajúc z tohto základu následne usmerní svoje analýzy na problematiku master-naratívov a foriem naratívneho vzdoru. Pokiaľ master-naratívy ako dominantné kultúrne naratívy prezentujú to, čo je považované za normatívnu skúsenosť, a poskytujú indicie pre naše individuálne príbehy, presvedčenia, hodnoty i správanie (103), formy naratívneho vzdoru predstavujú ich kolíznú interpretáciu. Tento typ autobiografickej tvorby Fonioková identifikuje predovšetkým vo vzťahu k spisovateľkám či spisovateľom, ktorí sa vyrovnávajú s problémami vyplývajúcimi z ich dvojitého kultúrneho zázemia (autorka tu prezentuje interpretáciu experimentálnej autobiografie *Válečnice* Maxine Hong Kingston z roku 1976, čes. 1998), pozornosť však venuje aj autobiografickým a autofikčným textom prí-

slušníkov etnických, sexuálnych či rodových menšín, keďže títo „tvůrci leckdy spolu se sociokulturními normami a master-narativy odmítají i tradiční vzory psaní o sobě. Jde o formu narativního vzdoru, kdy texty vytvářejí protinarativy nejen obsahem, ale též formou“ (112). Pomenovaný kontext zároveň vedie Foniokovú k doplneniu funkcií autobiografického písania: autobiografická tvorba sa v naznačených súvislostiach stáva príležitosťou na uplatnenie dosiaľ zanedbávaných hlasov, ktoré dostávajú priestor nielen na sebayjadrenie, ale tiež na formulovanie kritikej reflexie spoločenských noriem a prezentáciu naratívnych alternatív k prevládajúcim kultúrnym modelom a tradičným predstavám o správnom či normálnom živote (110).

Tretia kapitola ponúka naratologicky ukotvenú interpretačnú analýzu autobiografických textov Güntera Grassa (*Při loupání cibule*, 2006; čes. 2007), Christophera Isherwooda (*Christopher and His Kind*, 1976) a Mary Karr (*The Liars' Club*, 1995). Fonioková tu dominantne rekonštruje podmienky, za ktorých sa rozprávačka či rozprávač môže vzťahovať k vlastnej minulosti a svojim minulým verziám; v týchto súvislostiach exponuje predovšetkým problematiku dichotómie rozprávajúceho a rozprávaného „Ja“ v autobiografických naratívoch, koncepciu Doritt Cohn o konsonantnej a disonantnej sebanarácii a model naratívnej perspektívy Wolfa Schmida. Tento teoretický podklad umožňuje autorke sledovať, „jak narativní strategie v těchto dílech pomáhají vyjádřit odlišné postoje autobiografických vypravěčů ke vzpomínání a k vyprávění minulosti tím, že kladou důraz na kontinuitu vlastní existence, nebo naopak na změnu a pocit nesourodosti v čase“ (33).

Záverečná kapitola rekonštruje kontext nástupu a uplatnenia žánru autofikcie. Zachytenie premien kritikej diskusie o probléme autofikčného písania Fonioková sprevádza predstavením vlastnej teoretickej pozície, ktorá spočíva v postulovaní autofikcie „nikoli jako žánru, ale jako strategie záměrného a přiznaného mísení autobiograficky referenčního a fikčního vyprávění“ (177). V afir-

matívnej nadväznosti na výskum Alexandry Effel, Hannah Lawlor, Claudie Groneman, Martiny Wagner-Egelhaaf či Marie Darrieussecq navrhuje Fonioková sústrediť sa nie na autofikciu, ale na autofikčnosť ako stupňovateľný príznak, uplatňujúci sa v celom spektre textov (200 – 202). O autofikcii je potom produktívne hovoriť v tých prípadoch, keď sa autofikčnosť, resp. autofikčné postupy presadia v danom diele v centrálnej pozícii. Na základe vymedzenia zásadných znakov autofikčnosti (pozri 200 – 210) Fonioková následne upozorňuje na špecifické postavenie metaautobiografických autofikcií, ktorých poetologické atribúty dokumentuje analýzou diel Davea Eggersa (*Srdceryvné dílo ohromujícího génia*, 2000, čes. 2002) a Jana Němce (*Možnosti milostného románu*, 2019).

Treba povedať, že zachytené línie autorkinho výskumu zďaleka nevyčerpávajú potenciál jej monografie. Zuzana Fonioková napísala veľkú systematickú prácu obsahujúcu množstvo sekundárnych, navzájom sa prelínajúcich a dopĺňajúcich motívov, vykonala teoretický prieskum mimoriadne problematickej, dynamickej oblasti, ktorá sa vyznačuje exponovaním naratívnych foriem rozrušujúcich už tak krehké stabilizačné kritériá žánru autobiografie, detailne predstavila aktuálny zahraničný výskum a formulovala vlastnú teoretickú pozíciu. Jej monografia zachytáva odklony, variácie, variácie variácií, porušenia, destabilizačné postupy, všetky tie tvorivé pohyby, ktoré subvertujú žánrový základ autobiografie – a v tomto zmysle (na pozadí monografie Kláry Soukupovej) predstavuje pre túto chvíľu vyvrcholenie českého literárnovedného záujmu o problém autobiografického písania.

MARCEL FORGÁČ

Katedra slovenskej literatúry  
a literárnej vedy

Filozofická fakulta

Prešovská univerzita v Prešove

Slovenská republika

marcel.forgac@unipo.sk

ORCID: 0000-0003-1078-2061

Článok vznikol s podporou grantovej úlohy VEGA 1/0666/22 „Slovenská literárna kultúra po roku 1989 (slovník pojmov, subjektov a inštitúcií)“.

**KAREL SRP: Ti druzí. Jean-Paul Sartre a Československo 1934 – 1970**

[The Others. Jean-Paul Sartre and Czechoslovakia 1934–1970]

Řevnice: Arbor vitae, 2023. 380 s. ISBN 978-80-7467-166-1

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.14

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Kniha *Ti druzí. Jean-Paul Sartre a Československo 1934 – 1970* českého historika umenia a kurátora Karla Srpa, ktorého ako odborníka na moderné české umenie a na avantgardu zvlášť (surrealizmus i slovenský nadrealizmus) oceňujeme vďaka jeho otvorenosti voči interdisciplinárnemu dialógu aj v literárnohistorickom prostredí, sa rodila dlho. Autor ju síce plánoval už od prelomu rokov 2019/2020, no v dôsledku protipandemických opatrení skomplikoval jej vznik najprv sťažený prístup k zdrojom a neskôr i zmenené vydavateľské podmienky. Publikácia, ktorá v roku 2023 napokon uzrela svetlo sveta, však našťastie znaky týchto vonkajších okolností nenesie. Výpravné vydanie s bohatým obrazovým materiálom (fotografiami z divadelných predstavení a iných podujatí, portrétnymi fotografiami, obálkami knižných vydaní a fotoreprodukciami časopiseckých článkov, v skromnejšej miere s archívnym materiálom) svedčí naopak o plnej realizácii veľkorysého zámeru zachytiť nielen slovom, ale aj obrazom prítomnosť Sartrovej osobnosti v československom kontexte; svedčí o autorovej detailnej heuristickej práci, ktorú poznáme z jeho početných umeleckých monografií a výstavných katalógov.

Je azda prekvapujúce, že sa kunsthistorik rozhodol pre spracovanie témy, ktorá primárne nesúvisí s výtvarným umením, lebo veď Sartre bol eminentne majster slova a ak odhliadneme od jeho úvah o vzťahu existencializmu a sochárskeho diela Alberta Giacomettiho či o fenomenológii vnímania Mauricea Merleaua-Pontyho (vrátane vzájomnej korešpondencie), bol jeho vzťah k vý-

tvárnému umeniu rezervovaný. Sartre a Československo je však už napohľad významná kultúrohistorická téma, ktorá zásadným spôsobom zasahuje viaceré oblasti spoločenského a kultúrneho života – politiku, divadlo, literatúru, filozofiu, medzinárodné kultúrne vzťahy – a tým Sartra robí pre Srpa i kritikú čitateľskú obec zaujímavým ako osobnosť spoluvytvárajúcu v šesťdesiatych rokoch 20. storočia intelektuálny horizont i duchovnú atmosféru Československej republiky.

Textová časť Srpovej knihy predstavuje do veľkej miery súvislú správu o Sartrových návštevách Československa (bolo ich niekoľko, pričom tá z jesene roku 1963 sa vryla do kolektívnej pamäti azda najhlbšie, pretože sa spájala okrem iného s ďalším významným historickým momentom – s atentátom na J. F. Kennedyho), resp. správu o Sartrových vyjadreniach k spoločenskému a politickému daniu v krajine, počnajúc Mníchovom 1938 a končiac sovietskou okupáciou z 21. augusta 1968. Srp zaradil do svojej knihy aj preklad interview z 25. augusta, ktoré Sartre ponúkol ľavicovému talianskemu denníku *Paese sera*, kde jednoznačne odsúdil sovietsku inváziu do ČSSR a označil ju za dôsledok momentálnej politickej prevahy starých stalinistických síl v Kremli.

Sartrova prítomnosť v Prahe, v Bratislave a inde v republike však znamenala rovnako preklady, resp. viaceré vydania jeho poviedok, románov, divadelných hier, esejí i filozofických diel a takisto inscenovanie jeho drám i účasť na diskusiách o literatúre a umení, spoločnosti i filozofii (o Kafkovi, románe, marxizme, socializme atď.), do kto-



rych bola zapojená takmer celá vtedajšia československá intelektuálna elita. Zároveň sem však patrí bohatá sartróvska recepcia tak v Čechách, ako aj na Slovensku, a to prakticky už od roku 1945, jeho vplyv na akademické myslenie a tiež rozličné formy popularizácie jeho diela. Škoda, že sa nepodarilo dostať k nepublikovanej práci Antona Vantucha *J. P. Sartre a francúzsky ateistický existencializmus* z roku 1947, čo bola veľmi dlho asi najobsiahlejšia ucelená (i keď len absolventská) práca o Sartrovi v Československu. Srp ju len spomína, jej strojopis je však nedostupný – nachádza sa v Akademickú knižnici Univerzity Komenského, ktorá z tejto práce ktovie z akých dôvodov dodnes nepovoľuje čokoľvek technicky reprodukovať a zverejňovať.

Na pozadí bohatej sartróvskej recepcie, prekladov autorových diel a aj inscenácií drám, ktoré Srpova kniha podrobne dokumentuje, si dnes môžeme položiť nielen otázku, čím v šesťdesiatych rokoch Sartre reálne zapôsobil na našu, resp. na globálnu kultúru, ale smieme sa takisto spýtať, čo v českej, slovenskej, ale aj v globálnej kultúre zo Sartra zostalo po rokoch. V priebehu procesu odkúzenia marxizmu sa aspoň v našom kontexte presadil do veľkej miery karikatúrny obraz tohto francúzskeho autora a filozofa ako pokryteckého a navyše anachronického strašiaka meštiakov, tak ho aspoň vykresľovali po roku 1989 vplyvní konzervatívni popularizátori moderných intelektuálnych dejín ako Paul Johnson (jeho kniha *Intelektuáli* vyšla pôvodne v roku 1988 a odvtedy v mnohých vydaniach aj v prekladoch). Pri čítaní

Srpovej knihy si skutočne uvedomíme, koľko gestikulácie, páťosu a v neposlednom rade myšlienkového a slovného balastu sprevádzalo gloriózne roky Sartróvho pôsobenia. To všetko v šesťdesiatych rokoch nejako prispievalo k živej atmosfére doby, zaplňalo medzinárodný a aj československý kultúrny priestor a sotva narážalo na kritiku progresívnych vzdelancov a intelektuálov (ako pripomína Srp, jednou z mála osobností, ktoré si od Sartróvych vystúpení v Československu od začiatku udržiavali triezvy odstup, bol slovenský literárny kritik a kultúrny historik Milan Hamada). Veľká filozoficko-spoločensko-politická paradigma so špecifickým pojmoslovím a intelektuálnou problematizáciou sa ale v skutočnosti rozplývala postupne a definitívne sa zrútila až po čase, keď vysvitlo, že bola postavená na spoločenskej ilúzii, ktorá ako model nemohla nikdy reálne fungovať, pretože jej chýbali predpoklady, aké nachádzame v historickom človeku, o ktorého Sartre nejavil záujem. Napriek márnosti, aká sa nás na pozadí dnes už vyprázdnenej dobovej rétoriky zmocňuje, môžeme však aj po prečítaní knihy Karla Srpa tvrdiť, že to, čo zo Sartra zostalo dodnes, je étos nezlomného, diskutujúceho a neprispôsobivého, autonómneho intelektuála, ku ktorému anglosaská kultúra správne pridala na konci 20. storočia prívlastok „verejný“.

ADAM BŽOCH

Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i.

Bratislava

Slovenská republika

adam.bzoch@savba.sk

ORCID: 0000-0002-3943-3669



**OSMO PEKONEN (in coop. JOHAN C.-E. STÉN): Les Lumières en Finlande. Travaux et jours de dix-sept savants finlandais** [The Enlightenment in Finland. Works and days of seventeen Finnish scholars]  
Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2024. 236 s. ISBN: 978-2-406-17125-6

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2025.17.3.15

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Ak vôbec možno charakter storočí v Európe vystihnúť jediným slovom, tak 18. storočie by bolo storočím osvietenstva. Tento prívlastok živia dominantné predstavy, ktoré sa spájajú s filozofickými ideami popredných mysliteľov, rozmachom vedeckého poznania a postupnými revolučnými zmenami v usporiadaní spoločnosti. Takáto oslnivá charakteristika však Európu 18. storočia nevystihuje v jej celistvosti. Týka sa predovšetkým západných krajín, ktorých historická rezonancia nezriedka iné odsúva do úzadia. Vo zvyšku Európy preto treba hľadať vlastné podoby storočia.

Práve snaha uchopiť osvietenské storočie z doteraz systematickejšie neprebádanej fínskej perspektívy viedla Osma Pekonena k napísaniu knihy *Les Lumières en Finlande. Travaux et jours de dix-sept savants finlandais* (Osvietenstvo vo Fínsku. Práca a život sedemnástich fínskych vzdelancov). V roku 2024 vyšla vo francúzskom vydavateľstve Classiques Garnier ako 91. publikácia v rámci edície *L'Europe des Lumières* (Osvietenská Európa), ktorá si kladie za úlohu šíriť a prehľbovať poznatky o intelektuálnom, vedeckom, umeleckom a literárnom živote 18. storočia. Edícia sa neobmedzuje iba na tradičnú interpretáciu osvietenstva z pohľadu veľkých národov, ale pokrýva aj jeho „periférne“ podoby. Má interdisciplinárny charakter a je priestorom na preskúmanie takých aspektov storočia, ako cirkulácia vedeckých poznatkov a filozofických myšlienok, vzájomné prepojenie európskych mysliteľov, intelektuálne výmeny naprieč Európou atď. Svojím

záberom tak otvára priestor na reflexiu tohto obdobia z nového zorného uhla.

Pekonenova publikácia na vyše dvesto stranách ponúka kaleidoskopický pohľad na podoby fínskeho osvietenstva. Jeho obraz vytvára prostredníctvom sond do pôsobenia vybraných fínskych vzdelancov, ktorí sa zásadným spôsobom podieľali na intelektuálnom živote v krajine. Pri výbere osobností zavážil ich medzinárodný vplyv a cesty do zahraničia, pričom väčšina z nich sa na území dnešného Fínska buď narodila, alebo sa tam odohrala významná časť ich profesionálneho pôsobenia. Nájdú sa medzi nimi vedci, výskumníci, akademici, ale aj prieskumníci a dobrodruhovia, skrátka predstavitelia vtedajšej inteligencie.

Autor v úvode identifikuje dve zásadné otázky, ktoré celý koncept osvietenského storočia vo Fínsku problematizujú. V prvom rade ide o koncept fínskeho národa, keďže v 18. storočí geografická oblasť zodpovedajúca dnešnému územiu Fínska patrila Švédskemu kráľovstvu. Nie je teda prekvapujúce, že z celosvetového hľadiska sa povedomie o tomto období vo všeobecnosti redukuje na poznanie tých najvýraznejších švédskych osobností, akými sú Linné či Celsius. Pekonenova kniha má preto ambíciu „zaplniť medzeru v literatúre: pripomenúť, že Švédsko bolo v minulosti oveľa väčšie a medzi jeho významné osobnosti patria rovnako aj tie, ktoré pochádzajú z jeho východnej polovice, z Fínska“ (16; prel. M. V.).

V autorovom ponímaní ambivalentnou zostáva aj otázka, či možno na území vtedaj-

šieho Fínska oprávnene uvažovať o osvietenstvom storočí. Upozorňuje, že ak by sme vychádzali z francúzskeho ponímania osvietenstva tak, ako k nemu neraz pristupuje francúzska historiografia, tento pojem by sa sémanticky vyprázdnil (8 – 9). Pekonen v tomto smere nadväzuje na názor časti švédскеj historiografie, ktorá o podobe osvietenstva vo Švédsku 18. storočia konštatuje, že sa v ničom neponáša na situáciu vo Francúzsku. Príklad intelektuálneho života osvietených protagonistov fínskej proveniencie, ktorých pôsobenie kniha zachytáva, len potvrdzuje, že osvietenstvo v tejto časti Európy nebolo ani revolučné, ani nespochybňovalo kresťanskú tradíciu, keďže vo väčšine prípadov išlo o luteránskych kňazov. Na pozadí životopisov vzdelancov autor v knihe čitateľskej verejnosti odhaľuje podobu osvieteného storočia vlastnú fínskemu prostrediu, kde osvietenstvo nadobudlo skôr vedecký než ideologicko-politický ráz. Jeho ústrednú črtu predstavoval utilitarizmus, z ktorého vyplývala výrazná podpora technického a vedeckého pokroku v snahe zefektívniť využívanie prírodných zdrojov a prispieť tak k rozvoju hospodárstva v kráľovstve.

Jazykovo aj obsahovo Pekonen vychádza v ústrety čitateľskej verejnosti, pre ktorú je Fínsko neznáme. Jeho spis môže poslúžiť ako prostriedok na preniknutie do všeobecne menej známeho historického pozadia pred vznikom fínskeho národa. V tomto smere sú nápomocné vysvetlenia reálií, poznámky pod čiarou, ale aj samostatný stručný prehľad, ktorý v úvode publikácie v bodoch zachytáva sled významných udalostí vo Fínsku v 18. storočí. Kniha môže osloviť frankofónne čitateľstvo, ktoré sa zaujíma o európske dejiny, šírenie filozofických myšlienok naprieč národmi, ich prieniky a nadobudnuté podoby. Z tohto hľadiska má publikácia potenciál aj slovenskému publiku poodhaliť historické paralely medzi vývinom slovenského a fínskeho národa. Nemenej zaujímavá bude aj pre tých, ktorí chcú preniknúť do dobového stavu vedeckého poznania v disciplínach ako astronómia, meteorológia, medicína, botanika, geodézia či ekonómia.

Knihu tvorí úvod, niekoľko poznámok k princípom uplatneným pri koncepcii portrétov, ktoré dopĺňa krátky Pekonenov životopis, prehľad významných udalostí vo Fínsku 18. storočia, samostatné kapitoly, záver, poďakovanie, prehľad toponým vo fínskom a švédskom jazyku a menný register. Kapitoly sú zoradené chronologicky podľa roku, v ktorom sa narodili portretovaní vzdelanci uvedení v názve. Takéto usporiadanie do určitej miery umožňuje vnímať vývoj udalostí v časovom slede.

Po náhlej smrti Osma Pekonena v roku 2022 sa o vydanie nedokončeného manuskriptu knihy postaral Johan C.-E. Stén, ktorý výber pôvodných dvanástich vzdelancov obohatil o ďalších päť osobností. Vzhľadom na túto skutočnosť by sa žiadalo pri každej kapitole jasne rozlíšiť autorstvo, no tento údaj sa v knihe nikde nenachádza.

Hoci väčšina osvietených vzdelancov si miesto v publikácii získala účasťou na významných vedeckých výpravách a rozvojom tzv. tvrdých vied, v kapitole „Henrik Gabriel Porthan, le premier statufié“ (Henrik Gabriel Porthan, prvý, ktorému vztýčili pomník) autor vyzdvihol zásluhy tohto osvieteného polyhistora na rozvoji disciplín spadajúcich do dnešných humanitných vied. Na cestách do Nemecka sa Porthan inšpiroval novými metódami historického a literárneho výskumu a rozvinul vlastnú kritickú metódu „triezvej pochybnosti“ (*sobria dubitatio*), ktorá spočívala „v dôslednom skúmaní a porovnávaní informácií z rôznych zdrojov“ (172). Vo svojom univerzitnom pôsobení sa „štúdiom všetkých aspektov fínskeho ľudu: jazyka a nárečí, zvykov a kultúry, histórie a folklóru, snažil podporovať duchovný a materiálny rozvoj svojej vlasti“ (176), čím prispel k budovaniu samostatnej fínskej identity v kráľovstve. V záujme získania pravdiviejšieho a triezvejšieho pohľadu na fínsku históriu sa začal ako jeden z prvých venovať štúdiu fínskeho folklóru. Zozbieral ľudovú poéziu, ktorú neskôr publikoval v pôvodnom znení s latinským prekladom v sérii vedeckých štúdií, kde ľudové básne podrobil analýzám z hľadiska štruktúry, metra a štýlu. Do li-

terárneho života v krajine sa zapísal aj ako spoluzakladateľ tajnej spoločnosti Aurora a šéfredaktor prvých fínskych novín vydávaných vo švédskom jazyku *Tidningar utgifna af et sällskap i Åbo* (Noviny vydávané spoločnosťou v Turku). Na stránkach tohto periodika svojimi príspevkami debutovali viacerí intelektuáli a hoci členmi spoločnosti Aurora sa mohli stať výhradne muži, v literárnej sekcii novín dostali priestor na publikovanie svojej tvorby aj spisovatelia.

Rozsahovo a spracovaním obsahu budia kapitoly rozkolísaný dojem. Zatiaľ čo niektoré si zachovávajú primárne životopisný ráz (napr. kapitola o Andersovi Chydeniusovi alebo Abrahamovi Niclasovi Clewberg-Edelcrantsovi), iné pripomínajú skôr prehľadové štúdie mapujúce rozvoj vedeckej oblasti s čiastkovými portrétmi rôznych vedcov, ktorí sa na jej rozvoji podieľali. Životopis vzdelanca, ktorému je kapitola venovaná v názve, tak pôsobí takmer iba ako doplnok na dotvorenie celkového obrazu disciplíny. Ako príklad možno uviesť kapitolu „Johan Leche, médecin et météorologue“ (Johan Leche, lekár a meteorológ), ktorá sa z nepomerne väčšej časti venuje rozvoju meteorológie ako vednej disciplíny, pričom zachytáva prehľad osobností, ktoré sa na jej rozvoji podieľali, dokumentuje uplatňované postupy meteorologických meraní vo Fínsku v 18. storočí a zdôrazňuje ich európsky význam. Jej text je nasýtený podrobnými informáciami o existujúcich zachovaných meteorologických záznamoch v rôznych archívoch. Ak uvážime, že autor v knihe neuvádza úplný zoznam zdrojovej literatúry, pôsobí toto zahrnutie marginálnych pramenných informácií nevyvážené. Ďalším príkladom nesúmernosti informácií je kapitola, ktorá už v názve kladie ústrednú portrétovanú postavu na vedľajšiu kolaj. Ide o „Les débuts de la médecine finlandaise et Johan Haartman“ (Začiatky fínskej medicíny a Johan Haartman). Takmer celá prvá polovica kapitoly sa venuje priblíženiu dobového stavu medicíny v kráľovstve, zachytáva prínosy viacerých osobností do jej rozvoja a až potom prechádza k životu a významu

pôsobenia Johana Haartmana, ktorý sa považuje za otca fínskeho lekárstva.

Na základe uvedených príkladov možno argumentovať, že znenie podtitulu publikácie (Práca a život sedemnástich fínskych vzdelancov) môže navodiť skreslené očakávanie obsahovej náplne kapitol, ktoré úplne nekorešponduje so skutočnosťou. Nemožno však tvrdiť, že kapitoly, v ktorých sa autor nevyhnutne nezameriava na význam a pôsobenie jedného vzdelanca, nezohrávajú v celkovej koncepcii knihy dôležitú úlohu. Práve naopak, aj typ sondy, ktorý približuje miestny stav vedeckej oblasti napĺňa cieľ publikácie, keďže aj pohľad na fínske osvietenstvo cez prizmu rozvoja vedeckej disciplíny a jej prepojenia s európskou vedeckou obcou predstavuje jeden zo spôsobov, ako usúvzťažniť „perifériu“ s „centrom“.

Nesúrodosť knihy sa v texte miestami prejavila aj na úrovni štýlu. Zatiaľ čo kapitoly orientujúce sa na životopis, respektíve prínos osobností v rámci vedných disciplín, si zachovávajú znaky náučného štýlu, v kapitolách, ktoré približujú udalosti súvisiace s výpravami, faktografický výklad strieda príbehový naratív. Text tak na niektorých miestach nadobúda znaky umeleckého štýlu, čím autor dosahuje pútavosť čítania. Za všetky ako príklad možno uviesť kapitolu „Herman Spöring, un compagnon de voyage du capitaine Cook“ (Herman Spöring, spoločník na ceste kapitána Cooka), ktorá zachytáva udalosti súvisiace s námornou výpravou kapitána Jamesa Cooka pri jeho prvej plavbe okolo Zeme. Fínsky prírodovedec Herman Spöring patril k vedeckým členom expedície. Keďže bol povolaním hodinár, na výprave zodpovedal za údržbu vedeckých zariadení, podieľal sa však aj na zdokumentovaní prírodovedných objavov. Poetický opis Spöringovho pohrebu na mori v závere kapitoly sa dostáva do kontrastu s vecnou formuláciou znenia nasledujúcej kapitoly. Pri súvislom čítaní môže takáto juxtapozícia štýlov pôsobiť rušivo.

V závere kapitol sa vždy uvádza krátka informácia o zachovaných pamiatkach na vzdelancov a aspoň jeden odkaz na dopln-

kovú literatúru o danej osobnosti. Treba však skonštatovať, že dôsledné uvádzanie všetkých citovaných zdrojov by zvýšilo vedecký kredit knihy. Kapitoly boli zámerne koncipované tak, aby sa mohli čítať ako samostatné celky. Svedčia o tom aj opakujúce sa zmienky o rovnakých historických udalostiach. Aj napriek tomu by kniha nestratila zo zaujímavosti, ak by kapitoly konzistentným spôsobom odkazovali na už spomenuté osoby a skutočnosti. Autor by tak dosiahol vyššiu mieru koherentnosti textu ako celku. Do istej miery tento nedostatok kompenzuje menný register v závere knihy, vďaka ktorému si možno informácie pospájať jednoduchšie.

Ak vezmeme do úvahy, že ambíciou knihy je rozšíriť povedomie o významných fínskych vzdelancoch osvietenského obdobia (1721 – 1809), možno skonštatovať, že tento cieľ aj naplňa. Neponúka síce jednoznačné odpovede na otázky, ktoré vyvoláva jej názov, ale prinajmenšom nabáda k uvažovaniu

o podobách osvietenstva v periférnych oblastiach Európy. Poznanie podmienok a charakteru osvietenstva v okrajových oblastiach môže napokon viesť aj k novému pohľadu na veľké kultúry, ktoré sa popri periférnych ukážu v inom svetle. Aj napriek spomínaným nedostatkom knihe nemožno uprieť, že sprístupňuje množstvo všeobecne neznámych historiografických faktov, ktoré podávajú svedectvo o živote fínskych vzdelancov, ich intelektuálnej práci a mieste v európskej „République des Lettres“. Kniha Osma Pekone na tak môže pomôcť vyplniť niektoré z chýbajúcich dielov mozaiky, ktorou je Európa 18. storočia.

MARTINA VLADOVIČOVÁ

Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i.

Bratislava

Slovenská republika

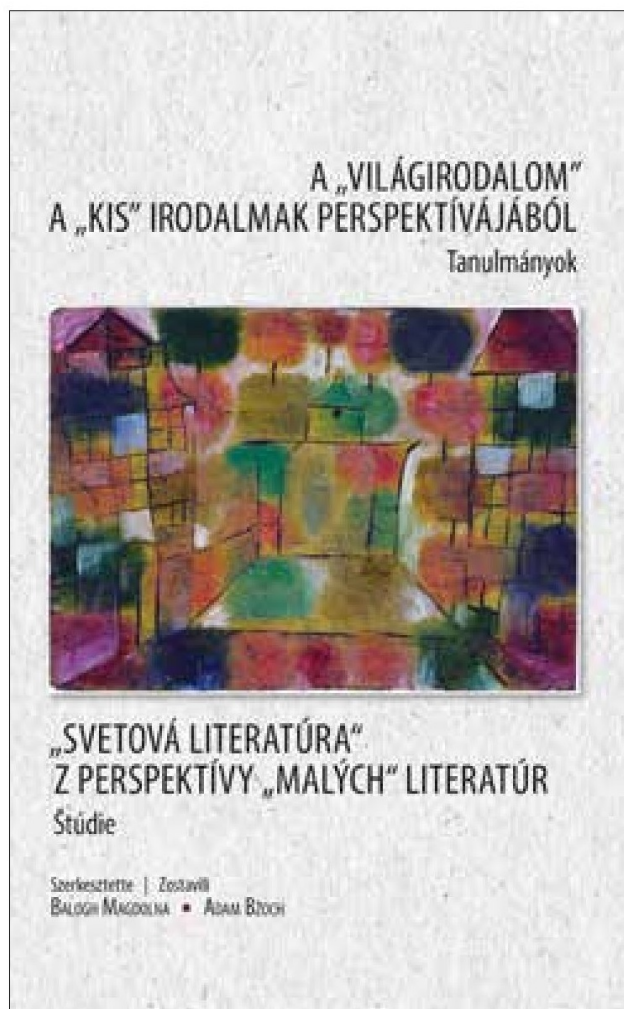
[martina.vladovicova@savba.sk](mailto:martina.vladovicova@savba.sk)

ORCID: 0009-0004-1880-5197

Táto práca bola podporená Agentúrou na podporu výskumu a vývoja na základe Zmluvy č. APVV-21-0198.



MAGDOLNA BALOGH — ADAM BŽOCH (eds.):  
 A „világirodalom” a „kis” irodalmak perspektívájából:  
 Tanulmányok / „Svetová literatúra” z perspektívy  
 „malých” literatúr: Štúdie. Budapest: Reciti Kiadó,  
 2024. 342 s. ISBN 978-963-672-019-3.



Zborník štúdií sa sústreďuje najmä na problémy literatúr tzv. malých národov alebo presnejšie literatúr, ktoré vznikajú v iných ako svetových jazykoch. Venuje sa otázke, ako sa diela tzv. malých národov dostávajú (môžu dostať) do tzv. svetovej literatúry, ktoré osoby a inštitúcie zohrávajú v tomto procese kľúčovú rolu, aké sú úskalia a podmienky úspešnej recepcie, ako sa jej vzory od seba odlišujú v jednotlivých kultúrach, aké presuny dôrazov nachádzame v stredoeurópskom regióne a podobne. Zborník je finálnym výstupom z konferencie, ktorej cieľom bolo výskumom javov v tzv. malých národoch osvetliť, resp. kriticky prehodnotiť isté polemické tvrdenia alebo konštatovania v koncepciách svetovej literatúry (Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti a ďalší) a zamyslieť sa nad možnými vzťahmi medzi národnou literatúrou, regionálnou (najmä stredoeurópskou) literatúrou zahŕňajúcou viac národných literatúr a svetovou literatúrou. V prvej časti sú zaradené state, ktoré spracúvajú tému z rôznych aspektov formou historického prehľadu. V druhej časti sa nachádzajú užšie zamerané prípadové štúdie, ktoré sa upriamujú na širšiu problematiku kultúrnych transferov, prekladu a recepcie, pertraktujú sa v nej však aj otázky uplatnenia vzorov a predobrazov zo svetovej literatúry v národných literatúrach.

The edited book focuses primarily on the problems of the so-called minor literatures, or more precisely, literatures written in languages other than world languages. It addresses the question of how the works of the so-called small nations find their way into the so-called world literature, which individuals and institutions play a key role in this process, the pitfalls and conditions for successful reception, how its models differ in different cultures, what shifts in emphasis can be found in the Central European region, and so on. The collection is the final output of a conference whose aim was to shed light on, or critically re-evaluate, certain controversial claims or statements in the concepts of world literature (Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, and others) and to reflect on the possible relationships between national literatures, regional (especially Central European) literatures encompassing multiple national literatures, and world literature. The first part includes articles that address the topic from various angles in the form of a historical overview. The second part contains more narrowly focused case studies that address the broader issues of cultural transfer, translation, and reception, but also discuss the application of models and prototypes from world literature in national literatures.



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Od začiatku rozsiahlej ruskej invázie na Ukrajinu vo februári 2022 slúži literatúra ako prostriedok na zviditeľňovanie traumy aj dokumentovanie sociálnych a kultúrnych transformácií v čase krízy. Tému čísla rozpracováva súbor štúdií ukrajinských vedkýň, ktoré analyzujú tieto literárne procesy zvnútra a ponúkajú stratégie na rekonštrukciu a konsolidáciu národnej a kultúrnej identity. Články venované najnovšej ukrajinskej literatúre predstavujú súbor vedeckých prác o vojnových skúsenostiach, pričom dávajú priestor rôznym naratívnyh perspektívam, ktoré odrážajú povahu kolektívnej a individuálnej traumy.

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, literature has served both as a means of revealing trauma and for documenting social and cultural transformations during times of crisis. This issue gathers studies by Ukrainian scholars who analyze these literary processes from an insider's perspective and offer strategies for reconstructing and consolidating national and cultural identity. The articles devoted to the latest Ukrainian literature present a body of scholarship on wartime experiences, giving voice to diverse narrative perspectives reflecting the nature of both collective and individual trauma.