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BALSAI IR TERITORIJOS: TAPATYBĖS ŽEMĖLAPIS ŠIUOLAIKINĖJE UKRAINIEČIŲ PROZOJE

Voices and Territories: A Map of Identity
in Modern Ukrainian Prose

SUMMARY

The article discusses examples of understanding post-colonial identity in modern Ukrainian prose, as well as models for interpreting this phenomenon. In Ukrainian literature, this phenomenon is described in stories about returning or moving to another place. Moving across the border, learning about new space, and memorizing forgotten language plots are important components of such prose. They provide an opportunity to reveal a character's hybrid identity and bring back memories of real-life events. These aspects are embodied in the work of Serhiy Zhadan, Victoria Amelina, Volodymyr Rafeenko. In their prose, the colonial past is destroyed by overcoming an ambivalent hybrid identity, drawing up a new identity map and returning to the native language.

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje aptariami pokolonijinės tapatybės suvokimo pavyzdžiai ir šio reiškinio interpretavimo modeliai šiuolaikinėje ukrainiečių prozoje. Ukrainiečių literatūroje šis reiškinys randamas pasakojimuose apie grįžimą ar persikėlimą į kitą vietą. Persikėlimas į užsienio valstybę, naujos erdvės pažinimas ir pamirštų kalbos siužetų įsiminimas yra svarbūs tokios prozos komponentai. Jie padeda atskleisti hibridinę veikėjo tapatybę ir atgaivina realaus gyvenimo įvykių prisiminimus. Šiuos aspektus įkūnija Serhijaus Žadano, Viktorijos Amelinos, Volodymyro Rafeenkos darbai. Šių autorių prozoje kolonijinė praeitis sunaikinama įveikiant dvejojančią hibridinę tapatybę, kuriant naują tapatybės žemėlapią ir grįžtant prie gimtosios kalbos.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: tapatybė, žemėlapis, kalba, pokolonijinė teorija, ukrainiečių literatūra.

KEY WORDS: identity, map, language, postcolonial theory, Ukrainian literature.

INTRODUCTION

Personal identity and collective identity are particularly closely linked in societies that gained independence in 1991 due to secession from the USSR. This connection has been studied by historians, sociologists, culturologists, and writers. In Ukrainian society, the revision of topos born in the Soviet semiotic space is associated with a critical reflection on the colonial experience and a return to colonial experiences. However, in these studies, another trend is more pronounced: the creation of a map of identities through the formation of ideas about borders, marking (imaginary and historical-topographical) of the territory; emphasizing the images of “your own” and “foreign” people.

The analysis of these trends is based on the study of the population’s mood (Razumkov Center, KIIS, Rating), historians – monuments of the past, which reflect the “stories” of identity (Yakovenko 2012), and writers – by modeling such narratives in which the story answers to the questions “who am I?”, “what is my voice”, “where is my land / territory?”. Despite the differences in the objects of study, the results of these studies have much in common. Thus, sociological research states a steady increase in the attractiveness of identifying one’s citizenship as Ukrainian. Thus, during the poll in 2021 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Ukraine – “the vast majority of respondents (72%) are rather or very proud of Ukrainian citizenship. Only 18.5% said they were rather or not at all proud of this fact. In general, over the last 19 years, there has been a steady

trend of increasing the number of those who are proud or very proud of Ukrainian citizenship” (30 years of independence 2021). In 2002, there were more than 40% of them, respectively, the figures have almost doubled. Natalia Yakovenko’s research describes trends in the formation of ideas about one’s own identity in the communities of the 15th–18th centuries in Ukraine and records a complex intertwining of “situational identities” (Yakovenko 2012: 103), a tendency to “topographize” historical memory (Yakovenko 2012: 77). relative), social and ethnic components of identity (Yakovenko 2012: 102). How does Ukrainian literature answer these questions? Its answer is recorded in such works as “Big Mac and Other Stories” by Serhiy Zhadan (collection of short stories), “Death of the Lion Cecil Made Sense” by Olena Styazhkina, “Mondegreen” by Volodymyr Rafeenko, “Home for Dom” by Victoria Amelina, “Who Are You?” by Artem Czech. These prose works embody such a way of writing and representation of reality, in which there is a clear desire to return to their own past, to destroy the colonial ideology or the consequences of the colonial identity dominance.

The intellectual stimulus to write this article was: a set of works of Ukrainian literature devoted to issues of identity; tendencies highlighted by sociologists during the study of the transformation of Ukrainians’ perceptions of their identity, Soviet nostalgia, etc.; discussions within postcolonial theory; reconceptualization of the Ukrainian past into escape / return / movement plots in works of art.

COORDINATES OF THE HOUSE

Ukrainian literature has been recording the space of Soviet identity and its gradual destruction since the middle of the twentieth century. This happens in different genres and language formulas:

1. Creative practices of the Ukrainian 1960s, especially the poetry of Lina Kostenko, Mykola Vingranovsky, Vasyl Stus, Vasyl Symonenko and their concept of humans being the highest value of life. The philosophy of protest and belief in the power of the human spirit is embodied in the poetic lines "Do you know that you are human?" (Vasyl Symonenko), "cover yourself with a copper mountain, hide the defiant pigeons" (Vasyl Stus), "A man allegedly does not fly... And he has wings. And it has wings!" (Lina Kostenko). Mostly this poetry is aphoristic. It emphasizes such linguistic formulas that refer the reader to specific Ukrainian realities and images and at the same time appeal to universal philosophical truths.
2. Ironic creative practices of the mid-1980s – early 1990s in the works of Les Poderviansky, Yuriy Andrukhovych, Bohdan Zholdak, Oleksandr Irvanets, Volodymyr Danylenko, Yuriy Lysenko (Yurko Pozayak) and others. This period in Ukrainian literature captures the powerful energy of the destruction of foreign cultural and aesthetic experience through laughter, irony, satire in poetry, prose, drama. In the lens of ridiculous practices, the Soviet appears as Foreign, Other. The leading aesthetic mark is the carnival, disguise, tearing off masks, which appeared in the plays of Lesya Podervy-

ansky ("Pavlik Morozov", "Turnip", etc.), ironic poetry of the group "Bu-Ba-Bu" and Yurko Pozayak, festival performances of the 1990s (Vyvykh festival in the early 1990s in Lviv and Chrysler Imperial performance based on lyrics by Yuri Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak, Oleksandr Irvanets). Soviet as the Foreign is embodied in the language formulas of surzhik, playing with quotes from Soviet slogans, movies, books. The Soviet here is an object of irony and satire. However, it is not yet the Other.

The search for new cultural coordinates and spatial mapping of the Ukrainian semiotic space itself is the next stage in the development of Ukrainian culture and literature. Two tendencies are typical for this period – mapping the boundaries of one's territory and meeting the Other. From the 1990s to the present. The construction of the map took place simultaneously with the destruction of the map of the Soviet space due to the blurring of borders and the border between Ukraine and the West and the delineation of Ukraine's borders as a cultural and semiotic space.

The first trend was clearly in Serhiy Zhadan's short stories "Big Mac and Other Stories". This is a meeting with the West. These are stories about crossing the border of Ukraine and leaving for Western Europe, meeting with the Other. Serhiy Zhadan's characters easily cross the border between the Ukrainian space and the space of the Western world and find themselves in a space alien to themselves. Zhadan outlined a map of Europe that did not correspond to the

ideas of the Soviet Union and the realities. This is an intercultural, diverse and multinational Europe. There, the semiotic layers of the European, socialist, and Western ones are bizarrely intertwined and create a new multicultural space. And this space does not correspond to the ideas of a man who left for Europe with Soviet stereotypes. A new image of Europe and European identity is emerging. Indicative in this context is the short story "Berlin, which we lost". The story is told in the first person. The autobiographical character tells about one day among artists, musicians and casual acquaintances. The action takes place both while moving to and while in Berlin. Among the described landmarks are the railway station, which has become a cultural center, and an abandoned factory, on the territory of which the work of the old dissident artist Rudy is being destroyed. This notable character voices a new perception of Europe – "in fact, space is not divided into their own or someone else's, space is either free or controlled, you know?" (Zhadan 2011: 26), and shows the main character and his casual friends, his half-ruined work of art. In the space of an almost ruined factory, he proclaims his understanding of his homeland and his space.

Look, "Rudy shouts at me, "this is my space and this is my homeland. All I have is this wall, and all I can do is come here sometimes and clean it of shit. Believe me, this is enough to not regret anything. Even if tomorrow this fucking Europe ends up globalizing and uniting with Asia, there will still be a wall of scrap metal here in Berlin, and even if I die tomorrow, I will send some fucking angels here to strip this shit, do you understand.

That's why I'm not going anywhere from here. I thought that, in principle, he was right, this old friend of Havel's in a military jacket, although he was well-dressed for his age, he was still right, as were the tens of thousands of Balkans and Turks who were building this the new Berlin, erecting scaffolding everywhere and supporting the cold Berlin skies, which hang low and sad, and from which it has been pouring more and more rain for several hours now (Zhadan 2011: 28).

The new cultural coordinates of Europe impress both the main character – the narrator in all the short stories of Sergei Zhadan from the collection "Big Mac and other stories", and the reader. Because in front of the reader unfolds a map of a new European identity, multicultural, hybrid. It bizarrely combines fragments of post-Soviet, old European and brought by migrants (mostly from the East). This colorful space reflects the crisis of old colonial identities and the crisis of forming a new identity. What unites all the characters of the new European map is a hybrid identity. Their language is a mixture of languages brought from around the world. The horizon of their vision is the "Berlin skies". Their identity map is the new Babylon of the 21st century. Here they experience the transformation of their "I", try to build a new world and realize that the new space it consists of fragments of the old world.

Complex semiotic connections are formed due to two components – the rhizome and the map. Rhizome is a model of textual organization in which all points (plot twists, images, fragments, etc.), it can be combined with others, even remote ones. And this is embodied in Serhiy Zhadan's prose as a set of fragmentary paint-

ings (mostly descriptions of memories, stereotypes from childhood, family stories or mass media). The map (although it may seem fixed once and for all) can actually be reproduced in different variations. As V. Chernetsky writes, “the map is open and combined in all its dimensions; it can be disassembled, deployed and subject to constant change”; she prefers performance to skill. The notions of rhizome and map are an integral part of the model of globalized post-communist culture” (Chernetsky 2013: 43-44). Textualization of the experience of forming ideas about identity, the limits of its implementation, the transformations that occur, while acquiring very interesting manifestations. Travel and relocation are key elements of this map combination.

Another dimension of the development and definition of a new space captures can be found in Victoria Amelina’s novel “House for Dom” (Amelina 2017). The topos of Lviv as a foreign space in this novel is not typical of Ukrainian literature. And thanks to this is very interesting. The writer describes how the Tsilyk family develops, appropriates foreign territory, when after years of service their father finds himself in a city and apartment that no one of the Tsiliks is aware of. The whole family has hybrid identity formed in the USSR. As a family of soldiers, they are eternal internal

migrants who bring luxury items from every corner of the service, which do not fit into a coherent set of family items, do not form a coherent family history. Lviv as the embodiment of the space with the strongest identity for the Tsilyk family is a space alien. Ironically, they live in the apartment where Stasnislav Lem’s family once lived. Memories of this apartment are recorded in his autobiographical book “High Castle”, and have many common descriptions with the novel by Victoria Amelina. However, Tsiliki are prisoners of maps of a different identity, the Soviet one. Their new space – Lviv – is alienlike to them. Therefore, for each family member, living in the new territory ends dramatically (death, flight, breakup, etc.). It is noteworthy that they can not tell their stories. The story in the novel is told on behalf of the dog named House. He does not really belong to the family. However, his voice is the strongest. Because it is he who sees and feels his own and other people’s territory better than people.

Victoria Amelina’s novel, like Serhiy Zhadan’s short stories, outlines in Ukrainian literature the conflicts that arise in the process of forming a new map of Ukraine’s identity. In it important components are not only external border, but also spaces / places which fix identity of the character.¹

WHEN THE OTHER SPEAKS

The map crisis and the identity crisis are closely linked to the language of writing. And in the case of Ukrainian literature (and even in the context of postcolonial criticism) – with the language of the

Other (colonizer, in Russian). These ideas of postcolonialism are interestingly transformed in modern Ukrainian literature in Volodymyr Rafeenko’s novel “Mondgreen”. His prose describes the dramatic

experiences of changing the identity map of Ukraine in connection with Russia's seizure of part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. First, it is due to the fact that the author left Donetsk after its occupation by Russia. Secondly, he personally overcame the crisis of the language – he switched from Russian to Ukrainian in everyday life, during public lectures and in writing works of art.

“Mondegreen” is the first work written by Volodymyr Rafeenko in Ukrainian. And the language in this story is a powerful center of meaning. The plot of Gaba Gabinsky's character's move to Kyiv and his development within a new space of existence is connected with the plot of studying the Ukrainian language. However, during the study of the language, repressed memories return to him. They reveal the true history of the Gabinsky family.

The textualization of lost experience and memories is described by Volodymyr Rafeenko in the story “Mondegreen” as the return of lost memory and the acquisition of lost language. The plot is connected not only with reality (moving from Donetsk to Kyiv, getting a job in a supermarket, Ukrainian language lessons, etc.), but also with phantasmagoric pictures. Character is joined by the mare's head, a character from Ukrainian folk tales. E. Meletinsky pointed out that the tale of the Mare's Head “depicted consecration”, “the acquisition of a helper spirit” (Meletinsky E. 2005: 167); “It's an extremely archaic magic fetish, most likely of totem origin. The cult of the horse and the horse's skull, in which a powerful spirit seems to be embodied, played a significant role in the primitive rites of different peoples” (Meletinsky 2005: 167).

For Gaba from the story “Mondegreen”, the Mare's Head brings first – anxiety, misunderstanding, distortion of reality, and then – the return of memory.

Distortion of reality is the basis of the narrative in Volodymyr Rafeenko's novel. This is embodied in many components:

1. The title of the story – “Mondegreen”, which means a mishearing or misinterpretation of a phrase in a way that gives it a new meaning, American writer Sylvia Wright coined the term in 1954. The metaphor of the misheard and the story unfolds to the metaphor of the history of the family, incorrectly recorded in the memory of the character.
2. False feeling, wrongly heard words, dissonance of words in the story is embodied in two aspects: during the study of the Ukrainian language and in the process of returning true memories. Ukrainian is the native language of the character, and the language of the colonizer – foreign. Distortion of language and what is heard leads to distortion of memories and reality.
3. The existence of a phantasmagoric character – the Mare's Head. She constantly provokes Gab Gabinsky to return to the real thing. And, in fact, it brings back memories of the past of his repressed Ukrainian (!) Family.
4. Existence of distorted space (work in the supermarket, memories of life in the city of Z, now occupied, as well as distorted memories of the family's past).

Dramatic collisions of moving from the occupied territories to Kyiv in Volodymyr Rafeenko's novel are connected for Gaba with discoveries of a

new reality, in particular – the beauty of the Ukrainian language:

But the most shocking news was the Ukrainian language. Singing and beautiful. On the one hand, this language said the nightingale, the mouse, the rooster and the wonderful worm. Not to mention the mare's head. On the other hand, the thing was that it was now necessary to communicate with him, with this worm, regularly (Rafeenko 2019: 17).

In addition, the story depicts how the character reveals two other important aspects related to language. The first author describes it as follows:

Something that is born of language is held by language and becomes language. Language is a lot. But it must be needed. Then you use it, and it builds you. This mechanism works on the model of communion. You take its body, drink cold kvass with raisins and fly across the sky from morning till night (Rafeenko 2019: 20).

The second author describes it as follows: "But here it turned out that in the case of the language, who masters it – not so obvious" (Rafeenko 2019: 20). The language gives a chance not only to Gabi Gabinski to express himself, but also gives his memories to break through. If before learning the language he used in blissful ignorance of those around him:

The Catechism of Blessed Ignorance was formed in his life slowly. As a child you should not know everything you know about those people around you. Because, first, each of them had their own Canon of Ignorance, and secondly, they are good but do not understand what they are doing. Don't know about the country and the city, about friends and girlfriends, about women and men, about their children and desires. About light and darkness, father and mother, brothers and sisters, grandparents, their past, their future (Rafeenko 2019: 99).

When the character begins to learn the language, the memory of the shooting of the family, the Holodomor, escape and relocation before and after the Second World War, etc. returns to him. Therefore, the identity of the character is expressed, his family history comes to life, all the forgotten and displaced characters appear in it. They are brought back by language as the embodiment of identity, and the fanstamagoric fairy-tale character of the Mare's Head as the personification of the container of the soul of the genus.

To speak a forgotten experience, to regain a lost memory and a lost language means to destroy the colonial experience, and thus to restore the lost voice and the opportunity to speak the real language and tell the real story.

CONCLUSIONS

The search for new ways to articulate one's own identity after the collapse of the Soviet empire and the change of great Soviet narratives in modern Ukrainian literature is associated with the emergence of the plot of movement / relocation in the structure of prose works. This

plot unfolds as a story of returning forgotten memories of individual family history, experiencing an identity crisis. The topos of the House and the crossing of the Border play an important role in the structure of these stories. These two components embody the ambivalence of

a character with a hybrid identity. Such a character reflects on his colonial experience, comprehends the causes and consequences of nostalgia for the colonial past. In addition, an important component of such prose is the return of not only memories but also the return of language. Mostly it is a plot of learning / remembering a Ukrainian language character. This makes it possible to destroy the colonial experience and bring back memories of the true history of the family, all the repressed memories that distorted the identity. In modern Ukrainian literature, this tendency accumulates in the plots of moving / moving to Europe

(the plot of meeting another and the opportunity to comprehend one's own identity), the plots of returning to one's home / searching for one's home (plot of meeting another family history, real). East of Ukraine to Kyiv or another part of the country (this plot is connected with the path of development of new territory and overcoming ambivalent identity). Discovering the past, the new identity map is also closely linked to language. The dramatic collision of the return of language not only reveals the dangers of dual identity, but also makes it possible to overcome this duality. And return the true Voice to the character.

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Endnotes

¹ Notably, in this context, there is another topic that goes beyond this article, but is illustrative. These are trends in the development of historical prose in modern Ukrainian literature. From a reflection on the boundaries and identities formed in the circle of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire in the essays of Yuri Andrukhovych, Sofia Andrukhovych's novel "Felix Austria" – to depict the transformation of spaces and identities in the

twentieth century during World War II and in the USSR. "Tango of Death", Oksana Zabuzhko's "Museum of Abandoned Secrets". Also interesting is the actualization of Odessa identity in Ivan Kozlenko's novel "Tangier", Central Ukrainian – in Tatiana Belimova's novel "Guilty People" in Eastern Ukrainian in Serhiy Zhadan's novel "Voroshilovgrad", Elena Styazhkina's "Death of the Lion Cecil" made sense.