



Construction of Borders and Walls in Contemporary Ukrainian Literature (Analysis of Oleksandr Irvanets' and Taras Antypovych Novels)

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ABSTRACT: Contemporary Ukrainian history offers fascinating cases of re-/de-bordering processes that provide evidence for how decision-makers and everyday citizens can change the historical course of the state. Border issues are particularly relevant to Ukraine, a country which has always been a borderland zone where many ethnic groups and cultures have interacted. For centuries, Ukraine has experienced multiple transformations of its territory, resulting from the influence of neighboring countries. In this paper we investigate how the image of the border is figuratively constructed in modern Ukrainian literature, paying particular attention to the shift in national self-identification caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and national revolutions (2004, 2013-2014). We examine two dystopias of Ukrainian postmodern literature—Oleksandr Irvanets' *Rivne/Rovno (Stina)* (2002) and Taras Antypovych's *Pomyrana* (2016). Only fourteen years separate these novels, but this period was marked by crucial events in Ukrainian history—the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014). The first novel, *Rivne/Rovno*,



represents an attempt to construct nationhood by parodying the Soviet past and the second, *Pomyrana*, allegorically reflects on Ukraine's future during the Russia-Ukraine war (2014-present time). These texts reveal several literary images that need clarifying in the Ukrainian context: real border and mental border; shifting borders; border and identity; border as a means of inclusion or exclusion, etc. The paper envelopes Ukrainian identity issues within discussions of national identity, border and 'otherness' by examining how Ukrainian literature figuratively constructs recent changes of the national geobody.

KEY WORDS: Ukrainian literature; Ukrainian identity; border; wall, self; other

INTRODUCTION

Recent Ukrainian history offers a fascinating case study into the transformation of geopolitical space, its impact on the country's historical course, and its effect on the whole nation's self-identification. The border issue is especially relevant to Ukraine. Over centuries, the country has repeatedly undergone territorial changes. It was under the influence of several different empires (Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russian Empire, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) and the territory itself was crisscrossed by trade routes, a borderland zone where many cultures and ethnic groups interacted. Despite the Ukrainian nation's long history, the state only became independent in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, it was still under the de facto influence of neighboring states. Little by little, the Ukrainian people started to rebuild their identity, liberating themselves from the burden of centuries of domination. Reconstructing national identity landmarks will be a complex process, in large part due to mainly two overlapping ideological models—post-Soviet pro-Russian and nationalist pro-European,¹ which generate a number of social, moral and ideological contradictions within Ukrainian society. The division into Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking Ukraine, into the industrial East and the agrarian West, into Russophobes and Russophiles, patriots and traitors, into 'us' and 'others', for is complicated by the economic and social inequality generated by the proliferation of an oligarchic system that originated before the first years of independence. Such heterogeneity of identity models, socio-economic inequality, and dependence of institutions of power on oligarchs' personal interests have led to political and

¹ The symbolic East-West divide of Ukraine has been extensively discussed in the academic literature. Western Ukraine is traditionally viewed as pro-Ukrainian in terms of political identity and more pro-European in terms of geopolitics, while Eastern Ukraine is perceived as pro-Soviet in terms of political identity, more Russian-speaking, and mostly pro-Russian in terms of geopolitics (for more information, see Podolian and Romanova).



economic instability, which has resulted in manifestations of popular dissent and revolutions (2004, 2013-2014).

Naturally, the Ukrainian artistic and intellectual world has been responding to recent events in Ukrainian history and tries to rethink the nation-building process of the post-Soviet and post-Maidan period, establishing new pillars for national self-identification and inspiring a national driving force in a nation thirsty for change. A number of intellectuals have explored theoretical aspects of Ukrainian identity (Semko, Rewakowicz, Zhurzhenko, Wolczuk). Several scholarly works have offered analyses of the concepts of identity and displacement in Ukrainian literary discourse: Stefania Andrusiv's *Модус національної ідентичності (Modus natsional'noi identychnosti; Modus of National Identity)* (2000); Yaroslav Polishchuk *Батьківщина як біографія (Bat'kivshhyna yak biohrafiya; Motherland as a Biography)* (2011); Bohdan Rubchak *Переміщене серце (Peremishhene serce; Displaced Heart)* (2008), Міти Метаморфоз, або Пошуки доброго світу (Mity Metamortoz, або Poshuky dobroho svitu; *Myths of Metamorphosis, or Search for a Good World*) (2012); and Yuriy Shevelyov *МИ і ми (MY i my; WE and we)* (2012), among others.

The painful experience of the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) and the subsequent military conflict with Russia has generated a series of narratives seeking to verbalize the trauma of the Ukrainian people. Among them are journalistic works, such as: *Майдан. Нерасказанная история (Majdan. Nerasskazannaya istoriya; Maidan. Untold Story)* (2015) by Sonya Koshkina, who presents various aspects of the conflict; a collective publication consisting of individual stories *Люди Майдану (Lyudy Majdanu; People of Maidan)* (2014) (edited by Larysa Ivshyna); the book *Євромайдан: [звичайні герої] (Yevromajdan: [zvyčajni heroyi]; Euromaidan [Ordinary Heroes])* (2015) by Natalya Huk. Oksana Zabuzhko has also created a polyphonic chronicle of Euromaidan—*Літопис самовидців: дев'ять місяців українського спротиву (Litoropys samovydciv: dev'yat' misyaciv ukrayins'koho sprotyvu; Chronicle of Self-Seekers. Nine Months of Ukrainian Resistance)* (2014). Works by Andriy Kurkov *Щоденник Майдану та Війни (Shhdennyk Majdanu ta Vijnny; Maidan's Diary)* (2014), Maria Matios *Приватний щоденник. Майдан. Війна (Pryvatnyj shhodennyk. Majdan. Vijnna; Private Diary. Maidan. War)* (2015), and Andriy Kokotyukha *Вогняна зима (Vohnyana zyma; Winter on Fire)* (2015) are also popular among Ukrainian readers. Among literary works dealing with this topic, it is worth mentioning the novels *Укри (Ukry)* (2015) by Bohdan Zholdak, *Іловайськ (Ilovajs'k; Ilovaisk)* (2015) by Yevhen Polozhiy, *Інтернат (Internat; Boarding School)* (2017) by Serhiy Zhadan and works close to autobiographical confessions *Кофе с привкусом пепла (Kofe s privkusom pepla; Coffee with a Taste of Ash)* (2018) by Oleksiy Petrov, *Життя після 16.30 (Zhyttya pislya 16.30; Life after 4.30 pm)* (2018) by Oleksandr Tereshchenko, *Доця (Dotsya; Daughter)* (2019) by Tamara Horikh Zernya, graphic novel *Діра (Dira; Hole)* (2016) by Serhiy Zakharov; the novel for young readers *Чотири нявкисти і Він (Chotyry nyavkisty i Vin; Four Tank-Kittens and Him)* (2016) by Pavlo Kushch; poetry collection *Абрикоси Донбасу (Abyrkosy Donbasu; Apricots of Donbass)* (2015) by Lyubov Yakymchuk.

All the above-mentioned narratives uncover the ways in which the recent changes in Ukrainian geopolitical space impact the construction of national identity



and reflect upon the choices that led to the division of the country into two parts (the formation of the Luhansk and Donetsk republics in Eastern Ukraine, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula during the Russia-Ukraine war [2014-present time]). Despite the considerable number of studies devoted to these various aspects of identity transformation in Ukraine, representations of de/re-bordering processes in Ukrainian literature remain out of view among researchers, or have not been considered in significant detail. In this paper we would like to focus on how the image of the border is verbally constructed and review its impact on processes of re-/identification of 'self' and 'other' in modern literary discourse, namely the conceptualization of the Border/Wall as a key element of Oleksandr Irvanets' novel Рівне/Ровно (Стіна) (*Rivne/Rovno (Stina)*; *Rivne/Rovno (Wall)*) (2002), and Taras Antypovych's Помирана (*Pomyrana*) (2016). Only fourteen years separate these two postmodern dystopias, but this time was marked by decisive events in the history of Ukraine—the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. Some scholarly works have already explored Irvanets' and Antypovych's literary discourse. They offer, for example, an overview of the elements of absurdity (Hrebenuik 243-252), of the imaginary construction of a totalitarian regime in Irvanets' novel (Nikolaenko 148-151) or analyze the humor present in Antypovych's work (Riabchenko). This study offers a comparative analysis of two novels and focuses on several main issues in the discourses, such as the ratio between the real and mental border, the correlation between Ukrainian national identity, regional identity and identity of the 'other', and bordering as a means of inclusion or exclusion etc.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study of the border verbalization in Ukrainian literary discourse is based on an ensemble of methods and theoretical concepts. A border-centered analysis requires a structural and semiotic approach and focuses on the performative practices of border construction and maintenance as well as on real and metaphorical border crossings and interactions. We share Tetyana Zhurzhenko's idea and believe that the border can be perceived not only as a real geographical line between the territories of different countries, but also as a symbolic phenomenon representing political, social and cultural aspects of territoriality and functioning as a zone of interaction, communication or integration (Zhurzhenko 26). Given this idea, the image of the wall can also function as a symbolic representation of the boundary between 'self' and 'other' and as a key marker for outlining the historical memory of the nation. One of the important preconditions for the existence of physical borders between countries is the so-called maintenance of non-sameness (Volkan), which is based on the promotion of linguistic, religious, and psychological barriers between neighboring states. Border narratives in literature are associated with a rethinking of real and symbolic border representations and are connected with dynamic social practices of spatial differentiation in real life (Brambilla *et al.* 2). At the same time, some theorists of Border Studies draw attention to the ambivalence of the border, which can be "both a



wall and a bridge” (Schimanski 17). Thus, we should consider this multimodal functionality of the border in society.

The concept of the “border” is closely related to such fundamental concepts like identity, memory and trauma. As Gloria Anzaldúa says in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, border is “una herida abierta” (3)—a border is an open wound that brings together individual and collective traumatic experience and shapes the collective history and identity of a nation. The literary, aesthetic and cultural narratives of borders establish certain models of practices and identify the border as a culturally constructed mythological phenomenon. This allows us to relate different concepts to each other (border, identity, memory, trauma etc.) and develop further such fields as Border Studies, Memory Studies, Cultural Anthropology.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

Oleksandr Irvanets’ is a Ukrainian writer, playwright, and essayist, one of three founders of the legendary association Bu-Ba-Bu. His novel, *Rivne/Rovno* was first published in 2002, but it is still relevant, as evidenced by numerous translations of the novel into other languages (*Riwne/Rowno*, Prószyński i S-ka, 2006; 2007; *Rivne/Rovno*, Publisher Dmitry Kolas, 2007; *Pralinen vom roten Stern [Candy from the Red Star]*, Haymon Verlag, 2017). In Ukraine, the novel was reissued four times (2002, 2006, 2010, 2011).

The novel’s plot is based on the division of the Ukrainian city of Rivne into two parts: the Western, which was part of the Western Ukrainian Republic (ZUR) and the Eastern, which belonged to the Socialist Republic of Ukraine (SRU). A wall separating them was built on the border between them. This Wall is the central simulacrum of the novel:

The wall ... It was erected at night, in the spotlights the soldiers of the building units of the SRU Army were fixing concrete blocks just under the curb of the street sidewalk on September 17, on the former Topoleva Street, they were putting them close together, these gray concrete panels produced by a local house-building plant. [...] Immediately after the hotel, the Wall made several turns [...] and then a sharp turn to the left, on the street Tolyatti [...] almost under the windows of the restored regional committee of the Communist Party [it] turned to the northwest, crossed the river Ustya (under the bridge there were installed triple bars, hammered to the river) [...] it was closed in a ring in the area of Basovy Kut next to the lake, separating it in favor of Eastern Rovno. (Irvanets’ 29)²

The Wall’s exact date of construction is not specified in the work, but we cannot ignore the fact that Western tourists wanted to “see with their own eyes, photograph and touch the new wall that has once again divided Europe” (Irvanets’ 20). This gives grounds to determine the approximate time of the construction of the Wall: between

² All the quotations from Ukrainian are the authors’ own translation unless otherwise noted.



the fall of the Berlin Wall and the year “200...”. However, the narrator also mentions the reasons for the construction of the new Ukrainian border:

It was a completely accidental inspection trip of NATO observers to the Tuchyn military range, which coincided with the Ukrainian-Russian alliance from the east, and owed its existence to Western Rivne. [...] The troops of the newly formed SRU, entering the city, stopped in its center, watching the antennas of the walkie-talkies of the Belgian and French paratroopers behind the neatly stacked sandbags on the other side of Independence Square. And in a few months Rivne was crossed by the Wall. (Irvanets’ 19)

The detailed, quasi-real image of the Wall that crosses over the entire city helps the writer construct two worlds, the Eastern and Western sectors, this and that side. In parallel, two diametrically opposed social and ideological systems are being constructed in the novel.

The Western sector of Rivne is portrayed as a “free and independent besieged enclave” (Irvanets’ 187), whose citizens lead a “quiet, full, peaceful” (Irvanets’ 82) working life. There are no physical boundaries or financial constraints, one can easily buy anything, rent a car, dine in a restaurant or drink coffee in numerous cafes. Cultural life is also diverse—theatrical premieres and art evenings take place in the city, one after another. Despite being surrounded by the Wall, the Western sector remains an open space to the outside world, citizens can travel freely, and foreigners can safely visit the city. There is an atmosphere of multiculturalism and multilingualism, many nationalities can coexist in this space and in the expensive hotels of Western Rivne live foreign guests who want to acquaint themselves with this cosmopolitan European city. The protagonist’s journey to the Eastern sector contrasts with the idealistic background image of the life of residents in Western Rivne.

In Irvanets’ novel, the world behind the Wall is uncovered through the gradual immersion of the protagonist Shloima Etsirvan into the social and ideological space of the Eastern sector. Etsirvan is a famous writer who was born and spent most of his life in Eastern Rovno but was accidentally separated from his family by the Wall, when, during its construction, he was visiting a friend in the Western part of the city. Since then, he is cut off from his parents and only several years later does he receive an official permission to enter the Eastern sector. As soon as he crosses the topographical border, Shloima internally feels the pressure of the other side and instinctively gleans that a person must adjust to the system, to begin to “think in the local way” (Irvanets’ 35). The author offers to look at the Eastern sector from the outside, in this way emphasizing the shock of colliding with this system and making it impossible to reconcile with such a social and political order.

Eastern Rovno recreates the authoritarian regime of the Soviet Union with restrictions on freedom of speech, total control of movement, prohibition of border crossing, “competent” authorities, forced relocation, bureaucracy and a regimented life of poverty. In the Eastern sector, they live in “Moscow time” (Irvanets’ 30), speak Russian at work and in everyday life, call each other “tovarishch” (comrade), travel in old Soviet cars and continue the traditions of the Soviet system. The children are still dressed in “white shirts and red pioneer ties” (Irvanets’ 79) and read Russian-language



propaganda poems in the local park. The use of Russian language and deliberate neglect of Ukrainian makes the reader recall the language policy of the Soviet Union that was targeted at the elimination of the cultural and language differences of the soviet republics. This artistic effect further intensifies the contrast between two worlds.

In the Eastern sector, everyone's private life is strictly controlled by surveillance cameras and the latest technology, and every step of a Rovno resident is under the watchful eye of officials who actually own the whole sector: "This country must belong to us. To us, executives, leaders, even, if you want—officials!" (Irvanets' 174). As in Soviet times, the people in power have unlimited influence and access to resources, they can afford a luxurious life against the backdrop of the impoverishment of the people, who are constantly in a state of fear.

Fear is omnipresent in the Eastern sector and can be clearly traced through the behavior of the locals. Terror and intimidation are the main tools of the totalitarian regime by which SRU officials maintain the so-called "order" among the population. Thus, Shloima's close acquaintance Petro Tymchuk pretends to see Etsirvan for the first time when he meets him, because he is afraid of being "attributed" to the so-called "enemy of the people".³ The young poet, a first-year student Oles Fialko-Baranyuk, during his first meeting with Shloima, publicly admires his works. And at the end of the novel, he states that "before that I was mistakenly impressed by his previous work and even partly promoted it among my peers, which I must now admit as an annoying and unacceptable mistake" (Irvanets' 157), because "older comrades explained to me the inadmissibility of such an acquaintance and such an attitude to the works of S. Etsirvan" (Irvanets' 157-158). In the post-Soviet period, people still remember that "older comrades explained" means that they were simply intimidated by those people.

Even the behavior and unnatural restraint of Shloima's mother make it clear how much this woman is terrified and is afraid for herself and her child. When she first meets her son after five years of being separated, she steps back and instead of rushing to him, she says quietly: "That's ok. Go to their meeting. They will not back off" (Irvanets' 39). Olena Blyashana is scared and forced to commit a shameful act towards her school friend Shloima. Thanks to her, the authorities of Eastern Rovno obtain leverage against Shloima and can blackmail him by promising to show the whole world "your sexual act, even from inside" (Irvanets' 176).

Fear outlines the psychological boundaries of people's behavior in Eastern Rovno. The inner borders of the characters do not allow them to cross the physical boundaries of their sector. And those few who dare to cross the border are destroyed physically and morally by the totalitarian regime of Socialist Ukraine. The protagonist of the novel recalls stories of residents of the Eastern sector of the city trying to cross the border. A sportsman who dares to cross the Wall in a hang glider is shot by the guards. Another man who tries to dig a tunnel under the Wall is buried beneath the earth, is later barely rescued, and then displaced with his family from his home 20 km to the east. Those who cross the border in the direction of Eastern Rovno never return. There are direct analogies with the Berlin Wall. It is known that the residents of East

³ "Enemy of the people"—the term was used by KGB-ists of the totalitarian Soviet regime.



Berlin tried to cross this border many times. The most famous attempts to cross the border were passages through tunnels, hang glider flights, on a rope thrown between two neighboring houses, and so on. And, unfortunately, as the Berlin Wall did in real life, Irvanets' Wall creates many victims and broken destinies. Even if some people do not suffer physically, they are deeply traumatized morally and psychologically. We can see this deep impact on the lives of average residents behind the Wall. They are not able to realize their traumatic experience and cannot find the answer to the question "How do you live here?". For example, Shloima's school friend Oblya answers:

[...] she looked up. There was sadness in her eyes. "You're asking that. I don't know ... It's dimly ... It's dimly, [life is] like those ficuses in tubs arranged in a corridor. It's as if everything is there, but something is missing. – What? Freedom? – I don't know how to call it ... We want it, and we are afraid. Yes, probably, freedom. If it is so called. (Irvanets' 105)

The inability to verbalize one's fears and desires, to comprehend the complexity of one's existence, to go beyond the system-dictated line of behavior indicates the stability of the psychological boundary, which does not allow a person to determine their values and place in this world. Charles Taylor, social and political philosopher, notes that our own understanding of what is important to us and what is not is determined by our identity. Thus, people's ignorance of who they are directly points to an identity crisis, which is essentially an "extreme form of disorientation" (Taylor 45).

While traveling in the Eastern sector, the protagonist is bombarded by memories. These are primarily related to a time when the city was still undivided and its inhabitants knew what freedom was. From the corners of his memory, Shloima Etsirvan traces the most pleasant reminiscences of adolescence. He worked here as a teacher for several years and achieved his first success by performing on stage. Here he fell in love and kissed a girl for the first time. Here he walked with his sister in the park, rode the elevator and did many other little things associated with childhood. These memories are connected with the toponyms of the Eastern part of the city. At the same time, the protagonist realizes that the contemporary reality of the Eastern sector city is now painted in negative shades.

A lack of freedom is perceived in seemingly insignificant details: "I looked back at my native school №24, which was in a light fog behind a barbed wire fence" (Irvanets' 36), "There were no defiant graffiti of anarchists or teenage rappers on its wall, only the terrifying barbed wire, which circled tightly the building" (Irvanets' 46), etc. The image of "barbed wire", which the author repeatedly uses when describing Eastern Rovno, clearly gives readers the sensation of a lack of freedom. The isolated Eastern part also has varied internal borders. Educational and cultural spaces are enclosed and, therefore, limited and separated from the world. Even the hotel with the symbolic name "Mir" (Peace), which accommodates only government officials, is also fenced off with "barbed wire" from the ordinary working population (Irvanets' 145). It is interesting that Irvanets', with the help of this image, constantly references historical events in Europe related to the Berlin Wall. After all, this wall was originally also a barbed wire fence, which in just two days divided Berlin into Western and Eastern



parts. In fact, the writer integrates the historical event into his novel, adjusting only the political actors and geographical location of the Wall:

It (the Wall) appeared on that summer night, when the command of the SRU troops finally got tired of the confrontation with NATO units [...] Checkpoints already existed, and there was a barbed wire fence around the perimeter of the current Wall. (Irvanets' 28)

Thus, the author of the novel makes the reader subconsciously compare the real history of Europe in the twentieth century with his interpretation of the alternative history of Ukraine.

Wrapping up the image of the totalitarian Eastern sector, the zone behind the Wall, Irvanets' adds one surreal detail to the description of "Socialist Ukraine"—a secret machine developed by the scientists of the SRU-DUPA—"Thought-unifying radial unit" (Irvanets' 148). This radiation makes the thoughts of the population unanimous. Thus, in the Eastern sector, even freedom of thought is appropriated by the administrative apparatus.

The protagonist's cognitive dissonance, the striking difference between reality and his reminiscences does not allow him to completely immerse himself in the happy world of childhood and adolescence. Little by little a boundary between "before and after", "here and there" is being constructed in the mind of Shloima Etsirvan with the help of space and temporal sensations. This boundary is determined by both the narrator and the protagonist: "[...] in his mind, he was already *there*, on the other side of the Wall, that was so close, present in the life of the city and so unreachable. *There*, in his hometown and for several years—in a foreign city for him" (Irvanets' 27), "Etsirvan tried to imagine today's life in the city, *on this side of the Wall*" (Irvanets' 106; *italics ours*), "My city is there, behind the Wall" (Irvanets' 166).

Even though the two parts of the city are separated by a border, they are very close geographically. The official way to cross this border is extremely difficult: "Entry and exit outside the Wall [...] was regulated by the Tripartite Agreement on the Western Sector and was extremely difficult" (Irvanets' 17), "it [even] takes two weeks to deliver the letter within one city, from there, from the other side of the Wall" (Irvanets' 10). The difficulty in overcoming the geographical border is caused by the great mental, psychological and socio-cultural distance between the inhabitants of Western Rivne and Eastern Rovno. The spatial dimension of the Eastern sector is not limited to one part of the city Rivne. The author mentions other geographical parts of Ukraine, expanding the invisible presence of the totalitarian regime. He writes about Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, where the Verkhovna Rada⁴ is located, controlled by the DUPA, and about "soldiers from the SRU Army, guys from Luhansk and Dnipropetrovsk, Kyrovohrad and Cherkasy" (Irvanets' 28). Gradually, the reader understands that all the eastern regions of Ukraine represent the "other side". As the novel unfolds, the authoritarian regime of the Eastern sector gradually extends to the Western part of the city. The reader will learn that the authorities have developed a plan to occupy the

⁴ The parliament of Ukraine.



whole city, have their spies everywhere, and the protagonist must play a leading role in the implementation of a daring operation by the “authorities” of the Eastern sector. Under the pressure of the circumstances, morally and psychologically destroyed, Shloima, eventually obeys and agrees to follow the instructions of officials, despite his internal struggle and the impossibility of moral reconciliation with the system: “We have only sky and air in common. – The writer Etsirvan did not give up positions. – And our cities are different. My city is there, behind the Wall” (Irvanets’ 166).

The destruction of the Wall, the symbolic boundary between here and there, between freedom and enslavement, marks the end of the novel and, in a broader sense, the end of a free and independent world: “This is the end. The end of the novel and the end of the independent city surrounded by the city. Western Rivne is over. The wall will not fall, it will simply disappear, will melt in the evening mist” (Irvanets’ 213).

It is no wonder the second title of the novel is *Stina (Wall)*. The wall is the main image of the work. Like the Berlin Wall, the border in Rivne not only separates families and destroys hundreds of human destinies, but also generates many social and cultural practices that later shape the worldviews of the inhabitants on both sides. The wall as an object of the real world in the novel performs three main functions—division, control and protection. On one hand, it divides the inhabitants of a single space into two groups on an arbitrary basis (essentially where the person was physically at the time of construction of the wall). These groups further develop peculiar social and cultural practices and behavior according to the laws of the newly formed territories. The regulatory function consists in strictly regulating crossings of the demarcation line and providing the opportunity to cross the border only to selected persons. On the other hand, the Wall acts as a barrier for one group and as a means of protection for another. The topographical barrier between two worlds, the border between the Eastern and Western sectors also has a symbolic meaning. It seems to separate two alternative scenarios for the future of Ukraine. Of course, the Eastern sector depicts the horrors of the Soviet past, but at the same time warns against repeating mistakes in the future. The Western sector provides an example of what a country can become if it is given a chance to build a free democratic society. Note that the cardinal ideological differences between the representatives of the Eastern and Western sectors make it impossible to maintain a constructive dialogue or interaction, which is why the author of the novel destroys the Wall at the end of the work.

The author of the novel *Pomyrana*, Ukrainian author and scriptwriter Taras Antypovych, chooses another means of artistic interpretation of the traumatic experience of the Ukrainian people. This experience, which is manifested both at the individual and collective levels, is created by the actualization of newly formed geographical and mental borders in Eastern Ukraine. In the industrial region of Ukraine—in the Donbass—the war has been going on since 2014, which “sharpened attention to the borderline emotions and feelings of man [...] the inhabitants of this region experience pain, fear, loss and depression” (Polishchuk 142).



Pomyrana was recognized as the best book of the year in the category *Prose* according to *LitAccent of the Year–2016*.⁵ In this dystopian novel, the writer constructs a horrible reality of an isolated group of people, the residents of the former landfill “Koryto” (trough), who are cut off from the rest of the world and try to survive in a hostile environment. In these conditions they build their own social model of life based on cruel laws of survival and construct a new collective memory. The author presents the imaginary world of the novel through the eyes of the protagonist Nelson, a young man born on the “Koryto”, a character who never knew another life, but unlike other locals, did not lose an inner desire for change and the will for freedom (Antypovych, 129).

Most reviewers of *Pomyrana* agree that this book can be defined as a clear political allegory referring to the occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine (Shynkarenko, Behta, Rodyk). The author does not use any toponyms of the Donbass regions directly but he determines the place where the story takes place by other features. Thus, the cry of the locals proclaiming that “Koryto feeds the whole world” (Antypovych 104) is a direct analogy to the slogans used by the people of Eastern Ukraine in 2014: “Donbass feeds the whole Ukraine”. Just as the residents of “Koryto” are proud of their “autonomy”, so in 2014 did the Eastern regions demand legal recognition of the Donbass’ autonomy from Ukraine.

Oleg Shynkarenko, summarizing his review of the novel, concludes:

Pomyrana is an extremely pessimistic image of human society, which does not learn anything, does not go anywhere and is completely focused on self-destruction. Unfortunately, this image is not just one of the dystopian models, but is recreated from the surrounding reality, where the grotesque is even more present than in the literature. (Shynkarenko)

The writer himself refers to the novel as a dystopia and says: “I portray a group of people who are focused on self-destruction without realizing it” (Shandro 4:50-5:00). The novel, indeed, depicts a society dominated by negative developments. Although, more specifically, the emphasis should not be on negative development, but on the full or partial (in the case of Nelson and Maya) degradation caused by the complete isolation of the space where the characters live. When asked about the possible allegorical meaning of the novel referencing recent events in the East of the country, Antypovych does not give any clear answer, but also does not deny it: “This is a kind of reality that grows out of such phenomena as degenerative republics in Donbass, or in North Korea, or in modern Russia” (Shandro 5:32-5:44). Thus, Antypovych’s *Pomyrana* allows readers to review the current state of society at a time of war and delimitation of the newly formed borders and offers readers a unique perspective on the further development of the conflict and its consequences.

From the very beginning of the work, markers of marginality attract the reader’s attention. Antypovych’s marginality is directly related to the spatial dimension in

⁵ *The LitAccent of the Year* is the award founded by the “LitAkcent web portal” in 2008. It rewards the best books written in Ukrainian and published within the current year in Ukraine or abroad.



which the main events take place. From the beginning, the plot space of *Pomyrana* is delineated by a landfill:

Koryto was the only entertainment and responsibility, work and leisure, and most importantly, it was a means of survival. Here the locals were gathering and hunting, here they could feel like a community and share news. (Antypovych 10)

Surprisingly, the landfill becomes the only place where these people can identify themselves as a community. The self-identification of this group, isolated from the civilized world, is associated with common repetitive activities in their small living space, “a life-saving island surrounded by danger” and at a higher level is realized through “a sense of belonging to that war” as the only event that deserves a place in the collective memory. The very presence in this space seemed to them, “though passive, but an effective defense against a possible external invasion, which can begin at any moment, and perhaps is already underway” (Antypovych 58).

The conditions in which the characters live are tragic. Every day is a test of survival as they survive in ruined buildings without any amenities and must constantly search for food and even fight over it. A long life in isolation, wherein several generations of residents of “Koryto” had already endured, led to moral and psychological degradation. Hunger is so strong that they are ready to consume inedible items such as rubber from a wheel or old shoes on a daily basis. Under conditions of constant struggle for survival and fear of starvation, the residents of the landfill gradually degrade more and more and they are left with animal instincts and desires: “Nelson crossed the threshold of the hangar somehow cautiously and uncertainly. Such primitive people were wary of unfamiliar caves and their inhabitants” (Antypovych 47). All this gives us reason to emphasize the traumatic reality in which the residents of “Koryto” live. Being under constant stress and in danger, people seek a means of psychological protection from it. Unable to find it, they isolate themselves and try to distance themselves from the environment and from others. Thus, personal interests prevail over group interests, which leads to selecting leaders according to physical strength and capacity for violence, cheating, thievery and betrayal, which multiply throughout the community.

The residents of “Koryto” are separated from the “other” world by a conditional border—“Kolyuchka” (diminutive from “barbed wire”)—that is not physically present in their living space but only mentioned in everyday conversations in reference to past events. Antypovych’s “Kolyuchka”, like Irvanets’ “barbed wire”, is a symbol that refers readers to the Berlin Wall. This boundary not only divides communities, highlighting the essential difference between them, but also makes it possible to identify a community as one that exists in this time and space. At the level of collective memory, the residents of the landfill have some fragmentary memories of what led to the separation of “Koryto” from the “other” world. Their perceptions of life and people on the other side of “Kolyuchka” have no logical foundation and are based on myths, beliefs and assumptions generated by fear. It is this sense of fear and an inability to accept this ‘otherness’ that generates hatred for everything ‘other’. In a discussion



about the “autonomy” of “Koryto”, sometimes it is difficult to draw the line between common sense and negative images generated by hate and fear. We can single out two points of view concerning “autonomy” among the residents of “Koryto”. The first version says that people

[...] decided that Koryto feeds the whole world. The sorting station really functioned at that time—wow! And people decided to separate it so that Koryto would only belong to us. And they took over Koryto. Whether by war or by cunning, I never understood [...] However, Koryto is ours now. And death is not terrible anymore! (Antypovych 104-105)

That is, according to this version, the residents of “Koryto” voluntarily decided to separate, so they are the initiators. However, at the beginning of the novel we find another version, according to which, the residents of “Koryto” are victims of envy and greed of the ‘other’, and, therefore, they only defend their territory, forming an autonomy. The dialogue between Tuzykha and Kalman illustrates the second version:

Only let them [those who encroached on “autonomy”—clarification is ours] in! They want to occupy our Koryto! They'll take everything down to the last thing and skin us! – They don't need our Koryto. They need us! That's the point. They want to destroy Koryto, they want to devastate it, and they will enslave all of us! (Antypovych 58)

We see that views on the creation of “Koryto” are contradictory. The same type of inconsistency can be found in the representation of “Kolyuchka” (barbed wire):

We didn't win, we lost an unequal battle. That's why we were surrounded by Kolyuchka [...] But our own Kolyuchka was built to protect autonomy! What kind of autonomy would there be without Kolyuchka—a free-for-all place where everybody can come and go! (Antypovych 57)

All these controversies remind the reader of recent events in Eastern Ukraine when in 2014 people faced a massive influx of fake news and manipulation in Russian and pro-Russian media that provoked disorientation and fear. Some people are still not able to differentiate the truth from lies and they are constantly trying to fill gaps in their representation of reality through information supplied by the official media. As in the novel, myths and legends generate negative reactions to the ‘other’. Propaganda and fake news in real life cultivated hatred among Ukrainians from East and West and distanced the inhabitants of the Luhansk and Donbass regions from the rest of Ukraine.

Just as the protagonist of Irvanets' novel *Rivne/Rovno* had a psychological boundary, which was defined by the division of the world into “before and after” and “here and there”, so the characters of Antypovych's *Pomyrana* have such an internal border. The residents of “Koryto” clearly draw a line between the events that led to so-called “autonomy”—their “island surrounded by danger” (Antypovych 58)—and the life after it. In their collective memory, the time “before” is associated with the war and struggle for independence three generations before, which nobody actually remembers. The time “after” is connected to a vague “autonomy” from others.



Antypovych's characters tend to divide people into 'us' and 'others' only on territorial principle. Cultural and social differences are not taken into consideration. Those who belong to "Koryto" consist of 'us' and everyone outside represents the 'others'. The author does not provide any information about the 'others'. We do not know their nationality or ideological views. The reader only knows that they live on the other side of "Kolyuchka". The residents of "Koryto" do not know much about 'others' either. They call the 'others' "they", "them" or "the ones": "I was watching at *them* from afar, I did not come close [...] And the petroleum feeds *them*" (Antypovych 17), "I heard only one thing from the old people— that *they* are too hostile to us" (27-28), "we haven't seen *those ones* here for a long time" (92; *italics ours*), etc.

A lack of information about the "other" and, moreover, an unwillingness to know the "other" strengthen the psychological tension in the group and the characters start to create their own reality and to demonize the "other":

Whoever crossed Kolyuchka, never came back! They say that they use our skin to make armchairs and mineral fertilizers [...] Imagination was offering hellish pictures: how they slowly peel someone's skin, hang a person by his feet, how they cook a bleached corpse at night, fishing out iron teeth from the brown water. (Antypovych 17)

The residents of the landfill cannot imagine their life beyond "Koryto". They do not want to believe that outside their isolated space there can be a better life: "Who are we without our Koryto—the homeless bastards! Do you think that they live better on the other side?!" (Antypovych 119).

Narrowness and hatred, and, most importantly, the internal psychological boundaries of the residents of "Koryto", which they establish themselves, acquire new forms of realization as the plot develops. At the very end, they are unable to accept the real world and to abandon their prejudices and naive speculations about the reality around them. The spatial and moral isolation of the landfill residents leads to an atrophied feeling of true and false and an inability to perceive the 'other'. For example, when they receive humanitarian aid with food "from the helicopter from the other side of Kolyuchka", they just burn it despite short supplies and general famine. They do not believe even Nelson, a man who spent all his life in "Koryto", but eventually dared to cross "Kolyuchka" and returned to save everyone. Their picture of the world is simply not compatible with the fact that life on the other side of "Kolyuchka" is much better and more comfortable. Even Nelson's arguments cannot affect the isolated community: "I wanted to cross Kolyuchka ... and saw that there was no Kolyuchka there [...] I visited them and agreed that we will be taken away from here. You can live there with them, but here you can only survive or die" (Antypovych 212-213). The locals do not hear Nelson because they just do not want to understand what he says. They ask him only one thing—to tell those who live behind "Kolyuchka" "not to show off and to build here at least a slaughterhouse. And then we will have some calories" (Antypovych 214).

The phantom border "Kolyuchka", a dividing line that exists only in the imagination of the landfill inhabitants, allows the author to emphasize the difference



between a mental and a real border in society. Mental boundaries, an inability to accept the “other”, intolerance and fear, further lead to conflicts and tragedies that real borders generate. The novel *Pomyrana* is not an exception. Its protagonist dies at the hands of his former friends from “Koryto”. A new border is being constructed inside the landfill. One group of residents returns to Dr. Frese’s bunker to protect themselves from the other locals, who reach an extreme point of their hatred, burning humanity out of their minds and practicing cannibalism. Long-term isolation and moral degradation lead to the destruction of some community members’ personalities. Controlled by primitive instincts, they turn into insatiable monsters who are ready to pounce on anything that moves. They are no longer able to see individual borders marking each person or distinguish between things and people. According to the author, the isolated world closed off from others and surrounded by a mental boundary like a strong stone wall has no alternative to development other than self-destruction. However, Antypovych leaves the reader with the hope that even in such a place, there are people able to change and open to others. One of the characters, a young girl Maya, still dares to leave “Koryto” after Nelson’s death and crosses “Kolyuchka” to discover another world with her own eyes (Antypovych 222).

CONCLUSION

Summarizing the core points of this paper, through the example of the novels *Rivne/Rovno* by Irvanets’ and *Pomyrana* by Antypovych, we have shown that border issues are deeply rooted in modern Ukrainian literary discourse and uncover numerous connections and crossing points between language, identity, trauma and collective memory.

The authors of the novels have their own ways of conceptualizing these issues in the texts. Irvanets’ depicts the border as an object of the real physical world—a solid wall that reorganizes reality and divides space, time and people around it. Antypovych presents readers with a phantom border that exists only in the collective memory of a certain community. The image of this conditional border is rudimentary. The author does not provide any details about it and the reader knows only the name of this division line—“Kolyuchka”. Nevertheless, this imaginary border conditions the moral qualities and social behavior of the community and changes the trajectory of their development. These two types of boundaries are equally able to influence the formation of community members’ worldviews and generate perceptions of the ‘other’. Both real and mental boundaries produce several binary oppositions and divide society into ‘us’ and ‘others’, here and there, before and after.

An important element in both novels is the journey of the protagonist, the border crossing, which juxtaposes the “other” world with his own. While the protagonist of *Rivne/Rovno* goes on a journey at the beginning of the novel, gradually immersing himself in the “other” world, the hero of *Pomyrana* travels to “another” world only at the end. This journey levels the existence of the border “Kolyuchka” as the protagonist learns that “Koryto” is not a separate geopolitical unit, but only a



“quarantine zone”. In both novels, the border crossing is directly related to a traumatic experience. For the protagonist of Irvanets’ novel, crossing the border leads to a moral breakdown and betrayal of his principles, in Antypovych’s novel, it leads to Nelson’s death.

Thus, Oleksandr Irvanets’ and Taras Antypovych in their novels *Rivne/Rovno* and *Pomyrana* bring to light many complex problems that are relevant to contemporary Ukrainian society, such as the relationship between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian identities, the impact of the Soviet past on the development of Ukrainian national identity, the relation between real border and mental border, and border as a means of inclusion or exclusion.

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