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TIME OF GLOBAL TURBULENCE: CHALLENGES FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

ASTAPENKA | BARAN-ZGŁOBICKA | BARTOSIEWICZ | CHAHRAK
DOTSIAK | EBERHARDT | GHEORGHIU | KALICHAVA | KATKOWSKI
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Literary Representation of National Consciousness: between Historical Memory and Civic Identity

Abstract: The material of this study comprises the poetry of combatant writers Serhiy Zhadan, Maksym "Dali" Kryvtsov, and Yurii Ruf. The subject of analysis is the textual representations of the concept of memory and civic identity. The examination of their poetic works reveals an anthropological dimension in which the central ontological questions are "Who am I? What is life?". In Serhiy Zhadan's works, the concept of memory is manifested primarily within a mythosemiotic paradigm through the imagery of trees, stones, and birds. In Maksym "Dali" Kryvtsov's poetry, the concept of memory is realized onomastically (through proper names and toponyms), as well as through imagery belonging, in particular, to the vegetative-floral mythological code. The chronotope of the field is interpreted as the chronotope of historical memory. In Yuriy Ruf's poems, the hypostases of the lyrical hero – "I," "You," and "We" – unfold variations of civic identity through the motifs of personal choice, mythological scenarios of initiation, and related symbolic structures.

Keywords: Anthropologism, Identity, Combatant Poetry, Memory

In June 2022, the Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine held a week-long scholarly and artistic forum «The Muses Are Not Silent!», which became a kind of reply to Cicero's dictum «Inter arma silent Musae». Nataliya Torkut, the initiator and coordinator of the Forum, dedicated to art born during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, aptly remarked: «If our Muses fall silent, the cannons will never cease». One of the outcomes of this Forum was the almanac «This Day Lasts an Eternity: Artistic Chronicles of the War», which included texts written after February 24, 20221.

1 «Вічність трива цей день»: Художні хроніки війни. Тернопіль: Джура, 2023. 444 с.

As Taras Pastukh notes, «Poetry is one of the manifestations of the collective spirit of the nation; it also reveals its 'moral forces'»². Therefore, artists are now also on the front lines, including those who simultaneously fight with weapons in hand and write poems in dugouts. Clearly, artistic imagery is powerless against real, lethal weapons. Yet metaphors serve those who search for meaning in an absurd world, in a situation and condition of abnormality (as Serhiy Zhadan characterizes war), in order not to lose their sanity amid grim realities. At present, poetry is excellently fulfilling its therapeutic mission: it may heal souls wounded by war, strengthens faith in humanity, and inspires one to live and to love. The Muses are not silent, for they have something to say.

Poets who perished in the current active phase of Russia's war against Ukraine return through the written word: Yuriy Ruf (Dadak) (author of the collections *Crimson Lyrics*, *The Time of Revolution*, *At the Turn of Epochs*, *Vanilla or Steel*), Illia Chernilevskyi (author of the collection *Let Us Share the Space*, translator, musician), Serhiy Skald (author of the collections *Point-Blank*, *Other*, *The Voice of Blood*), Hlib Babich (author of more than 500 poems and songs, including for Kozak System), Artem Dovhopolyi, Oleksandr Berezhnyi, Mykola Kravchenko (who did not live to publish their collections of poetry and fairy tales), Maksym Kryvtsov, and, sadly, many others. With the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, PEN Ukraine has been compiling statistics on cultural figures killed in the war (at present numbering over 200, of whom around one hundred were poets).

A defining feature of almost all combatant poetry is a powerful current of national self-identification. The scope of this article is narrowed to several figures of poet-combatants: the works of Serhiy Zhadan, a serviceman of the 13th Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine «Khartiya», as well as the works of the poets who perished in this war, Maksym «Dali» Kryvtsov and Yuriy Ruf. The focus of our analysis is the textual representation of national identity, particularly the concepts of memory and civic identity.

1. «Що ти будеш згадувати про ці часи?» («Memory remembers no names, no places, but still, remember, remember each one of us»)³: **Serhiy Zhadan**.

The verbal portrait of Serhiy Zhadan is created through his texts, which may be regarded as a «single book that he has been writing throughout his life, adding new poetic and prose chapters to it.». It is no coincidence that in January 2024, the publishing house *Meridian Czernowitz* released, under one cover, the complete body of Zhadan's poetic works – over 700 texts from his 16 collections⁴.

2 Пастух Т. Література про російсько-українську війну ХХІ ст. Історія української літератури: у 12-ти т. Т. 12. К.: Наукова думка, 2024. С. 882.

3 lines from a poem by Serhiy Zhadan *What Will You Remember About These Times?* (translated to English by Ellen Poplavskaya: <https://surl.cc/udgbhl>)

4 Жадан С. Усі вірші 1993–2023. Чернівці: Меридіан Черновіц, 2024. 1440 с.

In the book of poems and translations *The Life of Maria*⁵, the leitmotif is the ontological question: where is God in the war, and on whose side does He stand—light or darkness? Remembering and forgetting delineate the ambivalent process of living through the scenario of «everything from the beginning»⁶, while the *topos* of the «city that does not exist» reconstructs eschatological scenarios of a city executed, burned, or flooded, where the images of stone, iron, vice, sights, burning, «dark streams» and «hellish holes», «empty houses», explicate the semantics of total annihilation: «Передай своїм, що стріляти більше немає по кому» («*Tell your people there's no one left to shoot at*»). Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, like today's faces of death, multiply the torn, broken, shattered worlds of the million-strong city. Parallel to this, the collection outlines the *topos* of the abandoned city, and consequently the images of refugees, suitcases, railway stations, deserters, intensified by motifs of escape, (non-)return, loss, expectation, and (dis)hope. The motif of total loss (of home, family, ground underfoot, land, sky, faith, memory, love, life) is marked by the metaphor-symbol «розвалена чорна земля» («*the ruined black earth*»), which overlays figurative components of «death»: the tactile marker of sticky warm blood, dark coloratives, and sound details woven from the voices of the dead, saints, the living, and the murdered, while the pain of the mutilated country is likened to the broken paw of «щеняти, що виривається з нічної облоги» («*a puppy breaking free from the night siege*»). Composed of these atoms, «death» takes on the features of a creeping serpent of fear.

Zhadan transposes participants of biblical events into the dimension of the contemporary world, one maddened by lack of love, bleeding with hatred, crucifying saints for their faith. In the collection «Історія культури початку століття» (A *History of Culture at the Beginning of the Century*)⁷, time hardens into scar-poems, «прописується по шкірі, / поруч легені, на лівому передпліччі» («*written across the skin, / near the lungs, on the left forearm*»), and becomes denser with memories. In a 2015 interview with Tetiana Teren, Zhadan described the perception of time as follows: «Time is so thick and dense that one might even say—material»⁸. Time acquires subjective qualities, becoming someone's memory and thus one's own Ithaca: «Я з тієї частини світу, <...> / де немає мови – є лише голоси» («I am from that part of the world, <...> / where there is no language – *only voices*»). The toponymization of time-memory becomes a path to one's own (and particularly national) identity: «І ось вона – твоя пам'ять, узбережжя Ітаки, / I нічого тепер не зробиш із власним голосом. / I ти шепочеш їй: пиши по мені свої знаки. / Хай

5 Жадан С. Життя Марії. Книга віршів і перекладів. Чернівці: Meridian Czernowitz; Книги–XXI, 2015. 184 с.

6 On the idiosyncratic variations of the mythological scenario of the beginning in Serhiy Zhadan's poetry, see in the monograph: Вишницька Ю. Міфологічні сценарії в сучасному художньому та публіцистичному дискурсах. К.: Київ. ун-т ім. Б. Грінченка, 2016. С. 153–166. <https://surl.li/jktlb>

7 Жадан С.В. Прощання слов'янки. Харків: Фоліо, 2011. С. 154–196.

8 Терен Т. RECвізити. Антологія письменницьких голосів. Книга 1. Львів: Видавництво Старого Лева, 2015. с. 220.

я буду твоїм найкращим рукописом» («And here it is – your memory, the coast of Ithaca, / And nothing can now be done with your own voice. / And you whisper to her: write your signs upon me. / Let me be your finest manuscript») (the poem «Час, як шкіра втомленого чоловіка» *Time, Like the Skin of a Weary Man*).

Time transforms into the semiotics of the body-as-text, allowing one to read the the «мову ліній на тихій руці» («language of lines on a quiet hand»). Time unravels into sounds, ties itself into words, coils into snowballs that roll, shatter against you, wound you, and melt away. Time verbalizes the world, thus creating it out of Chaos. As the chief architect of the Universe, time is able to name, to give a word. The process of utterance, of voicing, of naming, becomes sacralized.

In the cycle «Три роки ми говоримо про війну» *Three Years We Talk about the War* from the collection *Antenna9*, time pulses with headaches (poem «Знайомий пішов добровольцем» *A Friend Went as a Volunteer*), hides within the dreadful number of the dead, falls mute and screams, freezes in the single photograph where lovers are together before he went to war, and in the library where a shell struck, tearing apart textbooks and «школярку, / що прибігла зранку / віддати прочитані книги» («a schoolgirl / who had come in the morning / to return the books she had read»), congeals in a city with shattered schools and in a field «з якого другий тиждень не забирають загиблих» («where for the second week the dead are left uncollected»). Time-as-memory balances itself with inhalation and exhalation, with rhythm and forgiveness, with joy and despair, ground into eternity by the «Lord's mills»—millstones.

The key images for unlocking the chests of memory in Serhiy Zhadan's poetry (particularly in his collection «Список кораблів» *The List of Ships*¹⁰) are birds, stones, and trees, which uphold the foundations of sky and earth. They also serve as mediators between the theistic above and the profane below, between abstract ideas and materialized actions, between silence and manifestation through sound, outline, contour—for the sake of developing the ability «слухати, як лежить каміння, / слухати, як стоять дерева» (to «listen to how stones lie, / listen to how trees stand»). The image of the tree becomes an imperative and a navigator of actions: live like the trees of mixed forests – with readiness «вибиватися з мокрого суглинку» («to break through wet clay loam»), with the ability «підтримати залізним плечем тих, / хто не може втриматися на вітрі» («to support with an iron shoulder those / who cannot withstand the wind»). It is precisely the images of the tree and the bird in the poem *And Then Not a Word* that transform into shelters and sonic retransmitters of memory¹¹.

9 Жадан С. Антена: поезії. Чернівці: Видавець Померанцев Святослав, 2023. 304 с.

10 Жадан С. Список кораблів. Чернівці: Видавець Померанцев Святослав, 2023. 160 с.

11 More details can be found in the chapter of the collective monograph: Vyshnytska Yu. (2024) "THE WORLD STITCHED WITH SURGICAL STITCHES OF THE CYRILLIC ALPHABET": SERHIY ZHADAN POETIC VISION. The latest approaches to improving philological sciences: Scientific monograph. Riga, Latvia : "Baltija Publishing", 2024. P. 31-59. <https://surl.li/wulpvd>

2. «На мінному полі пам'яті» («On the Minefield of Memory»)12: **Maksym «Dali» Kryvtsov**

Maksym «Dali» Kryvtsov wrote «Вірші з бійниці» *Poems from the Embrasure*¹³, which he compiled into a collection shortly before his death. The dominant concept of the collection is memory, explicitly articulated through names: «Коли мене запитають / що таке війна / я без роздуму відповім: / імена» («When I am asked / what war is / I answer without hesitation: / names»).

Names map a toponymic representation of Ukraine, where cities, towns, settlements, and villages ravaged by Russia – such as Irpin, Bucha, Bakhmut, and many others – speak to the world with the voices of Ukrainians killed by Russian forces. For instance, a woman with red-painted nails (whose photograph became a symbol of Bucha's massacre): «Її вбили п'ятого березня / коли вона поверталася на свою вулицю / їдучи на велосипеді» («She was killed on March 5 / as she was returning to her street / riding her / bicycle»).

Names are also encoded as numbers marking the anonymous graves in Kyiv Oblast, occupied by Russian forces during the first months of the full-scale invasion, in Izium, where the occupiers rampaged for over a year, and in other regions of Ukraine that were, or remain, under Moscow's occupation: «Тут спочиває номер 176 вічна пам'ять / тут спочиває номер 201 вічна пам'ять / тут спочиває номер 163 вічна пам'ять / тут спочиває номер 308 вічна пам'ять» («Here rests number 176, eternal memory / Here rests number 201, eternal memory / Here rests number 163, eternal memory / Here rests number 308, eternal memory»).

These numeric-names simultaneously become embodied as living people with unique traits, such as: «Льоха "Чорниця"! / пригадую / як довго він підбирає ракурс / коли фотографував букет із волошок / на фоні Дністровського каньйону / на війні він ретельно фотографував / і ретельно бився / у березні 2022-го / його спалили живцем / під Києвом» («Liokha "Chornytzia"! / I recall / how long he positioned the angle / when photographing a bouquet of cornflowers / against the backdrop of the Dniester Canyon / in the war he photographed carefully / and fought carefully / in March 2022 / he was burned alive / near Kyiv»). All of these names–faces–biographies–great suns–planets transform into «чорне море соняшів» (a «black sea of sunflowers»), and «поле пам'яті / всіяне / кукурудзою суму» (the «field of memory / sown with / maize of sorrow»). The chronotope of the field – with its boundless open space and its time of memory-forgetting – is manifested in Maxym «Dali» Kryvtsov's poetry through the image of sunflowers,

12 The subsection title uses the book's heading: Kryvtsov, Maksym. *Dali. On the Minefield of Memory: Diaries, Essays, Stories*. Kharkiv: Nash Format, 2025. 416 pp.

13 Кривцов М. – «Далі». Вірші з бійниці: поезії. К.: Наш формат, 2024. 192 с.

as in the poem «Падає ліс» *The Forest Falls*: «Можливо / я чай / чи чорні незіbrane соняхи: / монахи полів та священники посадок» («Perhaps / I am tea / or black unharvested sunflowers: / monks of the fields and priests of the plantations»).

The field and garden are associated with harvests, gathering of fruits, and yield. Yet the positive semantics of creative actions – «to sow», «to reap», «to gather the harvest» – in another poem titled «На дорогах...» *On the Roads...* transform into the destructive semantics of the metaphor «жнива смерті» («harvest of death»), and the «sowing» (of bread, vegetables) becomes «посівна тіл» («sowing of bodies»): На дорогах / і городах / тіла / мла і холод / посівна («On the roads / and in the gardens / bodies / dampness and cold / sowing»).

The field, where they carry «хлопця / пронизаного кулями / уколами смерті <...> невидимі хлопці в зношенному мультикамі» («a boy / pierced by bullets / pricked by death <...> invisible boys in worn camouflage»), possesses all the characteristics of a paradisiacal spacetime. The field-paradise is marked with Ukrainian national ethnonyms – mimicking the world tree: cherries, sour cherries, apple trees – as well as floral ethnonyms: poppies and cornflowers. This field – as a sacred chronotope of timeless paradise, a mediator between life and death – articulates the semantics of completeness, the finality of the journey.

The motif of the end, and its derivative metaphor «a person ends», is realized through a series of semantic parallels that reinforce the isomorphism and atomization of images: «Людина закінчується / як закінчується хліб / у магазині спального мікрорайону / як закінчується вода в крані / коли стала аварія на магістральному трубопроводі / як закінчується літо / як закінчуються сили в марафонця /.... як закінчуються набої під час бою» («A person ends / as bread ends / in a store in a residential microdistrict / as water ends in the tap / when there is a failure in the main pipeline / as summer ends / as strength ends in a marathon runner / ... as bullets run out in a battle»).

The primary element of being, «earth», appears in the texts of *Poems from the Trenches* not only as a spacetime in which living narratives of human destinies unfold, but also as an object of comparison: the image performs a reversible function in the poem «Вітаємо всіх на найжахливішому ток-шоу...» *Welcome Everyone to the Most Horrible Talk-Show....* The narrative poetry (reproducing causal sequences of «ток-шоу / «Війна» / на телеканалі «Забуття»» («talk-show / 'War' / on the channel 'Oblivion') includes, for example: «Це Коля «Сновидіння» / він ненавидить каву на арабіці / й небо / з якого можуть випасти метеорити / наче яблуко з дірявої торбинки / разом із хлопцями / він тримав посадку під Ізюмом у травні / накрили «касеткою» і фосфором / «Сновидіння» єдиний / хто не загинув того вечора» («This is Kolya "Dreaming" / he hates Arabica coffee / and the sky / from which meteors may fall / like an apple from a holey bag / together with the boys / he held the position near Izium in May / they were hit by "cluster bombs" and phosphorus / "Dreaming" was the only one / who did not die that evening»).

Thus, this narrative poetry is saturated with the emotions and feelings of the lyrical subject, a characteristic of lyrical poetry: the pain and grief of loss are converted into the steeliness of spirit and the resilience of the talk-show heroes, manifest in the image of earth-eyes: «Знайомтесь із гостями у студії / вони повернулися з вогню / очі їхні – земля / вони нам розкажуть / усе про війну / яка вона чудова / і романтична» («Meet the guests in the studio / they returned from the fire / their eyes – earth / they will tell us / everything about the war / how wonderful it is / and romantic»).

War, as an existential evil (explicitly realized through synergistic coloristic, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory isomorphic images of a hellish labyrinth: «важкий морок» («heavy darkness»), «мертве світло» («dead light»), «обгорілі дерева» («burnt trees»), «привиди мертві і живі» («ghosts, dead and alive»), «лабіринт окопів / із Мінотавром війни» («labyrinth of trenches / with the Minotaur of war») etc., becomes the locus of the poem's birth – «усмішки мовчання / спогадів про втрачене тепло» (a «smile of silence / memories of lost warmth»). Black coloration overlays both the inner and outer worlds of the lyrical subject, establishes orientation, delineates coordinates, and functions as a kind of Morse code intelligible to those involved. In the poem «Я йду по чорній вулиці» / *I Walk along the Black Street*, blackness constructs a bicentric verticality: «у чорному небі металеві чорні птахи» («in the black sky, metallic black birds»), on the ground, the lyrical subject with a metallic heart: «Намагаюсь почути власне серце / воно зроблене із металу» («I try to hear my own heart / it is made of metal»), which spreads horizontally through blackness: black people, black lake, black fish, black bread, black eyes, black dreams – countered by love as an implicate of life and an explicate of the color red: «Моя любов / ховається в бомбосховищі / і коли закінчиться повітряна тривога / забери її / забери її. / Я шукаю червоні двері / яких насправді немає» («My love / hides in the bomb shelter / and when the air raid ends / take it / take it. / ... I am looking for red doors / which do not actually exist»).

The artistic image of the «heart» appears in the poet's texts in conjunction with the image of the fish and is thereby interpreted through a hydromorphic code: «Мое серце давно не б'ється / витікає як річка. // Пливи / пливи / стрибай / бовтайся на гачку» («My heart has long stopped beating / it flows out like a river. // Swim / swim / jump / wriggle on the hook»).

The motif of spreading and flowing also unites images via the *tertium comparationis* of a «round form», realized in the metaphor «розчавленого мандарина неба / <що - Ю.В.> витікає, як серце» («the crushed tangerine of the sky / <that – Yu.V.> flows out like a heart»). The cordocentric semantics of the poem is reinforced through the stringing together of metaphors – semantic duplicates of the crushed heart: «Фонетика болю / транскрипція пам'яті / пунктуація смерті /

граматика любові» («*Phonetics of pain / transcription of memory / punctuation of death / grammar of love*»).

In the poem «А ти і кроку ступити не зможеш» *And You Cannot Take a Step*, «water», charged with the energy of memories, functions as a memory relay, a repository of omniscience: «Коли падає дощ / ніхто не сміється / вода усе пам'ятає» («*When it rains / no one laughs / the water remembers everything*»).

In *Poems from the Trenches*, the lyrical subject of Maksym «Dali» Kryvtsov consistently poses existential questions regarding identity («Who am I? / who?»): a Walt-Whitmanian transcendentalism atomizes the «I» and the universe, linking everything in everything: «Я в розголосі потягів метро / я в галасі черги до лікаря / я кричу свою / я хрускіт кісток / я трава, що гойдається од вітру» («*I am in the echo of metro trains / I am in the noise of the line at the doctor's office / I scream like an owl / I am the crunch of bones / I am the grass swaying in the wind*»).

A key motif in the awareness of one's own identity is the motif of breathing, which permeates nearly all texts of the collection: breathing functions as a marker of vitality, an energy regenerator, a receptor of return and memory, a method of therapeutic grounding, and an imperative for action.

In the poem «З неба падає...» *From the Sky Falls...*, affirmative identity («Можливо / я вулиця / максимум / розбитий ліхтар / ну добре / хай буде / мах крила птаха» («*Maybe / I am a street / at most / a broken lamp / well / let it be / the flap of a bird's wing*») coexists with a negating identity: «Мене не розіп'яли / бо я не Бог / звісно / і навіть не дерево / здається / ми вирішили / хто я» («*I was not crucified / for I am not God / of course / and not even a tree / it seems / we decided / who I am*»), which loosens the boundaries of the search for self-identity. In the poem «Чорні хвили» *Black Waves*, the central question of identity «Who am I?» transforms into existential signifiers of choice: «Where am I? What am I? / With whom am I?», enhancing the breathing motif (through the primary element of being, «air») with motifs of dispersion («Сон розсипався / як зорі / як цукор / як Всесвіт» («*Dream scattered / like stars / like sugar / like the universe*»)), dissolution («зливо, розчини мене» («*rain, dissolve me*»)), and flow («клєється слово» («*the word flows*»)). The process of breathing in the poem «Господь лісу огортає м'якою...» *The Lord of the Forest Envelops Softly...* is interpreted as sacred, and God is embodied in the grenadier, «зайвого не говорити / зайвого не подумає / Його слово тверде / як обсохла земля / його обійми гарячі / як доменна піч / Його молитва триває рівно 32 слова / короткими чи довгими чергами» («*he does not speak unnecessarily / he does not think unnecessarily / his word is firm / like parched earth / his embrace is hot / like a blast furnace / his prayer lasts exactly 32 words / in short or long bursts*»).

War, in which God stands alongside the Ukrainian defenders, is also sacralized, unfolding on the level of biblical intertext in Kryvtsov's works: in the poem «На дорогах» *On the Roads*: «Риє окопи / Марія / кожен робить / що вміє. // Патрони

несуть / Херувими / в посадку насипають / Серафими. // Порохом хрестить / Іоан / під наглядом Бога / й Перуна» («*Digs trenches / Maria / everyone does / what they can. // Cartridges are carried / by Cherubim / Seraphim pour into the position. // Crossed with gunpowder / John / under the watch of God / and Perun*»), and in «Хто не помер сьогодні» *Who Did Not Die Today*: «Тут Марко на посту / тут Марія чергує / тут Петро / підриває понтонні мости» («*Here Marko is on duty / here Maria keeps watch / here Petro / blows up pontoon bridges*»), «Тут Матвій / заряджає гармату / і пророки кажуть: стріляй» («*Here Matviy / loads the cannon / and the prophets say: shoo!*»). The biblical narrative of Jesus' birth in the manger is implied through the peripheral image of a farm, which serves as a visual synonym for the biblical locus where Jesus appeared: «Виє вітер / і виє Господь / бо розбили ту ферму / де мав народитись» («*The wind howls / and the Lord howls / for they destroyed the farm / where he was to be born*»), transferring the Bethlehem sacred spacetime to Ukraine, which fights for its independence in the war against the Russian aggressor: «Тож плаче Маля / на постах і в окопах / і порох, і бронік, і саперку / несуть три царі» («*So the Child cries / on posts and in trenches / and gunpowder, body armor, and a sapper / are carried by three kings*»).

3. «Ким тобі в світі бути – / Вибір в руках у тебе» («Who you will be in this world – / The choice is in your hands»): **Yuriy Ruf**.

The opening chord of the last lifetime collection of poems «Ваніль чи сталь?!»¹⁴ *Vanilla or Steel?!* by Yuriy Ruf – a poet, warrior, and rifleman of the 24th King Danylo Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, who died in combat against Russian occupiers on April 1, 2022, near Popasna, Luhansk region – is a direct, sharp question of self-determination and personal choice: «Є два світи: світ боротьби і світ ванілі. / Світ хазяїв та світ постійних жертв. / Твій вибір: пастир, чи худоба в стілі, / Німе гниття чи бою круговерть. / Чуже ярмо чи право обирати?! / Твій голос чи безликий шум юрби?! / Ваніль чи сталь?! / Просити чи давати? / То ж хто Ти? / Вибір правильний зроби!» («*There are two worlds: / the world of struggle and the world of vanilla. / The world of masters and the world of constant victims. / Your choice: shepherd, or livestock in the stall, / Silent decay or the whirl of battle. / Another's yoke or the right to choose?! / Your voice or the faceless noise of the crowd?! / Vanilla or steel?! / To ask or to give? / So, who are You? / Make the right choice!*»).

In Yuriy Ruf's poetry, the lyrical hero manifests in multiple hypostases: «I», «You», «We».

The «I» of the lyrical hero is self-sufficient, holistic: it encompasses all offices, contains all socio-political and economic institutions, becomes a shelter for values and categories, and embodies spatiotemporal loci. The «I» unites opposites, neutralizes differences, and blurs boundaries: «Я / Сам собі президент, / Сам собі

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Гетьманат, / Сам собі судова реформа в дії. /... / Я / Сам собі дикий степ, / Сам собі тихий сад, / Сам по собі Я, / Бо – Українець!» («I / Myself the president, / Myself the Hetmanate, / Myself the judicial reform in action. / ... / I / Myself the wild steppe, / Myself the quiet garden, / Myself alone, / For – I am Ukrainian!»). The «I» conveys its ambivalence: it is home both for the «master» and the «stranger», through the semantics of wholeness, realized in the metaphors of the wild steppe and the quiet garden. Yuriy Ruf's lyrical «I» seems to immediately declare personal identity: without hesitation or detours, it unambiguously and clearly asserts its belonging to the «ancient warriors» who plowed, built, and fought: «Я народився тут, на цій землі, / Й вкорінений у найдревнішу з Націй» («I was born here, on this land, / And rooted in the most ancient of Nations»).

In the poem «Твій край» *Your Land*, stroke by stroke outlines the locus of power of the lyrical hero's «I»: the «Ukrainian land» stretches vertically toward the horizon, «де хмара крайкою край неба крає» («where a cloud edges the edge of the sky»), while horizontally it extends «крайми впертий в краї чужинські, / краї далекі...» («stubbornly to foreign lands, / to distant lands...»). The accumulation and layering of cognate words and morphological homonyms with the semantics of boundlessness and infinity create the image of the «endless land», within whose spatiotemporal dimensions the search for personal identity becomes possible: «... де крок від себе – це шлях до себе» («...where a step away from oneself is a path toward oneself»).

The mythologeme of the land as one of the primary elements of being, textual variations of which are «serpent ramps» and «Ukrainian land», produces models of civic and national identities. The result of the search for selfhood is only possible through a personal choice. Thus, in the poem «Твій вибір» *Your Choice*, the coordinates of a value scale are delineated: dignity, freedom, strength, courage on the right side of the scale, and the absence of dignity, freedom, strength, courage on the left. The lyrical hero clearly distinguishes the positive and negative coordinates, which cannot be confused. Indeed: «Гідність для тих, хто гідний. / Воля для тих, хто вільний. / Мужність для тих, хто мужній. / Сила для тих, хто сильний» («Dignity for those who are worthy. / Freedom for those who are free. / Courage for those who are courageous. / Strength for those who are strong»). It is on this scale of values that the axiological identity of each individual is determined: «Кожному по заслузі, / Кожному по потребі. / Ким тобі в світі бути – / Вибір в руках у тебе» («To each according to merit, / To each according to need. / Who you are to be in the world – / The choice is in your hands»).

The lyrical «You», semantically linked with the lyrical «I», projects the same model of civic self-identity, which is reconstructed through an initiation scenario. In the poem «Каміння й лід» *Stones and Ice*, the trials of the lyrical «You» occur within the chronotope of a living, animated nature, where natural forces – «northern winds», rockfalls – create nearly insurmountable obstacles, the overcoming of

which signifies reward. Key images – attributes of the world in which the initiation takes place – are interwoven with motifs of violent action, destruction, and imprisonment: the northern winds «sweep away», «bind», «clasped», «bound», «tear apart», «turbulent», «vise-like». These images are explicated through synergistic markers: tactile signifiers of cold and destructive chaos – «frost», «hoarfrost», «ice floes», «ice», «blizzard», «swarm of prickly icy snow», «frenzied whirlwind»; auditory enhancers of the fury of the elements – «howl»; and the «desert» colorative of the abyss-trap – «the vices of the white cold desert» – all of which unfold full mythic scenarios of confrontation and initiation. The mythological representatives of the first type are the two elements, two primordial elements of being, embodied in the images of «stone» and «ice», between which the «struggle of the elements» takes place. The lyrical hero «You» is caught in the vices of this struggle (the locus of initiation). Having overcome the trial: «Ти спробував, ти витримав, ти зміг – / Морозну ніч долав до самого світанку» («You tried, you endured, you succeeded – / You overcame the frozen night until dawn») the initiated is rewarded with light, morning, and rays of the sun (metaphors of fortunate destiny). It is precisely upon «You» that the mission of the «last bastion» is placed: «You» is «Опорний пункт, / Незборний мур держави, / В майбутнє міст, / Наведений понтон» («The stronghold, / The indomitable wall of the state, / The bridge to the future, / The pontoon laid»).

Thus, in the eponymous poem, the missionary role of the «wall» also involves being a mediator «uniting hell, earth, and sky» (through the image of the «torrent of the turbulent vortex» as a symbol of an irresistible force), a Guide, Prophet, Messiah, Leader, Hero. All these heroic, militant, and sacrificial roles serve the achievement of a single purpose: «Можливо, саме ти заб'єш кілок / У груди монстра з іменем «росія»?!» («Perhaps it will be you who drives a stake / Into the chest of the monster named 'Russia'?!»).

Civic-national identity in Yuriy Ruf's poems is also reconstructed through a subject-generalized model of «We», which transmits the author's idea of the rootedness of the Ukrainian nation. Similar to «Змієві вали» *Snake Ramps*, the poem «Ми незалежні» *We are Independent* categorically asserts: «Ми тут жили від соторіння світу, / Вкарбовані в історії сліди!» («We have *lived here since the creation of the world*, / *The traces carved into history!*»). The declarative voice of the authorial «I» is realized syntactically through exclamatory sentences and direct word order, and morphologically through imperatives – categorical prompts to recognize the indisputability of fact: «Хай чуєть... / Хай бачать...» («Let them hear... / Let them see...»), «Ми Незалежні, час це зрозуміти! / Ми були, є і будемо завжди!» («We Are Independent, it is time to understand! / We were, are, and always will be!»)

This same confidence in the victory of good over evil resonates in the poem «Ми переможемо москву!» *We Will Defeat Moscow!* According to the lyrical hero, the path to victory is laid through a series of personal but no less significant tri-

umphs: as a nation, we are capable of «*breaking / The steel links of the chain*», for «Ми, вірю, вже перемогли: / Хтось страх, хтось лінь, / Хтось біль, хтось втому» («I believe we have already won: / Someone fear, someone laziness, / Someone pain, someone fatigue»). Another condition for our victory over Moscow is the awareness of ourselves as Ukrainians: «Для цього треба подолати / Малоросійство та хохла» («*For this, one must overcome / Little-Russian-ness and khokhol-ism*»).

The subjective «I» of Yuriy Ruf's lyrical hero is rooted in time yet simultaneously dissolves into timelessness. Perhaps the most powerful, didactic, and imperative image in the collection is that of time itself. Time – condensed into a single moment and stretched into eternity, time – anthropomorphic and abstract, time of the back and time of change. The temporal model in Ruf's poems is reconstructed along the axis of human value orientations, as in the poem «*Вітер змін*» *Wind of Change*: «По краплі спливає час – / Нам дали фору. / Ти, хто пішли перед нас, / Дали шанс. / Можна прикрити вікно, / Засунути штори. / Чи припинити ховатись – / Майбутнє залежить від нас» («Drop by drop, time slips away – / We were given a head start. / Those who went before us / Gave us a chance. / You can close the window, / Draw the curtains. / Or stop hiding – / The future depends on us»). Time-as-sprinter never stops, so «every second is a loss», and the chance to «cement the dust and debris» arises – to become the builder of one's own life and to disregard the axiom of those who have either not yet searched/found, or who have lost their identity: «not the time». *Memento mori!* – a leitmotif connecting the poems through the key theme of time.

In the poem «*З думкою про смерть*» *With Thoughts of Death* (set to music by the band *Blutfahne*), the concept of time is implied by the Jungian archetype of the Shadow («thought of death», «shadows of graves», «trace in the sand») and explicitly through dreamlike (dreams, cradle) and theistic (chalice as an allusion to the Grail and the Cross) codes. Human life is understood as a path along which «манівцями нитка долі водить» («the thread of fate leads by winding roads»), with the chalice filling with life's sap, eventually drying to the bottom. Time also functions as a memory eraser: «Слідом на піску / Час тихцем про тебе пам'ять зміє» («Following on the sand / Time quietly erases memory of you»), which in the poem «*Сліди твоїх кроків*» *Traces of Your Steps* transforms into the chronotope-image of destiny: «Сліди на піску попід обрій зливаються в лінію, / У лінію долі, що виткана з часу та простору» («Traces on the sand merge along the horizon into a line, / Into a line of fate woven from time and space»), and life – «різновир бусин днів з відтінком містичності» («a variety of beads of days with mysticism») – is conceived by the lyrical hero as the road to Eternity (approached step by step) and Immortality (led to by «every breath you take»).

Among time's attributes are its imperceptibility, verbalized, for example, in «*Дорога у літо*» *Road into Summer*, through stealthy motions: «Прокрадається час, / I на шибках автографи / Залишає для нас» («Time creeps in, / And leaves

*autographs / On the windows for us»), and its ability to glue, bind, and link fragments and puzzles, for when «обривається шлях – час зриває мости» («the path breaks – time tears bridges apart»). The inexorability, flight, and flow of time (as in «Час тече» *Time Flows*) coexist with its opposite capacities: to freeze, stop, and materialize interrupted lives as frozen traces (poem «Понад темною Тисою» *Over the Dark Tisza*). Time, as an effective manager of Eternity, ensures continuity of motion («Обрію лінія буде незмінна» *The horizon line will remain unchanged*) and stability of the cycle («Навіть коли розчиниться безслідно / Сіллю у моря бездонних глибинах, / Навіть тоді вічний Всесвіт не зміниться... / Просто не стане одної людини» («Even if one dissolves without a trace / As salt in the fathomless depths of the seas, / Even then the eternal Universe will not change... / Only one person will cease to exist»)). The locus where time most fully and effectively connects past, present, and future is the cemetery, where «у затінку каменю пам'ять дрімає» («in the shadow of the stone, memory slumbers»), as in poem «На зарослих могилах» *On Overgrown Graves*, and «На заіржавлених хрестах зарослих цвинтарів дрімає Вічність» («On rusted crosses of overgrown cemeteries, Eternity slumbers») (poem «На заіржавлених хрестах...» *On Rusted Crosses...*). The cemetery locus transforms into a time-space centered on the Obelisk of Time, reconstructed with «stone slabs overgrown with moss» and «eternity crucified on bowed crosses». The «Obelisk of Time» is perceived as «the alpha and omega of the whole world», and in the poem «Уламки вічності» *Fragments of Eternity*, memory (time) is realized through images of an oromorphic myth-model: «stone peaks», «rocky giants», «consecrated pillars». Time is assigned the roles of corrector, engineer, psychotherapist, doctor, killer, decorator, mason, etc. In the poem «Безмір часу» *The Measureless Time*, time is understood in military terms: counting days in the measureless span of time, empty shell casings of photographs, «lead hours», «life magazine», loaded clips, bullets, zinc coffins of elapsed days («zincs of new minutes»), «hand on the bolt» – this entire military arsenal» of artistic imagery projects the idea of life as battle and of active participation in one's own fate.*

The entire collection *Vanilla or Steel?!* by Yuriy Ruf revolves around an active stance, a conscious choice of one's place, role, actions, and words. The authorial imperative – addressed to himself, to the reader(s), to the conditional «you» and «us» – concerns both the awareness of personal, national, and civic identities, and the act of speaking the world into being: «Пиши, пиши – цей світ ще прагне слів. / Пиши, складай, зшивай слова в конструкти. / Можливо вдастся скласти сенси в купу / І сенси запалять каскад вогнів, / Якими в боротьбі горітиме Епоха» («Write, write – this world still craves words. / Write, compose, stitch words into constructs. / Perhaps it will be possible to gather meanings together / And the meanings will ignite a cascade of lights, / By which the Era will burn in the struggle»).

Therefore, the analyzed works of three Ukrainian poets – Serhiy Zhadan (serving in the ranks of the National Guard of Ukraine), Yuriy Ruf (killed on April 1, 2022,

in Luhansk), and Maksym «Dali» Kryvtsov (killed on January 7, 2024) – construct authorial models of searching for and discovering one's identity within the dimensions of national and civic self-consciousness. The dominant concept around which this awareness unfolds is memory, which threads through the fabric of the texts with durable threads: figurative-motivic links and fastenings.

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