

History as Trauma: Death, Violence, and Loss in the Poetry of Taras Mel'nychuk

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Abstract: The paper examines the liaison of key motifs and ways represented in the poetry of Taras Melnychuk through the concepts of trauma and violence. Body, home, and language are the main constituent elements of the indigenous space, and their dramatic destruction is a crucial motif in Melnychuk's poetry. On the one hand, the poet appeals to the holistic, consistent, formulaic language of folklore and mythology as to a mirror of an idyllic and non-fragmented world. On the other hand, dismemberment and fragmentation conceptualized as an act of violence committed against holistic language become the only way of describing the perverse and violent world in circumstances with no language for its expression at all.

Key words: Taras Melnychuk, contemporary Ukrainian poetry, trauma, violence, language

Historia jako trauma: śmierć, przemoc i strata w poezji Tarasa Melnychuka

Abstrakt: Artykuł analizuje połączenie kluczowych motywów obecnych w poezji Tarasa Melnychuka poprzez koncepcje traumy i przemocy. Ciało, dom i język są głównymi elementami składowymi rodzimej przestrzeni, a ich radykalne zniszczenie jest kluczowym motywem w poezji Melnychuka. Z jednej strony poeta odwołuje się do holistycznego, spójnego, utartego języka folkloru i mitologii jako zwierciadła idyllicznego i nierozdrobnionego świata. Z drugiej strony, podział i fragmentacja rozumiana jako przemoc w stosunku do holistycznego języka stają się jedynym sposobem opisywania przewrotnego i brutalnego świata w okolicznościach, w których nie istnieje już taki język, który mógłby go wyrazić.

Słowa kluczowe: Taras Melnychuk, współczesna poezja ukraińska, trauma, przemoc, język

Introduction

In contemporary Ukrainian poetry, Taras Mel'nychuk represents "the displaced generation" (I. Andrusiak) of poets who were prohibited from

publishing their writings during the Soviet period. The Kyiv School of poetry (Vasyl' Holoborod'ko, Mykola Vorobiov, Viktor Kordun, and Mykhaylo Hryhoriv) and the Lviv poetic underground (Ihor Kalynets, Oleh Lyshega, Hryhorii Chubay), as well as Taras Mel'nychuk, introduces the new concept of poetry and the new poetic language in contrast to Socialist Realism art principles. The poetry of Mel'nychuk can be analyzed as a narrative of a traumatic experience – a narrative generated from the fragmented wholeness of the folklore matrices.

The crucial concepts of indigenous / foreign space, blood, dew, land, and home are linked to death and violence in the poetry of Taras Mel'nychuk. More specifically, the axis of Mel'nychuk's poetry is a conceptualization of the indigenous space (land, home, and body) and a loss of it. The notions of lost land and total existential homelessness in Mel'nychuk's poetry are connected with totalitarian violence and oppression. World fragmentation is correlated not only with the disintegration of a subject of language but also with the chronological breaches eliminating the difference between the past and the present and transforming the specificity of a historical event into mythical plot of historical defeat which is being continuously reproduced. In other words, a narrative that can be defined as the narrative of trauma emerging through these continuous breaches and repetitions, through the fragmentation of space and language.

As Cathy Caruth states, trauma is “the response to unexpected and overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth 1996, 91). It is worth emphasizing that pathology is not presented in the event itself, which may or may not be equally traumatizing for everyone, or in the distortion of the event within somebody's psyche. According to Caruth, pathology is implied in a structure of perception or event experience when it is not assimilated fully at the moment of its occurrence but is realized as belated in its continuous repetitions through the obsession of a person who experiences it (Caruth 1995, 4). The specificity of traumatic events is in their nonlocalizability – they cannot be connected with a certain event in the past or with a certain place (Caruth 1996, 4), they cannot be classified or compared to other elements (Caruth 2009, 568) and, therefore, they remain unidentified, unassimilated, and senseless on psyche surface (Caruth 2009, 568). Moreover, traumatic events are not only imprinted in a memory as unrealized, they also block activation of memory resources for comprehending or verbalizing of those events (Caruth 2009, 568).

During traumatic events, encryption of memories is characterized by consciousness and sensor prints splitting (Caruth 2009, 567). Cathy Caruth argues, PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) is a solely dissociative disorder as it is distinguished by an incomplete integration of traumatic experience (Caruth 2009, 566). Both Juliet Mitchell (Mitchell 2009, 785–808) and

Cathy Caruth (Caruth 1996, 25–56) emphasize the liaison between trauma and identity – an example of several clinical stories by Mitchell as well as analyses of Duras and Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* by Caruth reveal how trauma affects self-identity and a sense of body. Jeffrey C. Alexander insists that trauma is linked to the collective identity – trauma is a result of discomfort emerging in the core of collectivity's sense of its own identity (Alexander 2012, 15). As Kaja Silverman states, history “as a force capable of tearing a hole in the fabric of the dominant fiction” is a real traumatic threat to collective identity (Silverman 1990, 119). Trauma inflicted by history emerging within the established systems of representation and signification, and the trauma “is experienced by the subjects who depend upon those systems for their sense of identity” (Silverman 1990, 121).

The mental disintegration resulted in the shattered identity of a person who experiences trauma is particularly evident on a language level. For instance, Mitchell analyzes the specific relation between a traumatized person and a language – trauma can be manifested through aphonia (which is described by Sigmund Freud in Dora's clinical story), temporal muteness, loss of ability to speak and listen to certain words, linguistic clichés and stereotypes, imitation of somebody's language or literality and its emotionless (Mitchell 2009, 785–808). Traumatic narratives “speak about and speak through the profound story of traumatic experience” (Caruth 1996, 4), they “address us in the attempt to tell us of reality or truth that is not otherwise available” – the truth is about what is known, but also what is unknown in our language or our actions core (Caruth 1996, 4). According to James Berger, the theory of trauma deals with something that cannot be represented in a conventional way, with objects or events that destabilize language and “demand a vocabulary and syntax in some sense incommensurate with what went before” (Berger 1997, 573). As Serguei A. Oushakine states, trauma reveals a deficiency of language (Oushakine 2009, 16), a lack of symbolic frame ableness of trauma correlates with its incompatibility with narrative traditions and semantic conventions oriented to structuredness of experience and coherence of its representation (Oushakine 2009, 14).

What should be the textual strategies of an adequate representation of traumatic experience and in what form should the trauma narrative should be? According to Anne Whitehead, “the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection” (Whitehead 2004, 3). Geoffrey H. Hartman says that trauma studies as well as literary criticism focus on breaches and lacunas, on conscious knowledge in speech, on “obliquity or residual muteness of ‘flowers of speech’ and other euphemic modes”, on uncanny part of accidents and “‘ghosting’ of a subject”, on the liaison of voice and identity, and on the fact that “literature as a testimonial act that transmits knowledge in a form that

is not scientific and does not coincide with either a totally realistic (as if that were possible) or analytic form of representation” (Hartman 1995, 552). Both Hayden White and James Berger draw attention to the correlation between historical traumas and literary styles and prevailing narratives. Hayden White observes “affinities of form and content” between social totalitarianism and literary modernism in a sense that modernism appears as an anticipation of new forms of historical reality, “a reality that included, among its supposedly unimaginable, unthinkable, and unspeakable aspects, the phenomena of Hitlerism, the Final Solution, total war, nuclear contamination, mass starvation, and ecological suicide” (White 1992, 52). James Berger insists that “it may be useful to look again at the rhetoric of poststructuralist and postmodernism theory – their emphases on decentering, fragmentation, the sublime and apocalyptic – and explore what relation they might have to the traumatic historical events of mid-century” (Berger 1997, 573).

House of Language: Illusion of Wholeness

Universe polarization in the poetry of Taras Mel’nychuk is not spawned by the natural order of things – it can be explained through evil pervasion in the world. Other here is not a part of a self but a stranger, a subject of violence. Thus, the indigenous space cannot be identified with itself and be defined as indigenous at all: a bound between our and their space is transparent and vulnerable. For this purpose, the very same element of the world exists in two dimensions simultaneously – in both indigenous and alien space. In some cases, indigenous and alien semantic systems coincide, in some cases they coexist, but this state of coexistence is temporary since their space absorbs our space intensively.

Therefore, the space, disappeared in reality, can exist only in language. For Mel’nychuk, language is the only instrument of restitution (or at least recreation) of the indigenous space. It should be pointed out that the indigenous space in Mel’nychuk’s poetry can be represented through the modes of body, home, and language. In such verbalization of space as indigenous which is mutual for poets of “the displaced generation”, language manifests itself through its magic function deriving from the word and deed (object) identity (and interoperability). Anna Pajdzińska analyses correlation between a magic word and a thing saved in the folklore (and sometimes literature) language but lost in the conventional ordinary language (Pajdzińska 2001, 17). Thus, the destroyed and lost homeland continues to exist only in the linguistic space. Shaping this imaginary space of his homeland, Mel’nychuk appeals, on the one hand, to the language of folklore, and, on the other hand, to the language of power and violence – the traumatic experience of loss speaks through these breaches and lacunas and contamination of different linguistic modes.

The language of folklore seems to be an ideal home, a home which is timeless, universal, unchangeable, and essentially resistant to the alienness: “and in the Danube, a pike / catches / meadows’ and grasses’ / and smart haymakers’ / hands”¹ («а в Дунаї шука / ловить за руку / луги трави / та косарів мисливих») (Mel'nychuk 1990, 14). However, a home rooted in folklore matrices and mythic symbols is a home which has never existed and, thus, is illusory – a home is both a golden age of the past and a paradise of childhood. Home exists only in a word's timelessness. Analyzing trauma as a loss that “emphasizes retrospective attempts to discover the logic of what has happened” (Oushakine 2009, 8), Oushakine argues that a loss becomes a reason for reassessment of non-existent “wholeness” – more precisely, “the very image of wholeness appears subsequently, in a process of a loss rethinking” (Oushakine 2009, 9). Traumatic experience contradicts existing linguistic means and, according to Oushakine, it has the only choice to use a ready representation paradigm (Oushakine 2009, 15). In the Mel'nychuk's poetry, a trauma narrative emerges through breaches in this rigid and structuralized wholeness – both as an intervention of power discourse with its specific rhetoric and as an insight into illusiveness of the Golden Age myth represented by the folklore discourse. Trauma, as Oushakine states, “provides direction for narration without being a subject of that” (Oushakine 2009, 13).

Impossibility of History

Conditional historical plots of Mel'nychuk's poetry are strangely non-historical, timeless. Despite of historical entourage and historical figures (the Cossacks, the steppe, the Scythians, Petro Sahaydachnyy, Bogdan Khmel'nytsky, Sviatoslav the Prince) in Mel'nychuk's poetry, history, which is unrelated to the specific moment in time, becomes a part of a myth rooted in folklore plots. Diffusion of time streams (perception of the past as the present and the present as timeless) paradoxically results in impossibility for history to become a part of real experience as well as to inscribe a lyrical character life into a sequence of historical events. Analyzing Freud's narratives of individual and historical traumas, Cathy Caruth suggests chronological breaches and absence of a person's own story to be constitutive symptoms of trauma (Caruth 1996, 10–24).

In his poetry, Mel'nychuk focuses on what happens here and now; however, paradoxically, a present moment is treated as taken out from a time passage and unrelated to the past and the future. An event or act is conceptualized as continuously repeated or replicated, and, thus, temporality of that is lost in an act of repetition: “and I have been learning and learning /

¹ Here and throughout the article, Ukrainian texts translations are mine.

but sometimes I cannot do it right: / the strings run off to Ukraine / from under my fingers” (“і вчуса вчуса / а то у мене нічого не виходить: / струни з-під пальців / тікають на Україну”) (Mel’nychuk 1990, 30). Time can be measured only through changes, and if a present moment solidifies in continuous repetition, time will collapse and the very notion of time becomes meaningless. In Mel’nychuk’s poetry, historical events are conceptualized as frozen in the present time – therefore, they do not take place at all or occur in a circular time: “I am walking around / and there are Scythians Scythians” (“іду / а воно скіфи скіфи”) (Mel’nychuk 1990, 29).

Time conceptualization is ideological in its essence – the Soviet present that happens here and now is treated as unchangeably repeated defeat which is similar to the defeat happened over one thousand years ago: “The Pecheneg is drinking wine / from the Sviatoslav’s skull / And how long will he the bloody stranger be drinking my blood?” (“П’є печеніг вино / з черепа Святослава / І доки він буде пити / кров мою / зайда кривава?”) (Mel’nychuk 1990, 53). Therefore, the events of both the Cossacks era and Sviatoslavian times fall outside the sphere of history as if they have never existed at all – there are no changes and no history, there is a continuous drama of defeat played by different actors in different times. And the terrifying implication of this is in the conclusion – if there is no change and no time in our history, we do not exist too (the repeated motif of illusory and ghostliness of existence neither in life nor in death is an illustration of that). According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is linked not only with destructiveness but with the enigma of survival (Caruth 1996, 58). As Caruth argues, “It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience” (Caruth 1996, 58).

For this reason, the historical discourse is conceptualized as rooted in the mythical: the Scythians, the Cumans, and the Cossacks exist(ed) not in the past but here and now, in everlasting space of the word. Attribute of myth repeated continuously in circular time forms a defeat and non-existence matrix whose terrifying incarnation is a chalice made of Sviatoslav’s skull (for a lyrical character, this chalice is his own body alienated and consumed through violence and usurpation).

Furthermore, as myth is ahistorical, all these historical events are predominantly a projection of desires existing in the ideal time and space, in the folklore word only, but not in reality. In Mel’nychuk’s poetry as well as in that of the 1980s generation and the Kyiv School, there is an appeal to the folklore formulae of song, fairy-tale, and spell. However, in Viktor Kordun’s or Vasyly Holoborod’ko’s texts, there is an attempt of national narrative wholeness reconstruction through an appeal to folklore and mythic matrices and even to nonverbal ritual practices. In Mel’nychuk’s poetry, folklore formulae are an illustration of fragmentation of the national nar-

rative. Conceptualization of the nation's history is also different – in the poetries of Kordun or Herasymiuk, any mention of past events is an attempt of further national memory deepening and rootedness in national history as opposed to the Soviet version. In Mel'nychuk's poetry, the historical, paradoxically, is a statement of absence of history as past events (according to Pierre Nora, institutionalized and unified history inscribed in the official discourse and multiplicity of private or group memories that can confirm or refute an official version of historical events can be differentiated (Nora 2014, 188–189).

Fragmentation of World, Language, Body

Folklore formulae of Mel'nychuk's poetry are fragments of the world that has not been integral at all. The crucial aspect of appealing to folklore matrices is related to syntax: semantic coherence of folklore formulae included in a poetic text is in contrast with their positional inconsistency. Thus, the text seems to be a set of fragments with semantic lacunas inside: “dew is pasturing cowbells / and cottage / is hiding the village behind its belt / mint is speaking with God in silence / and wing is talking to wind / oven is tying rolls in knots / lips are drowning in wine / butterfly / is weighing the world on its shoulders / and putting *trudodni*² in his wings” (“роса пасе дзвінки / і хата / хова за пазуху село / говорить мовчки з богом м'ята / і з вітром гомонить крило / піч калачі у вузлик в'яже / уста втопились у вині / метелик / світ на плечах важить / й складає в крильця трудодні” (Mel'nychuk 1990, 60). Idyllic space as a harmony of the natural and the human consists of fragments that are not mutually related. This fragmentation is linked to keeping narrator's eyes unfocused, to loss of a center as well as cohesion of perspective that can integrate these fragments into wholeness – a dew micro-image shifts sharply to a village macro-image shifting to a mint micro-image. This writing style is not about the artistic view defect but is connected to the description of the fragmented and destroyed world whose wholeness is possible only in language. As Oushakine states, a trauma story results in a narrative disharmony and chronological confusion (Oushakine 2009, 12). In Mel'nychuk's poetry, destruction of the indigenous world is linked with destruction of native language as ideal (idyllic) space, which implies hypothetical existence of the integrated world. Thus, the comfortableness of folklore images and plots

² Trudoden was a day of labor in collective farms of the Soviet Union in 1930–1966. As Lesa Melnyczuk states, “a trudoden payment was a payment in kind, for a day's work. It was generally made with food or grain. [...] Workers were supplied with amounts of bread or grain that could not sustain a single person, let alone meet the requirements of the whole family. For young children, the elderly, and others in the household who were unable to work, there was nothing” (Melnyczuk 2012, 57).

referring to fairy-tale formulae in the poem (a language of plants, honey and wine, rolls in an oven) is in contrast with the Soviet media discourse rhetoric (*trudodni*).

The specific style of Mel'nychuk's writing can be comprehended through essential incommensurability of the national and Soviet discourses. Soviet rhetoric is a language of violence represented through the lexis of weapon (a bullet, tanks, knives, a scaffold, an axe, and a gun), captivity (a prison, imprisonment, bars, and a chain), and coercion (a collective farm *kolgosp*, *trudodni*). Importantly enough, the native language in Mel'nychuk's poetry (as well as the indigenous space outlined through the folklore discourse) is predominantly formulaic, and these formulae refer to the wider context – for example, the formula of the opening sentence refers to folklore fairy-tale text that, in turn, refers to the world integrated within language. On the contrary, the foreign language as a language of violence and oppression is represented by separated words, considering this language appeals to the atomized world emerged through destruction. This language, apart from its instrumentality, cannot exist as wholeness at all. Thus, every word of that can be conceptualized as a direct violence and a strange body tearing the textual density apart.

Violence and Language

However, Melnychuk's philosophical questioning is much deeper: what if violence is inscribed in the core of existence and as such is an inherent attribute of being? He not only appeals to folklore language that can include memory of wholeness but also attempts to call into question a language ability to reflect reality. As a result, the formulaic density of language which seems to be the guarantee of world's integrity becomes the means of semantic erosion. That is to say, being based on its high integrity and tendency to produce clichés, language not only transforms reality into accordance to its interpretative schemes but also imposes on it a specific way of being – as integrated and highly structuralized wholeness such as language substantially is. Thus, Mel'nychuk calls meanings outlined by language into question. In this case, the poet practices ethical evaluation of what exists in language as unsplit and non-reflected. It is re-conceptualization of the very notion of natural that is not dependent on human will. That is to say, the human being can adjust or change the natural habitat, but specific initial state of a world when interaction between the human and the natural has not yet started is expected to be, and the world can be conceptualized as a thing-in-itself in this case.

In this regard, Slavoj Žižek's idea of symbolic violence is crucial for the amendment of language and violence liaisons. Žižek calls into question the conventional statement about opposition between violence and language

based on the idea of mediating function of language as a specifically human attribute. In contrast, Žižek, appealing to Hegel, draws attention to the fact that language itself is a kind of violence directed against the world of named things as much as the very act of naming is a procedure of schematization (in a word, whole thing complexity is reduced to a single attribute) and dismemberment (only specific attributes of a thing are differentiated). Moreover, a thing, through its naming, is involved into symbolic sphere that is external to it – as a result a thing is being transformed into an object, a thing-for-somebody (Žižek 2008, 61). In Mel'nychuk's poetry, the language of violence is that of power. Paradoxically, Mel'nychuk is quite skeptical about a language ability to describe the very core of violence. Thus, the only adequate strategy of world-in-violence verbalization for Mel'nychuk is a violence directed against language itself. By fragmenting the monolithic folklore discourse, by dissecting its formulae and destroying their meanings, Mel'nychuk is able to speak about what lies beyond words and what has no language for verbalizing itself.

Mel'nychuk's attempt to read a nature text as a text of culture, despite considerable literary tradition of the opposite, is one of the novelties in writing of the period. Moreover, this way of writing practiced by Mel'nychuk is the main strategy of text construction in the contemporary Ukrainian poetry by some representatives of the 2000s generation – for instance, Myroslav Laiuk. However, Mel'nychuk not only tries to call into question the naturalness of the natural but also radically changes the way of creating / using of categories, e.g. the natural / the cultural, the given / the created. That implies specific time conceptualization: if the focus of vision was able to change the view of the world, the past would be transformed under the impact of the present or the future. That explains the representation of the past and the present in Mel'nychuk's poetry as eternal (and timeless), existing without the beginning and the end.

This change of focus is resulted in Mel'nychuk's attempt to interpret what happens in the world in terms of human ethics. Thus, violence as a specifically human phenomenon is inscribed in the core of the natural: “at dawn, they condemned / the dew to death / and hung it from the grass” (“на світанку засудили / росу на смерть / і повісили на траві”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 29), “and now / the blue sea is drowning / through the boat / it is flowing” (“а тепер / синє море потопає / крізь човен / витікає”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 41), “the sky flew off – / cut off the wing / of the eagle” (“небо шугнуло – / втяло орлові / крило”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 59), “oh my rue / the troublemaker / so you has been bitten / with your feet nailed / to yellow sand” (“ой рутко моя / баламутко / тож тебе набито / ніжками до жовтого / пісочку прибито”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 59).

That is to say, the idyllic space created from folklore formulae is an illusion since the threat is in the core of the familiar indigenous world. Therefore, everything in nature can be conceptualized as a metaphor of

death and violence – sunset, dewy grass, plant germination, bird's fly. Violence is treated as inscribed in the natural cycle as an integral part of being. Another conclusion is that not only the violence, but also an observer of that is an integral part of the world. In other words, the world is watching itself observing its “loss of axis”, according to Vasyl' Stus.

This view of the world should be conceptualized in the context of traumatic experience of the last century. As Shoshana Felman states, analyzing the O. J. Simpson trial, “it is perhaps not the coincidence if such a trial takes place at the close of the twentieth century, a century whose history of wars and violence has taught us how to recognize traumatic symptoms and events of trauma (that once seemed extraordinary) as part of *normal*, ordinary life; a century of civil rights but also of unprecedented civilized abuses” (Felman 2002, 61). Under such circumstances, when violence becomes a part of normal life, when it becomes not precedential but institutionalized, blindness of culture related to trauma emerges. As Shoshana Felman states, “the limitations of the possibilities of seeing, the structural exclusions from our factual frames of reference, are determined not only by (conscious or unconscious) ideology but by a built-in-cultural *failure to see trauma*” (Felman 2002, trials 82–83).

Violence: Unnaturalness of the Natural

Assumption of the world and things self-consciousness enables the emergence of a specific literary motif such as suicide of a thing (plant, animal): “and the grass has already stepped / toward the scythe: / – Mow!” (“а вже трава ступила / до коси: / – Коси!”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 21). This motif manifested in the poetry by Oleh Lysheha and Vasyl' Herasymiuk was transformed into the ironical passage by Viktor Neborak in the 1990s – “Julebars hanged himself!” (about the dog). It is rather Mel'nychuk's fundamental ideological project – to return subjectivity to the voiceless other, than mythical identification of the micro- and the macro-world – an archaic motif of anthropomorphization of the world, conceptualizing of that as built according to the pattern of human body. Accordingly, nature is treated not as a field of making efforts (the status of an object), but as a subject of deed, since the only self-conscious subject can attack its own life.

Importantly enough, the previous conception of interaction between mankind and its habitat has been changed radically in Mel'nychuk's poetry. He is one of the first Ukrainian writers who actualizes an issue of ecological ethics. For the 1960s generation with their anthropocentric worldview, the natural was a pursuit of the human (both body and space); as both the body and the space the habitat seemed to be protected by human being. In 1960s generation poetry, nature was conceptualized as a habitat precisely because it was, similar to the renaissance scenery, a container for and a frame of

mankind. The world of nature and the world of culture were conceptualized as a place of existence of mankind.

For Mel'nychuk, nature is the other nearby the human world, a thing-in-itself which is not designed for protection or exploitation – and as such it is self-sufficient, not subordinated. The notion of the other is crucial in post-colonial theory since it is a starting point for establishing binarism of a colonizer and a colonized connected by power relations. The other is “important in defining the identity of the subject” and “can refer to the colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ‘ego’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, 155). Moreover, Mel'nychuk's notion of nature as the other in relation to mankind resonates with the post-colonial conception of environmentalism with its “increasing emphasis on the ‘more-than-human’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, 71). Importantly enough, “The enigma of place, the nature of indigeneity, the relationship between landscape and language, settler incursions with the consequent destruction of integrated biotas, colonial exploitation of resources and enforced cash-cropping (sometimes leading to desertification) have all been subjects of post-colonial study, especially in relation to genocide and the wholesale dispossession of indigenous peoples” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, 71). In this regard, violence in Mel'nychuk's poetry can be studied also in the context of political discourse and, thus, as a part of post-colonial theory.

I believe that acceptance of alterity and, moreover, sovereignty of the other in its alterity (whatever the other is – nature, a thing, an object of art or the other human being) and ethical attitude toward the other is the most important ideological basis by which the poetry of the displaced generation is characterized. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the ethical is “an interruption of the epistemological, which is the attempt to construct the other as object of knowledge” (Spivak 2004, 83). In fact, perception of the other as self-sufficient and equitable deeply contradicts the Soviet ideology principles that cultivate, on the one hand, the principle of the only truth, the only point of view and, on the other hand, the black-and-white view of the world without nuances and undertones. Conceptualizing the liaison of identity and trauma, Eric Santner emphasizes the importance of “a radical rethinking and reformulation of the very notions of boundaries and borderlines, of that “protective shield” regulative exchange between the inside and the outside of individuals and groups” (Santner 1992, 152–153). Accordingly, the aim of such reformulation is “development of a capacity to constitute boundaries that can create a dynamic space of mutual recognition (between self and other, indigenous and foreign)” (Santner 1992, 153).

Conceptualization of human violence as rooted in the natural world is a demonstration of perverse ideological model in which nature is treated as habitat, property, or a larder of resources for mankind. Consequently,

a topos of idyllic interaction of nature and mankind, where a human being is treated as harmonically co-existing with its habitat, and human traditional crafts is unobtrusively inscribed in a dynamics of environment and treated as its integral part, becomes an object of deconstruction in Mel'nychuk's poetic world. Supposedly, destruction of apparent harmony (or understanding of its inferiority) occurs under pressure of the Soviet ideology that crushes all norms and structures prevailing before, as it can be seen in this poetry: "Bees graze in a mountain valley / Earning their *trudodni*.³ / The sky has lain on the Carpathians, / As though on the universal basis [...] / Cows make the sign of the cross / For a clover / And die immediately, being alive" ("Бджоли пасуться на полонині / Заробляючи трудодні. / Небо лягло на Карпати, / Немов на підвалини світові... / Корови хрестяться / на конюшину / І тут же вмирають – живі") (Mel'nychuk 1990, 40). Working the soil which has been previously treated as a harmonic interaction of mankind with its environment becomes enslavement and exhausting endeavor for a human being. Similarly, the metaphor of a high spiritual impulse (the Carpathians) turns into the concept of a heavy burden ("The sky has lain on the Carpathians"). There is not only about transformation of the colony according to the empire will or intimidation and extermination of people but also about destruction of their lifestyle based on the specific ideological basis and destruction of the basis itself.

However, conceptualization of mankind and nature interaction (and working the soil as a main manifestation of the interaction) has another nuance of meaning in Mel'nychuk's poetry. In this context, the very working the soil is treated as violence against nature: "I mowed. Like this! Moving my arm, / With my left foot first. / Herbs are dying silently, / And a bee is licking honey from the scythe" ("Косив. Отак ось! Від плеча, / А ліва все вперед ішла. / Вмирають трави, а мовчать, / І лиже мед з коси бджола") (Mel'nychuk 1990, 22). I believe the motif of working as violence shows a collapse of the ideological model based on the principal inequality of mankind and nature.

Violence: Naturalness of the Unnatural

Conceptualizing of violence as an integral part of the universal body or, more specifically, conceptualizing of the natural world through the ethical prism of the human one comprises another dimension. In Mel'nychuk's poetry, alongside with natural landscapes treated as metaphors of death and violence, there are images of death, violence and war conceptualized as natural, as an integral part of landscapes or human relations. Moreover,

³ In this context, the word *trudodni* can be treated as foreign in Mel'nychuk's original poetry.

the images of death and captivity (cannons, bullets, rifles, tanks, chains, and bars) are radically humanized enough to be a familiar part of the indigenous space: “the lips of rifles / are moving, dried-up” (“губи гвинтівок / ворущаються і сохнуть”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 16), “in the oak barrel / the wine sun / the golden wine / over it / a raven / is cradling a baby / the only one / in Ukraine” (“в дубовій бочці / винне сонце / золоте вино / над ним / ворон / дитячко колише / на всю Україну / одніське-одно”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 18), “the lips of the cannon / are shameless” (“уста гармати / безсоромні”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 24), “and the bullet flicks its tongue from a barrel: / well, howdy here (happily!) / are you at home?” (“а куля з цівки висува язик: / ой здрасці (весело!) / ви вдома?”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 49), “the bullet is nesting / in the barrel of a rifle / (it needs a rest)” (“куля гніздиться / в стволі рушниці / (хоче відпочити)”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 82), “and barefoot tanks / are running after girls” (“і босоногі танки / біжать за дівчатами”) (Mel'nychuk 1990, 82). Metaphor of weapon's lips is typical here – it is based on association of body and thing. On the one hand, the metaphor is linked to folklore and mythic liaison between erotica and death (conceptualizing of death as wedding can be seen in folklore ballads, dream stories and rituals, especially in the ritual of burial of unmarried girls or bachelors). The liaison manifests the early or violent death – it explains the metaphor of weapon's lips as an instrument of murder.

On the other hand, there is a deeper meaning rooted in Mel'nychuk's poetics – lips and tongue are connected with speaking or silence (in his poetry, the bullet is speaking and the lips of the rifles are moving). The liaison of violence and language is determinant – language and violence are not at the opposite ends, language does not keep the world in balance and does not prevent its deformation and destruction. Instead, there is a notion of violence as language – the language of violence is responsible for the total destruction of the world.

Geoffrey Hartman argues that “there is something very contemporary about trauma studies, reflecting our sense that violence is coming ever nearer, like a storm – a storm that may already have moved into the core of our being” (Hartman 1995, 552). Therefore, the reality of violence is manifested “not simply as external fate, but intrinsic to psychological development of human species, and contaminating its institutions (the Law system not excluded)” (Hartman 1995, 552). As mentioned above, the Soviet language ruins and dismembers wholeness of the world built on folklore formulae. The alien body of the Soviet discourse fragments both the indigenous world and the indigenous language. Vice versa, violence is manifested as the only language of power. Moreover, the language of violence is conceptualized as an integral part of family relations: the raven is cradling a baby, tanks are running after girls like boys, and the bullet wonder if anybody is inside like a neighbor. That indicates that the world image is falling apart, that the very sense of boundary between the subaltern

indigenous and the violent foreign is lost, and violence becomes a general rule at the level of family relations – at the level which would be, as it seems, the most resistant to violent impulses.

Conclusion

In Mel'nychuk's poetry, there is a deep rethinking of such existential modi as death, violence, captivity, war, and destruction. Destruction of the indigenous space is total – the space is conceptualized in a mythical sense as a complex architecture of different subspaces interaction, from body and home (land) to language and world. The language itself demonstrates the paradoxes of Mel'nychuk's poetics. On the one hand, the mythic and folklore formulaic language to which Mel'nychuk appeals describes the non-fragmented idyllic world that is beyond the flow of the historical time – the world existing only within the language. On the other hand, the dense and highly structured folklore language becomes for the poet the only means of total perverseness of the real world that has no language for the self-presentation. Thus, death and violence become more than motifs, metaphors or concepts as much as they are inscribed in the structure of the language which describes the reality.

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