

UDC 82.09:821.161.2-31  
doi: 10.15330/jpnuphil.10.27-37

## LITERARY TRUTH OF THE HOLODOMOR IN THE NOVEL "THE AGE OF RED ANTS" BY T. PIANKOVA

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**Abstract.** Among the important tasks of modern humanities, one singles out textualization of trauma psychology as the entire traumatic experience of previous generations, imbedded into the mental map of Ukrainians, still remains not fully textualized, and the new genocide unleashed by Russia against Ukraine only exacerbates the situation. Given article is dedicated to the analysis of literary features of the novel "The Age of Red Ants" written by modern Ukrainian writer T. Piankova, as it has not been the object of literary studies yet. The article relies on the "trauma studies" methodology and explores narrative strategies, space-time modeling, ideological and literary meaning of macro- and microimages. Among the important literary devices creating the narrative background of the novel in question one should single out gradation of images. Resulting from the gradation levels in the narrative of characters, there comes forward the effect of extreme mental tension, exacerbation of suffering, inevitability of death, and all-encompassing dominance of the alimentary-aggressive code of alien psychology.

**Keywords:** Holodomor, trauma studies, national identity, genocide, memory, modern Ukrainian literature, Tetiana Piankova.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays trauma studies is among the topical areas of humanitarian research. One should emphasise the problem of collective trauma, its "revival" by means of textualization, particularly these days when there is an ongoing aggressive war unleashed against Ukraine; the war which, according to the Moscow fascists plan, is aimed at completion the genocide of Ukrainians carried out by Muscovia (Russia) for centuries and until now. Along with the novel of Tetiana Piankova, this article serves as a warning to the democratic world professing humanistic values: it is not the first time that Ukraine is going through the hell of genocide: it happened after the defeat of Mazepa near Poltava, later Ukrainians lost their statehood in bloody battles in the early XX century. Regarding Ukrainians' desire for independence, the Moscow-Bolshevik executioners started solving this problem preventively: they starved more than eight million people with hunger, they destroyed Ukrainian private farming sector, they beheaded the intelligentsia stratum. We have approached the terrible ninetieth anniversary commemorating the Holodomor (the Great Famine) of 1932-1933, but its truth is still alive.

In our study, we rely on methodology of the trauma studies. In the field of literary criticism there have been a plethora of researchers working on this strategy in their works dedicated to the problem of

collective, historical trauma, among them P. Ricoeur, T. Bilchevsky, G. Agamben, D. La Capri, P. Sztompka, D. Alexandra, H. Arendt, C. Erickson, C. Caruth, and S. Felman.

## 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

"Trauma studies" has been introduced into Ukrainian literary criticism with the help of works of T. Hundorova (*The Holodomor of 1932–1933...*, 2007), A. Matusiak, V. Vasylenko (Vasylenko, 2018). Among Ukrainian researchers working on the issues of the Holodomor and the traumatic impact of the ongoing war, one should mention O. Kis, O. Pukhonska, N. Tymoschuk, N. Horbach, V. Ohienko; they are focusing on peculiarities of identification of trauma in the narratives of works of fiction. Ukrainian researchers consider the trauma of the Holodomor as the most consciousness deforming trauma of the nation.

The Soviet authorities considered the topic of the Holodomor a taboo; therefore, it was dangerous to write about it as more than often the daring author was shot or put into an asylum. Among the first Ukrainian writers who somehow disregarded the danger and threats of the Soviet reality, and had the courage to tell the truth about the artificial famine that killed Ukrainian peasants, were A. Liubchenko ("Kostrыga" (1933) and P. Tychyna (the poem "There was a knock at the door") (Tymoshchuk, 2005). One should also mention literary works of Mykhailo Stelmakh ("Geese-Swans are Flying" (1964), I. Stadniuk ("People are not Angels" (1962), A. Dimarov ("Thirties" (written in 1966, published in 1988). After Ukraine gained its independence, there have appeared more works dedicated to the topic, among them "Samosud" ("Lynching") by A. Dimarov, "Osier Coffin" by P. Naniiv, "Entrapped by death" by M. Potupeiko, "Holodomor" by Ye. Hutsalo. However, memories regarding the Holodomor itself were an important part of the historic memory among Ukrainian diaspora abroad, they were present both at the level of oral narrative (people retelling the events to their own children and grandchildren), and at the literary level, by textualizing the trauma. In the context of this traumatic topic one cannot but mention "painful" yet powerful literary works V. Barka ("The Yellow Prince") and U. Samchuk ("Maria"), both of the works are now considered pinnacles when it comes to artistic evidence of the horrifying events of the Holodomor. In the contemporary Ukrainian literature, the topic of the Holodomor finds its realistic depiction in T. Piankova's novel "The Age of Red Ants" in all its historical accuracy.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The chronotope of the work is the terrible year of 1933 in the Poltava village of Machukhy. All the levels of the poetics of the text (plot, character, artistic-figurative, compositional, and narrative) revolve around the idea of testimony, "verbalisation" of the catastrophic real events brought upon Ukrainian peasants by Moscow-Bolshevik occupiers in extremely violent ways. It is due to the well-chosen narrative strategy that the novel reveals the terrible abyss of the "Bolshevik paradise", a kind of hell created for Ukrainians by "red ants", that is "cogs and wheels" of a terrible repressive machine.

Усі три персонажі пов'язані між собою часом і простором, долями інших, другорядних персонажів. There are three narrative voices in the work: two female voices (Dusia and Solia) and one male one (Svyryd). It is through the eyes of these characters that the reader is able to see all the events, share their experience and comprehend the artistic world of the work. T. Piankova deliberately chooses

these characters to create a literary reconstruction of the terrible historical events: Dokiya is a young girl, a daughter of a repressed "kulak" (a well-off Ukrainian peasant repressed under the Bolshevik regime) and she embodies the "psychology of dying"; Solomiya is a wife of "comrade" Olexii Basha, a Bolshevik commissar, who later becomes a head of a collective farm and torments Ukrainian peasants of Poltava; Svyryd Suchok is a head of the Machukhy komnezam (a committee of poor peasants created under the Bolshevik authorities). This narrative strategy provides a "three-dimensional" view of events. All three characters are interconnected by time and space, as well as fates of the supporting secondary characters.

One can witness the process of the Ukrainian cosmos and life dying through the eyes of Dokiia, though she is still resisting the gripping clutches of death. Her whole world revolves around her grandmother San'ka, who is loving and ready to sacrifice for the loved ones (in order for her grandchildren to survive, she refuses to eat), her mother Anna, beautiful inside and out (Dokiia tenderly calls her "my craneling"), her brother Miroslav, whom the girl sacrifices herself for, and her father Timofiy, who has been arrested as a "kurkul" (he appears in the memories of the family), and Melashka, a stranger child rescued in Poltava. This world is dying, smothered by a blanket of darkness and all-conquering force of hunger, yet it still preserves the warmth of humanity, it still has vivid memories of the freshly baked bread aroma, and ears of wheat on the father's field. The representatives of this world of light share their last morsels of food (Anna, Dokiia's mother, gives away her portion of boiled of buckwheat chaff to a neighbor who is crying from hunger, she also brings home and takes care of Melashka, a little girl abandoned by her mother in Poltava).

Relying on the ideological and artistic direction of the work, the narrative strategy determines the plot and compositional features of the novel: each of the three parts of the novel presented by the above-mentioned narrators becomes a complete story in itself, yet they do contain fragments pouring light on the fates of people around them (local undertaker Tosko Lantushko, Anna and Tymofiy Rybky, local beauty Tamara, spouses Arina and Fedir). Therefore, this very factor influences the architectonics of the whole novel — as it resembles a novel composed of short stories. One should emphasise the important ideological and literary role of the message that the author has used as a motto and dedication of the novel: «Ми не сіль цієї землі. Ми — її гіркий хліб, зневажений та знову відроджений з останньої крихти любові... Пам'яті кожної зернини – кожної людини, пам'яті ненароджених поколінь присвячую» // "We are not the salt of this land. We are its bitter bread, neglected yet from the last crumb of love... This [work] is dedicated to every grain – to every person - to the memory of the unborn generations " (Piankova, 2022, p. 5). These lines grant the work the air of solemn grandeur, as if it is the Book of Genesis that is unfolding, and it contains all the records of all the crimes and sins, and the text becomes a part of the chronotope of Eternity as a strict and impartial testimony for all the innocent victims.

These lines, that emphasise the central metaphorical image of bread, which gets transformed into the "last crumb of love" and creates a parallel of "a man as a grain", seeks to commemorate victims of the Holodomor; this message clearly contradicts the famous phrase of Soviet dictator Stalin: "when the forest is being chopped — splinters are flying everywhere". It is the bitter tragedy of these words that makes the narrative of Dokiia (and it is her narrative that is the most important in the novel) close to the documentary, despite the morbid nature of the events and experiences the girl has to go through, while balancing on the edge of death all the time. She is trying to keep in memory all those who fall victim of the terrible scythe of hunger: «Мое серце, що завжди було світлицею для живих, поволі стає

могилою для тих, інших, котрим уже нічого не треба. Вони безмовним студеним камінням лягають на дно моєї пам'яті, вистилають його, востають у нього» // "My heart that has always been a home of the living is slowly becoming a grave for those who no longer need anything. They sink to the bottom of my memory like silent cold stones, building it up, growing into it" (Piankova, 2022, p. 125). Dusia becomes a living memory of the collective trauma of dying. Her consciousness notices all the changes in the body and psyche of the victims on this path of suffering leading Ukraine to Golgotha under the auspices of the Moscow commissars: «Голод вилущує нас із людської подоби, наче соняшникове зерня зі шкаралупи, а далі кладе на зуба. ... І нам страшно. Спершу страшно. А потім мізерніємо, маліємо, перестаємо одчувати ту серцевину» // "Hunger strips us from the human skin like sunflower seeds from their shells, and then it bites into us.... And we're scared. It's scary at first. And then we become smaller, less significant, we cease to feel what is inside" (Piankova, 2022, p. 161).

The story of this character — the testimony of the terrible crimes of Moscow and its accomplices against the Ukrainian nation — «із-під дітей малих вузлички з кашею забирають, з-за пазух витрушують. Наші печі, жорна, поли потрощено, клуні, комори, сараї розібрано. Сади біля хат повирубано на дрова, до сільради завезено» // "the smallest bundles with porridge are taken away even from under the children, from clothes creases. Our ovens, quern-stones, mills, floors are destroyed, barns, pantries, and sheds are dismantled. The orchards near the houses are cut down for firewood, and then delivered to the village council" (Piankova, 2022, p. 161). Every day being aware of the impending death, Dusia stills lives believing in all the good: her strength lies in love her for her brother and mother, as well as for others. Her faith in the future is embodied in the symbol of grain: trying to save at least some food for her children, Hanna has hidden a fistful of grain in her mouth mouthful of grain during the Communist search of their house. It is this handful of grain mixed with blood (the activist who conducted the search beat Anna in the face with his boot until he killed her) that Dokiia wants to sow somewhere in secret in order to grow something that might keep them alive. The image of rye, its grain mixed with blood, is extremely symbolic: it is a symbol of the immortality of the nation.

The psychology of dying studies, the pivotal point in the transformation of the consciousness of victims takes place in the episode when Dusia is peeking through a gap in the fence of the sanatorium "at people, as well-fed as pigs, who do not know of hunger": Єдина думка, яка закрадається в голови нам, напівживим, — упіймати одну з тих свиней і напхати їхнім м'ясом наші порожні шлунки» // "The only thought that creeps into our half-dead minds is to catch one of those pigs and fill our empty stomachs with their meat" (Piankova, 2022, p. 194). However, even in the semi-consciousness state, tempted and tempered with, Dusia and Myros remain true to their humane nature: when Solia comes to their empty house, they try their best to take care of her somehow.

Solia presents the reader with the second "view" on the events in the novel. At first glance, her character may seem rather artificial, and thus implausible: after all, we are talking about a woman who does not swell from hunger – on the contrary in a dying village near Poltava in a sanatorium for party leaders and their families, she is being treated for obesity. Solomiya is the daughter of a Poltava surgeon who once successfully treated saber wounds of red commander Olexiy Basha. Solimia's world revolves around her beloved "Liosha" and their married life: she is indifferent to the events taking place around her, and she sees her surroundings only through Liosha's perspective. This triggers the process of betrayal of one's own self, one's own national and human identities. The woman notices changes in her husband as he climbs higher the career ladder, changes, however, her consciousness, dulled by

indifference (at first — it comes from her sated life, later — because of the loss of the child), does not want to comprehend the reality, she does not understand that the yesterday's "handsome hero" ends up turning into a brutal killer. It is impossible to deceive one's subconsciousness, though: «Щось незбагненне гнітить мою душу. Воно живе в мені давно, ще одтоді, як я виношувала Олексієву дитину, — росло разом із моїм животом, текло моїми судинами разом із кров'ю, розходилося легенями разом із киснем» // "Something incomprehensible is gnawing at my soul. It has been getting at me for a long time, since I was pregnant with Oleksiy's child — it grew with together with my belly, it flowed along my blood vessels, it spreaded together with oxygen throughout my lungs" (Piankova, 2022, p. 138). Her psychological trauma aggravates with the death of her daughter Yeva (it is symbolic that the baby dies from ignificant that the baby dies from an intestinal volvulus — "the intestine did not cope with the food"). One should emphasise that nutrition is one of the cultural bases of the novel, its code is nutritional-aggressive and it permeates the entire work, as it is a personalized image of hunger that is the invisible but powerful "master" in the chronotope of the novel.

It is worth emphasising that narratives of both Dusia and Solia start almost in the same way. Dusia examines her body fearfully, she takes notice of the irreversible changes that happen to it: «Спочатку пухнуть ноги. Вони все дужче терпнуть, дубіють, стають такі тяжкі та повні, наче дві бодні, наче хтось ізсередини наливає їх оловом, і вони вже не тримають тебе, як тримали колись, а лишень заважають. ... Далі тебе поволі розносить геть усю — од кінчиків пальців на ногах до маківки голови» // "It is legs that swell first. They get number and number, then get stiff and become as heavy and full as two barrels, as if they are lead-filled, and they no longer work for you as they used to, they are just their in the way... Then you are slowly swell all over — from the tips of your toes to the crown of your head" (Piankova, 2022, p. 7). This is a seemingly indifferent approach from the side, "through oneself" at one's own process of dying. That is why, when readers get acquainted with Solia and her narrative, they first believe they read another story of a hunger victim: «Спочатку ще не так страшно. Лише розпухаєш... » // "At first, it is not that scary. You just swell up... ». However, the following lines are shocking: «Просто живеш. Просто їси. Щось заїдаєш... день нинішній, день учорашній. Просто ростеш — рік у рік робишся більшою, ще більшою, іще. Час викруглює тобі лице, розносить твої стегна, литки, руки, живіт, наливає вагою ноги. Спершу розносить стопи» // "You just live. You simply eat. You stress-eat ... because of today, and yesterday. You just gain weight — year after year you get bigger, and bigger, and bigger. And with time your face goes rounder, your thighs, calves, hands, and stomach get bigger, your legs get heavier. It is your feet that swell first" (Piankova, 2022, p. 9).

The emphasis is on the changes of the body, smells ("you can't wash ot away"), increase in indifference, disappearance of the sexual drive and decrease in that attention from the husband ("the bed is losing its warmth, gets colder — almost freezing, it becomes empty"), and as a result — there comes transformation of consciousness («лежма лежиш і не думаєш ні про що. Є тільки одне, чого тобі іще хочеться, не так тобі, як тварині, котра оселилася у твоєму тілі, — їсти. ... одмовляє серце, і ти задихаєшся. Аж тоді він приходить — цей дивний страх, се жаске почуття порожнечі, близької прірви, якоїсь фатальної та недоворотної темні» // "[you are] lying there and you are thinking about nothing. There is only one thing you still want, not so much you want but as the animal that has settled in your body — to eat.... says the heart, and you lack breath. And then its comes forward — this strange fear, this terrible feeling of emptiness, a close abyss, some fatal and irreversible darkness" (Piankova,

2022, p. 11) — and all of that takes place against the background of starving peasants' sufferings. All of that looks like blasphemy. However, Solia stress-eats after her psychological trauma, gradually losing herself (the woman sees herself as an animal, as "a cow that is led to the slaughterhouse"). Feverishly, she searches for the explanation as to why she has lost her child, and punishes herself with food — she wants "her stomach to not cope, and burst at once". The answer is hidden deep in her subconsciousness, yet the woman does not want to know the terrible truth, she does not want to acknowledge that her child's death is not an accident: her Basha, a terrible enemy and executioner of her own people, the one who believes only in "red banners", and for whom "the party is his God, his mother and father", starves both small and adult Ukrainians to death. Generally, Solia remains unaware for a long time, her weak soul and consciousness get caught into a sticky web of lies of her husband — the red commissar. The comparison the character applies to herself — "like an animal" — vividly illustrates her state: «Душа моя зубожіла настільки, аби навіки скуцьорбитися перед величчю його душі» // "My soul has become so poor that it will forever be intimidated by the greatness of his soul" (Piankova, 2022, p. 79). However, it is inevitable that Solomiya sees the truth in the end. She becomes more and more anxious when she tries to look into her husband's eyes: «Колись я бачила там цілий світ. Зараз бачу темінь» // "Once I saw a whole world there. Now I can see only darkness" (Piankova, 2022, p. 150).

The fate of Svyryd Suchok, the head of the komnezam (committee of the poor) of the village of Machukhy, is a vivid illustration of the consciousness transmutation — among those who would voluntarily adopt the ideology of "red ants" are primarily people who have failed to heal their own souls from traumatic experience. For instance, Tos'ko Lantushko, the village undertaker, has witnessed the terrible execution of his thief father by peasants, and therefore, he hates all people. Tos'ko is indifferent to the sufferings of the dying — in order to save time and to not come back for the deceased, he kills the dying with a pitchfork. Svyryd is one of the three narrators of the novel, who has sold his soul to the red devil because he has lost Hanna — "my soul is lonely and rotten because of grief". In their youth, Hanna would lead Svyryd on, and later she married his friend Tymofiy. Svyryd tried to hang himself, but he survived, and then lived all the time looking into someone else's household. Having buried his pain and rage, he watched Hanna and Tymofiy's children grow up. Hanna would always come back in his dreams, and would become his manic obsession. Svyryd could forgive that someone else was happy, he had been neglected and it hurt, and although he did not want to admit it even to himself, his affiliations to poor communist peasantry, him giving away all his measly possessions and becoming a part of organisation were efforts to return Hanna. After Tymofiy was arrested, and Hanna and their children were evicted from the house, Svyryd offered her to live with him. Svyryd's narrative doesn't include evidence about him being behind the arrest of Tymofiy, but Hanna's characteristics of him — "so slippery that you cannot wash away", "[he is] as scary as death itself" — reveals the truth. After all, he himself admits: "lack of faith like an insatiable worm gnawed at my strength". Svyryd can be characterized by a clearly aggressive alimentary code: using beautiful Tamara, who is sincerely in love with him, he satisfies his carnal needs, and thus the erotic code becomes an aggressive-alimentary one: "as soft as dough, so tasty." «Голодним псом солод із Тамари злизую, видаю її всю, випиваю, смакуючи кожним порухом» // "I lick the malt from Tamara like a hungry dog, I eat all of her, drink her and savour every move" (Piankova, 2022, p. 13). There are multiple elements of mythopoeics and oneiric poetics the novel refers to (in his relations with Tamara Suchok plays the role of a snake: «Шкіпу порепану, наче змії, скидаю, за ніч обростаю новою і виповзаю в темінь» "Like a snake I shed my

broken skin, and overnight I grow a new one and crawl out into darkness" (Piankova, 2022, p. 12); hunger has a personified form that appears in Suchok's dreams, and the man tries to bargain with it for Hanna).

This character's psychological trauma of betrayal and of self-denial reveals itself in his monologues, written in the form of a stream of consciousness. Svyryd realizes that he has become a weapon in the hands of the killers, but there is no turning back. All his hopes that starvation could force Hanna to give in and seek refuge in him were vain: Hanna chose to die — it was a boot of a red villain that killed off a semi-alive and suffering from hunger woman during another search of the house. It was after Hanna's death that the revelation came upon the character — «Мені постійно здається, ніби у моїй голові живе ще один чоловік, іще один Свирид» // "It always seems to me that there is another man, another Svyryd, living in my head" (Piankova, 2022, p. 229). The former Svyryd, the one who did not betray his ancestry, his land, serves as a representative of the two key occupations significant for Ukrainian life and mentality: beekeeping and millery: «я, котрий котрий меле людям зерно у млині і в мішки насипає, доглядає бджіл». // "[It is] me, who mills grain in the mill and pours flour in bags, and take care of bees." At that time he is still "free", «його душа не пахне застоюним болотом, трупом, котрий наставився з-під снігової перини» // "his soul does not smell like a stagnant swamp, a corpse visible from under a snow blanket." Svyryd realizes that he has chosen a wrong way, but there is no turning back: there was time he believed in God, yet years of devoted service to foreign oppressors, after all the horrors Ukrainian villages suffered at the hands of people like him, Svyryd became a convinced atheist: «Після смерті нічого нема — тіло гниє і на ньому виростає трава». // "After death, there comes nothing — the body rots and grass grows through it." The last straw in the process of Svyryd losing his humanity is his act of abandoning his son: prior to the birth of the baby he used to question himself «Хто ти є? Людина ти чи звір, котрому треба м'яса і крові» // "Who are you? Are you a person or a beast who yearns meat and blood"; in the episode with babies tortured by Basha he was mortified, yet when it came to his own son, he dealt away with him in cold blood so that no one could accuse him of having "connection with the kulak daughter". He has already become a soulless red insect, and Basha's words "Svyryd, you and I are assistant personnel! sound like a ritual acceptance into an horde.

"Encyclopedia of myths of peoples of the world" emphasises that mythological meaning of an ant is largely due to its size — they become a "quantum" — a minimal faceless unit, a part of a big organism. Their collective nature is manifested in the forms of their collective existence and activities. In different national mythologies ants have both positive and negative connotations. For instance, Ukrainian folklore emphasizes that these insects are hard-working, however red ants are particularly aggressive and they have connotation of attackers and aggressors. In the text of the work in question the symbolism of this image is based not only on mythology. It stems from the deep water division, differentiation in terms of ways of life, a division between worldviews of permanent settlers, that is farmers, and nomads, who bring ruin and devastation everywhere they move. It is the social system of despotic Asian nomads that is somehow associated with an ants colony, where everything centers around one main individual, and all the rest mindlessly follow orders. It is this kind of mentality, alien for Ukrainians, that the hordes of Moscow conquerors tried to impose on Ukrainians, however, when they met serious resistance, they decided to get rid of the entire nation.

For the first time the image of red ants and their "big queen" — "Rodina" — appears on the pages of the novel in the narrative of Dokiia. To illustrate the all-encompassing invasion, the author uses

gradation: «Червоні мурахи плодяться, гуртуються у колонії, хутко розповзаються Україною. Вони вигортають наші комори, наші скрині, наші кишені, забирають наших матерів і дітей, нищать нас, вижирають зі світу, виїдають цукор із наших живих душ і не мають милосердя до тих, хто наважується струсити їх зі свого сіряка. Мстяться нам... » // "Red ants breed, group in colonies, and they quickly spread around Ukraine. They tear out our pantries, our chests, our pockets, take away our mothers and children, destroy us, devour the world, devour sugar from our living souls, and have no mercy on those who dare to shake them off their coats. They take revenge on us..." (Piankova, 2022, p. 131). This narrative is tense, painful, and the gradual increase in tension conveys the all-encompassing dominance of the steadfast, necrophilic, alimentary-aggressive code of alien psychology: «Наша єдність, наша людяність, наша щемлива приналежність до землі, котра дала нам колись життя, тоне, вигасає разом із нами. Вони невтомно повзуть через наші двори, через наші шиби, доїдають нас; випивають наші меди, наші роси, серцевини наших квітів; будують на наших кістках нові мурашники — щоразу вищі та вищі, щоразу громіздкіші. Їхні мурашники виростають на попелищах наших хат, наших церков, наших святинь. Їхнє червоне завзяття викликає жах. І все, що ми можемо, — дивитись, як червоніє навколо нас і змикається коло» // "Our unity, our humanity, our ties to the land that once gave us life, melt away together with us. Tirelessly they are crawling across our yards, over our windows, they eat us up; they drink our honey, our dew, our flowers' cores; they build new anthills on the top of our bones — and they get higher and higher, bigger and bigger. Their anthills appear upon the ashes of our huts, our churches, and our shrines. Their red zeal is terrifying. And all we can do is watch how the red spreads around us and encircle us" (Piankova, 2022, p. 131). Символічний образ безликих червоних мурах має своє конкретне втілення і в образах Зіни Тузики, Тоська Лантушка, Свирида, однак найповніше хижа натура і плани загарбників щодо знищення України виявляються в образі Олексія Баші. Він — намісник на Полтавщині «вусатої смерті» «з натхненним лицем» (П'янкova 2022) (замість ікон у Баші — портрет Сталіна), саме він тут втілює політику «ненажерливої пащеки партії», для якої українські селяни «лише м'ясо» (П'янкova 2022). The symbolic image of faceless red ants has its own specific embodiment in the characters of Zina Tuzyha, Toska Lantushka, Svyryd, yet the predatory nature and plans of the invaders to destroy Ukraine reveal themselves to the fullest in the character of Oleksiy Basha. He is the representative of the "death with moustache" who has "an inspired face" (Piankova, 2022, p. 82-83) (instead of icons Basha keeps a portrait of Stalin), he is the character who embodies the policy of the "bottomless pit of the party", for which Ukrainian peasants are "just meat" (Piankova, 2022, p. 95). Basha is a Muscovite, his wife's language annoys him, in the beginning he was fighting for the idea of "red ants" with weapons in his hands, then as the head of collective farms he started implementing the party's instructions aimed at killing Ukrainian peasants off ("I will manage collective farms near "Paltava"). Basha grew up in an orphanage, so he does not know any family values. Solia's memories make it clear that there was period when this man loved her, but over time there took place a final transmutation of his nature: the party replaced all his human feelings, all civilizational foundations. Having lost his daughter, he shows unexplicable cruelty to the babies left by desperate mothers dying of hunger near the village council: he forbids Svyryd to feed them («Ти чьо, Свірид, савсем із ума вижил? Врагов народа малаком кармить?» // "What's wrong with you, Svyryd, have you lost your marbles? Are you planning to feed enemies of the people with milk?" (Piankova, 2022, p. 134)), he orders to incarcerate



them in a cold basement and then waits until the child's crying subsides, afterwards he calls an undertaker.

Three narrative lines of the novel are often intertwined, but Solomiia and Dusia meet each other only in the final chapters: ghosts swollen from hunger do not even have the right to approach the sanatorium as paramilitary guards do not allow to disturb "well-fed pigs" peace, while families members of the party authorities are also not allowed to go out beyond the fence. Solomia manages to secretly slip out of the sanatorium into the village, and there she witnesses all the terrifying truth. All the things that Arina has been talking about regarding decimation of peasants and the rest of things Solomia has refused to believe turn out to be true as Solomia sees terrible pictures of ruined houses stinking of corpses, hunger-swollen children talking about bread and death, the undertaker's cart with half-dead and half-alive people. Among the victims there is beautiful Tamara, whose luxurious golden hair "flows down like a living river, freely falling to the ground and following the cart." (Piankova, 2022, p. 235). In this episode Solia's narrative resembles wailing, mourning the deceased. She gets the feeling that what she has witnessed (this traumatic experience) will be passed down in generations: «І мої — іще не зачаті, не народжені — діти скрикують у мені та заходяться сльозами... Господи, обітни мене аж під корінь!» // "And mine — not yet conceived, not yet born — children yelp in me and burst in tears... Lord, cut me down at my roots!" (Piankova, 2022, p. 235). Then there comes the final insight: the woman realizes what a terrible monster she has been living with, how guilty she is when it comes to her people and nation. The fact that Solia risks her life and saves Dokiia and Myrosia is a kind of "happy end" which is highly unlikely to take place in the terrible realities of 1933. However, in terms of literary credibility and persuasiveness such a plot twist is totally justified: there should remain hope that the future generations (symbolic grain) will go on. Dokia's narrative becomes a centrepiece of the last chapter of the novel. It contains expressive and highly impressionable moments of everything the girl has experienced: every night she sees nightmares. In terms of architectonics, it is an effective compositional tool, kind of "focusing" on each and every climactic "frame" from previous stories, and that emphasises the depth of trauma. These visions overlap with the prenatal anguish of a woman in labour («Одходять води... Кровить світанок... На світ приходить дитина — розриває мою плоть немовлячим криком усіх ненароджених» // "Waters have broken... The dawn is bleeding... A child comes into the world — it tears my flesh with the infantile cry of all the unborn" (Piankova, 2022, p. 250). Yet, they give way to the picture of the field where Dusia and Myros are sowing "grain from the dead mother's mouth". This phantasmagoric vision the woman in labour pictures in her tired and exhausted by childbirth psyche signifies hope. Therefore, an ant that climbs on the blanket of a newborn is no longer a threat — «Бог теплими губами обережно здуває її на землю» // "God gently blows it to the ground with warm lips" (Piankova, 2022, p. 250).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

All the levels of the novel poetics (plot, character, literary images, composition, narrative) are subordinated to the central idea of testimony, "voicing" the catastrophic events of reality resulting from extreme forms of violence Moscow-Bolshevik occupiers employed against Ukrainian peasants. The author portrays terrible pictures of the Ukrainian village dying, erosion of identity and, at the same time, efforts to preserve the moral principles that make a person Human. The novel of T. Piankova is a study of the psychology of dying, as well as transformation of victims consciousness (the collective trauma of

starvation is described with documentary precision: consciousness of the characters captures all the changes of bodies and psyche), and assertion of faith in humanity, at the same time. Among the important things in this aspect is the symbolism of the microimages (in particular, the image of grain that appears in the introduction, and influences the narrative of the main character).

The author successfully combines elements of mythopoetics and oneiric poetics, symbolism of the red colour. In the text of the work the image of red ants and their "great female" – "Rodina" (Motherland) – relies not only on mythological images: it stems from a deep watershed, distinguishing between the ways Ukrainians and Muscovites exist, their worldviews, as the latter brutally destroy basic foundations of human existence. Among the important literary devices that create the narrative background of the novel one should single out gradation. Gradation levels used in the narrative helps to create an atmosphere of extreme emotional and mental tension of the characters, adding to feelings of irrevocability, inevitability of death, and aggravated suffering. The gradual increase in tension conveys the all-encompassing dominance of the inexorably necrophilic, alimentary-aggressive code of alien psychology.

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**Received:** April 02, 2023; **revised:** May 05, 2023.

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Наталія Мафтин. Художня правда теми голодомору в романі Т. П'янкової "Вік червоних мурах". *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника. Філологія*, 10 (2023), 27–37.

Текстуалізація психології травми є важливим завданням сучасної гуманітаристики, адже увесь травматичний досвід попередніх поколінь, відбитий на ментальній мапі українців, що досі залишається не наративізований у повному вимірі, загострюється в ситуації нового геноциду, розв'язаного Росією проти України. Пропонована стаття присвячена аналізу художніх прикмет роману сучасної української письменниці Т. П'янкової «Вік червоних мурах», що досі не був об'єктом літературознавчих студій. Шляхом використання методології «trauma studies» у статті досліджено наративну стратегію, моделювання часопростору, ідейно-художнє навантаження макро- і мікрообразів. Одним із важливих художніх засобів, що творять наративне тло аналізованого роману, є градація образів. Завдяки використанню градаційних рядів у наративі персонажів досягається ефект гранично напруженого психічного стану, наростання страждань, неминучості смерті, всеохопного домінування аліментарно-агресивного коду психології чужинців.

**Ключові слова:** Голодомор, trauma studies, національна ідентичність, геноцид, пам'ять, сучасна українська література, Тетяна П'янкова.