

## HOMO PACIFICUS IN THE POETRY OF VICTORIA AMELINA (based on the poetry book Testimonies)

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**Abstract.** With the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian aggressor, the term 'new Executed Renaissance' is increasingly being used in artistic circulation, meaning those artists who have died since 2014 in the war with Russia. One of these writers is Victoria Amelina. The article is devoted to the study of her poetry book *Testimonies*, which can be defined as a kind of poeticized diary, which records war crimes in the artistic form and depicts those who became either victims or witnesses. The main emphasis is placed on the characterization of *homo pacificus* in poetic texts, in particular, women who experience loss - from their home to their loved ones. *Homo pacificus* in the epicenter of war does not always act heroically in the traditional sense; true heroism can also consist in staying on this earth, helping others to stay on and taking their pain on, trying to accept and survive losses in order to tell the whole world about destroyed cities, stolen seas, and broken lives.

**Keywords:** war, war crimes, trauma, woman, new Executed Renaissance, contemporary Ukrainian poetry, Victoria Amelina.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Victoria Amelina's poetry book was published in 2024, actually a year after the author was killed by a Russian missile. The writer formulated its title on May 15, 2023. She wanted to call the book *Testimonies* (Amelina, 2024, p. 76). The poems included in the book were written between April 5, 2022 and June 10, 2023 and are a kind of diary of civilians' testimonies about war crimes, losses, and attempts to live with them.

This is the first poetry book by Victoria Amelina, who was previously known as the author of prose works: novels *The November Syndrome*, or *Homo Compatiens* (2014), *Home for Dom* (2017), children's books *Someone*, or *the Water Heart* (2016), and *E-E-Excavator Eka's Stories* (2021). As the author said in one of her poems:

я не пишу поезію  
я прозаїк  
просто реальність війни  
з'їдає пунктуацію  
зв'язність сюжету (Amelina, 2024, p. 17)

(I don't write poetry  
I'm a prose writer  
just the reality of war  
eats up punctuation  
the coherence of the plot)

In 2022, she joined the Truth Hounds team, which investigates war crimes, traveling and documenting the testimonies of people who have been victims. She was planning to write a documentary book, *Looking at Women Looking at War: A War and Justice Diary*. The emotional impressions of her conversations with eyewitnesses are presented in the book *The Testimonies*.

Viktoriia Amelina is one of the representatives of the new Executed Renaissance, whose list, unfortunately, continues to grow: '...my worst fear is coming true: I am inside the new Executed Renaissance. As in the 1930s, Ukrainian artists are being killed, their manuscripts disappear, and their memory is being deleted. It seems that times are mixing and freezing in expectation of a conclusion - I am looking in the Slobozhansky black soil not only for the notes of one of us, but for all the lost Ukrainian texts at once: the second part of *The Woodcocks* Khvylovyi's, Kulish's plays, Stus's last poems, diaries from the Holodomor, old books burned in a Kyiv library in 1964. All of our losses - from old books to Volodymyr Vakulenko's diary - seem to be one big text that will never be read again' (Vakulenko, 2024).

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Viktoriia Amelina's prose works have frequently been the subject of literary studies. Researchers J. Polishchuk and O. Pukhonska have pointed out the original narrator in her novel *Home for Dom* and the fact that by using an animalistic character, she created a new version of emotional rethinking of the past: to uncover the peculiarities of individual, family, urban, and national memory. The dog's perception of the past in the novel is the author's attempt to shift the emphasis from categorical assessments of the complex and contradictory processes of the twentieth century: wars, genocides, repressions, deportations, enslavement of people and nations (Polishchuk, Pukhonska, 2021). Pukhonska also speaks about the problem of revitalizing the memory of the past, which was pushed to the cultural margins by Soviet ideology, in this novel (Pukhonska, 2018). Romanenko identifies the peculiarities of the reconstruction of individual memory in this novel (Романенко, 2018). K. Romanenko studies the novel *The November Syndrome*, or *Homo Compatriens* from the perspective of the functioning of toponymic concept (Romanenko, 2021). T. Virchenko views this novel as a work about the Revolution of Dignity, and the image of the Maidan is interpreted as a source of metaphorical meanings and is revealed in the archetypes of Chaos / Order, In-group and Out-group (Virchenko, 2021).

In 2024, the anthology *Writing Under Fire: Poetry and Prose from Ukraine and the Black Country*, dedicated to the memory of Victoria Amelina. This book includes works by ten Ukrainian authors. The tenth is by Victoria Amelina herself. Her death echoes with pain in the hearts of those who knew her:

біжи, сестро, неси свою звістку  
попри святкові showcases,  
відбивайся у кожній  
(...) біжи, сестро,  
колись цей біг назвуть марафонським (Kruk, 2024, p. 241)

(Run, sister, carry your tidings  
through the holiday windows,  
and reflect in every glass window  
(...) run, sister,  
one day this run will be called a marathon)

It is evident that there is a need to talk about both Victoria Amelina herself and her writing, in particular her poetry book *Testimonies*, which hasn't yet been the object of literary studies. This makes our research actual.

In one of her interviews, Victoria Amelina said the following about herself as a poet: 'I'm still not sure if I'm a poet now, but these poems have appeared in many anthologies. In general, they have already been translated into different languages and quoted in various foreign editions. Therefore, now I have such a hypostasis' (Amelina, 2023). As Soaia Cheliak noted in the afterword to the publication, 'Victoria wrote the first poems from the collection about her friends, about the women and children she helped evacuate. Since the summer of 2022, after she went on her first trip with the Truth Hounds organization, which has been documenting war crimes since 2014, the voices of people she met as a war crimes documentor began to sound in her poems' (Amelina, 2024, p. 61).

The aim of this article is to determine the peculiarities of the depiction of *homo pacificus* in the conditions of war in Victoria Amelina's poetry book *Testimonies*. The study uses hermeneutical, feminist, mythological, and biographical methods that allow us to comprehensively analyze literary texts taking into account the author's life and civic position and to dive deeper into her poetic world.

### 3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The peculiarity of Victoria Amelina's poetry is its artistic documentary style, balancing between lyricism and fact, which reveals the pain and worries of those who live through the war not somewhere in the rear, but in the hottest places. Each poem features people, mostly women, who don't speak directly about their fear, despair, and losses. The lyrical character speaks for them, that is, testifies. *Homo pacificus*, non-belligerent people who suddenly find themselves in the midst of war, without other people, homes, and their native land. The author is not talking about material losses, but about the losses and traumas that will become collective traumas of Ukrainians from individual ones:

Повітряна тривога по всій країні  
так наче щоразу ведуть на розстріл  
усіх  
а цілять лише в одного  
переважно того, хто скраю  
Сьогодні не ти, відбій (Amelina, 2024, p. 5)  
(Air raid alert across the country  
as if every time all of us  
were being led to the firing squad  
but only one is targeted.  
mostly the one on the edge  
Not you today, stand down)

In an interview with Yale University Professor Jason Stanley, he said about the poem: 'Victoria Amelina's poetry has spoken to many people in the world. Her poem is about how your whole country seems to be being led to a firing squad every time there is a shelling. It struck a chord with the world. We can call it propaganda, or we can call it a tool that someone who has fewer resources but is on the side of good can use to reach the world' (Stanley, 2023).

What does the world care about people from Ukraine? They are only interested in memories, which are taken apart for souvenirs by photographers and journalists, prosecutors and detectives, museum and archive workers (Amelina, 2024, p. 32), but it is important not to forget the real thing:

ні облич  
 ні імен  
 ні країни  
 ні відчуття її  
 у землі (Amelina, 2024, p. 33)  
 (no faces  
 no names  
 no country  
 nor the feeling of it  
 in the ground)

This anxiety of not being truly heard is expressed with a new strength in the poem *Again: з днем пам'яті та примирення*

повітряна тривога  
 пройдіть в укриття українці  
 всі інші можуть продовжити  
 говорити  
 ніколи знову (Amelina, 2024, p. 16)  
 (happy memorial and reconciliation day  
 air raid alert  
 take shelter Ukrainians  
 everyone else can continue  
 to talk  
 never again)

These few lines contain both sad irony and sarcasm. 'Never again' is becoming 'again' for Ukrainians in the twenty-first century, but they can't talk about it because they are hiding in shelters, and everyone else, for whom the war is just part of the news, can continue their pathetic pseudo-pacifist speeches and conversations that will change nothing for Ukrainians, and they will not stop the missiles or the explosions. After all, who cares about ordinary citizens of another country hiding in shelters? War heroes are admired, impressive stories are written about them, but ordinary people who just want to survive are of little interest to anyone. And they, the people on the edge or almost on the edge, the ones who go into shelters, become the heroes of Victoria Amelina's poetry, as well as those who left their usual lives, got out from under the ruins of their houses and are trying to start living again. These are the people who are those secret numbers that no one will know until the end of the war:

Буде сусід, чоловік дивачки,

яка саджала червоні квіти.

Друг, який нікого не попередив.

Викладач, якого ми так любили.

Та дівчинка, яка усіх дратувала.

Художник, який завжди всім подобався (Amelina, 2024, p. 11)

(There will be a neighbor, the husband of a eccentric women,  
who planted red flowers.

A friend who didn't warn anyone.

The teacher we loved so much.

The girl who annoyed everyone.

The artist who everyone always liked)

While in real life Victoria Amelina documented the facts of the crimes of the russian occupiers, in her poems her lyrical heroine seems to document the pain and silence of horror and numbness of those who lost their voices and disappeared without a sign:

в цьому дивному місті свідчать лише жінки

одна говорить мені про зниклу дитину

дві говорять про закатованих у підвалі

три кажуть, що не чули

про згвалтування й відводять очі

чотири говорять про крики

з комендатури

п'ятеро про застрелених на подвір'ях (Amelina, 2024, p. 47).

(in this strange city, only women testify

one tells me of a missing child

two tell me about the tortured in the basement

three say they haven't heard

about the rape and look away

four tell me about the screams

from the commandant's office

five talked about people being shot in the yards)

Her texts feature mostly women, and the author speaks most often about women, declaring a female world with female voices and female silence:

кожна обрала зброю

кожна уже набрала

повні легені повітря

повні вітрила крові

повні ноші любові (Amelina, 2024, p. 52)

(each has chosen a weapon

each has already took

full lungs of air

full sails of blood

full of the burden of love)

However, there is more silence than anything else, which is why a woman in a black dress appears in one of the poems (here we can trace the features of autobiography: Victoria, who documented crimes, the author, who loved black dresses), who says the names of her sisters: She'll scream at them all:

Викричить усіх із себе  
 ту, що відлетіла швидко  
 ту, яка про смерть благала  
 ту, що не спинила смерть  
 ту, яка чекає досі  
 ту, яка усе ще вірить  
 ту, що сорок днів мовчить (Amelina, 2024, p. 37)  
 (the one that flew away so fast  
 the one who begged for death  
 the one who didn't stop death  
 the one who's still waiting  
 the one who still believes  
 the one who has been silent for forty days)

This cry of pain should sow the field from which 'new sisters will grow for her'. The use of the word 'sister' in the poems enhances the level of intimacy, when the pain of another woman becomes the pain of the lyrical heroine, and thus she can and has the right not only to talk about it, but to scream. To scream about the lost life, home, city:

а тепер відпускає цілі міста  
 вулиці, площі, мости і стіни  
 як кораблики, відпускає в пільму  
 - пливить, – каже їм  
 рахує їх у пільмі до ста (Amelina, 2024, p. 43)  
 (and now releases entire cities  
 streets, squares, bridges and walls  
 like boats, letting them go into the darkness  
 'swim', he tells them  
 counts them up to a hundred in the darkness)

Indeed, Victoria Amelina's women have nothing left but invisible and unheard pain:

Бачиш жінку з простягнутою назад рукою?  
 Вона ніби тягне валізу або веде когось за собою  
 Невидима валіза важка, бо жінка іде повільно  
 Такі жінки загалом називаються божевільні  
 Їй нічого було брати з її згорілого дому... (Amelina, 2024, p. 45)  
 (Do you see the woman with her arm outstretched backwards?  
 She seems to be pulling a suitcase or leading someone behind her  
 The invisible suitcase is heavy because the woman is walking slowly  
 Such women are generally called crazy  
 She had nothing to take from her burnt house...)

Vira, the heroine of another poem, 'A Story for the Return', also takes nothing because she believes that she will come back, unlike Mira, who takes a bead, Tim, who takes a stone from his street, and Yarka, who takes a kernel from her apricot garden. For each of them, these are not just memorabilia, but a memory of their home, an attempt to create a new home somewhere else:

Тім почав нове місто з каменю  
місто схоже на рідне  
тільки моря немає (Amelina, 2024, p. 13)  
(Tim started a new city out of stone  
the city looks like home  
but there is no sea)

All Vira has to do is tell the story of her escape and how her home is getting smaller behind her, turning into a small stone, a bead, a kernel, a piece of glass, a shell, a sunflower seed, a button:

Дім помалу ростиме  
і ти ніколи  
запам'ятай, ніколи  
не будеш без свого Дому (Amelina, p. 15)  
(The house will grow little by little  
and you will never  
remember, never  
be without your home)

The locus of home in the poems of this author acquires sacral features. Home is your own apartment, street, city, sea. Everything that was native and that was so mercilessly taken away or destroyed by the enemy. 'Acquiring a home as one's own existence is the acquiring of the whole of the true existence of being, overcoming alienation and struggling with one's own vulnerability' (Shakhova, 2019, p. 136). In fact, a home is a fragment, a piece of the world that a person has managed to assimilate and turn into his/her own locus. And here we are talking not only about the house as a building, but also as a space of human existence. After all, the home is one of the markers of a person as a person, a formal determinant of his or her human existence, and a guarantee of safety for him or her. Ultimately, it is the form that a person fills with his/her own content.

And this sense makes it special, and therefore sacred, because it speaks (is silent?) about what is closed from public view and access, about the secrets that are part of the property of those who inhabit this locus. Losing a home means losing a sacred locus, getting away from that marker of human life as a human, civilizational progress, and also losing safety. First of all, it is accompanied by disorientation, so Vira doesn't believe that it is forever and doesn't take anything, because she will return to her sacred space from the alien one in which she is forced to temporarily stay, so another woman can't leave her native Ukrainian New York with her cherry garden ('And this is not poetry either'), and another woman, disoriented by a foreign sea, calls for her own ('a woman disoriented by a foreign sea'). The desperate desire to take their home with them, to save it from destruction and death, is what the women in Amelina's poems strive for. Another desire is to protect each other, because the relationship between them is close, as they are united by a common war:

коли прийшла зима, вони цілили у мій дім  
а тріщини раптом з'являлися в її домі

у домі над морем на вічних скелях

«Що діється з її будинком» -

Перешіптувались її сусіди, дивились скося (Amelina, 2024, p. 41)

(when winter came, they were shooting at my house

and cracks suddenly appeared in her house

in the house above the sea on the eternal rocks

"What's happening to her house?"

Her neighbors whispered, looking sideways)

Sisterhood, solidarity, and togetherness are what help to survive in the cruel conditions of war, when your pain is my pain, when they shoot at you, they shoot at me, when I can survive, you can survive. 'War creates new challenges: displacements, unemployment, or the need to defend the community. During war, women and girls become victims of aggression, fighters, activists, refugees, and single mothers' (Salo, 2024). Sisterhood and nativity should help them to survive and not be afraid:

коли вони цілитимуть у мене завтра

вони не знають: вони зв'язались із нею

(...)

так само, коли вони цілять у тебе

вони не знають, що мають справу зі мною

з моєю історією про тебе, що не минає (Amelina, 2024, p. 42)

(when they're going to shoot me tomorrow

they don't know: they are in conflict with her

(...)

just like when they shoot at you

they don't know they're dealing with me

with my story about you that doesn't pass away)

The testimony appears again: this is the story that the lyrical heroine tells when her sister is silent, this is the story that the sister tells when the lyrical heroine can't speak. And it will always be like that. The story of war, loss, and pain will always be spoken, passed down from generation to generation. These are the stories that Victoria Amelina's women take with them on a long journey instead of their suitcases, stories that a foreign sea and a foreign land hear. The stories that the lyrical heroine memorizes, the story that will be brought to light and will be heard again and again, the story that will not end. And it will always be women who are not strangers to each other, because they live on the same land, so they are relatives, so they are sisters. As V. Amelina said in an interview: 'Now is the time when we need to take special care of each other' (Amelina, 2022).

Such sisterhood is an opportunity to shout out the pain of another woman who is so close to you, and to try to assume her pain, to take it on for at least a little while. And who knows, maybe you will be able to live and survive the pain of loss.

In her poems, Victoria Amelina shows a different, completely unusual kind of heroism: surviving, saving yourself, and testifying about the crimes you witnessed or became a victim of. In the past, the classical hero, mostly male, dared to step out of the mundane world into the land of supernatural wonders; there he gains fairy powers and achieves a decisive victory, and then returns from his mysterious journey empowered to do good for his community (Campbell, 224, p. 34). In Victoria



Amelina's novel, the women's journey is forced, caused by the loss of their homes or threats to their lives. They go to a foreign land (but the reasons are completely different), where they long for their lost paradise and believe in returning. J. Hollis says that a hero is a name, or a designation or personification of a certain energy and determination that is inherent in each of us, although we may not even know how to get there (Hollis, 2024, p. 99).

Therefore, the mythology of the hero is the expression of the energy needed to fulfill the transpersonal life program. And an ordinary person, finding himself in a hopeless situation in front of something that terrifies him, is longing for a hero to come, win, and save him. In Victoria Amelina's poems, the women are not waiting for anyone or anything except for their own return, they aren't endowed with messianic qualities, they don't ask where those who are supposed to save them are. They save themselves, save people like them, and if they can't, they take on the pain of those around them. And in fact, heroism in Testimonies is the ability to take on the pain of others and make it your own.

Homo pacificus in time of war is not only about the ability to act heroically, killing enemies, but also about fear, despair, confusion, escape, and forced emigration. The author writes about their losses: the loss of their homes, themselves, and their loved ones. Her protagonists are those who live the war subconsciously or become witnesses to terrible crimes. Women who testify by their silence, so the lyrical heroine becomes their voice-the voice of a woman carrying memories in a suitcase, protecting her home-life, experiencing loss and sorrow, her pain and her desperation. After all, they are sisters, related not by blood but by pain and loss:

мене син і у неї син  
у неї до війни було два  
у мене завжди був один  
(...)  
і спробуй комусь іще поясни  
що з нею на двох у нас три сини (Amelina, 2024, p. 39)  
(I have a son and she has a son  
She had two before the war  
I always had one  
(...)  
and try to explain to someone else  
that we have three sons together)

This is sisterhood in action - to tell about the loss of her son during the war, to take on this pain and speak about it:

вона його родить щодня під крик  
але крик жінки, не немовля  
а хлопчик усе не кричить ніяк  
хоч вона родить його щодня (Amelina, 2024, p. 39)  
(she gives birth to him every day screaming  
but a woman's scream, not a baby's.  
and the boy does not scream at all  
even though she gives birth to him every day)

This 'giving birth every day' is the daily living of the trauma, the impossibility of returning to a normal life (and, after all, there is no normal life anymore), because it is darkness all around.

Another woman counts the stones, calling them by their children's names, because she no longer has children (will she ever have any?), asks the Dnipro to take her away, and releases the stones into the water like fish:

один у мене зостався  
без імені  
безвісти  
нічиє дитя  
носиш  
носиш  
а не народиш  
щоб стати йому за матір  
обернулася бабою кам'яною  
над степовим курганом  
над Дніпром (Amelina, 2024, pp. 27-28).  
(I have one left  
nameless  
missing  
nobody's child  
carry  
carry  
not give birth  
to be his mother  
turned into a stone woman  
over a steppe mound  
over the river Dnipro)

A woman over water is an image that often appears in Victoria Amelina's poetry. Water is the fundamental basis of life; it is the oldest cultural symbol of life, movement, and the beginning of something new. The woman seems to be looking for strength and support in it after her losses, but alien water doesn't understand her, and she can only tell her own water about her pain. We are reminded of Yaroslavna, who asked the Dnipro to return Prince Ihor to her. The request, the appeal to the water for help, is like the last hope when no one else hears, when no one else can help, when there is no one else to tell about your pain. The water doesn't get in there, it carries women's tears, voices, women's stories of loss and desire to live.

Homo pacificus in Viktori Amelina's poetry can be represented as follows:

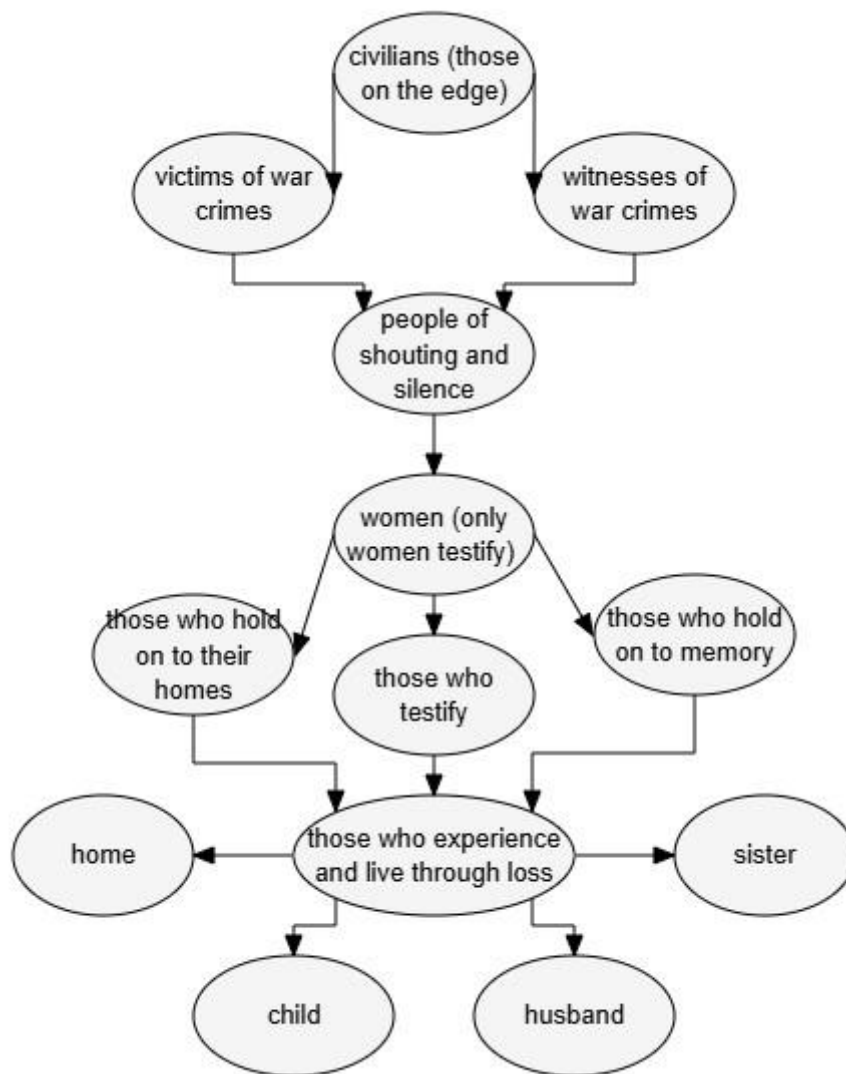


Fig.1 *Homo pacificus* in the poetry

The ability to speak, to give them a voice so that not only the facts of war crimes are heard, but also the pain and suffering that one has to go through and overcome on the way to victory is one of the true testimonies of what happens to peace and peaceful life during war. What is the purpose of these testimonies? For a real, not a souvenir, memory and in order to disagree

на свободу нашу  
 менш повну  
 ніж повня понад дорогами  
 двадцять четвертого лютого  
 дві тисячі двадцять другого (Amelina, 2024, p. 35)  
 (to our freedom  
 less complete  
 than the full moon over the roads  
 on February twenty-fourth  
 two thousand twenty-two)

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In Victoria Amelina's poetry, a peaceful person is a person who finds himself in the midst of war, who doesn't always know how to act, how to escape and save his world, a person who doesn't take up arms, cannot defend himself/herself, doesn't do anyone harm, and is as patient as love itself. Often these heroes are confused and silent. They don't do heroic deeds, but to survive in the epicenter of war and to keep themselves alive is also heroism. And the greatest heroism is the ability to feel the pain of another as your own and testify about it to the whole world, as long as the latter repeats 'never again', as long as the enemy is aiming at the one on the edge. Every poem in Victoria Amelina's book is a testimony to what war leaves behind, a testimony to pain and powerlessness to change anything, only to accept and be in that pain, to be that pain, to share it with others, to take someone else's pain and turn it into your own, not to wait for an abstract hero from myths or fairy tales, but to become a heroine of new realities and new conditions. A person who is peaceful in time of war is the one who lives through inevitable losses: of home, sister, husband, child, and self, hiding a kernel from his native garden, a shell from his native sea in his pocket, remembering the lost names, the stories that need to be told in order to breathe life into the world around him, to live to see a peaceful land.

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Ольга Деркачова. Номо расіфікус у поезії Вікторії Амеліної (на матеріалі збірки «Свідчення»). *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника. Філологія*, **11** (2024), 60–72.

З початком повномасштабного вторгнення російського агресора в Україну в мистецькому обігу все частіше з'являється таке поняття, як нове Розстріляне Відродження, тобто це ті митці, які загинули, починаючи з 2014 року у війні з росією. Однією з таких письменниць є Вікторія Амеліна. Стаття присвячена дослідженню поетичної збірки цієї поетки «Свідчення», яку можна означити як своєрідний опоетизований щоденник, у якому зафіксовано у художній формі воєнні злочини та зображено тих, хто стали або їхніми жертвами, або свідками. Головний акцент зроблено на характеристиці номо расіфікус у поетичних текстах, зокрема жінках, що переживають втрати – від рідного дому до рідної людини. Номо расіфікус в епіцентрі війни не завжди діє героїчно у традиційному розумінні, справжній героїзм може полягати і в тому, щоб втриматися на цій землі, допомогти втриматися іншим і взяти його біль на себе, спробувати прийняти та пережити втрати для того, щоб розповісти усьому світові про зруйновані міста, вкрадене море та поламане життя.

**Ключові слова:** війна, воєнні злочини, травма, жінка, нове Розстріляне Відродження, сучасна українська поезія, Вікторія Амеліна.