

ARTICLES

## Ukraine and War in Russian-Language Literature

Go Koshino  
(Keio University)

### Abstract

While the Soviet tradition of remembering the Eastern Front of WW2 as the “Great Patriotic War” is inherited and reinforced in Russia and Belarus today, the term itself tends not to be used in Ukraine. This essay uses war novels written by Russian-language writers of the Soviet era to analyze and compare the spatial representations of Ukraine and the image of Ukrainians. This will provide clues to unravel the intricate boundaries in the historical memory of the former Soviet regions.

Donbass writer Boris Gorbатов’s *The Unvanquished* blurs the boundaries between Russia and Ukraine, while allowing no in-between presence such as POWs or collaborators. Belarusian writer Ales Adamovich’s *The Chasteners* gives them a human face of complex interiority and ethnic traits, but also fosters a discourse that views Ukrainians as collaborators with fascism. Both novels borrow motifs from Nikolai Gogol’s *Taras Bulba* on Ukrainian Cossacks.

*Keywords:* War Literature, Image of Ukraine, Boris Gorbатов, Ales Adamovich

On May 2, 2014, a violent conflict occurred in Odessa between pro-Russian and pro-Maidan groups of radical activists. The labor union building in which pro-Russian activists had barricaded themselves was set on fire, and more than 40 people died. Many Russian media organizations called the incident Odessa Khatyn (Odessaia Khatyn), reminiscent of the Khatyn Massacre, a famous Nazi atrocity that took place in a Belarusian village<sup>1</sup>. This was a powerful expression equating Ukrainian nationalists with fascist war criminals. Moreover, it would possibly connote the existence of Ukrainian collaborators during the wartime,

---

<sup>1</sup> Russian state-owned TV news Vesti actively introduced the phrase “Odessa Khatyn.” (See, for example, the broadcast on May 5, 2014. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/181442>.) President Putin also used this expression in his speech on September 30, 2022 at the ceremony declaring the annexation of four occupied provinces in Ukraine, contextualizing the incident into the war of Donbass. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>

showing that the word Khatyn is still capable of evoking deep emotions in political and historical contexts. The memory of the Great Patriotic War evokes a desire to integrate Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus into a single imperial space. Any element that deviates from this cause is seen as a traitorous act, collaborating with Nazism.

This paper will compare the images of Ukrainians in two novels about World War II, *The Unvanquished (Taras's Family)* by Ukrainian writer Boris Gorbатов, and *The Chasteners* by Belarusian writer Ales Adamovich<sup>2</sup>. Although one writer was Ukrainian and the other Belarusian, both wrote mainly in Russian and lived in Moscow for long periods of time, and therefore were mostly known as writers of Soviet literature. However, in their works, they often wrote about local subjects from Ukraine (Donbass) and Belarus, respectively. It is important to point out, however, that although both experienced the war, they were active as writers during different times: Gorbатов in the Stalin period, and Adamovich in the post-Stalin and late Soviet periods.

Previous studies have already shed light on the image of Ukraine in 19th-century Russian literature, particularly with regard to its importance during the Romanticism period<sup>3</sup>. In particular, while Cossacks often appeared as typical Ukrainian heroes on the one hand, on the other they were mythologized as the embodiment of Russian spirituality. Gogol's *Taras Bulba* played an essential role in this process<sup>4</sup>. The motifs of Gogol's novel are one of the foundations of both of the works analyzed in this paper.

Boris Gorbатов (1908–1954), born in the Donbass region of Ukraine (now Pervomaysk, Luhansk Oblast) became famous in the genre of “production

---

<sup>2</sup> All citations below are from the following edition of the novels, respectively. *Горбатов Б. Л. Непокоренные//Собрание сочинений в 4-х томах. М., 1988. Т. 3. С. 162–293; Адамович А. М. Каратели (Радость ножа, или Жизнеописание гипербореев)//Собрание сочинений в 4-х томах. Минск, 1983. Т. 4. С. 6–232.*

<sup>3</sup> In her recent monograph, covering from Ryleev to Kuprin, Olga Kriukova points out that Ukraine was imagined in connection with Italy as a southern picturesque landscape. *Крюкова О. С. Романтический образ Украины в русской литературе XIX века. М.: Наука, 2017.* Chyzhevsky, a preeminent Slavist, notes that both Russian and Polish Romantics were willing to apply Ukrainian “exotic” subjects. Dmytro Čyzevskyj, *A History of Ukrainian Literature* (N. Y.: Ukrainian Academic Press, 1975), pp. 449–454.

<sup>4</sup> Judith D. Komblatt, *The Cossack Hero in Russian Literature* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp.39–60.

novels”, set in the Donbass and the Russian Far North. He was also a co-author of screenplays for the films *It Happened in the Donbass* (1954) and *The Miners of Donetsk* (1950). Gorbатов served in World War II and wrote war novels and reportages; among these was his best-known work, *The Unvanquished* (1943). The town in which the story is set appears to be anonymous, but it is clearly modeled on Luhansk (then Voroshilovgrad). The main characters are Taras Yatsenko, an old skilled master of foundry, his children, and other members of his family, and the novel depicts the lives of the people under German occupation from July 1942 to February 1943. It is also noteworthy for its clear depiction of the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust. The work was adapted for the cinema in 1945 by Odessa-born director Mark Donskoy.

Ales Adamovich (1927–1994) was born in Belarus and fought as a boy soldier in a partisan unit during World War II. He made his debut with the novel *War Under the Roof* (1960), based on his war-time experiences. He is also well known for the collections of testimonies interviewing survivors of the mass killing of civilians in rural Belarus and the siege of Leningrad, *I am from the Fiery Village (Out of Fire)* (1975) and *The Blockade Book* (1977–1981) respectively, written with co-authors. In contrast to Gorbатов, who was relatively loyal to the Communist Party line, Adamovich was often criticized for not depicting the heroic exploits of Soviet people in the war. However, he cannot be considered an anti-establishment or dissident writer.<sup>5</sup> The novel *The Chasteners* (1981) depicts horrific violence by the notorious Dirlewanger Brigade (SS Sonderkommando) in a Belarusian village, Borki<sup>6</sup>, where the inhabitants were suspected of providing secret support to partisans, as was the case with the village of Khatyn, mentioned above. This problematic work is unique in its depiction of Nazi war crimes from the perspective of the perpetrators. It is considered to be one of the original sources for Elem Klimov’s famous war film *Go*

---

<sup>5</sup> He rather considered himself one of the “liberals of the 1960s” (шестидесятники), which means a generation of intellectuals appearing during the time of the Khrushchev Thaw. The title of the following book is suggestive. *Адамович А. М. Мы — шестидесятники*. М.: Советский писатель, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> 1,843 people were killed in the village of Borki and surrounding settlements in the Kirov district of Mogilyov Province. In the collection of survivors’ testimonies *I am from the Fiery Village*, Adamovich and his co-authors call this place “the largest Khatyn” in Belarus. *Адамович А. Калеснік Ул. Брыль Я. Я з вогненнай вёскі...* Мінск: Мастацкая літаратура, 1975. С. 392.

*and See* (1985). In addition to German soldiers and SS personnel, including the commander Oskar Dirlewanger, many Russian and Belarusian local collaborators appear in the novel, but the roles of Ukrainians are particularly prominent. Those who have become collaborators range from ex-criminals, Soviet POWs, voluntary enlistees, and anti-Soviet nationalists. Among them, this paper focuses on a character modeled after a real person, Ivan Melnichenko, who led a “Ukrainian” military unit.

### **The Khatyn Massacre and Ukrainians**

On the morning of March 22, 1943, a group of partisans, after spending the night in the Belarusian village of Khatyn, attacked some German troops passing nearby. Among those killed was an officer, Hans Woellke, the winner of a gold medal (in the shot put) at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. In the afternoon, the German army (an auxiliary police battalion with mostly Ukrainian collaborators) carried out a raid in revenge on Khatyn village. Victims were either burned alive on site, or were shot while trying to escape. The number of people killed was 149, among which 75 were children under 16 years old. Only one adult man, Yosif Kaminski, and several children survived the atrocity.<sup>7</sup>

It is said that thousands of villages suffered similar brutal attacks by the German army, and more than 600 settlements were completely destroyed. Khatyn was only one of such villages, and it became a place representative of the suffering of the Belarusian war only after 1969, when the famous memorial complex was built on the former site of the village.

The involvement of not only Germans but also many local collaborators, especially Ukrainians, in the massacres in Khatyn and other rural villages (or Holocaust in urban areas) under German occupation was not actively discussed in the official discourse during the Soviet period. Most Soviet writers in their works on war, including Gorbатов’s *The Unvanquished* and Adamovich’s novels before *The Chasteners*, preferred to describe the more “familiar” local collaborators, that is, to deal with the conflicts and post-war traumatic memory caused by the division of inhabitants of the same village into two factions: collaborators

---

<sup>7</sup> Per Anders Rudling, “The Khatyn Massacre in Belarussia: A Historical Controversy Revisited,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012), pp. 29–58; *Адамушко В., Валаханович И., Кириллова Н. et al.* (ред.) *Хатынь: трагедия и память. Документы и материалы*. Минск: НАРВ, 2009.

with the German forces, and supporters of Soviet partisans<sup>8</sup>. Hrihorii Vashula, the leader of the collaborators in the 118th Battalion and a key player in the Khatyn massacre, was exposed of perpetrating the crime in the late Soviet period and sentenced to death at his Minsk trial in 1986. Details of the trial were not reported until 1990, supposedly because of the intervention of the General Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, who feared that the fact that the defendant was Ukrainian would worsen relations between the two Soviet republics<sup>9</sup>.

On the other hand, Ukrainian nationalists represented by OUN (or Belarusian and Baltic equivalents) inherited the civil war after the Russian revolution and fought against the Soviet Union, sometimes in alliance with Nazi Germany during World War II. Their political causes and activities were memorialized by exiled writers such as the Ukrainian Ulas Samchuk, which was in turn re-integrated into post-Soviet national histories and literatures after the 1990s<sup>10</sup>. As a result, the monolithic discourse of Soviet literature has been dismantled, while new conflicts have emerged, such as the difference in Russian and Ukrainian historical perceptions of representative figures, for example Stepan Bandera<sup>11</sup>.

### Russian, Rus, Russia and Ukraine

In Gorbatov's *The Unvanquished*, Ukraine, especially the Donbass, is not always clearly delineated from the territory of Russia. The use of the adjective "Russian (русский)" is particularly characteristic. It is understandable that the enemy Germans refer to the inhabitants of the Donbass disparagingly, for example, as "Russian pigs" or "Russian slackers", without making any particular

---

<sup>8</sup> Adamovich's debut novel *War Under the Roof* depicts the psychological and emotional conflicts of local collaborators in a Belarusian town under German occupation. Rein distinguishes the different ways of being collaborators in the Western and Eastern fronts during WW II, emphasizing the "forced" nature of the latter case. Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (Berghahn Books: N. Y.; Oxford, 2011)

<sup>9</sup> Rudling, "The Khatyn Massacre...", p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Mykola Soroka, "Contested Memories about World War II in Ukrainian Literary Discourse: Soviet versus émigrée," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Vol. 52, No. 3/4 (2012), pp. 491–510.

<sup>11</sup> Касьянов Г. Украина и соседи: историческая политика. 1987–2018. М.: НЛЮ, 2019. С. 174–179.

distinction between Ukrainians and Russians. But even in the narrator's description, this adjective is often used in a broad sense. For example, the Germans show a newsreel about the war in the occupied city, and the local women who watch it start crying because they think their husbands and sons are being shot. "The officers were angry with the Russian women, but the Russian women cried even louder" (178). The same is true of the protagonist Taras's dialogue. His granddaughter Mariika, living under German occupation, thinks she has become a German, and asks Taras:

- Grandpa, she asked one day, are the Russians coming soon?
- And what are you, not Russian? — Taras got angry.
- No. We're German now. Yes?
- No! You're Russian! And this land is Russian. And our city was and will be Russian. That's what you should say, Mariika: Our people will come. Our people will come soon! Our people will chase the Germans away. (199)

Thus, the inhabitants of Luhansk and the family of Taras are considered Russians (русские), while the Soviet troops fighting the Germans are also considered Russians, and both are united by the pronoun "we". Other terms used in the novel include the damp Russian wind (русский мокрый ветер), the Russian autumn rain (русский осенний дождь), the Russian land (русская земля), and the Russian heart (русское сердце). The landscape and nature of the Donbass are also considered to be seamlessly connected to Russia.

It is important to note that in each word combination, the adjective "Russian" is used, not the noun "Russia". Although the Russian word "русский" can indicate Russia as a nation, it is also derived from Rus (Русь), which encompasses all of the three East Slav nations: Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The latter meaning is thought to be emphasized in Gorbатов's novel. In this regard *The Unvanquished* is clearly conscious of Nikolai Gogol's classical novel *Taras Bulba* (1835, 1842) although it is not directly mentioned in the work.<sup>12</sup> Gogol's novel describes a historical war between the Ukrainian Cossacks and Poland. The protagonist, Taras Bulba, shares the same fervent patriotism and

---

<sup>12</sup> The film adaptation *The Unvanquished* by Mark Donskoy actually quotes a passage from *Taras Bulba* at the beginning of the movie.

patriarchal family relationships as Taras in *The Unvanquished*. There is also a similarity in that the adjective “Russian” blurs the boundary between Ukraine and Russia. It is suggestive that the phrase “Russian land” is also repeatedly used in the revised edition of *Taras Bulba* (1842)<sup>13</sup>.

The word “Ukraine” is also found frequently in *The Unvanquished* (as was the case with Gogol’s novel, too). Later in the novel, Taras travels from the German-occupied Donbass to the Don Region in search of food for his family. There is a scene in which similarly starving people gather with wheelbarrows in tow. Here, sharing the common goal of obtaining food, the inhabitants of different regions are placed in the category of Ukraine, and even the word “народ” (nation) is used.

From Kharkov, from Poltava, from Donbass, from Zaporozh’е (Zaporizhzhia), Artiomovsk (Artemivsk) people with a sack of salt on a wheelbarrow, Kremenchug residents with stolen tobacco from a factory, and Rubezhnoe (Rubizhne) people with cans of paint. It was as if all cities of Ukraine had converged on this field. As if all nations went to wander with the wheelbarrows, looking for bread. Bread! (226)

Beyond that, people from Russia, also living under the harsh occupation, meet Taras and other Ukrainians. In this scene, Russia and Ukraine are clearly distinguished. It is suggestive, however, that the noun “Russia” is chosen instead of the adjective “Russian”. “On the roads of the Don region, our wheelbarrowers (тачетники) encountered a flood of people from Russia. There were people from Kursk, from Belgorod, from Voronezh. Russia met with Ukraine.” (233)

Although Ukraine and Russia are recognized as different places, no visible boundaries are marked in either the landscape of the steppes, or the character of the people between two territories. “Here Ukraine met Russia, the border could not be seen in the steppe needlegrasses, equally silvery on the other side, nor in the people...” (252)

---

<sup>13</sup> While Gogol can be seen as Russifying the Ukrainian Cossacks, the novel possibly aims toward representing the space of Ukraine through the word of Rus. It is not without rationale that some of the Ukrainian translations of *Taras Bulba* render “Russian land” as “Ukrainian land.” Edyta M. Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007), p. 270.

Compared to the blurred boundary between Ukraine and Russia, the boundary between “them”, the German enemy, and “us”, marked by the adjective “русский”, is clearly emphasized, and there is no intermediate position between the two sides. For example, an inhabitant of Luhansk, a young woman named Lisa, who befriends enemy soldiers, is immediately deprived of her “Russian” nature and takes on the German name of Louisa. Andrei, one of Taras’ sons, is captured by the Germans and returns home, having lost the will to fight any further. He was held in the prison camp of Millerovo, which was established in the Rostov region. There, many prisoners of war were trapped in a section of wasteland surrounded only by barbed wire, without any shelter, where they died of hunger and cold<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to a nearby peasant woman who took pity on Andrei and pretended to be his wife, he was able to escape. His father Taras, however, denounces his son, who laid down his arms and surrendered, as a “traitor to Russia.” (207) It is exceptional that here the noun “Russia”, not the adjective “Russian”, is used. The father’s harsh attitude recalls the scene in Gogol’s novel where Taras Bulba executes his son Andrii, who has fallen in love with a Polish woman and turned to the enemy side. However, unlike in Gogol’s novel, Andrei in *The Unvanquished* reforms himself and is reborn as a model Red Army soldier.

According to Vitalii Kovalev, the use of the adjective “Russian”, which could be taken as Great Russian chauvinism, was based on wartime propaganda policy<sup>15</sup>. In Soviet literature, it is not common to describe Ukraine or Belarus as Russian (русский). No such usage is found in Ales Adamovich’s works. However, Gorbатов’s novel was highly regarded and reprinted repeatedly during the postwar period. In today’s pro-Russian controlled Donbass, there is a trend toward commemorating Gorbатов, a Ukrainian-Soviet author writing in Russian, as a representative figure of the region.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Мемориал «Жертвам фашизма» в городе Миллерово. Миллерово, 2017. [http://mousosh2miller.ucoz.ru/marushenko/2017-2018/issledovatel'skaja\\_rabota-millerovo.pdf](http://mousosh2miller.ucoz.ru/marushenko/2017-2018/issledovatel'skaja_rabota-millerovo.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Ковалев В. Н. «Огненное лицо» Украины и «запах русской земли». Общерусские и украинские акценты в советской пропаганде периода отечественной войны // Украина и украинцы: образы, представления, стереотипы. Русские и украинцы во взаимном общении и восприятии. М.: Институт славяноведения РАН, 2008. С. 252–278.

<sup>16</sup> In 2018, the Donbass Post (Почта Домбасса) in the “Donetsk People’s Republic” issued a commemorative stamp celebrating the 110th anniversary of the writer’s



### Collaborators between Friend and Foe

The characters in Gorbатов's novel are strictly distinguished as either friend or foe, Germans and "Russians", with no in-between positions allowed. Collaborators and prisoners of war must equally be traitors, and are to be placed in the enemy (either German or non-Russian) category, like Louisa and Taras's son Andrei. On the other hand, there appear characters such as the young man Vasiliok, who is cooperating with the Germans as a polizei (auxiliary policeman) but is actually a member of the Soviet underground resistance, spying on German occupation forces.<sup>17</sup> His true identity is, however, simply not visible to the reader, and in fact, is firmly fixed with no wavering whatsoever. By contrast, the collaborators in Adamovich's *The Chasteners* assume intermediate positions to different extents between the Soviet Union and Germany. For example, Bely and Sukhov, both ex-officers in the Red Army, become prisoners of the Germans. Like Andrei in *The Unvanquished*, they underwent a harsh experience in the POW camp around Bobruysk, a Belarusian city,<sup>18</sup> and decide to serve as collaborators in order to survive, joining the Dirlwanger Brigade (80-82). Although both characters are ashamed of their choice, waiting for an opportunity to surrender intentionally to the Soviet partisans, they gradually become involved in Nazi war crimes, and the massacre in Belarusian villages. According to the moral criteria of Gorbатов's novel, they must be categorized as enemies and traitors. By contrast, many of the characters in *The Chasteners* are neither unshakable heroes, nor villains devoid of any conscience whatsoever.

Ivan Melnichenko is portrayed as a representative of the Ukrainian collaborators in Nazi atrocities. The description of his private history is, however, worthy

---

birth. <https://dan-news.info/obschestvo/pochta-donbassa-vypustila-novuyu-marku-k-110-letiyu-sovetskogo-pisatelya-i-voenkora-borisa-gorbatova/>

<sup>17</sup> Vasiliok has only a minor role in the novel, but in the film adaptation he is incorporated into the large Taras family as the lover of Taras' daughter Nastia, and plays an important role in saving a Jewish girl kidnapped by German police. It is worth mentioning that the novel *The Unvanquished* and its film adaptation appeared as one of the first works that depicted Holocaust during wartime.

<sup>18</sup> Snyder considers the temporary POW camps (dulag) to be the most successful operation of Nazi Germany's artificial "Hunger Plan" and mass-killing of the population in the occupied territories, referring to the names of the camps including Bobruysk (dulag 131). Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), pp. 175–181. (Chapter 5)

of detailed analysis. He experienced the great Ukrainian famine (Holodomor) in the early 1930s. Once his father, who was then the chairman of the kolkhoz in Nikolaev (Mikalayiv) Oblast, asked the prosecutor who tried to put the starving and dying people to work, “Don’t you know the truth?”. It becomes clear that Soviet people had learned “to see nothing, to remember nothing” during the time of political persecution (110). It is ironic, however, that Melnichenko, who becomes a Nazi Germany collaborator because of his opposition to the Soviet regime, visits his parents in Kiev with a German trunk filled with souvenirs looted from Belarusian villages. Just as the Soviet official previously failed to recognize the reality of the Great Hunger, now he is forced to pretend that he does not know the truth about German war crimes. Melnichenko likens his parents to the harmless old couple in Gogol’s another novel *The Old World Landlords*, published simultaneously with *Taras Bulba* (110). Unlike Gogol’s comical protagonists, who never notice the embezzlement and misappropriation taking place in their domain, however, the parents are aware of their son’s awful transgressions. When he tries to get his parents to move into the fine house of an expelled Jew, the mother resists, saying, “I won’t go even if they kill me!”. Eventually the father even judges him: “I wish the Germans would kill you, son. Germans would be better than our people would do” (112). Although there are no references to Gogol’s *Taras Bulba*, the plot of that novel, in which a father executes his traitorous son, is surely being evoked.

It is also notable that in both Gogol’s and Gorbatov’s novels, the dialogue between father and son is in Russian, whereas in Adamovich’s novel, much of the Ukrainians’ conversation is made in Ukrainian, albeit in accordance with the Russian script and orthography. In Gorbatov’s *The Unvanquished*, most of the main characters live in the city and speak in Russian, whereas only the rural secondary characters prefer the Ukrainian language. The same configuration can be seen in Fadeyev’s famous novel *The Young Guard*, also set in the Donbass during the Second World War. The party leader Protsenko uses different languages, speaking in Russian to the young protagonists, and in Ukrainian to the rural inhabitants.

In *The Unvanquished*, the young poet Pavlik appears as the only urban intellectual, writing in Ukrainian, but all of his dialogue in the novel is in Russian. He is offered the opportunity to publish his work in Ukrainian in German-occupied Kiev, but he refuses to cooperate with the fascists, even in the

midst of a crisis of poverty and hunger. It is suggestive that writers are also encouraged to write about the “Ukrainian nation”, and about a culture that does not require participation in politics. In the capital city, even the “Petliura Club” offers a delight for Ukrainians (274). This episode with Pavlik is the only section of the novel that hints at Ukrainian nationalism and its relationship with German occupation policy. It is also characteristic that a subtle boundary is drawn between the Donbass and Kiev.

The names of Bandera and other Ukrainian nationalists are not mentioned in *The Unvanquished* (except for Petliura, as mentioned above). In Adamovich’s *The Chasteners*, by contrast, Melnichenko is said to have met Bandera once in the past, and the term “бандеровцы” (Bandera followers) is repeatedly used. This term, however, has only a vague meaning of someone being nothing more than a collaborator with Nazi Germany and traitor to the Soviet Union<sup>19</sup>. In another of Adamovich’s novels *The Khatyn Story* (1971), written about 10 years before on the same topic of Nazi atrocities in a Belarusian village, the word “власовцы” (soldiers of Russian Liberation Army led by Andrei Vlasov) is used instead of “бандеровцы” for the very same meaning. As well as the term “куркуль” (Belarusian and Ukrainian version of klark, meaning rich farmer), these terms are used as a kind of political label in Adamovich’s novels.

In the Soviet Union’s cultural policy, which emphasized the “friendship of peoples” (дружба народов), overt displays of Ukrainian or other Soviet nations’ or ethnic groups’ cooperation with Nazi Germany were unwelcome. The focus on Ukrainian characters in *The Chasteners* was intended to reveal a hidden fact in Soviet history. However, it also facilitated stereotypical understanding, linking Ukrainian nationalists (especially Bandera followers) to collaboration with fascism.

In reality, however, the collaborators were composed of diverse national and ethnic groups within the Soviet Union, even though a considerable proportion were Ukrainians. In Adamovich’s novel, Avgust Barchke, a local Belarusian of German descent, leads the local collaborators in driving the village residents to the execution site. After entering the pit where the dead are to be buried, Barchke tries to make the people that are to be shot stand up in order, but in the

---

<sup>19</sup> Rudling points out that the Ukrainian collaborators involved in the massacres in Khatyn and other Belarusian villages were mostly followers of Andrii Melnyk, not of Bandera. Rudling, “The Khatyn Massacre...,” p. 44.

chaos, it becomes impossible to distinguish the living from the dead. “He can no longer tell who is alive in the pit and who has been shot, bends over and grabs everyone in a row, trying to lift and put the dead on their feet...” (118) In Gogol’s *Taras Bulba*, too, brutal violence was often combined with grotesque laughter<sup>20</sup>. The scenes of carnage in *The Chasteners* have become a kind of carnival, where the boundaries between friend and foe, patriot and traitor, and Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are indistinguishable.

### Conclusion

This paper analyzes how people, especially Ukrainians, were portrayed in the extreme circumstances of war in Russian-language literature during the Soviet era. In accordance with wartime patriotic propaganda, Gorbатов’s *The Unvanquished* blurred the differences between Ukrainians and Russians by expanding the meaning of the adjective “Russian” (русский), while emphasizing the boundaries between friend (Soviet-Russians) and foe (Nazi-Germans), and not allowing for intermediate positions such as collaborator. Adamovich’s *Chasteners*, meanwhile, focused on the diverse ways of being in the collaborators’ motives and psychology. The ethnic characterization of the collaborators, especially Ukrainians, gave a concrete living image to the faces of those who oscillated between the two totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalin’s USSR. The motif of filicide (killing of one’s own child) in *Taras Bulba*, while placed in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, different from Gogol’s era, proves to be effective in depicting the fissures and violence between family ties, national identity, and state political ideology. These texts are also associated with the politicized discourses that assimilate Ukrainians into the larger category of Russian population, or demonize them as fascists or ultranationalists. However, Gorbатов and Adamovich’s works are also useful for examining the myriad boundaries and shared ideas between Russia and Ukraine to different degrees: from what kind of past they have derived, and what kind of possibilities they would have in the future.

---

<sup>20</sup> Masayuki Uemura, “Gogol’s Grotesque in *Taras Bul’ba*,” *Bulletin of the Japanese Association for the Study of Russian Language and Literature* 53 (2021), 89–112. (in Japanese)