

Секція:  
**ЦІННОСТІ ЯК ВИЗНАЧАЛЬНА ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА  
ЛЮДСЬКОГО БУТТЯ: ІСТОРІЯ І СУЧАСНІСТЬ**

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**INSTANT MEMORY OF WAR: THE TRANSFORMATION  
OF THE IMAGES OF HERO AND VICTIM IN CONTEMPORARY  
UKRAINIAN POETRY**

**Introduction.** The full-scale Russian–Ukrainian war has generated a substantial body of poetic texts that record the immediate experience of catastrophe. Contemporary Ukrainian wartime poetry emerges under conditions of minimal temporal distance from the event: texts are written and published while the war is still ongoing, and lived experience has not yet stabilized within the forms of cultural memory. Under such conditions, poetry captures the war from within the process of its lived experience, at a moment when the event has not yet become history but is already beginning to transform into memory.

Classical theories of memory have largely been developed on the assumption that such processes unfold after an event has occurred. Maurice Halbwachs conceptualized memory as socially framed recollection shaped within collective structures. Jan and Aleida Assmann further distinguished between communicative memory, which circulates through everyday social interaction, and cultural memory, which becomes stabilized through institutional preservation, canonization, and durable symbolic forms. Later developments in memory studies have emphasized the role of mediation and circulation in shaping remembrance: Astrid Erll demonstrated that memory emerges through media that structure how experiences are transmitted and interpreted; Ann Rigney highlighted the dynamic circulation and afterlives of literary memory across audiences and cultural contexts; and Andrew Hoskins described the accelerated and networked character of remembering in contemporary media environments.

Building on these approaches, this article introduces the concept of *instant memory* to describe a stage of memory formation that remains insufficiently theorized. *Instant memory* refers to an early phase of memory-making in which the

experience of an ongoing event already takes textual form and begins to circulate publicly – through literary publication, media discussion, and scholarly engagement – yet has not undergone historical interpretation or cultural stabilization. Unlike communicative memory in the sense proposed by Jan and Aleida Assmann, which refers to the circulation of recollections about the past, *instant memory* emerges before the event has concluded, when the text is already public but the event itself has not yet become the past. In this sense, *instant memory* designates the cultural moment in which experience begins to crystallize into memory while the event itself remains historically unfinished.

Despite considerable scholarly attention devoted to trauma, testimony, and the media circulation of wartime experience, contemporary research has insufficiently described the phase in which a poetic text simultaneously belongs to the unfolding event and already begins to function as memory. This situation reshapes the structure of wartime narratives: the traditional opposition between hero and victim becomes unstable, while the central figure becomes a subject who remains within the catastrophe and simultaneously begins to transform lived experience into memory.

The aim of this article is to analyze how instant memory of war is formed in contemporary Ukrainian wartime poetry and how this regime of remembering transforms the images of hero and victim.

**Literature Review.** Recent scholarship on Ukrainian wartime poetry emphasizes that texts written after 24 February 2022 frequently function as forms of testimony that document the traumatic experience of war (Subarno Chattarji [3]; Rory Finnin [4]; Vitaly Chernetsky [2]). Researchers have also drawn attention to their modes of circulation: the dissemination of poetry through digital platforms creates a near “real-time” regime in which poetic texts become spaces for the public interpretation of unfolding events (Amelia M. Glaser [5]; Harriet Murav [10]).

Other studies focus on the symbolic strategies through which war is interpreted in contemporary poetry, including the personalized experiences of combatants, national archetypes, and representations of loss and trauma (I. Orinenko [11]; L. Machulin [8]; I. Prushkovska [12]; T. Riazantseva & Ye. Kanchura [14]). At the same time, as Tetiana Belimova [1] argues, contemporary poetry is already forming a new archive of the war’s memory. However, the transformation of the images of hero and victim under conditions in which memory is formed during the unfolding of the event itself remains insufficiently conceptualized. This gap defines the analytical perspective of the present study.

**The Transformation of the Images of Hero and Victim in the Regime of Instant Memory of War.** In the context of an ongoing war, poetry functions as a space of instant memory, recording not an interpreted past but the lived experience of an event that is still unfolding. Within this regime, traditional images of hero and

victim change: instead of stabilized memorial figures, poetic texts present subjects who remain within the war, experience it bodily, and simultaneously begin to transform this experience into memory.

This transformation is particularly visible in the poetry of Valerii Puzik [13]. His texts demythologize heroism: the hero appears not as a triumphant figure but as a person acting within catastrophe – exhausted, vulnerable, and often traumatized, yet capable of continuing to act. In the poem “Pastor,” the central figure is a sapper whose image is constructed through labor and responsibility rather than through the rhetoric of heroic achievement. The metaphor of a “weapon that grew ears of grain within him instead of war” symbolizes the clearing of space for life after destruction. Such texts record the event from within lived experience, where the hero is not yet a memorialized figure but a subject who becomes a bearer of memory in the very moment of its formation.

In the poetry of Halyna Kruk (the collection *Lost in Living* [6]), the opposition between hero and victim nearly disappears. The central figure becomes a subject of loss who continues to live after catastrophe. The image of the “black dog” that pursues the speaker, the motif of emptiness (“love leaves a hole in a woman’s heart”), and the crisis of language present memory as an ongoing inner condition that has not yet been shaped into a stable narrative.

A different modification of the wartime subject appears in the poetry of Oksana Maksymchuk in the collection *Still City: Diary of an Invasion* [9]. Here the war enters the space of everyday urban life, while the lyrical subject appears less as a hero of action than as a witness to the destruction of normality. The fragmentary structure of the texts and their attention to everyday details convey a mode of thinking shaped by the unfolding event, when the war still resists coherent interpretation. In this sense, *Still City* functions as a poetic archive of an ongoing experience in which memory emerges simultaneously with the experience of the event itself.

In the poetry of Maksym Kryvtsov [7], the central motif becomes the radical personalization of loss. Heroism is dismantled through the specificity of names, call signs, memories of family life, and small everyday gestures. War appears not as an abstract historical event but as a constellation of individual human stories. His verses articulate an ethics of memory centered on the concrete individual.

Such texts demonstrate a characteristic mechanism of instant memory. While the war is still unfolding, poetry resists depersonalization by transforming the event into a space of names, voices, and private biographies. Memory here emerges as an immediate memorial gesture – an ethical practice of naming those whom war attempts to reduce to statistics. As a result, hero and victim are no longer opposed: the hero may become a victim, while the victim retains dignity through the uniqueness of an individual life.

Another perspective appears in the poetry of Eva Tur [15], where the gendered optics of war are deconstructed. The lyrical heroine refuses the symbolic role of the “woman at war” often imposed by media representations. The formula “a sexless being at war” does not imply the disappearance of corporeality but signals the loss of gender as a defining category in wartime conditions. Competence, experience, endurance, and responsibility toward the unit come to the foreground. In this way, Tur’s poetry presents another transformation of the heroic figure: the wartime subject emerges beyond gender roles within a community structured by risk and solidarity.

This poetics reveals another dimension of instant memory. The lyrical heroine refuses externally imposed symbolic roles because the experience of the front has not yet undergone ideological or cultural codification. The poetic text records the event at the moment of its lived experience, before it is converted into a convenient public image or integrated into established cultural scripts. In this sense, instant memory appears as a form of memory that resists the symbolic “packaging” of experience and insists on the primacy of lived experience.

In the texts examined, instant memory of war takes multiple forms: testimony from within the event, the language of loss, the archiving of everyday catastrophe, the naming of the dead, and resistance to external schemes of representation. The transformation of the images of hero and victim thus appears as a consequence of a specific regime of remembering that emerges before historical distance is established.

Across different poetic models – from testimony in Puzik to the poetics of loss in Kruk, the archiving of experience in Maksymchuk, the personalization of memory in Kryvtsov, and resistance to symbolic roles in Tur – the same mechanism becomes visible: an ongoing war generates instant memory, which in turn reshapes the traditional figures of hero and victim.

**Conclusions.** The analysis of contemporary Ukrainian wartime poetry demonstrates that its value narratives are formed within the regime of instant memory of war – a mode of remembering that arises during the event itself, when experience has not yet acquired historical distance. In this sense, instant memory is not merely communication about war but a distinct stage of memory-making in which the poetic text already circulates within the cultural sphere while the event itself has not yet become the past.

In the texts of Valerii Puzik, Halyna Kruk, Oksana Maksymchuk, Maksym Kryvtsov, and Eva Tur, the binary opposition of hero and victim gradually loses its defining role. The subject appears not as a memorialized figure but as a person who remains within the catastrophe while simultaneously transforming lived experience into memory. This results in different models of such a subject: the witnessing hero, the subject of loss, the bearer of personalized memory, the archivist of everyday

wartime experience, and the member of a combat community beyond traditional gender roles.

Thus, contemporary Ukrainian wartime poetry not only represents war but also participates in shaping its primary forms of cultural remembering. The poetic text functions as a space of instant memory – open and ethically charged, oriented against forgetting and the depersonalization of experience.

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