

# Creating the Image of the Other in Ukrainian Literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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**ABSTRACT:** An imagological research in literature is important as the writers create the images of the other countries for their compatriots. Moreover, those images are to stay in collective memory through the years. It is also necessary to focus on the details, which are depicted in the literary works to understand what creates the universal image of a nation and people. Currently travel literature becomes more and more popular in Ukraine and many authors work in the genre of travelogue. To analyse the trends of actual national images of other countries in Ukrainian contemporary literature the literary pieces of three celebrated Ukrainian writers were taken. The images of Germany, Latin America and the Balkans are represented in the books written by A. Kuzmenko, M. Kidruk and A. Lyubka. It should be noted that all the analysed literary works are the bestsellers. It means that an imagological research deals with the national images, perceived by thousands of the Ukrainians. Furthermore, literature can construct some new national stereotypes of represented nations and destroy some old stereotypes of those nations in the minds of Ukrainian readers. Such a scientific investigation can make it easier to understand the way how cultural artefacts can influence the perception of nations in the period of fast globalization.

**KEYWORDS:** imagology, the Other, stereotype, contemporary literature, travel literature

## **Introduction**

The concept of the image of the Other can be quite different in culture in general and exactly in literature. While considering the image of the Other in culture the scientists all over the world dwell on various types of them: mythological creatures, gods, super heroes, the representatives of different subcultures, nations etc.

Actually, this research is dedicated to the analysis of the creating the image of the Other in Ukrainian Literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It must be noted that the paper deals with the so-called “travel literature” representatives in Ukrainian literature of the last few decades, as analyzed literary works were first published in 2006 (“Me, Pobeda and Berlin”, Andriy “Kuzma” Kuzmenko), 2010 (“The Journey to the Navel of the World”, Max Kidruk) and 2019 (“In search of barbarians: the journey to the regions where the Balkans begin and do not end”, Andriy Lyubka) and two of them were reprinted, moreover, can be considered to be national literary bestsellers in Ukraine. In addition, it should be stated that the authors (whose books are the object of the research) are rather influential in the cultural life of Ukraine, active participants of different international literary and cultural festivals. These writers are awarded by various prizes for their literary works (for instance, nominated for BBC Book of the Year in Ukraine) and their books are the favorites among the Ukrainian readers.

Still, while discussing travel literature (travelogues) it is important to remember that one of the first description of the travelling can be trips to the netherworld or mythological voyages when people started to understand their Otherness. As a result, men have always fashioned images of their gods. The great religions (Classical, Nordic, Indian, Jewish, Christian, Islamic) developed a great variety of myths representing god and the gods in pictures, statuary, and mythological narratives. But what is more, any tribe or polity connected its moral essence and its political authority with the deities. The myths of their founding gods and godlike heroes expressed their cultural and political identity (Beller 2007, 376). Imagological studies (especially, connected with travel literature) deal with different patterns of the Other: foreigners, exoticism,

stereotypes, mentalities, images, topos, identity, representation, social psychology problems and varieties etc.

### **Imagological Dimensions: Creating and Destroying of the Stereotypes in Ukrainian Contemporary Literature**

Scientists consider that fundamentally, stereotypes are fictions; but their cultural study has found that, while stereotypes distort reality, they also create problematic realities of their own. Social psychologists agree that stereotypes resist revision; accordingly, scientific analysis revolves around the shortcomings of over-generalization and rigidity which make the relationship between stereotype and reality so problematic (Beller 2007, 430). It is important to trace whether the stereotypes occur in analyzed books and how they function in the text.

Of course, it is clear, that any travelogue's construction contains documentary and fiction. However, the correlation and balance of those elements are different in any literary piece. Every writer combines some documentary details (the peculiarities of the lifestyle, clothing, food, traditions, language, relationship, space, rituals, landscape, etc.) and his or her personal impressions during the travel, which are fictional. In some examples the writers can add such "incarnations" as legends, historical/professional documents, parts of interviews/conversations, fairy tales and so on to their texts.

The goal of the current research is to compare the ways in which images of the Other are created by contemporary Ukrainian authors, who wrote their books about their travelling to different countries/regions: Germany, Chile and the Balkans.

The first one is an autobiographical story written by a famous Ukrainian musician, singer, poet and writer Andriy "Kuzma" Kuzmenko. It was published in 2006 and republished for several times since then. It is known that in medieval times, people encountered other cultures in the context of crusades, pilgrimages and studies, a number of topos and commonplaces emerged to characterize European societies and 'nations', be it in complimentary or a mocking manner. In this emerging prototypology of modern nations, the Germans were stereotyped as strong, warlike, uncivilized. Dante's *Divina commedia* stresses their heavy drinking and their voracious eating habits. Such characterizations survive in German nicknames down to the present day (Beller 2007, 160).

Analyzing the language of the story "Me, Pobeda and Berlin" it must be stated that some parts are written by the mixed up variant of the German words and popular collocations given in Ukrainian letters (Kuzma 2011), that proves the universal stereotyped language patterns which can be understood by different people all over the world. It is the evidence of Germany's being among politically leading countries of the past years and nowadays. Also the author notices one of the traditional stereotype about disciplined Germans (especially, the representatives of German police and authorities), following the rules and laws, perfect roads and good automobiles (Kuzma 2011, 31-36), which confirm represented, widely spread stereotypes about this European nation.

By the way, meanwhile, the new, globalization- and immigration-driven social intermingling of peoples and religions is also affecting Germany, which, in the course of reconstructing a new democratic state, seems to have become the most 'postnational' country of Europe. As its neighbours to the East are struggling for, and debating, their national identities, it is an open question, which kind of image the Germans will assume in their way to European integration (Beller 2007, 164).

In Kuzma's story the writer stresses on the neo-fascist vector of the Turkish people in Berlin (the book was first published in 2006), respectful interaction between the Ukrainians and the Germans (Kuzma 2006, 62-63) and reveals the comparison between the representatives of German police and Polish police (and people in general), to whom, the personages of the story show less respect (Kuzma 2006, 68-69). It proves the fact that the image of the Germans is more privileged than the image of people of Poland in the ethnic hierarchy of the Ukrainians of that time. Those stereotypes are not only proved in the story, but conveyed to comedy or extremely

comic situations. It makes the national stereotypes more distinguished in the text and they become the basis of the creating of the image of the Other.

As for the novel "The Journey to the Navel of the World" written by Max Kidruk, it is important not only to shift the point to another part of the planet but to understand that it depicts the life of periphery not a cultural centre or some capital city (as it was in the situation when the trip was to Berlin, for instance).

Due to the 'periphery' (or 'margin') it denotes the areas and social spheres furthest removed from the centre. This can refer to distant rural/provincial areas close to the country's edge or border, but also, more specifically, to those sections of the country or society which are uninvolved in the networks of culture and power (Leersen 2007, 278). Even the first title (of the prologue of the novel) is "Once in Atacama desert..." (Kidruk 2016, 7) and it focuses on the fact that this travel is quite special one because of its being too distant and unique. Such places can be characterized as "too other" for the foreigners. It is depicted by the situation when two characters (in prologue of the novel) got stuck in a sand desert and couldn't solve that problem immediately in spite of the fact of having new (but broken in desert) automobile or knowing several foreign international languages. In fact, it can be considered as a metaphor, which shows that universal skills may help people in any capital city all over the world but can be completely useless while getting in absolutely Other landscape/space. Actually, this is the literary example, in which the Otherness starts not with a different language code or appearance and actions of people, but with the Other nature, which becomes the first image of the Other in the novel.

The two characters of the book are the representatives of different nations (the Ukrainian and the Czech) who met during their studying. However, they do not feel that they are too different as they have similar interests. Nevertheless, both of them experience the Otherness of the space and the Other feeling of time during their travel to Latin America (Kidruk 2016).

Evidently, it is important to understand that the novel corresponds not only with the wide range in images of the Other or with a concept of periphery, but with the exoticism patterns either.

Exoticism is thus also a modality of Othering, of heightening the Other's strangeness. Accordingly, exotic settings are often popular in the genre of the adventure romance, which is characterized by a storyline full of incident, thrill and adventure. The exotic locale is a place where the laws of normality, realism and mundane plausibility are suspended in favor of 'strange', exiting, unpredictable and sometimes even supernatural or magical events (Leersen 2007, 325). The Kidruk's novel mirrors all those patterns almost completely.

Moreover, the novel contains photos (Kidruk 2016, 132, 195), maps (Kidruk 2016, 127, 199), authentic legends (Kidruk 2016, 123-125, 167-168, 285-286). It makes the book a real travelogue, which consists of documentary part (documents, photos, real facts) and fictional ones (unusual events, original plot, impressions of the trip etc.). Max Kidruk creates the image of the Other space, depicting the views of the country, its ancient traditions, representing it as a kind of the Other world. Furthermore, the supernatural part is depicted by rapid changes of the weather and even 'existence' of so-called mountain devils (Kidruk 2016, 66). This world is so completely Other to the personages that it is stated in the text that I was difficult for them even to breath. But afterwards it turns out that it is normal reaction according to the chemical composition of the air in that area, which is explained, almost scientifically, in the text of the travelogue (Kidruk 2016, 67).

"In Search of Barbarians: the Journey to the Regions where the Balkans Begin and do not End" written by Andriy Lyubka is a kind of a road-story, which was created during his real travelling to the Balkans. The image of the Other is constructed by depicting the details of an every day life of people of different Balkan nations. Still the fact that the countries border each other does not mean that they are similar. They are too different. The author dwell on the point that some stereotypes during this trip were destroyed as he had them before because of ignorance and the lack of knowledge (Lyubka 2019, 29). The fact is that the writer focuses on the statement that the region, where he is from (Zakarpattya) is considered to be multicultural, but it is not like that. According to Lyubka reality is substituted exactly by stereotypes, and everybody needs to

destroy them to get knowledge (Lybka 2019, 32) to understand better who are all those people abroad and around.

Generally, in this non-fiction travelogue barbarian is a stranger and the Other and people need some border to separate themselves from the barbarians (Lyubka 2019, 34).

However, the image of the border is one of the key-images in the book. It is given as a body of any state which contains its soul (Lyubka 2019, 84). Moreover, the author compares the concepts of border and the concept of frontier, states that the first meeting the Other happens before crossing the borders, while a person moves closer to the frontier (Lyubka 2019, 84). As a matter of fact, the writer constructs the image of the Other by comparing different nations, their traditions, cuisine and, for instance music.

An interesting fact is that in this travelogue the writer does not equate country and people. He differentiates a country with its nature, history and tradition from the people, who live in this country with their actual lifestyle. The main evidence of it is the statement that Lyubka's favourite Balkan country is Bosnia, but the most beloved people are the Macedonians (Lyubka 2019, 194), possibly, because they are similar to the Ukrainians. In fact, the main feature of this book is the ability of the writer to create the images of the Other by mixing up details in the narration that's why the readers can notice the destruction of some stereotypes (some of them are really out-of-date) and constructing new ones by the exploration of current lifestyles of the Balkan nations.

## Conclusion

Summing up the material of the research, it is emphasized that in three stories the images of the Other are created by the authors quite differently. While in the first case the readers are introduced to hyperbolized stereotypes in the third represented travelogue, on the contrary, the writer tries to destroy traditional stereotypes, noticing the tiniest details of the every day life of different nations and even dwelling on the difference between meeting frontier-people and abroad people and the changes in their image of each other. Still the novel written by Max Kidruk is special among these three literary pieces as the writer creates an exotic space with its own peculiarities of feeling the time and changing the estimation of values.

Thus, if the travelogue is created to introduce the Others to the reader and change him or her during this trip, then all the stories change the reception of the Other and makes It closer and less strange to the reader. Finally, during those `voyages` the reader can get more knowledge about the traditional and current concept of dealing with the Other and can experience mental crossing the borders.

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