



<https://doi.org/10.28925/2311-259x.2023.4.4>
UDC 82(091)

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**DYSTOPIAN FUTURE AND BORDERS OF HUMANITY:
ANALYZING «THE ROAD» (2006) BY CORMAC MCCARTHY
AND «POMYRANA» (2016) BY TARAS ANTYPOVYCH**

The article explores the artistic means of representation of the degradation of food practices in the post-apocalyptic literary discourse of contemporary writers. The study focuses on the strategies of food culture degradation in the post-humanist discourse of two novels — Cormac McCarthy’s “The Road” and Taras Antypovych’s “Pomyrana”. Using interpretative and comparative methods, the article aims to concentrate on the existential issues of the novels and compare the artistic means of depicting the moral degradation of humanity and the decline of food culture in “The Road” and “Pomyrana”.

The research results affirm that the portrayal of food not only highlights the struggle for survival but also carries symbolic and metaphorical significance. Both authors use the issue of food supply to reflect the collective anxieties of modern society and to link the issue of moral degradation and the survival of human beings. Food imagery is used to describe possible means of survival for the protagonists in the post-apocalyptic world, symbolizes the lost world (“The Road”) and reflects the inner moral state of a community (“Pomyrana”). The expression “you are what you eat” has a special significance in these texts — in Pomyrana the semi-robotized people eat inedible substances to satisfy their animalistic hunger, eventually turning to cannibalism, which reflects their deep moral degradation. In “The Road”, the protagonists continuously choose starvation over cannibalism, spending their time looking for pre-apocalyptic food and for a chance at survival. In this case, cannibalism is presented as a liminal food practice of “bad people”. The novelty of the article lies in the comparative approach to analyzing how food-related discourse is portrayed throughout the novels and what cannibalism reveals about both the characters and society as a whole. Thus, cannibalism serves as a means to construct the boundary between human and inhuman, defines categories of good and evil, and illustrates the moral orientations of the heroes in the analyzed novels.

Keywords: post-apocalyptic literature; dystopia; cannibalism; hunger.

Introduction

In his book *Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought*, Adam Stock argues that we live in dystopian times, and that the dystopia genre has achieved symbolic cultural value in representing fears and anxieties about the future (2019, p. 2). Dystopian fictions and post-apocalyptic narratives mirror the contemporary world and enable discussions about pertinent, world changing issues such as governance and power, discrimination, economic and political crises, social instabilities, and existential hopes and fears. By trying to find possible solutions to these issues, post-apocalyptic narratives also explore the ways to stay truly human in the context of survival horror, “by testing not only our physical survival skills, but also our values, our morals, and our beliefs” (Gurr, 2015, p. 1). In this paper, we will focus our attention on the exploration of alternative foodscapes that

recently became one of the central themes of dystopian imagery and “a constant image and metaphor within dystopian and utopian genres” (Mayer, 2019). The possible visions of the future generate discussions about how food will be produced and what or who exactly humans will eat in the post-apocalyptic world. While imagining new ecosystems and speculating about the issue of food supply in the overpopulated globalized community, the authors also investigate the distortion of the human / nature relationship in consumer society. In this research, we have analyzed how hunger and starvation can not only modify or destroy the eating culture but also blur the boundaries of normality after “the end of the world”. Who can survive in a post-apocalyptic world? How and why can they survive? What do they do to ensure their survival? What can be the sources of food? In what circumstances can food become the symbol of

power or domination? Can the difference between the consumption of meat of a nonhuman animal and the meat of a human be erased? How can a certain part of the population be dehumanized and thus perceived as food for the members of other groups?

Indeed, many authors have tried to answer these questions by producing a series of literary and film narratives. Some of the authors speculate about possible alternative solutions for the food industry (for ex. *Stuffing* by Jerry Oltionin (2006) or *Hungry* by H. A. Swain (2014)). Dystopian narratives go further in exploring the limits of this phenomenon by constructing alternative worlds where “who eats who” becomes the question of survival and the taboo on cannibalism is partially or completely removed (ex. films *Soylent Green* (1973), *Delicatessen* (1991), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), *The Platform* (2019) and literary works *The Sharing of Flesh* by Poul Anderson (1968), *Donald Kingsbury's Courtship Rite* by Donald Kingsbury (1982), *Lucifer's Hammer* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (1977), *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood (2009), *Tender Is the Flesh* by Agustina Bazterrica (2017)). In these dystopian narratives, the consumption of food is often presented as a transformed sociocultural practice that triggers profound changes in the perception of self and others, leading to appropriation of forbidden food practices. In this study, we would like to trace the differences in the construction of the semiotics of the relationships between food and humanity by analyzing two contemporary novels — *The Road* by American writer Cormac McCarthy and *Pomyrana* by Ukrainian writer Taras Antypovych. *The Road* was published in 2006 and awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction in 2006. Antypovych's *Pomyrana*, a “disgusting and desperate novel” (Ivasenko, 2017), appeared 10 years later, in 2016, and also received a lot of critical attention. These novels are both placed in a post-apocalyptic, uncertain future. While *Pomyrana* depicts a fantastic, hyperbolized world of semi-robotized people, *The Road* describes the long journey of a father and his son through the devastated landscapes of the USA. They both explore the limits of humanity after “the end of the world” as we know it and seek to answer the existential question of what it means to stay human in a post-apocalyptic world.

It is worth noting that both novels have already undergone a great deal of analysis. *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy attracted much critical attention after its publication. In their scholarly works, researchers discuss the relationships between ethics, religion, and morality (Wielenberg, 2010; Guo, 2015), aspects of the aesthetics of exhaustion (Hoberek, 2011), dynamics of descriptions of space and landscape (Ellis, 2006; Graulund, 2010), the dialectics of mobility (Schleusener, 2017) or stylistic aspects of the novel (Englander and Gome, 2015). Some works have also analyzed the theme of cannibalism in the novel, for example, the relation between anthropophagy depicted in *The Road* and ecological cannibalism

(Huebert, 2017) or the relation between consuming human flesh and the interplay of human / nature binary and consumer society (Estes, 2017). Antypovych's literary discourse has also been largely explored. Researchers' works offer, for example, an overview of the elements of allegory (Behta, 2017; Zhezhera, 2017), imagery of posthumanism aesthetics in *Pomyrana* (Polishchuk, 2017), or the humor present in Antypovych's work (Riabchenko, 2017). However, the comparative aspect of food representation in the above-mentioned novels has not been considered in detail. This study offers a comparative analysis of two novels and focuses on the issues of food and food supply in their literary discourses. Authors agree that the act of eating in literary works not only represents a biological need of human beings but also contains a lot of symbolic meaning (Peksoy, 2014, p. 80). Types of food, eating habits, food rituals and traditions, and ways of food preparation reflect the social and cultural features of a certain community. In the imagined world of dystopian novels, a study of food representation allows us to consider a large variety of other concepts such as the relation between food and power (Mayer, 2019), the borders of self and other, humanity and survival. The expression “you are what you eat” acquires special significance in the two novels, especially given the fine line between the primary instinct of survival and moral values, and respect for the bodies of others. We think that food habits can also transmit information not only about individuals but also about communities and agree with Anderson, who claims that food is used to communicate messages within societies, the most important of which are messages of group solidarity (2005, p. 6). This paper will use textual, qualitative, interpretative, and comparative approaches to focus on the novels' existential problems such as life, death and survival, moral qualities and degradation, hope and desperation, and human and post-human in order to uncover the meaning of the authors' messages. The paper argues that cannibalism is not chosen accidentally by the authors, it serves as a central means of constructing the border between the human and the unhuman, defines the categories of good and bad, and illustrates the moral orientation of the protagonists.

The food imagery after “the end of the world” in McCarthy's *The Road*

McCarthy's novel *The Road* details the journey on foot to the ocean coast of a father and his son over a period of several months across the post-apocalyptic landscape of the United States devastated by an unknown cataclysm. The extinction event is not specified by the author; we only know some details from the memories of the protagonist:

The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions. He got up and went to the window. What is it? she said. He didn't answer. He went into the bathroom and threw the light switch, but the power was already

gone. A dull rose glows in the window glass.
(McCarthy, 2006, p. 45)

The author deliberately does not give any details about the nature of the distinction event by generalizing it. The cataclysm can be anything — a war, a natural disaster, or human-made disaster. The most important is the scale of its destructive influence on life on Earth which is depicted through the journey of the protagonists. The event has transformed the land into an endless gray landscape of dead woods, burned cities, fields, and mountains covered with ash. The adjectives “dead” and “gray” are most frequently used to describe the transformed landscape — trees, grass, fields, mountains. The fauna was also destroyed by the disaster; the protagonists do not meet animal life during their journey (except for one dog lost in the burned city). It is no longer possible to see the sun because of the smoke and the nights are totally black due to absence of electricity: “The blackness he woke to on those nights was sightless and impenetrable. A blackness to hurt your ears with listening. Often, he had to get up. No sound but the wind in the bare and blackened trees” (2006, p. 13). In a world with almost no place for hope, the protagonist creates an illusion for himself and his son. He decides to go to the South, to the ocean. He hopes that the climate will be warmer, and some life could be found there. But the endless spaces of the devastated continent, and monotonous gray landscapes that gloomily meet the main characters at every new curve of the road, reveal the fact that the event has destroyed the whole industrial civilization and almost all life on Earth. McCarthy utilizes the classic road motif, proper to American literary discourse, to demonstrate the awful transformation of the world of the post-apocalypse full of despair and hopelessness.

The cataclysm has also brutally transformed the life of humans that have to survive on a lifeless Earth. Many of them are dead, the burned cities are empty, those who have stayed alive turned into nomads and are constantly traveling looking for food. In this post-apocalyptic world, humans are forced to either scavenge for remnants of pre-apocalyptic nourishment or consume human flesh, thus becoming cannibals.

McCarthy and, as we will see later, Antypovych, uses the depiction of degradation of food habits to draw the line between two categories of people — between those, who easily get down to the level of animal instincts and those, who have strong moral qualities. Cannibalism in this case represents a forbidden practice adopted by the majority of the characters (*The Road*) or by a limited group of people (*Pomyrana*). In this case, cannibalism is not only connected to the savage and wild, but also to the loss of human face, to the transition from a human to a monster-like creature. In *The Road*, it is particularly evocatively described with the encounters of the protagonists with gangs of cannibals (“bad guys” (2006, p. 67)). These gloomy encounters brightly demonstrate how the need for survival destroys

ethical values of certain individuals. The father and the son meet them several times throughout their journey. The first encounter described in the novel happens on the road. When the father sees armed people traveling by truck, he is very scared, and he tries to hide in the woods with his son but accidentally runs into one of the gang members. Protecting his son, he shoots the stranger and runs away, leaving behind all the belongings. When they come back the next day, they find the remains of the dead man:

He walked out through the woods to where they'd left the cart. It was still lying there but it had been plundered... There was nothing there. Dried blood dark in the leaves. The boy's knapsack was gone. Coming back, he found the bones and the skin piled together with rocks over them. A pool of guts. He pushed at the bones with the toe of his shoe. They looked to have been boiled. No pieces of clothing. Dark was coming on again and it was already very cold, and he turned and went out to where he'd left the boy and knelt and put his arms around him and held him. (2006, p. 60)

The author does not describe the shocking scenes of eating human flesh, leaving room for the reader's imagination. He concentrates on the emotional state of the protagonists, showing their shock and fear of the evil they are confronted with. The father instinctively rushes to his son to protect him from this unbearable reality. This episode illustrates that the new order of things has been adopted by certain groups of survivors. They turned into cannibals who act like hunters looking for their prey. They track down, lure, and capture their human prey and are even ready to eat their community members if given such an opportunity. New social formations are being created, new groups sharing the same reimagined food practices are being formed. Those from whom you need to hide are easily recognizable on the road:

An army in tennis shoes, tramping. <...> Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites ill clothed against the cold and fitted in dog collars and yoked each to each. (2006, p. 77)

The fact that cannibals consume not only their “prey” but also of the flesh of their group members demonstrates the degree of degradation of the characters. Indeed, in this type of community, anybody can become a victim and be reduced to meat. As we will see later, the author of *Pomyrana* also uses the trope of group self-consumption, but in Antypovych's novel we can track the process from inside as the transgression from human to unhuman is depicted throughout the novel, while in *The Road*, the author maintains a distance between the protagonists and the bad guys.

In another episode, looking for food, the father and the son accidentally come across the house, inhabited by cannibals. They realize this fact when they find a basement where the gang keeps their terrified prey — starving people, women and men, kept in the basement in complete darkness with no hope to escape:

He started down the rough wooden steps. He ducked his head and then flicked the lighter and swung the flame out over the darkness like an offering. <...> He crouched and stepped down again and held out the light. Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous. Jesus, he whispered. (2006, p. 94)

These people who were unlucky to fall into the cannibals' trap are kept in horrible conditions. They are reduced to nothing, naked and voiceless, dehumanized, transformed into a piece of meat that predators can consume whenever they want. This scene shows how cruel some people can be, highlighting the atrocities that they are ready to commit to continue living as they used to. It investigates the boundaries between human and inhuman, allowed and forbidden food practices, making the reader reflect on the moral limitations of ones and immorality of others. Again, the author does not describe the scenes of human flesh consumption, though the blatant tragedy of the situation is transmitted through the prism of the protagonist's eyes. He describes a man with the legs cut off and kept alive to be consumed later, and young men and women that are going to be eaten very soon and the terrible screams that are coming from that house at night:

In the night he heard hideous shrieks coming from the house and he tried to put his hands over the boy's ears and after a while the screaming stopped. He lay listening. <...> He dozed and woke up. What is coming? Footsteps in the leaves. (2006, p. 97)

All of this provokes such an intense fear that the father, sick with terror is even ready to kill his son, his sense of existence, to avoid him being eaten alive (2006, p. 99).

But one of the most horrific scenes of cannibalism in McCarthy's novel describes a human baby being cooked over a campfire (2006, p. 167). The father and the son discover the remains of a tiny body, most probably of a newborn baby on their trip to the South: "What is it? he said. What is it? The boy shook his head. Oh Papa, he said. He turned and looked again. What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (2006, p. 167). After seeing the baby cooked on

the fire, the boy froze in a profound shock, he could not even walk and was deeply traumatized: "He bent and picked the boy up and started for the road with him, holding him close. I'm sorry, he whispered. I'm sorry... He didn't know if he'd ever speak again" (2006, p. 167). It was probably the baby of an exhausted pregnant woman that they saw on the road with her knackered companions the night before. The author does not say directly whether these people tried to eat their own baby, or if it was somebody else. We ignore whether the baby was born dead or alive or maybe was kidnapped from his biological parents. In any case this act of cannibalism profoundly impacted the father and the son and it underlines more the horrific brutality of the post-apocalyptic world full of suffering and hopelessness. Sometime later when the boy is able to speak again, he recalls this vulnerable baby and comforts himself by saying that if the baby were alive, they could care for him. Indeed, in *The Road*, the issue of eating human flesh is a question of human dignity, one of the criteria for dividing people into good guys, those who "carry the fire", and the bad guys. And to be a good guy means to search for an alternative to cannibalism or reject it even at the cost of your own life: "We wouldn't ever eat anybody, would we? — No. Of course not. — Even if we were starving? <...> No. We wouldn't. — No matter what? — No. No matter what... Because we're the good guys. — Yes" (2006, p. 108–109). The opposition of the father and the son to cannibalism, and the determination not to follow the practice accepted by many others clearly shows the dividing line between the good and the evil. Thus, despite all the atrocities, the protagonists keep searching for ways to not betray one's moral values and to stay human. As it will be demonstrated later by the analysis of *Pomyrana*, both authors use the issue of cannibalism to underline the human traits of one and the monstrous degradation of others.

In both novels that depict life after the end of civilization, the issue of food supply is presented as a main concern of the protagonists. Indeed, when the industrial production of food is destroyed as in *The Road*, or not accessible because of self-isolation as in *Pomyrana*, the sources of food are very scarce.

In the imaginary world of *The Road* "populated by men who would eat your children in front of your eyes", where "murder was everywhere" (2006, p. 111), for the protagonists, there is only one way to get food — to search for it everywhere, even in almost unimaginable places, from abandoned houses and basements to sunken yachts. In their search for food, the father and the son overcome many kilometers throughout the novel, which transforms their journey into a constant quest for something edible. Unlike Antypovych's *Pomyrana*, where the characters are enclosed in one space and look for food in a landfill that is divided into sectors, the father and the son are constantly on the move which makes them constantly balance between despair and hope for survival. Very often their efforts are fruitless, and they

have to starve for several days. Weak and exhausted, they keep moving on: “They’d had no food and little sleep in five days and in this condition on the outskirts of a small town they came upon a once grand house sited on a rise above the road” (2006, p. 62). Similar to *Pomyrana*, the food that protagonists consume is pre-apocalyptic; these are industrially produced products from the world before the extinction event — canned beans, sausages, or fruits. They completely depend on what they can find in devastated cities and the key to their survival is a grocery cart from the supermarket that they use to store and carry all their belongings and food supply during their long journey. In a world almost without hope and without any landmarks, the cart becomes a symbol of the lost home for the people who cannot attach themselves to a certain place. In the cart, one can find toys, blankets to sleep, utensils to cook, and most importantly, food. The cart can also be perceived as a symbol of a consumerist society that is lost forever. An object from another time that one could so easily fill with plenty of food in a supermarket, an attribute of the everyday life of an average person, now has a crucial meaning for survival.

The constant deprivation and ongoing search for food transforms any available food source into an object of immeasurable value, a fleeting, rare resource that people fight and kill for. In these circumstances, even a simple can of Coca-Cola can represent real treasure:

He withdrew his hand slowly and sat looking at a Coca-Cola. — What is it, Papa? — It’s a treat. For you. — What is it? — Here. Sit down. — He took the can and sipped it and handed it back. You drink it, he said. Let’s just sit here. It’s because I won’t ever get to drink another one, isn’t it? (2006, p. 19–20)

As the father has the advantage of remembering life before the disaster, he shows his son how to open the can and leans “his nose to the slight fizz coming from the can” (2006, p. 20) as if trying to find a way to the lost world or comfort himself with pleasant moments of the past.

Pure drinking water (2006, p. 103) or a handful of dried apples (2006, p. 102) accidentally found in an abandoned orchard can also become the source of joy and pleasure. Especially if this food is shared with someone you care about. The ritual of sharing food is very important for the father as well as for his son. He does not want his father to sacrifice his part of food for him; if they eat, they eat together, and if they starve, they also do it together:

In a pocket of his knapsack he’d found a last half packet of cocoa and he fixed it for the boy and then poured his own cup with hot water and sat blowing at the rim. You promised not to do that, the boy said. — What? — You know what, Papa. — He poured the hot water back into the pan and

took the boy’s cup and poured some of the cocoa into his own and then handed it back. — I have to watch you all the time, the boy said. (2006, p. 29)

When civilization is gone, eating together remains one of the main socializing practices, and the father, despite the horrors of the devastated world around him, teaches his son how to enjoy food together.

One of the most comforting moments for the protagonists is when they find a “tiny paradise” (2006, p. 116) in the middle of nowhere. In one of the abandoned houses, the father accidentally discovers a hidden door in the ground. They open the door, descend the stairs and see a bunker full of all kinds of goods:

Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten-gallon plastic jerry jugs. Paper towels, toilet paper, paper plates. Plastic trash bags stuffed with blankets. He held his forehead in his hand. Oh my God, he said. He looked back at the boy. It’s all right, he said. Come down. (2006, p. 117)

This abundance astonishes both of them. For the father this discovery represents “the richness of a vanished world.” and the boy seems not to understand that this place is real: “The man thought he had probably not fully committed himself to any of this. You could wake in the dark wet woods at any time” (2006, p. 119). The boy even wants to make sure that he can believe what he sees: “Why is this here? <...> Is it real?” (2006, p. 117). For the first time the father could ask “What would you like for supper?” and the boy could choose from the abundance of the supplies in the bunker. Interestingly, they found this bunker at a time when they had almost no hope left, and they were going to give up: “He’d been ready to die and now he wasn’t going to, and he had to think about that” (2006, p. 121). This dreamlike discovery allows the protagonists to take a break and to have a rest from their difficult journey. In this situation the protagonists reveal their best moral qualities once again — the boy thanks the people who constructed the bunker and explains that they would never take away the food from others:

We know that you saved it for yourself and if you were here we wouldn’t eat it no matter how hungry we were and we’re sorry that you didn’t get to eat it and we hope that you’re safe in heaven with God. (2006, p. 123)

At last, they could offer themselves a real feast:

He set out a bowl of biscuits covered with a hand towel and a plate of butter and a can of condensed milk. Salt and pepper. He looked at the boy. The boy looked drugged. He brought the frying

pan from the stove and forked a piece of browned ham onto the boy's plate and scooped scrambled eggs from the other pan and ladled out spoonful's of baked beans and poured coffee into their cups. (2006, p. 122)

Despite the comfort and abundance that this place offers, the father understands that it is extremely dangerous to stay too long in the bunker as others can discover it too. Unfortunately, they need to leave this oasis and continue their dangerous journey to the South. The bunker, this paradisiac place, represents one more symbol of the lost world so familiar to the father and unknown to the son. But losing the world and admitting that “there is no past” (2006, p. 47) does not allow one to lose their humanity. Thus, the novel is not only about survival but also about how not to betray one's moral values and to stay human in a post-apocalyptic world where reimagined food culture serves as a means of measuring humanity. The way of eating becomes a differentiating criterion between groups of people and their moral motivations. Even if cannibalism seems to be the only option for survival for some groups, the protagonists resist it to betraying their moral values. Now, we will analyze the role of food consumption in Antypovych's work.

Depicting social and food degradation in Taras Antypovych's *Pomyrana*

Pomyrana by the Ukrainian writer Taras Antypovych is also written in the dystopian genre and the story is set in “a place, where everything is bad” (Webster, p. 87). One literary critic, Oleg Shynkarenko, defines *Pomyrana* as “an extremely pessimistic depiction of human society that learns nothing, goes nowhere, and focuses entirely on self-destruction” (Shynkarenko, 2016). According to Shynkarenko “this image is not just one of the dystopian models, but reflects our reality, where the grotesque is even more present than in the literature” (2016).

In this dystopian novel, the writer constructs a terrifying reality of an isolated group of people who are cut off from the rest of the civilized society and try to survive in a hostile environment. The spatial landscape of *Pomyrana*, in contrast to *The Road*, is limited and separated from the world by the so-called “Kolyuchka”, a border between locals and the others, their enemies. Unlike the endless landscapes of *The Road* and the voluntary isolation of the protagonists from others, the author of *Pomyrana* constructs an enclosed socio-spatial system where the community members have to coexist, interact, and find ways to survive. The events of the novel are concentrated in one location — a landfill of the former town of Koryto (trough). There used to be a garbage processing factory here and life around it was not different from other cities. But after it was closed, everything stopped. Part of the population left the territory that was declared unsuitable for living, but some decided to stay, justifying their decision by the imagined war between others and

Korytans for Koryto, which they won and constructed the Kolyuchka-border to protect it. As time passed the isolated community began to degrade little by little, both physically and morally. Gradually, they forgot how to read and write correctly, and lost the ability to learn and acquire any knowledge. Then the community started to lose its true history, traditions, moral values, social bonds, and even their human-like appearance. Some community members replaced parts of their bodies such as their noses, ears or teeth with metal parts. Their lives simply turned into a daily struggle for survival of semi-robotized people: “Koryto (the name of the landfill) was the only entertainment and necessity, work and rest, and most importantly — a means of survival. Here the locals practiced gathering and hunting, could feel again as a community and exchange some news¹” (Antypovych, 2016, p. 10). In these conditions, they create their own social model of life based on cruel laws of survival and construct a new collective identity. The author presents the imaginary world of the novel through the eyes of the protagonist Nelson, a young man born in Koryto, a character who has never known another life, but unlike other locals, did not lose an inner desire for change and the will for freedom (2016, p. 129).

As in *The Road*, the search for food represents one of the main topics of the novel. In *Pomyrana*, the main purpose of the existence of the new community is to find at least something edible. Every day, the Korytans go to the landfill, where each family or individual is assigned a certain area. The violation of the territorial division can be paid for with one's own life. In the multi-layered accumulations of the former landfill, people are looking for food. Most often they stay hungry because new waste has not been brought here for a long time and the locals sorrowfully recall then good times when “you could find a half-pack of chips, popcorn, a little cereal or expired canned food” (2016, p. 12). As in *The Road*, the characters can only rely on the industrially-produced food that was produced a long time before and have only two ways of getting food — to search for it or try to steal it from others. Those who are more resourceful learned to catch sparrows but recently even birds have been avoiding this area, so catching a sparrow is a real holiday, accompanied by a “wonderful” feast. But in *Pomyrana* the consumption of the food from the times before the cataclysm (in this case — an imaginary war) has a different meaning. Throughout the story, the reader learns that this community sentenced itself to such existence of starvation and survival when they have another choice. Several miles away from Koryto there exists a developed technological society that is ready to accept the inhabitants of Koryto and it is only the Korytans' inability to accept others that creates obstacles in attaining an abundant life. Here the author focuses the reader's attention on the absurdity of all

¹ Translation from Ukrainian is ours.

self-imposed sufferings of the community and its unwillingness to change, while in *The Road* the protagonists face the inevitable challenges of the post-apocalyptic world. In such circumstances, the degradation of certain group members seems even more horrible.

Several generations of Korytans grew up in complete isolation from the civilized world and were constantly exposed to horrible living conditions. There exists only one goal — to sate one's hunger. In turn, their animalistic instincts and desires begin to dominate over human ones. The moral degradation is also reflected in their food habits and culture — inedible items such as rubber from a tyre, a suede jacket, or "sawdust in an alkaline solution" became common food for them (2016, p. 15). Indeed, their development did not just stop but turned in the opposite direction completely: "Nelson crossed the threshold of the hangar somehow cautiously and uncertainly. The same way that primitive people were wary of unknown caves and their inhabitants" (2016, p. 47). Antypovych periodically, but with a certain regularity, depicts the animalistic behavior of people caused by the feeling of hunger and moral degradation: "Bozhena ate the smoked pigeon in a flash. She wiped her fingers, a little ashamed of her animal hunger" (2016, p. 44). It is interesting how two authors chose to use food to reflect the inner state of their protagonists. In *The Road*, despite all the horrors of life after "the end of the world", the protagonists could still enjoy their food and with the little they had, they could create a small feast. Even after prolonged starvation, they did not allow themselves to cross the line. In *Pomyrana* the characters are indiscriminate in their choice of food, they consume inedible items as easily and quickly as something edible. Thus, the way they eat reflects the degree of their moral degradation.

As it becomes more difficult for the characters to get food for themselves, the more vividly the writer depicts the degradation of their humanity: "in one fell swoop he cut off the crow's head and grabbed the bird's neck with his lips. Blood still flowed into his mouth and he drank it greedily, while it was still warm, sticky like syrup" (2016, p. 143). By creating this stark contrast between human behavior and animal instincts the author makes us think about where the line between human and animal behavior really is, between normality and abnormality, admissible and inadmissible in the *Homo sapiens* food culture. This distorted food culture reflects the inner world of the members of this community focused on self-destruction. In contrast to *The Road*, where the author was focused on describing the disappearing food practices in fading society after the extinction event, Antypovych draws the reader's attention to high-risk food behavior and the absence of socialization in the act of consuming food. The traumatic reality of the Korytans and their fight for physical survival, fueled by the constant feeling of hunger, makes the community teeter on the edge of common

sense and madness. Individualism and the desire to satisfy personal needs prevent them from thinking about the common good and they cannot unite to improve the conditions of their existence. In this case, we can see how hunger changes the culture of food in society and blurs the line between human and animal.

The protagonist of the novel, Nelson, is one of the few who realized that working together could save the Korytans from complete physical destruction. He tries to unite people and make them work together for the common good — to get access to endless sources of food. But passive, inert inhabitants of Koryto, so degraded in their isolated space, refuse to work together to improve their own existence: "As Nelson wandered around the houses, he was disappointed by his inability to ignite his neighbors with a valuable idea" (2016, p. 59) Nelson could not allow one's selfishness to ruin his plans and found an argument matching animal instincts of Korytans:

Nelson pointed at his brother with a rag resting on a pile of excavated clay. Hector took a crow out of his bag and lifted it over his head. <...> — One carcass per person for one working day! — said Nelson. (2016, p. 59)

Indeed, this motivation gave the expected result: the next day, about two dozen Korytans went to work. Thus, food becomes the unit by which power can be measured. For the residents of Koryto, it is the one who has food that possesses power and control over society. This is a new function, which, in addition to the traditional one — satisfying hunger, is performed by food in the novel *Pomyrana*. Thus, at some point in the novel, human relationships start to be measured by the access to or the possession of food by a particular person or group of people. It turns out that people can be easily manipulated and controlled by food; the feeling of hunger took away all of their will and ability to make decisions. Actually, they do not think about Nelson's great idea to save the community but do the demanded things just to get their cut in the evening. Taking into consideration the degree of degradation of this community, this could not last long and there appeared such will-less group members who decided not to do anything because "it is better just to starve to death than to work and then die" (2016, p. 82).

The worst thing happened a little later — a community member, the helpless Tuz, who was ill and unable to move on his own, was eaten. The writer leaves no doubt that this was done by one of the Korytans. Nelson is trying to find out who exactly became a cannibal in their community. It is important that the author gives the description of the Korytans not on behalf of the narrator, but with the help of Nelson, i.e., the inhabitant of the landfill himself:

Peckerwoods. Motivated only by their own hunger. Each of them could descend to the irreparable.

Everyone was under suspicion, except for the elderly women who did not use Freze's dental services, and Maya, who miraculously managed not to lose her teeth for a long time. <...> Mouths. Mouths. Mouths. Identical metal rows of teeth soldered to the jaws. Cutting, shredding, grinding. (2016, p. 88–89)

The image of the found remains of an eaten person strikes with its realism depicting a gnawed body with "fragments of skin hanging from the bitten heel" (2016, p. 109) carelessly hidden in the garbage. From now on, self-defense against cannibalism becomes the most important issue for the inhabitants of this isolated community.

In such conditions, some actions of the Korytans seem meaningless. For example, they are hostile to food humanitarian aid that was delivered from the other side of Kolyuchka, believing that others are trying to physically destroy them by deliberately providing poisoned food: "Everything from the other side of Kolyuchka is death to us" (2016, p. 127). The braver ones, motivated by animalistic hunger, tried to steal at least something from humanitarian aid, but one of the most morally degraded characters just burned all boxes of food, not leaving a single chance for salvation. Indeed, it's fear and inability to accept others that makes these people behave in this manner. The inhabitants of Koryto, no matter how strong their hunger is, would rather starve to death or consume each other than accept the help from outside that can lead to the destruction of their usual but isolated and devastated living space. Thus, the degradation of society, caused by the constant feeling of hunger, intensifies the hatred of the characters for each other within the group and for others, and cannibalism is depicted as the most critical moment of the moral and physical destruction.

Again, people are split into predators and their prey. As in *The Road*, some of the community members cross the line and start adopting forbidden food practices. The division into cannibals and their victims seems to be done randomly. At first, some locals eat each other and try to hide the crime, but then a new hierarchy is constructed — a new group starts to track down and hunt others openly. We see that among those who did not cross the forbidden moral line are Korytans who are vulnerable, still have the remnants of humanity, can sympathize with others, and care for their loved ones. And cannibals are those who are physically stronger and have completely lost their humanity. There is no emotional or social bond between those who decided to unite to become cannibals. The aspect of physical domination is crucial in this transformation, for as soon as one loses his physical power, he is immediately transformed into prey. For example, they decide without hesitation to eat their gang member, Venya, who is wounded but still alive: "He will not survive, — said Cabigrob. — Let's take him" (2016, p. 208). The characters try to explain acts of cannibalism by the

primitive pagan idea that certain physical power of the eaten person passes to those who eat it: "Their power will not disappear, it will pass to us! And it is better to take away strength than to give it away" (2016, p. 177); "I thought: if I eat Tuz, then women will stick to me, as to him in his youth" (2016, p. 186).

Selfishness, the focus on one's own survival, and loss of moral values of the characters of *Pomyrana* leads to the complete degradation of the social order. As a result, a number of group members transform the limited space of Koryto into a slaughterhouse where the weak are brutally killed and eaten. The others try to get to the bunker of a local doctor, where they can hide from cannibals. At the end of the work, the readers are exposed to the most horrible pictures of the struggle for the survival of the Korytans: "Outside there were heard the sounds of human agony mixed with something beast-like and almost dissolving in it" (2016, p. 219).

Conclusion

The satisfaction of hunger in these novels uncovers answers to fundamental questions about what it means to stay human in the post-human era, what are the relations between human and inhuman, and what are the boundaries of normality after "the end of the world".

Survival is one of the most urgent questions of these post-apocalyptic novels, as it is concerned with staying alive in a hostile environment and trying to muster hope for the future. While *The Road* depicts a desperate attempt to find someplace suitable for living in the devastated endless continent describing the trip full of danger but also small moments of sharing and compassion, *Pomyrana* is focused on the gradual regression and the refusal to use the chance at salvation, as if the isolated community sentenced itself to death. In the case of *The Road* and *Pomyrana* survival conflicts acutely with the ethics and morality of the characters as the novels draw frighteningly real scenarios where people need to fight or kill for food and moreover, some are turned to consuming others in order to survive. However, *The Road* and *Pomyrana* present cannibalism as a liminal practice of certain community members that constitute a taboo for other characters. In *Pomyrana*, cannibals are the most degraded part of the isolated community who, driven by hunger and pagan superstitions, at some point lose control and unite to eat others. In *The Road*, cannibals are represented as well-organized bandit gangs who systematically hunt people to enslave and eat them. Some of the cases are represented as occasional acts of cannibalism that reflect human despair. In *The Road*, cannibalism is used as a recurring motif that verbalizes a constant danger for the life of the protagonists, and the tension is gradually created by the scenes of different degrees of cruelty (from eating a person who is already dead to consuming a human baby). At the same time, this liminal food practice serves to draw a line between good and bad people, between those who are blinded by hunger and ready to do anything

to satisfy it and those who “to carry the torch” and search for alternatives to cannibalism. In *Pomyrana*, the issue of cannibalism is introduced only at the end of the novel and is conceptualized as the climax of the moral devastation of the society. In both novels, anthropophagy is perceived as the supreme point of degradation of food culture and questions the humanity of future civilizations and of those community members who engage in the practice.

The pre-apocalyptic food in *The Road* illustrates how the connection between the protagonist and the world that does not exist anymore helps him not lose the humanity and moral principles of the people. The food imaginarily reconstructs the lost world and has symbolic meaning. It also intends to exhibit the strategies of conceptualization of food culture degradation in post-humanist discourse. In *Pomyrana* food is perceived as the main purpose of the characters, as the only motivation for any action. Thus, it embodies the functions of control and power, domination in society, and outlines the relationship between people, both personal and social. But as the issue of food shortages progresses, the latter becomes a litmus test for the line between human and animalistic behavior. This boundary is blurred when people radically change their food culture by turning to cannibalism. It is the irresistible feeling of hunger that erases the limits of common sense and leads to the self-destruction of the characters in Antypovych's work.

Thus, the food-related discourse portrayed throughout *The Road* and *Pomyrana* helps to unfold the main concerns about the contemporary world's future and show what cannibalism reveals about human nature and society as a whole.

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ПОСТАПОКАЛІПТИЧНЕ МАЙБУТНЄ ТА МЕЖІ ЛЮДЯНОСТІ: АНАЛІЗ «ДОРОГИ» КОРМАКА МАККАРТІ ТА «ПОМИРАНИ» ТАРАСА АНТИПОВИЧА

У статті досліджуються художні засоби репрезентації деградації практик харчування в постапокаліптичному літературному дискурсі сучасних письменників. Предметом дослідження є стратегії концептуалізації деградації харчової культури в постгуманістичному дискурсі двох романів — «Дорога» Кормака Маккарті та «Помирана» Тараса Антиповича. Використано інтерпретаційний і порівняльний методи. Стаття має на меті зосередитися на екзистенційній проблематиці романів та порівняти художні засоби зображення моральної деградації людства й занепаду харчової культури у творах «Дорога» і «Помирана».

Результати дослідження свідчать, що зображення їжі не лише висвітлює боротьбу за виживання, але також має символічне і метафоричне значення. Обидва романи розкривають проблему продовольчого забезпечення після кінця світу, щоб осмислити колективні тривоги суспільства та пов'язати проблему моральної деградації й виживання людей. Образи їжі використовуються для опису можливих засобів виживання для героїв у постапокаліптичному світі та символізують утрачений світ («Дорога») або відображають внутрішній моральний стан спільноти («Помирана»). Вираз «ти те, що ти споживаєш» має особливе значення для цих текстів: у «Помирані» напівроботизовані люди споживають неістівні речовини, щоб утамувати тваринний голод, зрештою звертаючись до канібалізму, що відображає їхню глибоку моральну деградацію. У «Дорозі» герої обирають голод, а не канібалізм, проводячи час у пошуках доапокаліптичної їжі й шансу на виживання. У цьому випадку канібалізм представлений як лімінальна харчова практика «поганих людей». Новизна статті полягає в порівняльному підході до аналізу специфіки деградації практики харчування та канібалізму в художніх творах, що і розкриває риси героїв, і говорить про сучасне суспільство в цілому. Таким чином, канібалізм служить засобом побудови межі між людським і нелюдським, визначає категорії добра і зла та ілюструє моральні орієнтації героїв у проаналізованих романах.

Ключові слова: постапокаліптична література; антиутопія; канібалізм; голод.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 03.07.2023