Identity building through perpetual choice: lyrical self in Vasyl Stus’s poetry

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Abstract:
Based on the oeuvre of Vasyl Stus, the article investigates the origin of personal identity in Ukrainian poetry of the 20th century. The lyrical self in Stus’s poetry is supposed to be represented by identity building provided through perpetual choice. The article indicates and explores the connection between the choice of lyrical self and the topical concepts of Stus’s poetry, such as alive-death and death-life are. The article states that the lyrical self builds the identity perpetually by choosing beyond or within these concepts.

Keywords:
lyrical self, Vasyl Stus, identity, personal choice, authenticity.
Introduction

As a synthesis of phonic, visual, and semantic hypostasis poetry is based on the certain system of concepts. Probably due to this poetry-reader is constantly trying to catch the speaker’s voice in order to indicate the point. Generally the message and the form of its delivery may be named as a lyrical self, or subject/actor of lyrics.

Lyrical self is the main source to represent the author's worldview. In poetry, lyrical self outlines the specific problems and offers the ways to solve them. Generally it is the union of key-ideas (concepts), integrated into the text by the means of symbols, and a set of tools (rhythm, verse, rhyme, and visual structure of lines). All together it makes lyrical semantics. Consequently, lyrical self is a voice speaking ideas of exact lyrical semantics.

This article is a part of the research on the broader topic entitled Lyrical self in the poetry of V.Stus, O. Zuyevskyi, and M. Atwood. The author assumes that totalitarian conditions in some degree influenced the lyrical self in Ukrainian poetry of 20th century. It is well-represented by Vasyly Stus’s poetry as its lyrical self is strongly connected with the problem of personal and national identity. Probably, identity is a cultural pattern in Ukrainian mythopoetics. It's a measure of creative work and human honesty with other people and own self. In the poetry of Stus the problem of identity is one of the most spoken by lyrical self. Identity belongs there to sacred sphere and is built by perpetual private choice of the lyrical self. The article is an effort to explore in-depth the unique key-concepts shaping the lyrical self in Stus’s poetry.

The Origin of Personal Identity

Personal identity is a complex structure of the self-building which is determined by both external and interior factors. Roman Ingarden remarks that strict identity of human is an ontological principle of personal responsibility (Інгарден, 2010, p. 107). Identity comprises at least three basic patterns which are individual's self-cognition, person's acknowledgment by society, and human's admission to the group (Maryна, 2014, p. 17–18). Personal identity building frequently requires outlining of the links between the human and special communities which may be national, local, professional, or other groups. According to Anthony Smith, national identity as a multidimensional construction requires at least areal, mythological, historical, cultural, economic, and law unity of the community. In stateless countries identity supports the forces tending to become political equivalents of state power. The sense of national identity determines and orients the self in the context of original culture. Opening the culture persons newly open themselves, they find out their authentic self. In most cases the substantial tool to build national identity is ethnical basis of nation building (Смир, 1994, p. 23–30).

Identity means the links between the world-view and different concepts of self. It is created through expression and representation of human choice. Through special values and national culture societies do represent different ways of being human (Тейнноп, 2005, p. 636, 141, 91). Charles Taylor indicates acknowledgment, lack of it, or wrong acknowledgment as basic factors to shape identity. Correspondingly, person is existentially imprisoned and oppressed by the non-recognition and wrong acknowledgment. Identity strongly depends on the person’s relations with others. Impossible isolated identity as a construction originates only through inner and external dialogue with others (Тейнноп, 2004, p. 29–37; Ганюк, 2005, p. 84).

The next important hypostasis of personal identity is authenticity. Authenticity includes the creation, the development, and the disclosure to be related with the opposition to society's rules and to be shaped through the dialogue between the human and the community. Containing the disclosure of the life itself authenticity is an idea of freedom (Тейнноп, 2013, p. 56–57). On the personal level it is chiefly represented by honesty. Being honest with yourself means keeping honesty to your originality. The articulation and representation of originality determine the self of particular person. Honesty to the person's nature is unique element to be actualized by human being. The main principle of authenticity concept is the honesty enforcing moral dimension of the culture. Authenticity makes important the image of person's self-becoming. Moreover, it should be mentioned that people are able to understand themselves and to determine their identity only after having mastered various languages of human communication. Self-understanding is probably reached through personal choice to be provided in different spheres of human life. This choice is mostly represented by pivotal problems, which are existential for concrete person, and by variety of ways to solve them according to unique moral imperative of human (Тейнноп, 2013, p. 28, 36).

To conclude, personal identity is built through the dialogue between the person and the communities. This perpetual conversation is generally supported by searching for authenticity and reaching self-understanding. Having personal moral rules and keeping them strictly in all spheres of existence lead to identity shaping and development of the unique way to be a human.

Personal Choice as Identity-Builder

As a cogitative and a social creature human being seeks for self-understanding through being understood by community. Although this aspiration might be provided various ways, the tendency is that the person tries to achieve the self-understanding despite the hostility of the life conditions. Limited in social activities or imprisoned the human repeatedly merges in the freedom of thought. This inner space allows person to confirm own unicity, to delineate the borders of personal self, and to build the personal identity. Moreover, identity building is often accomplished through creative work by retransmission of the person's inner existence. The handing up of unsteady emotional states and desperate ideas, the perpetual self-filling, and the constant self-search altogether help the poet to build the personal identity and demonstrate it somehow by the form of the lyrical self. Totalitarian regimes of the 20th century showed that the human tends to seek for self-understanding against and despite: against complicated historical conditions and despite the lack of political freedom. Vasyly Stus is an outstanding example of such personality in Ukrainian poetry of the 20th century.

The self-assertion as universal and atemporal practice is related to human desire of self-cognition and personal identity building. It is strongly connected with the personal choice of the way to be a human. The self-assertion as the main principle of Stus's life and creative work shapes the lyrical self of his poetry. The lyrical self of Stus's poetry seeks for the answer of how to stay human in totalitarian conditions of personality eradicating. According to Hannah Arendt (1996), prisoners of the totalitarian camp were the object of experiment provided by totalitarian power as there person’s individuality was exposed to be totally destructed (Арендт, 1996, p. 590). In conditions of public activities expropriation human being is led to submerge into the space of the freedom of thought. Correspondingly, the humaneness declines as much as the person refuses the freedom of thinking. Being simultaneously alienated from the hostile reality and taking this reality into account allow to open the sphere of freedom and to transmit this inner space of...
thought through creative work (Аренц, 2008, p. 52–46). This probably explains why imprisoned Vasyl Stus tried to send his poetry abroad so that to publish the created texts and share them with the human community.

Art itself is the dimension of artist’s freedom. Philippe Sers determines the art as a mechanism of the reasoning, the moral and the philosophical choice. The inner experience of the human living in totalitarian conditions is the kind of the evidence exposure (Серс, 2004, p. 14, 118). In case of Stus the experience of surviving in totalitarian conditions is probably transformed by the poet through the way that allows demonstrating of the reality by the means of the poetry. As Ingarden(1996) states, the literature text is intentional, intersubjective, and transcendental in reference to the feelings of both author and reader. The text itself in contradistinction from its concretely perceived version contains the gaps to be filled in by reader and includes the plan of images which possibly might be completed by interpreter (Інгарен, 1996, p.136–163). For this reason, the poetry of Stus is the colossal source of searching for authenticity which needs being explicated and reviewed through the prism of the lyrical self-development.

Personal identity building is supposed to be the key-tool to resist totalitarian regime. In totalitarian conditions creative work helps human to control the sense and to save personal freedom. The distinctive feature of personality is denial of the common consensus in favor of the subjective attitude to the absolute and inviolable things. That’s why personality building is the choice of the way to achieve this absolute. It requires specific tools to determine the sense and values. In such conditions the sense is originated as a result of the connection between the inspiration and the possibility. The creative work becomes an indicator of artist’s personality to be built (Серс, 2004, p. 187–210).

In USSR the building of personality started since the shaping of nationalistic sense which creation was strictly suppressed by the totalitarian system. Ernest Gellner (1991) claims the importance of nationalistic sense as a substantial element of personal identity in the post-industrial world. Nationalism is a principle in concordance with which political and ethnic units must coincide. In this paradigm nationalistic sense means both indignation caused by nationalism infringed and contentment resulted by nationalism embodied (Геллер, 1991, p. 5–23). It should be noticed that strengthening of the person’s nationalistic sense occurs simultaneously with self-understanding and accepting the reality as it is, through searching the answer for eternal question “Who am i in this world?” Taking into account the life and the oeuvre of Stus might be concluded that to be human in totalitarian condition means for person to choose whether cooperate with the system or resist it. Resistance foresees keeping ethical principles and nationalistic sense, living in the freedom of thought and creating art against and despite.

Totalitarian regimes demonstrated that staying human means behaving the way to correspond the keeping of personal ethical principles which contradict the ideology. The texts of Stus broadcast his inner life to the outside world by balancing on the edge of existence through the search of the self provided as an everlasting renewal and personality building. Therefore identity building means a perpetual self-development which in totalitarian conditions helps person to resist the system and to save the authenticity. Stus’s personal choice of the way to be human was developed at least in four aspects which might be determined as the direct resistance (writing of the letters-appeals, letters-accusations, letters to close people, and poetry creating), the outstanding behavior (indignation concerning the arrests of Ukrainian intellectuals, keeping the personal ethical rules, hunger-strikes, angriness caused by prison-workers’ behavior, and claim for justice), the freethinking provided in creative work (poetry, diary, and correspondence), and the connection with the free world (delivery of the texts abroad in order to have them published there).

In order to outline the personal choice of lyrical self in Stus’s poetry it should be noticed that his texts have specific character. For instance, Yuriy Shevelov (1987) defines Stus’s texts as the non-program poetry reflecting the thoughts and feelings in the process of their shaping. The treasure of such poetry is in the inconstancy of the feelings of lyrical self. The lyrics of Stus are produced by the shifting from the observed world to the poet’s inner feeling. The topics and motives are only the exits to the inner world, to the diary of the soul, to the unsent letters about interior world of Stus’s personality. The poorer external world is, the more separated and distinguished become the substantial, spiritual and mental aspects of lyrical self, the more noticeable appear the dynamics of psychical motions and the richness of transformed thoughts and moods (Шевелов, 1987, p. 371–372).

Having a closer look at Stus’s poetry reader might find out that it contains several typical motives to be varied from text to text accordingly to the emotional state of the lyrical self. All of these motives are connected to identity shaping. In this part of the article the attention should be paid to the motives which are related to the personal choice provided by lyrical self. The first and the strongest motif of Stus’s poetry is the free will of doom acceptance. For example, in the poetry (1) (“The broken branch of the evening is trembling…”): “Only you consecrate the world… “): “Only you are its precursor” (Стус, 2010, p. 98).

Being sure that the way is right gives lyrical self the strength to keep on the self building. This motif is demonstrated, for instance, in (37) (“Only you make my heart shout. / Only you give me force go / ahead the world storm, / Only You, only You”) (Стус, 2010, p. 60).
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The lyrical self in Stus’s poetry is supposed to be beyond or within the observed reality. This principle is realized by the concepts which might be entitled as alive-death and dead-life. As a result of perpetual choice, lyrical self fluctuates between alive-death and dead-life. These concepts are strongly related to the motif of being honest with own self. It is transformed into different symbols such as a mirror, a fluctuating branch, or external movement. For instance, in (3) (“Hundred of mirrors are directed to me”) the mirror is a means to provide the self-reflection: “Hundred of mirrors are directed to me / exactly on my solitude and voicelessness. / Are you there? Are you really there? Maybe / not. sure, you are not / …. Who are you? Alive or dead? Or maybe / both alive and dead and being yourself?” (Cryc, 2010, p. 14). Moreover, the motif of fluctuation (not a branch but the pine-tree) is supposed to be a vision of Ukraine’s future, the important goal to be achieved through the accepting of the person’s doom: (12) (“The pine-tree emerged as a ship...”) “But you are already on opposite side, beyond the edge / where the frail phantom is being trembled. / There is Ukraine. Beyond. / Left turn from heart. Cause of young grief / pine-tree emerges through the light of night ship. / God whispers thirstily: I will pay you back!” (Cryc, 2010, p. 24).

The ability to watch out the space from beyond the daily reality symbolizes some sort of alternative existence to be achieved through the constant movement. It might be presented by the water flow or diving into space of thought. In (28) (“The water whimpers...”) the water appears as a metaphor of movement: “The water whimpers. The same way time is running / approximating me to the time term. / Away from memories – observed is only blackness of the holes. / The road’s free of mines – please go! / The blessed are climbing / and glorified the native land” (Cryc, 2010, p. 48). Time rids the person of the memories and allows reviewing of the things: the observer is located beyond the reality, in the alternative space, out of the edge. Correspondingly existence is determined as a constant moving beyond or within the world.

Lyrical self is constantly exploring the inner space of personal thought. For instance, in (44) (“Meanwhile reading Yasunari Kawabata”) the goal of this movement is ideal middle located in the space of thought and self-understanding: “Spread, my soul, / for four tattami, / And don’t bend cause of strokes / and don’t close yourself with the hands. / Although you have two borders / the middle is true. / The enemy fails guessing / whether young this truth is or mature. / In the middle the trunk of the years, / on the sides their top. / In the middle the eternal trace is / from the cradle to death” (Cryc, 2010, p. 70). Reaching the desired middle is the destination of identity building, the best expectation of self-becoming.

The concepts of alive-death and dead-life probably allow finding the way of identity creation. Stus’s lyrical self accepts the death as a logical way to exist. For example, in (42) (“It’s great I don’t afraid of death...”) the concept of alive-death is supported by the motif of eternal return: “My nation, I’ll come back to you / in death I turn to life / my face is not evil, it’s just afflicted. / As a son I will bow down you / and honestly will stare into your eyes / and in the death I’ll be connected with my native land” (Cryc, 2010, p. 66). In (90) (“How strongly want die!”) lyrical self wishes to die in order to reach the alternative reality: “How strongly want die! / For silence avoiding, / for shout escaping... Being unnoticed, to reach / beyond the expectation border, / beyond the horizon of impossibility, / beyond the wall of humility, / beyond the grating of madness, / beyond the fierceness, the borders, / beyond the vines of appeals” (Cryc, 2010, p.154, 156).

The motif of consciousness choice of death is connected with the concept of everlasting movement. For instance, in (140) (“Today is the...”)
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Budowanie tożsamości poprzez nieustanny wybór. „Ja” liryczne w poezji Wasyla Stusa.

Streszczenie:
Opierając się na przykładzie Wasyla Stusa, w artykule przedmiotem badania uczyniono genię tożsamości jednostkowej w dwudziestościwowej poezji ukraińskiej. „Ja” liryczne w poezji Stusa wydaje się być reprezentowane przez tożsamość kształtowaną w wyniku nieustannych wyborów. W artykule wskazuje się na związek między wyborem dokonywanym przez podmiot a głównymi pojęciami obecnymi w poezji Wasyla Stusa, takimi jak żywy-martwy czy śmierć-życie. Zakłada się przy tym, że podmiot nieustannie buduje swą tożsamość wybierając między tymi pojęciami.

Słowa kluczowe:
„Ja” liryczne, Wasyl Stus, tożsamość, wolny wybór, autentyczność.