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**THE IMAGE OF THE WAY IN THE POETRY BOOK
'POEMS FROM THE LOOPHOLE' BY MAKSYM KRYVTSOV**

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*The article presents a comprehensive study of the poetic world of Maksym 'Dali' Kryvtsov – a soldier-poet and representative of the New Executed Renaissance who was killed in the war in January 2024. Based on his poetry book *Poems from the Loophole*, the research analyzes the image of the road and the lyrical hero's path, as well as the functioning of the traveller figure, which emerge as key concepts shaping both the structure and semantic depth of Kryvtsov's lyrical narrative. **The purpose** of the study is to identify the specific features of the poetic modelling of the road and the traveller figure in Kryvtsov's poems. **The methodology** combines structural-semantic analysis of poetic texts, elements of hermeneutics, and intertextual analysis. This approach makes it possible to reveal the compositional features of the author's poetics, uncover deeper semantic layers of war poetry, and trace the transformation of the monomyth in the context of contemporary warfare. **The results** of the study show that the images of the road and the traveller acquire multidimensionality. The lyrical hero becomes a warrior, a witness, and a wanderer moving between two worlds – the living and the dead, the sacred and the profane. War is interpreted as a road that performs the functions of departure, initiation, and the (im)possibility of return, while Christian images – God, Mary, the saints – acquire new symbolic roles embedded in the everyday reality of trench life. Kryvtsov's poetry is marked by the remythologization of sacred motifs, giving the war experience a metaphysical dimension, and by the fragmentary, discontinuous structure of his poems, which reflects the psychological nature of wartime existence. **The scientific novelty** of the study lies in the fact that it provides the first comprehensive literary analysis of the road as a central conceptual element in the poetic world of Maksym "Dali" Kryvtsov and defines its key role in shaping the modern image of the traveller in Ukrainian war poetry. **The practical significance** of the research lies in its applicability to the study of contemporary Ukrainian war literature, the teaching of literary studies, and the formation of a corpus of texts representing the New Executed Renaissance. The article also contributes to a broader understanding of the role of the soldier-poet in the contemporary Ukrainian cultural space.*

Key words: *road, traveller, Maksym Kryvtsov, monomyth, remythologization, New Executed Renaissance, poetry, road movie, vizualisation, image, corporelity.*

In Ukrainian literature during the period of full-scale war, texts written by combatants take on particular significance. Their poetry depicts experiences that can't be recreated from an observer's perspective – experiences of being on the edge of death, memory, and spiritual growth. One of the important voices of this time was Maksym 'Dali' Kryvtsov, a poet and warrior. His book 'Poems from the Loopholes' combined elements of diary-like truthfulness, sacred thinking, and a mythopoetic vision of the modern world.

One of the recurring images in Kryvtsov's poetic world is the road – a universal metaphor for human existence, which takes on particular intensity and multidimensionality in the context of war. The road appears not only as a physical space for movement, but as an existential and spiritual path where the lyrical hero makes his own journey — from correction to initiation, from meeting God to meeting death, from the desire to return to its potential impossibility. Kryvtsov's image of the road takes on the functions of a sacred path, a road of war, a road of memory, and at the same time – a road between two worlds: the living and the dead.

In this context, the lyrical hero appears as a traveller who moves not only topographically, but above all spiritually. His path is determined by war, but at the same time transcends its boundaries, drawing on a rich complex of biblical, mythological, cultural and autobiographical meanings. The image of the road is one of the oldest and most significant universals of world culture. The road symbolises physical movement, inner transformation, and the existential dynamics of a person who is on a path of knowledge, trials, and development. In biblical, ancient, medieval and modern traditions, the road symbolises not only a journey, but also an existential choice, a search for truth, a meeting with God, a transition between two worlds. In the Holy Scriptures, we read: 'Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act; he will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday' (Psalm 36:5-6). Travel was perceived not only as movement in space, but as a spiritual practice, a way to know and challenge yourself. The traveling lifestyle became a characteristic of entire social groups who practiced imitating Christ in this way, appealing to the image of God the traveller [14]. In the 21st century, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, this symbol takes on a new meaning: the road becomes a space of survival, struggle, death, and spiritual renewal. This is particularly evident in the poems of Maksym 'Dali' Kryvtsov, whose texts are written from the perspective of a direct participant in the war.

A traveller, a wanderer – this is one way of existing as a person. Gabriel Marcel wrote that, at first view, nothing could seem more irrational than com-

bining the existence of some stable earthly order with a position of consciousness that can be described as a journey, that is, with the fundamental situation of a traveller [12, 11]. The entire history of human development is connected with the road. The road is also an appointment with good and evil, with danger, a search for truth, a path to be alone and find those who can walk beside you, a daily and ontological choice, an opportunity to select. In fact, the road can be called a symbol of all human life. That is why it is present in many works of art, literature and cinema. It takes on a special meaning in texts of modern Ukrainian literature dealing with the themes of war, evacuation and refugees.

In Maksym Kryvtsov's poetry, the road is often the road of war, and the traveller is a civilian who has found himself in this war. The wanderer did not choose whom to meet on the way, with whom to walk alongside, and does not know whether he will complete his journey or how he will do so. This is not surprising, since the author himself has been on the front lines since 2014, and with the start of the full-scale invasion, he rejoined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

In 2023, his first book of poetry, 'Poems from the Loopholes', was published. On his Facebook page on 29 December 2023, the author wrote: 'It's the book's birthday! The work on the book took more than a year. Since then, I have replaced more than half of the poems that were originally there' [10]. It was included in PEN Ukraine's list of the best Ukrainian books of 2023. The poet died on 7 January 2024. The second edition of 'Poems from the Loopholes' was published in the same year. And in 2025, the book 'On the Minefield of Memory' was published, which included Maxim Kryvtsov's diaries, essays and short stories, as well as a synopsis of a novel that will never be completed. He is one of those writers we call the authors of the New Executed Renaissance. His life ended in January 2024, but his texts live on in the pages of books and in songs based on his words.

In the introduction to the edition 'On the Minefield of Memory', editor Valery Puzik mentions that Maxim Kryvtsov received dozens of rejections from publishers at one time, and once joked: 'I guess I need to die, and then I'll become a classic. Oh no,' he laughed, 'better to die in the war, then they'll definitely publish the book' [10, 9]. At the end of 2022, the publishing house Nash Format took on the poetry book of the warrior-poet. The author came up with the title in 2015 in Pisky, while recording himself reading his poems on camera. 'Maksym recorded them while literally sitting in front of a loophole. Light through the hole fell on the young man's tired face, behind him a brick wall, a gun...' [10, 10].

This poetry is becoming the subject of such literary research. Halyna Matusiak focuses on the mythological scenarios in the book 'Poems from the Loopholes,' the intertextual codes, and identifies the neo-mythological themes. The researcher notes that "the author has a neo-mythological type of

thinking, which manifests itself in the interpretation of contemporary reality through the prism of mythology using the technique of resemantisation. The poet mostly remythologises biblical scenarios of the beginning and the end with corresponding images, motifs, and plots, applying their military arrangement. The most frequently recurrent is the mythological narrative of the end, reflected in the recurring motif of death and the multifaceted image of God, who is, on the one hand, transcendent and omnipotent, and on the other hand, humanly corporeal and vulnerable. The book 'Poems from the Loopholes' presents a narrative of love rooted in the biblical idea of messianism [13].

Nadiya Havryliuk points out the poet's free verse forms: 'Maksym Kryvtsov's free verse is clearly metonymic: the poet shows the whole picture by showing its parts. This "atomised" approach is dictated both by the destructive nature of war (when a person can be torn to pieces at any moment – arms, legs, head) and by the human psyche's need to focus on details so that the description does not become mechanical, dry statistics' [4].

Yurii Kovaliv argues that the problem of identification goes above and beyond the specific identity that feels unity with the world, an integral part of its diversity. Without falling into agnosticism, the poet used apophatic techniques to figure out who he really was and was not, revealing his potential. The literary critic also draws attention to free verse of various configurations from the unfolding of an epic plot in balanced syntactic structures with a 'prosaic' presentation to the expressionistic 'quantisation' of the text with impulsive stringing together of intonational and syntactic blocks, ending with a cadence. In the first case, the autological type of versification prevails, and the genre features of the novella come to the fore, while in the second case, the metalogical type prevails. Sometimes the author combined both types of free verse [6].

Yulia Vyshynska writes about how Kryvtsov's poetry constructs the space-time of memory. Memory in his poems is rooted in the names of the dead, in the toponyms of destroyed Ukrainian cities, in the numbers of nameless graves. Through images of fields, sunflowers, water, black and red colours, the poet creates a symbolic chronotope of war – a space between life and death where words are born. The study demonstrates how these images form a poetic map of the Ukrainian experience of war and collective memory [2].

The author had this to say about his book: 'The book will be fun: it'll have quirks like poems written down, photos from the war, and white pages where you can write your own poem or draw your own illustration. Because this book isn't mine — it's yours. All the words belong to someone else. All the experiences are just circumstances' [7].

Maksym Kryvtsov's book 'Poems from the Loopholes' is a story about war from someone who's in it, someone who sees it from the inside, someone

who becomes a traveller in it and through it, so this road often reminds one of the Cross Road, where at each station there are those you can help and those you cannot reach in time:

*On the streets and in the fields
new Golgothas appeared
only with bullets instead of nails
only with artillery instead of spears [9, 14]
Maria drew
Jesus' blood on his forehead:
Jesus with a mechanised device,
the time of applying the tourniquet
thirty-third year
since the birth of Christ. [9, 23]*

Galina Matusyak notes that in the book 'Poems from the Loopholes,' Maksym Kryvtsov creates a unique philosophy of messianism, his testament of love through self-sacrifice, saving others at the cost of his own life, giving war a sacred significance. In his poems, mythological scenarios appear as 'an organisational element of the artistic world' [13, 69]. Indeed, the collection contains many Christian themes, motifs and images, and they take on special significance when we remember that the poet died at the age of 33 – the age of Christ. In one interview, the author said: 'I rarely think about my age. Or even the date, day of the week, or month. Everything is different here. There is no age, no time. What matters is what will be at the end' [12].

In the Bible, we can find many episodes about Christ's travels and the journeys of his disciples. Christ himself said that he was the way, the truth, and the life. The road was and is a place where important religious events take place. Two disciples walked with the risen Lord to Emmaus, not realising who was walking with them. Then they returned to Jerusalem by the same road, telling how Jesus had appeared to them while breaking bread. Saint Paul, when he was still called Saul, met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Later, as the apostle to the pagans, he travelled the roads of the Roman Empire and became one of the great men whose life was spent on the road [3]. In Maksym Kryvtsov's poems, God travels from trench to trench, looks into loopholes, walks through cities:

*The Lord walks along the Milky Way
with a fishing rod,
The Lord walks along the Milky Way
with nets [9, 124].
And God entered the city [9, 91]
The city lies
The Lord walks through the city [9, 56]
The word walks
and its flash*

is seen by the enemy
who moves into attack [9, 57]

Mary, saints, and the three kings appear in the poems, keeping their holiness, but in war everything is different:

I go into the dugout cell
light a trench candle
behind tall leafy trees [9, 50].

There is no familiar order with churches, icons, holidays, no familiar life where everything was clear and understandable, so they are forced to act differently:

So Mary cries
at the posts and in the trenches
and the three kings carry gunpowder, body armour, and a sapper [9, 58].

Mary digs trenches, the Cherubims bring ammunition, John baptises with gunpowder, Peter detonates pontoon bridges, Matthew loads the cannon. The image of five fish and five loaves of bread is also repeated, only they are black, meaning they are not about life, but about death. And the church itself is a place where God hears you and you hear Him, but it can be in a trench, in a forest, or on a burnt-out site:

I will enter this church
made of earth and water and glass
to commune with the air [9, 146]

God does not lose his sanctity in poetry, despite the fact that he does what humans do in the profane world: 'he can cry, speak, write, fish, feel loneliness, eat pancakes, hug and pray. He is multifaceted: Lord of the forest, Lord of the automatic grenade launcher, Lord of dreams. The ambivalence of this image lies in his simultaneous omnipotence and vulnerability: in M. Kryvtsov's poem, God can watch over everyone without blinking, but he can also get lost like a child and lose his slippers' [13]. This is not about a simplified perception of God, but about trying to be as close to Him as possible in order to feel His support and protection, to realise that He is everywhere, wherever the traveller may be. In an interview with Natalya Kornienko, the poet said: 'Most often, He can be found in the midst of silence. God is the water you take with you on a mission, and there is never enough of it. God is a protein bar that you eat while waiting out shelling in a trench. God is black, dry sunflowers that almost hide you from view. But most of all, God is returning' [9]. Returning appears from time to time in his poetry, but there are different ways of returning:

...I will come, wait for me mum [9, 110]
I will come
wait [9, 111]

I remember
how I returned from rotation [9, 141]
The boys will go home
to the light and to memory [9, 181]

Everyone dreams about returning home, to their former life, to peace – both the living and the dead. And if not in real life, then at least in memories:

From the images in my grandmother's house,
childhood gazes back at me.
Just come [9, 125]

The lyrical hero speaks about himself and himself on this journey as follows:

I will become
a traveller [9, 62]
I am a fish walking on land [9, 127]
If war
is a film
then it doesn't have to be horror
in my case
it's a road movie [9, 186]

A road movie is a travel film in which the plot is based on the principle of a journey that changes the hero [15]. This plot is not new; we can find it, for example, in folk tales, where the hero passes through a way of initiation. Road movies about war are always about change, but not always about life, rather about death – those who were with you yesterday, and on the way you meet not only the living, but also the dead, whom you did not have time to reach, who did not have time to reach you.

War changes the circumstances of the lyrical hero's journey. It is not he who chooses his path, but war: 'You cannot escape war' [9, 142].

I looked out of the train window
calmly and quietly
the journey
called war
continued [9, 142]

The war determines his routes, where and whom he will meet, what the way itself will be like. The road passing by the field of memory, the road between the dead, the road leading from the world of the living to the world of the dead, inevitable as life and death:

I drive past the black sea of sunflowers [9, 25]
that have fallen to the ground of
roads
between the ghosts
of the dead and the alive [9, 38]

I walk down a black street
 towards a black light
 black cars
 drive out onto a black highway [9, 41]
 you walk here bodies and bodies [9, 56]
 like invisible boys in worn-out camouflage
 they will come to take him away
 to lead him to another field
 strewn with poppies and cornflowers [9, 65]

The hero of the poem becomes a witness how the souls take a new path, while their bodies stay on his way:

Above the roads, smoke-smoke,
 I see souls overcoming the march,
 and this city landscape disappears
 like those rings on the water
 Here, one has joined the ranks
 bodies burn in the gardens
 smoke from the roads takes away the fog:
 the crematorium of old grass [9, 90].

This betweenness – that of peace and war, life and death – is a characteristic of the traveller Maksym Kryvtsov, who clearly understands that war is not a tourist trip or a talk show; it requires an intelligent reading of oneself as a text ('the world is poisonous / like methane'), without putting uncharacteristic, often thoughtless labels on it — like saying it's 'wonderful / and romantic.' All kinds of 'talk shows / War / on TV Oblivion not only horribly replace reality with virtual reality, but also dangerously manipulate viewers. Avoiding journalistic passages, the poet advised, not without irony, to remove the veil from our eyes: 'clap your hands while you still have them / tap your feet while you still have them' ('Welcome everyone to the most terrible talk show...').

Any falseness is not acceptable, because 'War smells of words / smells of unborn children / and born paths / oceans of gunpowder'. In the road movie, the hero's journey is without choice. The road of the lyrical hero is the road of defending his native land, liberating it from invaders and occupiers, protecting those who cannot protect themselves. And this road, which the author, who has been fighting since 2014, invites his readers to take, is well recognisable: we recognise the road the lyrical hero is travelling, the burned cities he passes or stops in, the events that may not be events, but rather hints and allusions. And Campbell's 'The hero dies in the present but is reborn for eternity as a perfect, universal, generalised image' [5, 25] is lived here and now, because here we are no longer talking about the lyrical hero, but about his creator, a recipient of the Order of Merit, III degree (posthumously), whose journey ended on 7 January 2024 on the Kharkiv front line (according

to his comrades, the poet died as a result of shelling in a dugout together with his cat).

Joseph Campbell identified three acts in any story about heroic adventures: the journey (the hero, of his own free will or under pressure from circumstances, leaves his familiar world and sets off on a journey), initiation (overcoming obstacles, changing status), return (the changed hero, endowed with new qualities) [5, 34]. 'The hero is a man or woman who has managed to break through personal and local historical limitations and become a universally recognised, universally accepted figure. The visions, ideas and insights of such a person are pure because they come from the primary, unclouded sources of human life and thought' [5, 25]. In an interview with Nataliya Korniyenko, the poet said: 'I probably don't know anything at all. But here you don't need to know. Here you just have to. Here, it is a matter of being or not being, existing or not existing, breathing or suffocating. That is why I am at war' [12]. Similarly, for his lyrical hero, this is an inevitable choice, a choice without choice, if you want to live and for others to live. And the road on which he begins to feel the contrast between the war and peace, the importance of being here and now. The road on which the hero changes, on which he begins to see, feel, and hear what was not given to him before: God, the souls of those who died in the war going to heaven, the voice of trees and fields, himself:

I listened attentively,
looked down,
and saw my legs, a stalk.
I passed my hand over my face,
and dry, empty seeds scattered.
I will stay with you, guys,
I ask the sunflowers,
and you haven't gone anywhere,
they reply [9, 95].

The hero becomes part of these roads between minefields, between fields of memory, between smoke and fog, in which God again shares five loaves and five fish, in which

I crash into walls
is this hope
or are these actually fragments of me [9, 128].

On the one hand, there is faith in return, because every road movie presupposes it, it is written in the monomyth as obligatory and inevitable, and on the other hand, there is a premonition that the hero stays here forever, that he becomes part of the field or the landing, that he becomes part of those fogs in which souls slowly rise to the sky. Yes, you are given extraordinary strength:

Because you have to go
because the vehicle won't get through
because you want to go back and dry your things over the stove
(...)
tomorrow you have to go again
because the vehicle
won't get through [9, 121-122].

But extraordinary strength does not mean immortality.

The author demonstrates several roads of war: the path of God, the path of the lyrical hero, and the paths of others whom the lyrical hero saw or was not destined to see. These are the paths of memories of civilian life, the path of war, and the path as a transition between the world of the living and the dead. What is important on this road are those you meet, those who accompany you, those you are accompanied by, those you meet, those you see, those you look at and what you look at. The author of these poetic texts has found such a companion in recent months – a huge ginger cat 'like dry August hay'.

In Maksym Kryvtsov's poetry, the path is the road of war, which is not chosen but which one must take because of its inevitability; the road of challenges, which becomes a path of initiation; the sacred road, on which God, Mary, and the saints are present; a road of transition, leading between life and death; a road of memory, where the living meet the dead; a road of return, which may never be reached.

Kryvtsov creates a unique imagery: God is not far away here, but is present on the road of war, also a traveller. He walks right next to the soldier, while Mary digs trenches, cherubs carry ammunition, and Saint Peter blows up bridges. It's an attempt to make the most terrifying experience sacred, to find God where you begin to doubt his existence. The road is not just a path of travel, but a place where the dead lie with the living, souls take their own path, and the lyrical hero feels the fragility of the boundary. Here, the road becomes the border between two worlds, and the hero is a spectator of their crossing. The road is also an internal transformation, as in the classic monomyth. The road also absorbs, making the lyrical hero part of the landscape of war. The lyrical hero calls his path a road movie, in which the journey inevitably changes the hero. In war, this change is fundamental, and the hero's path is not a choice; the scenes are filmed by reality itself, and the ending is rarely a happy one. The road becomes the main organising symbol of the lyrical hero's poetic world: spiritual, existential, sacred, borderline.

The traveller in Maksym Kryvtsov's poetry is a person who has left his civilian life in the past, choosing the path of war. This path is another, because it is chosen consciously not out of desire, but out of necessity. We hear the voice of a warrior-poet who sees and feels God like no one else, who hears Mary, the apostles, and the saints coming to his help, who listens to the voices of the living and the dead, who is able to marvel at what he sees

around him, who hears the horror of war: 'It's amazing when you're sitting in a place where you can't show yourself because the enemy is close and your defences are very conditional, and your comrade suddenly says, 'Look, a hoopoe is eating a mole cricket.' These are such a bird and a beetle. The people who greeted us with applause in Balakliya were impressive. It was one of the best days of my life. The hardest thing is falling asleep. And also realising what horrors may await ahead...' [9]. These poems are filled with the desire to go through the war with dignity, not to lose oneself and to preserve what has been found on this path in memory and words, and the obligatory return with the last frame of the road movie.

The poet creates a philosophy of the road, in which war is not just an accident, but an ontological state. The road defines the hero, reveals him and at the same time destroys him. It is a path from which the traveller may not return – and Kryvtsov himself becomes proof that 'return' often takes place only in words, in memory, in text.

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ОБРАЗ ДОРОГИ В ПОЕТИЧНІЙ ЗБІРЦІ МАКСИМА КРИВЦОВА «ВІРШІ З БІЙНИЦІ»

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Статтю присвячено комплексному дослідженню поетичного світу Максима «Далі» Кривцова – поета-воїна та представника Нового розстріляного відродження, який загинув на війні у січні 2024 року. На матеріалі збірки «Вірші з бійниці» аналізується образ дороги, шляху ліричного героя, а також функціонування образу подорожнього, що у поетичному дискурсі Кривцова постають ключовими у визначенні структури та смислового наповнення ліричного наративу. Метою дослідження є виявлення особливостей поетичного моделювання дороги та образу подорожнього у творчості Максима Кривцова. Методи дослідження ґрунтуються на поєднанні структурно-семантичного аналізу поетичного тексту, елементів герменевтики та інтертекстуального методу. Застосування цих методів дозволило розкрити композиційні особливості поезики текстів, виявити глибинні смислові рівні воєнної лірики та простежити трансформацію мономіфу в умовах сучасної війни. Результати дослідження показують, що образ подорожнього, дороги набувають багатовимірності. Ліричний герой є воїном, свідком, мандрівником між двома світами — живих і мертвих, між сакральним і профанним. Війна осмислюється як дорога, що виконує функції виправи, ініціації та (не)можливого повернення, а християнські образи - Бог, Марія, святі - набувають нової символічної ролі, співприсутньої у повсякденності окопного життя. У поезії домінує реміфологізація сакральних мотивів, що надає досвіду війни метафізичного виміру, а вірші Кривцова

вирізняються фрагментарністю, уривчастю, що відтворюють психологічну природу воєнного досвіду. **Наукова новизна** полягає в тому, що у статті **вперше** здійснено комплексне літературознавче осмислення образу дороги як центрального концепту поетичного світу Максима «Далі» Кривцова та визначено його ключову роль у формуванні сучасного образу подорожнього у воєнній ліриці. **Практичне значення дослідження** полягає у можливості використання його результатів у вивченні новітньої української воєнної літератури, у викладанні літературознавчих дисциплін, а також у формуванні корпусу текстів, що репрезентують Нове розстріляне відродження. Стаття також сприяє подальшому осмисленню ролі поета-воїна у сучасному українському культурному просторі.

Ключові слова: дорога, подорожній, Максим Кривцов, мономіф, реміфологізація, Нове розстріляне відродження, роудмуві, візуалізація, образ, тілесність.