

Coloniality, (Social) Abjection, and Reforms in Andrii Liubka's Post-Euromaidan Prose

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I. Introduction

The 2013-14 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, also known as the Euromaidan, ousted the corrupt President Viktor Yanukovich and his ruling political party (“Party of Regions”) from office and led to demands for transparent, corruption-free, democratic governing principles, calling for an array of reforms in the public sector to achieve these goals. Civic activists proclaimed: only with such reforms “will people in Ukraine be genuinely living in dignity and able to call their ‘Revolution of Dignity’ a success.”¹ Topics of governance, democratic reforms, and the need to expose and fight corruption are nowadays prevalent in the cultural sphere, inasmuch as many representatives of the Ukrainian cultural elite (authors, journalists, artists, musicians) were themselves part of the Euromaidan movement. Thus, it is no coincidence that Halyna Kruk, a Ukrainian poet and literary critic, observes a special sensitivity to and awareness of current sociocultural and political situations in contemporary Ukrainian literature.² Indeed, post-Euromaidan literature tends to address the changing and unsettling nature of Ukrainian society as the country shifts from the Soviet model to Western democracy. Another remarkable feature of some contemporary Ukrainian authors is their particular literary sensibility—we may call it a neo-

¹ Johann, “Opinion: Revolution of dignity in Ukraine,” para. 8. For more on the Euromaidan, see, for instance, Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 66-98.

² Kruk, “Introduction,” 13.

Gothic aesthetic.³ As Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky point out in their preface to a recent anthology of Ukrainian poetry devoted to the theme of war stemming from the Russian military aggression in Ukraine’s East, the images of death, uncanniness, liminality, chaos, tragedy, nightmare, and disfiguration resurface in the works of both new and established poets, who are important voices on the post-Euromaidan Ukrainian literary scene.⁴ While Maksymchuk and Rosochinsky speak of the poetry, the same applies to the post-Euromaidan prose, where many authors draw on a variety of speculative and horror genres to introduce sociopolitical commentary.⁵ A notable example is Andrii Liubka’s recent and much-discussed novel *Karbid* (*Carbide*, published in 2015), which presents, through a mixture of neo-Gothic, adventure, and picaresque elements, an apt examination of the European integration initiative—one of the major expected outcomes of the proposed reforms in Ukraine.

Liubka is a young but well-established and active author on the contemporary Ukrainian literary scene. He sets most of his fiction and creative non-fiction in the same location—his native Transcarpathia (or Zakarpattia region), Ukraine’s western borderland. While the novel *Carbide* is Liubka’s most known work, having being shortlisted for two prestigious literary awards (BBC Ukrainian Book of the Year 2015 and the ANGELUS Central European Literature Award in 2017

³ The Gothic literary movement spans over three hundred years and is marked by anti-realism, the presence of horror, and an obsession with excess. The Gothic discourse originated in late eighteenth-century Britain and spread throughout the world, especially during the “long nineteenth century.” The Gothic historically served as a platform for exploring social fears and anxieties that were too controversial to be addressed directly. Neo-Gothicism (or New/contemporary Gothic, as it is also called in scholarship) refers to the post-modern era (starting from the 1970s), and, if anything, is marked by even greater exaggeration, excess, perversion, and transgression than before; these features project sociopolitical, cultural, and post-colonial sensibilities of the contemporary globalized world. For a survey of the Gothic literary movement and its various modes, shifts, and hybrid forms, see, for instance, Botting, *Gothic*. On the neo-Gothic aesthetics specifically, see Art History Archive, “Gothic & Neo-Gothic Etymology.”

⁴ See Maksymchuk and Rosochinsky, “Preface.”

⁵ To offer just a few examples, a neo-Gothic aesthetic may be seen in the following representative selection of the contemporary Ukrainian prose: Sofiia Andrukhovych (*Feliks Avstriia* [Felix Austria], 2015), discussed in this special issue of *CSP*; Dmytro Bilyi (*Kabinet doktora Kalihusy* [The Cabinet of Dr. Kalihus], 2018), subtitled as a “neo-Gothic thriller” and referencing, intertextually, a 1920 German horror film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; or Illarion Pavluik (*Bilyi popil* [White Ashes], 2018) who draws on Nikolai Gogol/Mykola Hohol’s Gothic novella *Vii* (1835).

for its Polish translation), Liubka also published several collections of short prose and poetry.⁶ Liubka's prose projects a keen interest in local traditions and a multicultural essence of Transcarpathia—a region near the state border that physically and metaphorically separates Ukraine from the countries in the European Union. Most of Liubka's recent works deal with Transcarpathia's micrological sociopolitical history, exploring both its past and present, including the formative post-Euromaidan years. However, it is Liubka's novel *Carbide* that brings this topic to the fore, elaborating, creatively, on the first year of Ukraine's post-Euromaidan transition, its long-anticipated reforms, and the European response to these changes.⁷

Carbide takes place in the imagined western Ukrainian town of Vedmediv in Transcarpathia. Vedmediv is portrayed as a door to Europe in the novel because it borders three countries that recently became part of the European Union: Hungary, Romania, and the Slovak Republic. However, despite the modern rhetoric of European integration and the opening of borders, organized crime groups in Vedmediv show a desire for even *stronger* borders that would facilitate smuggling and expand the shadow economy. Liubka's novel presents this paradox in a playful manner when a group of criminal individuals exploit a reformist idea of the novel's protagonist—a naïve but patriotic high school history teacher, Mykhailo Oleksiiovych. Nicknamed Karbid (i.e., Carbide) by his students for his foul smell (a reference to “carbide” chemical compounds), the protagonist prefers to call himself by a different name—Tys—after the name of the river Tysa that runs through Vedmediv. By taking the name of a river, Tys follows the Roman

⁶ These include *Kimnata dlia pechali* (*A Room for One's Sorrow*, 2016), which contains eleven short stories linked by the theme of solitude; *Saudade* (2017), which features over 60 one- to three-page reflective non-fiction essays, memoirs, and travelogues; and most recently, *Killer+* (2018), a revised and expanded edition of his collection of stories from 2012.

⁷ In September 2018, Liubka published his latest novel, *Tvii pohliad, Chio-Chio-San* (*Your Eyes, Chio-Chio San*, 2018), which continues some of the sociopolitical themes and critiques that he introduced in *Carbide*, for example, corruption and lawlessness. The novel's blurb informs us that a local judge, driving under intoxication, runs his SUV into a young woman at a pedestrian crossing, killing her, and easily escapes punishment due to his connections in the corrupt governmental and oligarchic circle.

emperor Tiberius whose given name “of the [river] Tiber” and patriotic deeds he wants to emulate. Tys is depicted as a contemporary Ukrainian Don Quixote, an idealistic fool with a head in the clouds and not in touch with reality (following Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s famous Renaissance personage). As a result, his ideas are either ignored or openly scorned by his wife Marichka, his students, and the local male population of Vedmediv, with whom he frequents bars.

One of Tys’s constant worries, stemming from his Quixotic patriotism, is the slow efforts of Ukrainian politicians to open borders to Europe after the Euromaidan victory. Hence, given Vedmediv’s proximity to the EU, Tys comes up with an idea to build an underground passage through which Ukrainians could experience Europe before EU membership has been officially granted to Ukraine.⁸ He preserves enough rational thinking to understand that such a project needs the support of local governance and is too difficult to pull off on his own. Therefore, Tys engages first his former schoolmate, nicknamed Ikar (after Icarus in Greek mythology), and later with Icarus’s help, a number of people in local business and administration to launch this initiative. This group of individuals in power jump at Tys’s idea, duping him into believing they will follow his patriotic motivations, but all of them are also local contrabandists who wish for nothing but to exploit Tys’s idea for their own monetary benefit. They come up with a plan to build a landmark on the Vedmediv side of the tunnel—a fountain that they name “Union with Europe”—to seemingly underscore Tys’s patriotic premise. In reality, however, they care nothing about Tys’s nationalistic aspirations and simply plan for the fountain to mask the entrance to the tunnel and

⁸ “[...] поволі [...] крок за кроком, громадянин за громадянином [...] всі українці перейдуть за кордон і таким чином євроінтегруються! А коли всі українці опиняться в ЄС, то в нещасних євробюрократів уже не залишиться варіантів, вони змушені будуть прийняти Україну в Європейський Союз! Так, безумовно, ніхто ще так не робив, але нічого, це буде наш, особливий шлях!” “[...] slowly [...] step-by-step, citizen after citizen [...], all Ukrainians will cross the border [via the underground tunnel] and integrate themselves into Europe! And when all Ukrainians find their way to Europe, then the poor EU bureaucrats won’t have any other option but to accept Ukraine into the European Union! For sure, no one has done it before, but it will be our own, special way!” Liubka, *Karbid*, 79. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

mute the sounds of its underground, illegal activity. In the end it is Tys who falls victim to the contrabandist plan, becoming literally devoured by it when he and his wife are killed by electric shock in an overflowed tunnel. Thus, Tys's "reformist" plan of European integration ends up being implemented practically as a money-laundering enterprise because the criminals in Vedmediv intend to use the tunnel to smuggle goods, drugs, human cargo, and people's organs between Ukraine and Europe, and the only obstacle in their way—Tys, who represents morality, patriotism, and service for the betterment of Ukraine (even if comically)—is dead.

Liubka's tongue-in-cheek tragicomedy, which some may even call "a manual for contraband and corruption,"⁹ contains a social commentary hidden behind its burlesque style. Liubka—I propose—points to the inner colonial microclimate of Ukraine's governing "comprador elites"¹⁰ many of whom are Russia-oriented, who, in a cancer-like manner, spread corruption over the region, draining its resources. These elites, I argue, may be viewed through the lens of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection in terms of self/other relations between the governors and the governed.¹¹ Liubka depicts Vedmediv's elites as Ukraine's infernal "Other," a remnant of the Soviet colonial ideology that comes to the fore in all its decaying, "vampiric" essence in the corrupt milieu of Vedmediv—hence, the abject reference—and hinders Ukraine's democratization efforts expressed in the Euromaidan protests. The local population is forced by these elites into a different kind of abjection—a social abjection that resembles Imogen Tyler's contemporary historical and political reworking of Kristeva's concept. In her study *Revolting Subjects* (2013), Tyler approaches abjection "as a social force (a cultural political economy of disgust) [...] and mode of governmentality, which [...] binds together societies [...] through 'including forms of

⁹ Pomerantsev, *Blurb*.

¹⁰ I.e., foreign-allied national elites. See "Comprador Elite."

¹¹ For more on the concept of abjection and its definition in terms of self/other relations, see Wolfreys, "Abjection."

exclusion.”¹² The exclusion of the population from participation in the city’s government and their marginalization, which Tyler defines as characteristics of social abjection, are exaggerated in *Carbide*, where the whole population of Vedmediv is turned into a right-less, silent human waste, completely disregarded by the corrupt oligarchs and leaders. It is this social milieu that gives birth to Tys’s desperate, Quixotic initiative to fight corruption with illegal means. Tys’s failure and ignominious death at the end of the novel, as I will show below, portray the dialectic between the post-Euromaidan strivings of Ukraine’s citizens and the rampant corruption in today’s Ukraine, promoted by the “comprador elites,” that stifles the progress of those citizens towards a better life.

Hence, through the use of neo-*noir* and comic Gothic sensibilities,¹³ particularly in the exaggeration of the colonial relationship between the leaders and the governed (which Kristeva’s and later Tyler’s concept of abjection help to elucidate), Liubka’s novel alerts the reader to the need of, first, stronger reforms, and, second, transparency in reforms, without which Ukraine’s transition toward European integration will be stalled.

II. *Carbide’s* Gotho-Carnavalesque Aesthetics

The main source of humour in Liubka’s *Carbide* comes from a vast contrast between the positive intentions of reforms in post-Euromaidan Ukraine and their distorted outcome that the novel presents in an exaggerated manner. As a result of such exaggeration, Liubka shows the reforms in various social sectors to be turned inside out. For instance, the main character of the novel, Tys, proclaims patriotic, well-meaning slogans for uniting Ukraine with Europe but finds no other way to accomplish such unity than to engage in contrabandist schemes, clandestine midnight meetings, and even becomes complicit in murder, which clouds his best intentions with a Gotho-

¹² Tyler, “What Is Social Abjection,” para. 1. See also Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*.

¹³ On the value of the comic turn in Gothic texts, see Horner and Zlosnik, *Gothic and the Comic Turn*.

carnavalesque cycle of fraud and moral degradation. One night, when Tys appeals to his accomplices, he exclaims, “Let me tell you the truth: I involved you, already knowing that everyone would pursue their goal. Mine is the salvation of Ukraine and Europe, yours is a tunnel for smuggling. But at this stage, we can combine our interests, although I am sad, very sad, that you have no single drop of patriotism in your hearts...”¹⁴

In line with the novel’s tragicomic aesthetics, Tys’s criminal collaborators are portrayed in the Renaissance *commedia dell’arte* style as humorous stock characters, but with a Gothic hint.¹⁵ The combination of these seemingly incongruous aesthetic modes in the depiction of the criminal gang and their operations serves to underscore the perversity of the corruption and power relations in the region. In the laughter that gives way to horror, Liubka mocks the unregulated lawlessness and impunity of Ukraine’s ferocious elites—on the example of Vedmediv’s officials—and underscores their deadly power and agency in ostracizing the population to the lowest level of society, leading to their inept and easily manipulated status: the very reason for the stalling of reforms. Through members of the criminal gang that Tys puts together, Liubka portrays corruption in a variety of social spheres that kills the reforms from the inside.

The criminal gang includes a corrupt mayor, a few smugglers, a sadistic doctor (a she-devil or vampiress as she’s referred to), and two illegal builders. The most heartless and perverted individual in the novel is its sadistic pathologist Uliana Kruk (nicknamed “Dokhtorka” or “Dyivolytsia”—a “she-devil”).¹⁶ Her last name, “Kruk” means “raven” in Ukrainian and

¹⁴ “Скажу правду: я залучив вас, уже розуміючи, що кожен переслідуватиме свою ціль. Моя—спасіння України й Європи. Ваша—тунель для контрабанди. Але на цьому етапі ми можемо поєднати наші інтереси, хоч мені й гірко, дуже гірко, що у вас не залишилося жодної краплі патріотизму в серці...” Liubka, *Karbid*, 155-56.

¹⁵ Renaissance *commedia dell’arte* was an early form of professional theatre, performed at the city market or a carnival, that featured stereotypical characters and hyperboles, often with social or political undertones, for a comical effect. For more on the *commedia dell’arte*, see Partan, *Vagabonding Masks*.

¹⁶ Uliana’s satanic depiction, of course, follows the depiction of doctor and scientist figures in the Gothic genre, starting with Mary Shelley’s *Victor Frankenstein* (1818).

metaphorically refers to the darkness and death that she signifies in the novel. Depicted as a *femme fatale* who brings a threat to the established social milieu of Vedmediv, Uliana is perceived as a witch and a prostitute by Vedmediv's locals, especially due to her self-imposed social isolation: she is not married and she does not go to church. Uliana's character represents a health sphere in the novel, but in a perverted way: she works at a hospital, but instead of healing people, she performs autopsies. Furthermore, Uliana uses her medical knowledge to remove people's organs and harvest their blood for smuggling it abroad. In the novel she is called a "fermer krovi" ("farmer of blood"—note the masculine gender of the noun "fermer," more on which later) who literally engages in "bloody business" ("kryvavyi biznes"),¹⁷ and she is extraordinarily wealthy. Uliana's character throws a Gothic light on the healthcare reforms in Ukraine, which are aimed specifically to fight the "grey economy" in the medical field. One purpose of such reforms, among others, is to rationalize the state allocation of resources to the health sphere in order to avoid situations where "patients are forced to buy [i.e., spend their own money on] medicines or vaccines, which have already been purchased at a budget cost," as the *Ukraine Crisis Media Center* observes.¹⁸ Liubka's Uliana can be interpreted as an example of such practices when she smuggles abroad drugs and medical supplies to which she has access in the hospital, for personal profit. As a result of the "grey economy," "medical workers' declarations include expensive cars, thousands of square meters of real estate, and millions of hryvnias in cash, which rarely match up with their official salaries."¹⁹ This explains Uliana's illegal accumulation of wealth in the novel.

Uliana murders the gravedigger Ychi, whom the gang employs as a physical hand for the project to dig the tunnel and whom the tunnel collapse has put in a coma. Without informing the

¹⁷ Liubka, *Karbid*, 139.

¹⁸ NGO Ukraine Crisis Media Center, "What Do You Need to Know," para. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 5.

rest of the group, Uliana disconnects Ychi from the life support system, dismembers his body, and sells his organs clandestinely abroad. Once this becomes known to the group, Uliana informs them with a demonic, fierce laughter that she has already transported Ychi into the European Union (“ievrointegruvala”), albeit in parts.²⁰ Hence, the comical elements in the portrayal of the gang give way to horror in the depiction of Uliana’s character and the reforms in the public sector that she represents. Uliana—who carries a parliamentary mandate and is a member of the local city council—is deadly, venomous, and completely clouded in the Gothic milieu. This is emphasized by her house—a Frankenstein’s demonic laboratory, a castle of death, full of preserved body parts, which metaphorically represent Ukraine, dismembered by an oligarchic clan of ex-President Ianuklovych and previous corrupt regimes. As such, Uliana—who, as the novel points out “likarka, a shche nikoho ne vylikovala” (“is a doctor but has not cured anyone yet”)²¹—becomes an epitome of the Gotho-carnavalesque aesthetics of excess and a symbol of Kristeva’s concept of abjection. She is a personification of corruption—the societal evil—released to the forefront of society in disgust out of the depth of its clandestine milieu.

III. Two Layers of Abjection in *Carbide*

Kristeva developed the concept of abjection in her book-length study *The Powers of Horror* (1982) when examining “the psychic origins, function and mechanism of revulsion, aversion and disgust.”²² As Tyler observes in her subsequent sociological reworking of the concept, “[f]or

²⁰ “— Не хвилюйтеся, дорогенький, у нашого колеги все гаразд, я його, так би мовити, вже євроінтегрувала, — грайливо відповіла Дияволиця.

— Як це так євроінтегрувала? — не зрозумів вчитель.

— А так, потрошку, частинами, спочатку — рука, потім — нога, а потім і решта. Так що він тепер уже в Європі, першим вирвався вперед! — пирснула сміхом Уляна Дмитрівна, а за нею й усі, крім Тиса, зайшлися несамовитим реготом.” Liubka, *Karbid*, 197.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

²² Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 27.

Kristeva, the abject is a concept that describes all that is repulsive and fascinating about bodies.”²³ According to Kristeva herself, “[t]he abjection [...] reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills [...] interferes with what [...] is supposed to save [one]: childhood, science, among others.”²⁴ Going beyond the state of being (i.e., life) to the state of belonging (i.e., society),²⁵ we can add to Kristeva’s list the health care system, as something that is supposed to save life, and the state body in general as a guarantor of public services and fundamental human rights. The abjection (literally, something that is “cast out”) in Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theorization serves as the release of an individual’s repressed instincts and, as Tyler explains, is always triggered by a real or imaginary transgression.²⁶ Indeed, as Kristeva points out, “abjection [...] disturbs identity, system, order [...]. [It] does not respect borders, positions, rules.”²⁷ The concept of a border is fundamental for Liubka’s Gotho-carnavalesque novel, where border violations (be it of a physical body²⁸ or a social/political body) are an essential part of all political or business operations in Vedmediv. Because of such distorted normativity, Tys’s patriotic venture accepts the border violation as given. Hence, the corruption at the state level in managing the borders facilitates and encourages the transgression of the law, even among the patriotically minded individuals (like Tys). This, in turn, disrupts the moral, legal, and ethical boundaries in this imagined part of Transcarpathia, and brings forward the abjection. The abjection reaches its apogee in Vedmediv’s corrupt elites, first and foremost in Uliana, and, through her excessively degenerate, Gothic image,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

²⁵ For more on these two states, see Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 3.

²⁶ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 28.

²⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

²⁸ Uliana’s own body is violated when she is raped as a young girl; later on, it is she who violates the bodies of her fellow citizens, in a vampire-like fashion, by collecting their blood and/or organs via illegal and even forceful means, to smuggle them abroad.

is released in a perverted, amalgamated symbol of death and moral decay in the region: “It is death infecting life,” to quote one of Kristeva’s definitions of abjection again.²⁹

In addition to border violations, abjection is shown through the reversal of gender-based normative values in the seemingly patriarchal society of Vedmediv when Uliana, the only female member of the criminal group and an active member at that, gains strong, masculine features, while male characters in the novel gradually become emasculated. Uliana’s power is shown in the fact that she sponsors more than 50% of the enterprise’s budget (estimated at US\$300,000), producing payments in cash immediately on demand, and regularly has sexual intercourse with almost all members of the group (except Tys who, in her eyes, is emasculated from the start due to his poverty and patriotism—two values that the members of the gang equate³⁰), calling all of them her “boys” (“khlopchyky”).³¹ The expression “boys” gives her character the archetypal feature of a motherly figure, but instead of nurturing, associated with mothers, her character becomes the image of a female Satan, the abjection of all good associated with humanity. Hence, Uliana’s power as a woman becomes perverted as opposed to being empowering and uplifting. She turns into a true black widow, a vampiress, devouring everyone around her in the corrupt milieu of Vedmediv.

Kristeva’s psychoanalytical concept of abjection is thus realized in *Carbide* in the depiction of the corrupt elites, whose unethicity, lawlessness, greed, violence, and abuse of power (power that was granted to them by the people they are supposed to represent) turn them into a moral aberration. As Kristeva states, “Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter [...], a debtor who sells

²⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

³⁰ “Він із цих, патріотів,—лукаво усміхнувся Геній Карпат.” (“‘He is one of those, a patriot,’ smiled the Genius of the Carpathians.”) Liubka, *Karbid*, 145. In other words, Tys’s patriotism is a symbol of his emasculation and, possibly, his madness.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 144, 146, 156.

you up, a friend who stabs you...”³² Tys reinforces this image of the elites when he accuses his accomplices of having sold Ukraine for 30 silver coins, comparing them to the Biblical Judas—a symbol of betrayal, darkness, and absolute evil. As a result, Vedmediv’s elites become a social cancer, an abnormality that brings death to the city from the inside, functioning as an internal threat, a dark power that oppresses the city—a metaphorical return of the totalitarian Soviet “East” to a region that aspires to become “West.”

However, the concept of abjection in the novel goes beyond the symbolic depiction of the elites as the return of the totalitarian darkness under the cover of ruthless capitalism (both of which undermine democracy) and could also be applied to the local population in Vedmediv. The latter are oppressed by the corrupt elites to the point that the “distance between the body politic proper and those excluded from the body of the state” (to quote Tyler), turns into a chasm.³³ As such, the local population becomes a symbol of another form of abjection—social abjection, in which the abjected are cast down, humbled, and degraded by the corrupt leaders. This social abjection is exemplified first by Ychi (the gravedigger who represents the blunt physical force in the novel), and later by Tys, whose deaths make them examples of disposable human waste.

Tys’s logic of putting together a group of supposed “giant spirits, patriots, Ukrainians,”³⁴ who all turn out to be nothing but criminals, is consistent with the perverted reality of Vedmediv, where “law enforcement, border protection, and smuggling circles” are seen as one.³⁵ Hence, in the city where corruption saturates every sector, where the local leaders and, at the state level, the President (shown on the example of the ex-President Ianukovych) all have official criminal records

³² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

³³ Tyler, “What Is Social Abjection,” para. 41.

³⁴ “команду велетнів духу, патріотів, українців.” Liubka, *Karbid*, 10.

³⁵ “правоохоронних, прикордонних чи контрабандних колах, що часто виявлялися одним і тим же колом.” *Ibid.*, 43.

and have served prison terms, a new social paradigm is born. Within this paradigm, lawlessness and underground projects become the new normality. With corruption internalized as the new normativity and two distinct layers of population (the elites and the masses) personified as abjections, Vedmediv becomes a Gothic locale featuring nineteenth-century ruthless colonial power relations between the comprador governors and the governed—a microcosm for Ukraine overall, and a reminder of its colonial, Soviet past that has not entirely disappeared.

IV. Conclusion

Liubka's novel *Carbide* offers a series of sketches of contraband schemes, many of which are based on real events.³⁶ If there is one word to define *Carbide*'s topic, it would be “corruption,” in all its abject, grotesque, decayed forms. It is this uncontrollable, deadly abuse of power at all levels—a metaphorical echo of Ukraine's colonial and totalitarian past—that led to the outburst of the Euromaidan/Revolution of Dignity and that continues to subvert any attempts at democratic reforms despite the Euromaidan victory. The “vampiric,” corrupt elites deprive Transcarpathia of its life forces, leading to its stagnation and eventual death (“the shadow realm of the dead,” as stated on the novel's cover³⁷). The death of the region is exemplified, first by the death of Ychi, and later is further emphasized by the death of Tys, a Vedmediv native and a patriot. Tys is the only character in *Carbide* who, despite having his head in the clouds, preserves a national mindset. The identities of the other “patriots” are nation-less, tied to illegal commercial schemes and monetary enrichment. Ironically, it is Tys who dies in the novel, a “noble hero” (“shliakhetna

³⁶ Liubka offers the following quote from *Reuters* as his epigraph to the novel: “Під кордоном між Словаччиною й Україною виявлено оснащений залізницею потаємний тунель завдовжки в сім футбольних полів, а в ньому — понад 2,5 мільйони контрабандних сигарет, повідомив словацький уряд. Поліція заявляє, що тунель також міг використовуватися для нелегального перевезення людей...” (*Reuters*, 19.07.2012). The same story is available on the Ukrainian news channel TSN, “Tunel' pid ukrains'kym kordonom.”

³⁷ “підземне царство тіней.” Liubka, *Karbid*, title page.

liudyna”³⁸), which symbolizes the death of humanity (perhaps, the first deaths of the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-14); and his tomb—the underground tunnel—can be metaphorically viewed as a dark reality with no way out (“beznadiia” [“hopelessness”]³⁹). Through such tragicomic and absurd plot twists, Liubka’s novel graphically illustrates the need for reforms at all levels of society that could lead to the elimination of comprador oligarchic system of governance and make the European integration initiative of the novel’s protagonist, Tys, realized legally.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., annotation.

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