

Holodomor, Amnesia, and Memory-(Re)Making in Post-War Ukrainian Literature and Film

Iryna Starovoyt

***Abstract:** This article examines Ukrainian works of literature and film that sought to preserve the memory of the Holodomor (the Ukrainian Great Famine of 1932–33) during the period when the Holodomor was still unmentionable in the Soviet press and largely unknown or forgotten elsewhere in the world, from the mid-1930s to mid-1980s. While this half-century was generally characterized by the cultural and social forgetting of the Holodomor, there were writers and film-makers who attempted to preserve its memory in their works. The article approaches the memory work performed in these texts as a response to the phenomenon of mass martyrdom and the collectivization of suffering that was invented by the twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. The point of contact between totalitarian martyrdom and memory may be read out of the ancient Greek literal meaning of the term “martyr”—a witness. In this ancient tradition, however, the martyr dies for a cause. In contrast, totalitarianism created the phenomenon of mass martyrdom, characterized by a drive precisely to suppress the memory of the witness, to prevent the act of witnessing. Ukrainian writers who addressed the Holodomor both in the USSR and in emigration set out to resist this by rescuing this memory and encoding it in culture through the articulation of a mnemonic anti-narrative.*

The Holodomor (the Great Famine of 1932–33) was a non-story for more than fifty years. However, during these years it remained a nexus of trauma and conspiracy. The suffering of the famine victims was to some degree masked by the prevailing focus on the atrocities