

WORLDWIDE READING OF UKRAINIAN LITERATURE

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WAR DIARIES

Natalka Vorozhbit

Look at the road.

Kyiv 1 March 2022

What should I have taken but didn't? I took money and ID. I grabbed two rings (people in books always take jewellery). But I left the cross on the wall, a family heirloom, and the painting of a guelder rose. I chose to leave all the icons behind to guard my home and my city, Kyiv. I didn't take any of my photos, or the portraits of two Ukrainian writers, Shevchenko and Gogol. I watered all my plants, but how long will they last if I never return? Who will defrost my freezer? I left behind my heart. Grandmother's photograph, still on the shelf. A moisturiser, a new one, I left in the bathroom. I've never even used it. Stop thinking about the moisturiser, you stupid woman, and watch the road.

I focus on the road. What else did I leave behind? I left everything behind. I took only the important stuff: my mother, my daughter and Dyusha, our pedigree cat, who squealed and stank out the car all the way. It'll be 30 hours at the wheel soon. I'm fleeing from Kyiv because it's being bombed by Russians. I desperately want to sleep but the cat just shat in the car and the stench keeps me awake. What did I hope to take but wasn't able to? My husband and the father of my daughter (two different men). My daughter's father is a writer – seeing him holding a gun was just weird. I left my friends,

our half-made film, the streets of my town. The chestnuts will soon be in bloom without me there to see them.

What should one pack to start a new life somewhere? What right did they have to take the life I've already built?

Have you ever wondered what you'd take with you if you thought you might never come home again? I've been thinking about it for the past eight years, and more so these past few months, but I could never settle on anything. Death is more defined, you just know that it's the end of everything. But war is the end of all that's good and the start of all that's bad, for everyone. How could anyone prepare for this? What should we pack in order to do ... what? Start a new life somewhere? But what right did they have to take the life I've already built here? No, we didn't deserve any of this. But listen, no one deserves to be bombed, to flee or to die, just because the dictator of a country gone mad desires your destruction.

For someone out there, this was the last year they could have got pregnant. Someone else was just finishing decorating their new apartment (now a shelter for refugees, welcome!). Someone had just finished paying off a debt (now back in the red again), another person lay dying in bed (surrounded by loved ones who will now die on the road, or be bombed). A child was graduating from school (but you, my child, you'll never graduate).

We were about to open our own theatre, the Playwrights' theatre, on 12 March. We'd been planning it for so long: a theatre with space for all the important words to resound. Ukraine has never had a theatre like it. We put our hearts into it. Our money, too. It's all gone, it's been crossed out. Watch the road. Don't cry. We never managed to open, so really it never actually

existed. But Mariupol had a theatre. Or used to. You can see the pictures, before and after the bombs. Only you can't tell from the photos that under the rubble was a bomb shelter, with hundreds and hundreds of ordinary people hiding in it. So far they have pulled out 300 bodies. I'll never tire of reminding people that these are Russian bombs. That it is Russian hands pressing the buttons to release the bombs that fall on us. What is the point of national culture if it has no influence over the people of that nation? What is this culture we think of as great? Does this Russian culture delight you still?

Stop stressing. Look at the road. Look at the road instead of getting upset, I remind myself. But I've been looking at the road and nothing else for the last eight years. Eight years we have been engaged with the subject of war. Eight years we've been trying to shout to the world, to alert them to the Russian military threat. And only after 24 February did they finally hear us. That is the only positive I can see.

On 1 April, the Royal Court is hosting readings of plays by Ukrainian playwrights about their experience of war. We're sick and tired of this experience, we dream of writing, making films, talking of things that are not war. But after 24 February, these other things were closed to us, and will remain so for the rest of our creative lives. We've been condemned to focus on the regions of pain, despair, injustice, death. But also on the mightiness of the human spirit, on patriotism and love. We are ready. But first we want to win, and return home, and water our plants. And we need your help.

Translated by Sasha Dugdale

Olena Stiazhkina

stayed in her home in Kyiv.

Olena Stiazhkina, an exclusive for »Standard Wochenende«

Kyiv, March 5, 2022

For the first six months after escaping the hell of Donetsk, we always reflexively threw ourselves on the floor as soon as we heard a loud sound. Now, as Tatusya Bo (*Ukrainian author of children's books*) described, they have also put notices on the gates and doors of cities and towns in the West, saying: »We ask you not to slam doors too hard. This is where refugees stay. Otherwise, they will think they are explosions.«

After the war, we will all be very quiet. Listening to quiet music, having quiet conversations, smiling quietly. And there will be no fireworks.

Kyiv, March 6, 2022

People are leaving the city. People are leaving, and we say goodbye to them, shouting »See you in victory!« as they leave. I feel despair, anger, guilt, and fear. Strangely, although I do not have the resources to leave, to start a new life in a more peaceful region, I do have the strength to stay and fight. Strength and resources are probably two completely different things. I wish

that everyone can leave who wants to. And I don't want to have to say goodbye anymore.

Kyiv, March 15, 2022

There should always be something to write on in the emergency kit. If there is a dead person next to you, it is still a person and not a corpse. A person must have a first name, last name, and age. They must not be lost. Someone loves them, someone is waiting for them. Someone will mourn and remember them for the rest of their life. Even if they have no documents, as a survivor, you need to create a record. Describe at least the approximate age, height, hair color, eyes. Think about the characteristics of the person, give information about clothes and shoes – about something that definitely belonged to this person. Think about what they talked about when you were together in a shelter or while walking through a humanitarian corridor. Names, names of cities, names of dogs, songs ...

Maybe they sang songs. Remember and write it down – twice. Once to leave the information on the person: in a pocket, behind a belt, in a shoe. The second time to pass the information to those who work for the state.

Maybe you can write down this information three times, once for yourself. For after the war, for your conscience, and for the work that needs to be done so that the one you saw dead will not be forgotten and remain anonymous.

Kyiv, March 17, 2022

Since 2014, it has been customary in Ukraine to thank the soldiers who stopped the enemy's advance in the east. It's very simple: if you see a soldier on the street, you put your right hand over your heart and say, sometimes loudly, sometimes in a whisper, »Thank you!« I don't want to lie, this is not done everywhere, but the hand placed on the heart is a language that is understood by all Ukrainians. Since 2014, we have been on our knees accompanying our heroes on their final journey.

When the funeral procession leads through a town or village, people kneel on both sides of the road who may not even have known the deceased. This is the case everywhere – without exception.

Kyiv, March 22, 2022

When we call each other in the morning, we ask, »Are you still alive?« And it is a stupidity for which one would have been slapped in peacetime. Because when I pick up the phone and say »Hello«, of course I'm alive. But to ask now, »How are you?« – that would simply be a mockery of common sense.

So an »Are you alive?« is better and more appropriate. Today we started a philological discussion about »how to answer this stupid question correctly.« The possible answers: »yes, still«, »yet again«, »you're also alive«, »of course«, »thank the army or God« (which is basically the same thing now).

Today is lockdown, since yesterday and until tomorrow: the third or fourth time in this war. The volunteers call the curfew the »day off«: a day to sleep a little more and follow the news a little more. If physical resources are used

up on volunteer days, then mental resources are used up during days off. Therefore, the days off are not really days off. But you don't have to get up because the alarm clock rings.

It is morning. The air raid alarm is loud. My husband wakes up and looks at the clock with a dull, still tired look. I touch his back and say in a reassuring way, »Don't be scared, that's just the alarm, not the alarm clock. We can still sleep.«

We both laugh. But we know we are acting irresponsibly.

The news from (*the besieged city of*) Mariupol that acquaintances and journalists receive is worse than the blockade diaries (*of the Russian woman Tania Savicheva in World War II*):

»Tell everyone that there is still grain on the third floor in the house across the street in apartment No. 27.«

»There are still two elderly people on the ninth floor. They were still alive the day before yesterday.«

»I can't take another child in the car. Forgive me. I can't forgive myself.«

»We don't know which country we will be in when we come out of the cellar. It only makes sense to live if it will be Ukraine.«

»The dog's name is Matilda. She eats pretty much everything. Please feed her and keep her away from my body.«

Dear Europeans, Do Not Be under Any Illusions

A guest article by Serhiy Zhadan

An exclusively for »SPIEGEL Kultur«

March 18, 2022, 2:03 p.m.

My friends were fired at on Thursday in Kharkiv by a Russian Grad, which is a multiple rocket launcher system. A projectile exploded a few dozen meters away from them and then hit the car that was driving behind them.

If they had been five seconds slower, they would have lost their lives. They are not soldiers. They are artists. Popular young artists. Before the war, they had their own exhibitions, lived an artist's life. After the Russians invaded, they stayed in the city and did volunteer work, bringing food and medicine to the city and helping the civilian population. They now came under fire.

It can hit anyone in Kharkiv right now: The Russians are bombarding the city chaotically and continuously, hitting residential areas, bedrooms, schools, hospitals, kindergartens. The bombardment is felt constantly. This is our

reality. But the city is not afraid, it continues to live its life. Just now, life takes place under a hail of rockets.

Kharkiv is very close to the Russian border. Russian troops already appeared here on the first day of the war. It seemed that they expected to take the city quickly and with little bloodshed. Russian tanks also appeared on the surrounding roads near the town on the first day. They were shot down and burned.

The streets are empty at noon

The defense of the city proved to be quite effective – the Russians could not enter the city, and the combat groups that managed to break through to Kharkiv were annihilated. The city was not defeated, as it managed to eliminate a large number of enemy troops. Since the Russian army failed to take the city by storm, it began to attack with aircraft and missiles.

However, in the process, it lost a large number of planes over Kharkiv. They no longer fly so frequently. Instead, the residential areas are bombed, as if in this way the Russians want to take revenge on the city that will not surrender.

The city continues to function. All municipal services are functioning, humanitarian aid is arriving from all over the country, and the civilian population is gradually being evacuated. Putting aside the constant sound of shelling, the city can make you feel like you are living a normal life. However, there are not so many people on the streets anymore. And there are more and more destroyed buildings.

At noon, the streets are empty – the citizens of Kharkiv then prepare for curfew. At night, periods of silence alternate with violent explosions, and bomb alarms go off every hour. The worst hit so far has been the large suburb of Saltivka, a bedroom community – the Russians simply destroy the houses there with their missiles. I have friends there, they escaped death by a hair.

In the morning I talk to a priest I know there – in the zone with the heaviest shelling – and ask him about the situation. »Very good, in fact«, he replies. »Will the service be held on Saturday?«, I ask. »Of course«, he says, »absolutely.«

I don't know how this war is portrayed in Germany, how it is depicted, what is said about it. But several times I have seen Western politicians talking about how NATO will not get involved in the Ukraine conflict. So not in the »war«, or »war with the aggressor«, but »conflict.« This really does not surprise me.

In the past eight years, since the annexation of Crimea, I have very often seen citizens of Germany, France or Switzerland looking for ever new ways not to call a spade a spade. For example, not calling Russia an »aggressor«, not calling Putin a »rogue«, not calling the war in the Donbass a »Russian-Ukrainian war.« We have seen how the Western powers have continued and continue to trade with the Kremlin – while uttering fine words about »freedom« and »democracy.«

I don't know when this war will end and what price we will have to pay for our victory. But I would like to say a few words about the collective responsibility

of the West for all that is going on. You have negotiated too long and too brazenly with the perpetrators of this war. You have long hesitated between your principles and your convenience, forgetting all the obligations of partnership. You have allowed Russian propaganda to flood your consciousness with lies about »Ukrainian Nazis« and the »civil war in Ukraine« or the »social conflict.« You have a share of the responsibility.

After everything that the Russians have done in Mariupol, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and other Ukrainian cities, I think there can be no compromise with today's Russia. Because this is not a war between the Russian army and the Ukrainian army. It is a war between the Russian army and the Ukrainian people. What is happening here is a genocide. The Russians are deliberately and systematically decimating the civilian population of Ukraine. They are destroying infrastructure, bombing schools, theaters, museums, churches, residential buildings.

This is the destruction of the Ukrainian people. And for this the Russians will bear a collective responsibility. One thing should be understood here: In this conflict, the cities that are suffering the most are those that were still loyal to Russia after the start of the war in 2014. Whose inhabitants felt they belonged to Russia and who tried to separate the Russian people and Putin. Russia has done everything in the past three weeks to make the Russian-speaking Ukrainians of the East lose their illusions about the people of the Russian Federation.

We are not being killed by an abstract Putin, but by certain citizens of the aggressor country who came here for this very purpose – to kill us. There is no other name for it.

The Kremlin can spread as much nonsense about »denazification« as it wants, these idiotic lies lose all sense when you see the bombed theater of Mariupol.

Dear Europeans, do not be under any illusions: This is not a local conflict that will end tomorrow. This is the Third World War. And the civilized world has no right to lose it if it considers itself civilized and independent.

Nude Photos and Music for Ukraine

Yuriy Gurzhy's War Diary

March 29, 2022

When the news reached me that the Kharkiv TV tower was damaged in a bombing, I couldn't help but think of »X-Radio«, the radio station where I worked in the early nineties. That was my first real job and probably the best time of my life. I was 17 and a passionate music lover, there was nothing more important to me than music – playing music on the radio for hours a day sounded like a dream come true. Even if it only paid \$30 a month, I was happy.

In 1992, our little house was right next to the TV tower, that's where we sat, three new alternative stations. That was pure exoticism at that time, for decades we had only state broadcasting. Suddenly there was this generational change, radio shows were made by cheeky young people, and the people of Kharkiv celebrated us. Our studio had the bare minimum of the technology that was necessary, including two CD players.

The musical idea was already there, only the lyrics were missing

CDs as a medium had not yet really arrived in Ukraine, there was only one store in town that sold them. The station had 16 CDs at our disposal, which was a small treasure, but still much too little, because we had to create our program exclusively with the music from these CDs.

For months I worked every day and sometimes at night – and so even 30 years later I can remember pretty much every song we played back then (because they were always the same ones). »This Garden« by the band The Levellers was one of them, I liked it very much and played it every day.

Last week an old acquaintance from the UK called me. Many years ago, we did a compilation with Phil Meadley of Eastern European funk from the seventies. Phil makes music, his current project is called Gaslight Troubadours. Like so many musicians, he would love to do something, he says, preferably record a song about the current situation in Ukraine and raise funds with it.

Actually, he already has a very concrete idea, only the lyrics are missing. He has already recorded something, namely with the legendary Tom Robinson as well as Jon Sevink, the violinist of The Levellers. If I could come up with something to go with it, he would love it. I might not have believed it thirty years ago, but today nothing surprises me.

If Patti Smith sings her English translation of the Ukrainian national anthem at concerts, if the singer of the Ukrainian band BoomBox mentions that they talked to David Gilmour of Pink Floyd yesterday about a joint song ... everything is possible.

Who will pay for Anatoli's photo?

My lyrics for the song by Phil, Tom, and Jon will be ready in a few hours. I call Katya Tasheva, with whom we often make music, she comes over and sings along. The song is ready. We think about what to call our project and decide on The Anti-Dicktators.

The other day I met a top American manager who was born in Kyiv and now, in addition to his job in Chicago, coordinates deliveries of medicine and food and evacuations from cities like Chernihiv and Mariupol. Our song is to raise funds for his organization Ukraine TrustChain. And it does; in three days, »Russian Warship (Go Fuck Yourself!)« raised over 600 euros.

It feels good and right to be able to donate and generate donations. As a musician, I can't think of anything better right now. And I see that many of my colleagues are doing exactly the same thing. There are benefit concerts

every day. DJs stream their DJ sets and collect donations in the process. Visual artists sell their work – and donate the profits.

Late last night, Anatoli called me – he's 52, comes from Kharkiv like me, and lives in Erlangen. He sounds excited because he just read that Ukrainian erotic models are launching a web campaign: they will send exclusive nude photos to those who donate to the Ukrainian Army or Territorial Defense. »A brilliant idea!« says Anatoly, »I'm thinking about doing something like that too! I'm not the youngest anymore, maybe a bit fat, but I'm sure I can find people who would be willing to pay for my photos as well. Or, what do you think?«

In the Surrounded Fortress

A guest article by Serhiy Zhadan

April 5, 2022

People in Kharkiv live in the awareness that there are simply no safe places here. We all have only one goal: to support the army. The city is holding out.

Recently, a Russian missile hit a post office on the outskirts of Kharkiv. One dead, a few wounded. A shell also hit one of the city's shopping centers. The

Russians keep hitting places where civilians gather. Humanitarian aid centers, stores, and food depots for civilians have come under fire. Residential neighborhoods without industrial infrastructure or military installations are also regularly bombed. Kharkiv has been at war for two months, and you can get hit anywhere in the city. The outskirts are hit harder; they are closer to Russian positions. But even the center comes under fire from time to time – some central streets were massively shelled just a few days ago. People in Kharkiv live in the awareness that there are simply no safe places in the city. And also within the country's borders.

Recently, a Russian »hailstorm« in the middle of the street burned down a car with two occupants, who simply burned inside their car. »Hailstorm« is the Russian Grad rocket launcher, which can fire dozens of projectiles at once. There is no military logic behind such actions. The only explanation for this planned, chaotic brutality can be that the Russians want to scare the population, make them surrender, make them lose faith in victory and create panic. However, the opposite is true: people in Kharkiv now live as if in a fortress surrounded by a warring army. Everyone is working for the same cause. Volunteers, authorities, and citizens support the army.

In the first six weeks of the war, Ukrainian troops managed to drive the Russians out of the city, even launched their own offensive, and have since reliably held the roads into Kharkiv. Air defenses also work quite well – Russian planes have not flown over the city for a long time. However, Ukrainian troops are unable to protect the city from the »hail.« Kharkiv suffers from this brutality. It wears down the city's residents – but does not lead to panic.

Networks of help

Many Kharkiv residents have left the city, but a large part of those who have remained have done so in full awareness: to work and to help. A network of volunteer centers, relief centers, and humanitarian aid distribution points has spread throughout the city. Tens of thousands of Kharkiv citizens are participating in volunteer activities, helping those who have lost their homes or cannot afford everything they need. Many people have been camping in the subway stations or in the basements of their houses for weeks and need to be provided with the most basic necessities – food, medicines and heat. It is mainly the elderly who are proving helpless under the conditions of war. The city authorities do a lot to help them, but the targeted mobile support provided by volunteers is often unreliable.

Kharkiv receives support from all over Ukraine. The city is the focus of attention of many European countries, many foreign journalists are there. This is very important – we must ensure that Russian aggression and military atrocities do not disappear from the European media landscape, and we must all ensure that this war ends with a Ukrainian victory and that all perpetrators are punished justly. The pain of seeing the lives of hundreds of thousands of people violently and brutally destroyed must not be in vain. Evil must be punished. That is why it is important that we talk about what is happening now in our cities, what is happening on the front lines, what is happening in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia.

A grandmother was picked up in the morning in the middle of the shelling and taken to a safe place. She is 80 years old and has suffered two strokes. Her children are on the other side of the front line, in the occupied territories. They cannot help her. She had taken only a small backpack with clothes and a box of food from home and just locked her apartment, where she has spent her whole life, behind her. No one knows if she will be able to return to it and if the apartment would survive the attacks. She appeared stressed, but in her right mind. She recounted that she was caught in shelling, and someone shouted to her to drop. »If I fall, no one will pick me up!« she shouted back and kept running.

The twisted state of mind of war

There are hundreds of such stories, thousands of deaths and personal tragedies. They form the twisted, painful body of this war, this tragedy of a country that is being threatened with destruction. But at the heart of this body, at the heart of this twisted state of mind, lies the will of the people to live their lives, to defend their freedom, to fight for their future. We are paying a very high price indeed for the right to remain Ukrainians. However, we have no other choice whatsoever.

Therefore, we continue to stay in our fortresses and defend them, believing that we will be victorious. We protect our elders and our children. Also our memories. And our future. That is enough to believe and not to be afraid.

Yuri Durkot

Lviv, May 28, noon

The square in front of the railroad station in Lviv has become quiet. There is no trace of the streams of refugees that dominated the scene two months ago. No endless queues of women and children waiting in the snow and wind for the next evacuation train to Przemyśl. Only a few people can still be seen in front of the entrance to the lobby. One could almost believe that the station was operating normally on this gloomy morning with drizzle coming down again and again.

An inattentive observer hurrying to his train might not have noticed a few tents in a small green area to the left of the main entrance. But actually, they are unmistakable. The big gray tent of the emergency management services. The tents of the international aid organizations. Only there are hardly any refugees here. One could have mistaken the helpers themselves for refugees, such as a somewhat confused-looking Australian or an Englishman with his mane of gray hair. If they weren't wearing their red helper vests. Otherwise, both look as if they hadn't slept for a few days and would now like to jump into the shower.

The streetcar squeaks leisurely in the loop before picking up a few passengers at the stop. I hear a woman with a rolling suitcase ask someone where she can find a pharmacy here. It could be that she has just arrived from the East. Or returning from Poland and wants to quickly get some

medicine before continuing on her journey. But this scene could just as well have taken place in peacetime.

Evacuation trains from the East rarely arrive in Lviv. Now it's more likely to go the other way. About two million Ukrainians have now returned, according to the border guards. However, people go back home only if they feel at least safe enough. And if the house has not been bombed. So out of about 200,000 refugees originally officially registered in Lviv, about 150,000 are still there. They no longer have a home, whether in Chernihiv, Kharkiv or the Donbass.

For all those returning from Europe to Lviv by train, there is only one transfer station in Poland: Przemyśl. The broad-gauge railway ends in this Polish town with a name unpronounceable for a German. This technical detail has made it a natural terminus for Ukrainian intercity express trains. There is no time for a gauge change during the war.

It is said that every day many people return by train from Przemyśl, to Lviv and to Kyiv. To Odessa probably not, although there is an intercity from Przemyśl to Odessa. There are no trains from Poland in the morning, though, so I can't really check. The last one should have arrived two hours ago according to the timetable.

Currently, trains are delayed more and more often, so I decide to check after all. The lobby is dark as usual, there are a few travelers at the ticket counters. Otherwise, there is not much going on. At the information desk, there is only one woman in front of me. When it is my turn, I ask if the train from Przemyśl has arrived. In normal times, such a question would not have surprised anyone. But these are not normal times, and my interest must seem a bit

suspicious to the lady behind the glass window. She looks at me with suspicion and wants to know why I need the information. I quickly invent the story that we had lost contact with a family on this train. Then she turns the dial on her red telephone. She didn't alert the police. She just says that the train was on time today.

Bucha: Visiting Home

Oleh Kozarev, an exclusive for Deutsche Welle.

June 20, 2022

For the first time since the beginning of the war, for the first time since the end of the occupation and the liberation, I go home, to Bucha, now known all over the world. The impressions of our reunion are lurid, contradictory, full of contrasts.

An exciting moment: I get off the bus that took me from the »Akademmistechko« metro station, the last stop on the Kyiv metro en route to Bucha (most public transportation has resumed service in the suburbs). Right at the stop, the first thing that catches my eye is a handwritten advertisement: »Major cleaning of your apartment after the fascists, nothing is too hard for us.« It was easy to predict that my stay would be under the motto of just such a »big cleaning.« Last month it was the motto of the whole city. A little bit of order is returning to Bucha: the municipal infrastructure has

resumed work, stores and facilities are open again (even the bookstore!). I first set about the »major cleaning« of my apartment, which was occupied for some time. The whole thing went off without any destruction, and only small things were stolen – I got off lightly. One of the apartments from the neighboring elevator, on the other hand, is badly damaged from a »landing.«

The material consequences of the war in Bucha are selective. In certain places there is serious destruction. Elsewhere, only individual parts of individual houses are damaged. Certain areas have escaped completely or almost completely unscathed. The impression of total destruction that one gets when looking at photos or videos does not match the real Bucha. But how could one forget that here the soldiers left the burned bodies of the inhabitants? In this city, unlike in the adjacent suburbs, people suffered the most.

The »Module«, a large shopping center in the west of Bucha on the Kyiv-Warsaw highway, has been turned into a scorched wasteland, above it picturesquely the letters »Retail...« A hundred meters away is a smaller shopping center in good condition. Only ten meters separate a completely destroyed pharmacy and an intact, cozy café with a summer terrace and chaise longues. The café is crowded and noisy, the waiters can hardly keep up with serving the orders of food and drinks.

One of the most famous new residential areas of the city is the Bucha-Quarter. Most of the houses stand intact, children play on the well-kept playgrounds. However, the atmosphere of green tranquility evaporates at the sight of improvised »stoves« in the courtyards. In the days of fighting and

occupation, when there was no light, no gas, and no water in the pipes, residents had built them. On these »stoves« people prepared something to eat and boiled water to wash themselves at least fleetingly. Serhij, who is showing me the neighborhood, leads me into a cul-de-sac, and it is only then that I notice that one doorway of the otherwise neat house has half collapsed. The damage is severe, but Serhij proclaims, »Just think, no one was hit in this ›landing‹.«

Behind the skyscrapers of the Bucha-Quarter and Nova Bucha, in the direction of Irpin, is a large neighborhood of primarily single-story, single-family homes. This is Yablunka, one of the villages from which was incorporated into Bucha at the beginning of the 20th century. This place has the sad reputation of being the place where the occupiers committed the worst crimes. Most of the civilians are said to have perished here. Everyone I talk to is sure that it was Buryats who committed the cruelest acts in Yablunka.

Today in Yablunka many buildings are destroyed, on the fences you can read notices addressed to the occupiers, such as »civilians«, but also the word »mine.« The worst area is at the intersection of the Yablunka and train station streets – there whole blocks were razed to the ground...

The events of February and March are still the number one topic of conversation in Bucha.

Number one: The words »occupation«, »advance«, »Moskali« (for »Russians«), and »direct hit«, can be heard just about everywhere people

gather. Passers-by on the streets often seem depressed and exhausted. There is often something black on the clothes of the people of Bucha, as a sign of mourning for those who were killed.

But there are also clear contrasts. By no means are all the stories from those bloody and destructive days limited to tragedy. Viktor, who likes to be ironic, tells me the story of how there was a celebration in his small street in one of the neighboring courtyards at the very moment when the Russians invaded Bucha:

»One of the party guests, he was already a bit drunk, heard that soldiers were walking around in the street and said, ›I'm going to have a talk with them now«. Swaying and wearing a bathrobe, he stepped in front of the door and started to make some kind of speech across from the Russian unit. They could have taken him in right away. But as soon as he opened his mouth, they waved him away: ›Come on, go back inside, we'll take care of you«. So he went back into the yard and kept drinking.«

Curious stories with happy endings are popular here, which is quite telling psychologically. Andriy, also with a proclivity for irony, tells of a mirror-image case. As he shows me the broken window in his apartment, he points out an elderly gentleman sitting motionless on a bench in the courtyard:

»There you see a grandpa with a sense of humor. I was here all the time during the occupation. When ours finally entered the city, the territorial defense came through first, grandpa was sitting back there somewhere in a corner where you couldn't see him. The fighters passed by and didn't notice

him until he shouted at them from behind in Russian, ›Halt! Who goes there?‹ They all jumped in fright. But they didn't hurt him, of course. A joker. His family had left him and Bucha early on, they had ›forgotten‹ him. That's how it was. «

Just as jokes and optimism begin to pop up in many conversations about the war, so too do the attributes of the real, conditionally peaceful everyday life of the constant horrors of war. The number of cars on the streets is increasing, the playgrounds are filling up with children, young people are enjoying the spring evenings in the courtyards.

Those who return to the city now find it a special kind of consolation that the wonderful park of Bucha has suffered practically nothing. But talking to people we haven't seen for a long time, even in its green labyrinths, on the benches, we again talk about the war. Natalya tells about how peaceful residents hid in a school, Oleksandr had holed up in his apartment. Together they commemorate the dead.

Today, anything and everything in Bucha is a reminder of them, the dead. However, memorials have not yet been created. It is also not yet clear what a future strategy of commemoration might look like. Just as little as the future itself is really clear: Will the tragedy that became known as #buchamassacre eventually turn into a memory? Will it be repeated? It is bad enough that similar or worse atrocities continue at this hour in the villages and towns of Ukraine occupied and destroyed by the enemy. Will the attempt to return to normal life be successful? Those who have returned to Bucha, or who have not left it at all, often feel at the moment as if they were visiting their own homes. For the most part, people look to the Ukrainian military with hope and

gratitude. And understand only too well how much will depend on the determination with which the countries of the West continue to help Ukraine defend itself against the invasion.

Translated by Andrew Stonehouse

PROSE

Oksana Zabuzhko

“This is no longer your home,” the men with machine guns tell you. “Pack up, the transport is ready.”

This message can come – has come, countless times, – in different versions. For example, *You have two hours to pack* (or half an hour, or twenty-four hours – a difference, in this case, nothing short of existential). Or, *You are allowed two kilos of belongings per person*, (or five, or as much as you can carry), and every clarifying detail here is worth its weight in living flesh, each smells of breast-milk, of freshly baked bread, of baby hair and old photographs, of the conjugal bed, medicine, dried herbs in a sachet, the candle-wax splattered gods of the hearth – of that entire inalienable life of yours, fed into your blood by several generations, and out of which you now must snatch, with great precision, a few essential elements so that it can stay intact – and it’s already fallen apart! – and you can throw together a new, portable, backpackable home for yourself, a snail’s shell that would keep you whole. This is why it is in fact a very important question, the question of all questions perhaps, one the answer to which will say much more about you than hundreds of questionnaires and quizzes of the five-books-you-would-take-to-a-desert-island variety: *How much time would you need to pack if you found men with machine guns on your doorstep and they told you, get out, the transport is waiting?*

This is not a journey – a journey is something from which you return. It’s not emigration – emigration is something you choose. At least you retain agency

in your actions. Here, the key word is “transport”, because you become cargo, a statistical unit of logistics on a mass scale, like a head of cattle, or a cord of wood. Someone else’s invisible will has determined that you are to be uprooted, like a tree, from your one and only *home*, from the landscape of your tribal, genetic memory, as organic and tangible as a limb, to be transported across the map into oblivion and abandoned in an alien place. Now, they tell you, your home is here – put down new roots. If you can’t, if you wither – well, that’s your own fault.

Should the experiment be repeated on several generations, those subjected to it learn not to put down deep roots anywhere, ever. They learn to avoid becoming one with any place, like those unfortunate souls who had their first love brutally thwarted and spend their entire lives afraid of loving again. The instinctive, bone-marrow-deep memory of the original trauma of being uprooted blocks every subsequent attempt at rootedness, flashes a red alarm: a home of one’s own (and, by extension, the protective concentric rings of one’s village, city, and country around it) is *the thing that it hurts to lose*, so – no, please, don’t make me, I’ll have a light, portable home instead. This way, should the doors fly open and the strangers with machine guns step inside, you could pack, grab the essentials (your baby in the sling, your laptop in your backpack, your credit cards in your chest-pocket, you’ll buy what you need wherever you’re going, hurry, hurry, *the transport is waiting!*), and roll on with the wind, through cold, desolate space, not rupturing anything, no bleeding heart, no slashed flesh, having taught yourself to love not a point on the map but the distance between points, not the stasis, but the transition, not a place, but the motion: the road – the railway station – the airport. You’re up for it – being a nomad, living out of a suitcase, for years,

decades if you have to, blind to your environment, as a tourist is blind to the peeling, flee-stained wall-paper in hotel rooms.

One learns to recognize them – places that are unloved, land that had been robbed of true owners, villages littered with strangers' graves, places under the pall of anemia as if someone had pumped all of their blood out and injected them instead with someone else's, of incompatible type. The new, rejected blood cells are people, and their loitering in these places, among incomprehensible walls and neglected homesteads where other families' ghosts howl in the chimneys leaves an outside observer with a disorienting impression that all these people are, mentally, not here but elsewhere, someplace where, they secretly believe, their real life, their *own* ancestral Golden Age is being kept, with no expiration date or long-term penalties, on ice, awaiting defrosting. This faith of theirs stays with them as the smell preserved somehow at the bottom of their own grandmother's hastily packed (*You have two hours!*) suitcase. Even if nothing else could be preserved, taken along, this smell is forever – there is no home without it. Not even a portable home.

We catch whiffs of it in every corner of the world, at every latitude. The children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the deported, we have spread over the surface of the planet like a new ocean, carrying with us our virus of acquired home-deficiency. We want to feel at home everywhere – and so we have homogenized, ironed out the universe into a few universally recognizable – and therefore (trans)portable – elements: the highway, the gas station, the McDonalds, the airport. We rely on disposable cutlery and cycle through domiciles and localities as we do through laptops and mass-produced winter coats. We have adapted quite well, when you think about it, nothing to complain about. The only thorn in our collective side is this smell.

It can overcome you without warning – it ambushes you in a snippet of an old tune, an accidental combination of colors, the sounds of a forgotten language. It's in the steam rising from a pot of food –oh yes, we are convinced this is *exactly* what it smelled like in the kitchen of our great-great-grand-home, recipes are always replicated from memory, aren't they, so the same food tastes the same no matter where it's cooked. Doesn't it? (The correct answer is, no, it doesn't, but it's better not to know this.) Movies, books, retro-styled cafes, historic reconstructions – we have spawned an entire industry of nostalgia, just so we wouldn't feel homeless. But the smell still visits us in our dreams, and can explode with sudden, awesome force, reverberating through the entire length, it feels, of that long-ago un-rooted trunk – and that's how you find a grown woman, a refugee from the occupied Donetsk, wailing and screaming at the stunned hospital personnel to dare not--*dare not!*— designate her a “migrant” in her new records, because she's no migrant, oh no, *she had driven her own car here.*

And you cry with her, you wail right along, disapproving looks from the check-in ladies be damned, because you know this: two or three generations ago, this woman's ancestors were brought to the Donbas to work the mines, like most of the locals to-be, precisely as official Soviet “migrants” – in a cattle car filled with other exiled *kulaks*. They were lucky – my kin were taken out to much more distant lands, to Siberia and the Kazakh steppes, and the mines they dug there and the cities that grew, like polyps, around those mines are now falling into ruin without any help from the Russian army, by virtue of those lands' restoring themselves to wilderness in the wake of the violence inflicted upon them by men – and there isn't anyone there who might look after the graves of those of my family's members who never came back.

The woman in Kyiv – the third-generation deportee – had come back. By herself. She drove her own car. And it doesn't matter that she was forced to do so – to pick up and go, albeit in the opposite direction this time – by men with machine guns (probably of the same brand as all those years before). The important thing is that she is no longer a piece of cargo, she has “her own car” – a perfect snail's shell, her portable home that she had managed to put together from the land that was never really domesticated – and thus never loved, and thus the land so bitterly, hopelessly, and frighteningly left *defenseless*.

I can picture her driving. Through the rolled-down window, she could smell the smoke of burnt-out fires, the steam of field canteens at check-points, exhaust and the breath of the spring steppe coming to life – the smell of home.

Translation by Nina Shevchuk-Murray, 2015

Yuri Andrukhovych

“The Moscoviad”

In the meantime, let's sum up a few things, von F. You did indeed walk out, no, break out to

freedom from Galya's. You are indeed standing in the rain and touchingly think about unhappy love, about loneliness and the strange cruelty of woman. Besides you are trying to figure out your next steps, still somewhat uncertain because of the booze consumed.

For, despite the gained freedom, you are now dealing with a few newly acquired palpable minuses. First of all, the raincoat is lost. It was left as a hostage there, in her apartment. At any moment she can cut it up with knives or douse it with gasoline and torch it. This would be black magic, a sacred. And now you all can do is go soak in the rain and let your teeth chatter from the cold. Second, the tape with Mike Oldfield's latest record. This is a much more serious loss, for without music, without your beloved music you, von F., are nobody and nothing. Without music you are a cheap son of a bitch, an egotistic monster, narrow-minded self-absorbed piece of trash. With music you are a poet, a genius, a sage and a lover of humanity; only music grants sense to your depressing, erroneous and, indeed, accidental existence, you dumbass. Music gives you a chance to redeem at least half a Nail off your sin-drenched, scoundrel body. And you throw your music around, abandon it in inappropriate places.

Finally, an even more horrifying loss: Galya. Since now, having punched her in the cheekbone, it is senseless to hope for some renewal of relations, for forgiveness and calming down, even for an ordinary human friendship. Her doors are closed to you once and for all. Yet one more time you turned out

to be unworthy of a woman who for your sake was ready for anything, ready even to poison you with her refined snake venom. You will never find a woman like this. Surely she was a gift to you from above. You cast this gift off in the most careless plebeian fashion. Which by the way is nowhere near its end. And you amble towards new losses, in a sweater, in the rain, and Moscow ambles towards you, lame, wet, belching, with its war veterans, blacks, Armenians, Chinese, commies, soccer fans in their red-and-white caps, sergeants, lapsed ex-cons, and peasant petitioners to Lenin. And you are walking with a large bag for the gifts, even though you know perfectly well that today it is almost impossible to buy someone a gift in Moscow. This city is no longer capable of gift giving. This is the city of losses.

This is the city of a thousand and one torture chambers. A tall advance bastion of the East in

anticipation of conquering the West. Asia's last city, from whose drunken nightmares fled the anemic germanized monarchs. The city syphilis and hooligans, the favorite fairytale of armed hobos. The city of Bolshevik imperial architecture with the high-rise ghosts of people's commissariats, secret entryways, forbidden alleys, the city of concentration camps, of fossilized giants aimed at the sky. The population of local prisons could comprise a European nation. The city of granite monograms and marble ears of wheat and five-pointed stars as large as the sun. It only knows how to devour, this city of puke-covered courtyards and crooked picket fences in polar fluff-covered lanes with despotic names:

Garden-Forehead-Beating-sky, Kutuzov-Mound-sky, New-Executioner-sky, Cudgel-Beat-up-sky, Minor- October-Graveyard-sky...

This is the city of losses. It would be nice to level it. To plant again thick Finnish forests, introduce bears, elk, deer: let them graze around the moss-covered Kremlin ruins, let perches swim in its rivers and lakes returned to life, let wild bees focus on storing honey in the deepest fragrant tree cavities. This land needs a rest from its criminal capital. Perhaps then it will be capable of something good. Since it can't go on forever poisoning the world with the bacilli of evil, oppression, and aggressive dumb destruction!

And herein, ladies and gentlemen, lies the task of task, the key prerequisite for the survival of

humanity, and let the civilizations of modernity's great nations concentrate their efforts on this:

without shedding a single drop of blood, without even a shadow of violence, by means of humane parliamentary levers, to level all of Moscow, except perhaps a few old churches and monasteries, and to create in its place a green preserve for oxygen, light, and recreation. Only in this case one can speak of future for all of us on this planet, meine Damen und Herren! Thank you for your attention. (General applause, everyone gets up and sings the "Ode to Joy", music by Beethoven, lyrics by Schiller.) But this only your drunken opinion, von F. And it very well can be totally not coincidental. That is, be fatally unable to coincide with anything. And there will be no end to human losses on this earth.

Translated by Vitaly Chernetsky

POETRY

Boris Khersonsky

Missa in tempore belli

1. Kyrie

Lord, have mercy on us,
if You are for us, who can be against us?

Christ, have mercy on us,
especially if our hours are numbered.

Lord, have mercy on us,
especially in days of war

Kyrie eleison.

Christe eleison

Kyrie eleison

2. Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo

et in terra pax

hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Glory to God in the highest — wondrous are Your works!

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth — more war.

Glory to God in the highest — be not troubled, soldier, nightingales!

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth — bodies flail,
arms flung wide. People's will is evil.

Thus it has been and always will.

We praise you, soldier, slender of neck, sharp of throat.

We bless you, soldier, who on bayonet raise up the foe,
We lift on high your long dying groan.
God is cruel at times, but still better than earthly thrones.
We bless you, mister General,
we glorify you, mister President,
you who have robbed us blind,
did the Lord trample down death with death for your kind?
“Yes, sir!” says the General, hand to visor.
He’s taken an oath to submit to his own dear tsar.
But his own dear tsar has flown up on a branch and cries, “Cocka-doodle-
doo!”
He has a comb of gold, and a log in each eye, too.
Be glorified in the highest, God, behold not what’s going on down here.
The bullet’s a fool, the bayonet a good boy, one hit — and no more boy to
fear.
With the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.
Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

3. Credo

I believe that God is God alone,
He is Lord of his own.
He is the peace created by Him,
He is the light by whom the world is illumined,
And when battle flags fly, He is their Wind.
Out of black concrete holes the rockets fly.
The unseen world attacks the world in sight.

I believe that in Christ this God was made flesh,
and was crucified on the cross in sculpture and on canvas,
outside of time and yet within time, outside of space and yet on a hill,
between two thieves, a kind of earth-to-earth.

But if life is a sea, Christ stands at the helm
and steers the ship of the universe.

A ship with hundreds of thousands of cannons on board.

I doubt it can dock in the heavenly port.

Christ said, "I bring not peace, but the sword,
and with it, the chance to lie dead in the earth,
but when the reveille plays on the archangel's trump,
the graves will open right up.

And the skeletons will arise and before our eyes
they'll grow muscle and then a cover of skin,
and they'll tread the battlefield in delirium
always, forever and ever, for weather of weathers,
for trenches of trenches, for tranches of tranches,
where once they lay side by side, feeding the lice.

And the lice grew as big as typhoidal cows on the kolhoz,
and the tanks rumbled as good as armored tractors down the rows."

4. Sanctus

Holy, holy, holy, the Lord, God of might!

In other words — God of the heavenly hosts, or of the heavenly lights!

You went out with us to war, you seized the foe by the throat!

You filled earth and heaven with Your glory like a jug with wine.

You let the earth turn upside down.

Hosannah in the highest! We'll see you around in the next world.

5. Benedictus

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord in a glorious
and frightening time, a time of troubles, a time of war,
blessed are those who walk row by row, each one shall be a hero,
salvos three and into the ground they go.

And once again — Hosannah in the highest! Hosannah on high!
The further into battle, the fewer heroes left behind.

6. Agnus

Lamb of God, who has freed all people from deadly snares,
Lamb of God, who has borne the immeasurable weight of our sins,
Lamb of God, who has counted and pardoned every fall,
Lamb of God, have mercy on us all.

Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Light from true Light,
Lamb of God, Savior of constellations, planets and stars in the sky,
Lamb of God, who crown your iconostasis,
Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, little lamb lain on the altar,
a time of war has come. Cinders rise from the earth.

Grant us peace, we are sated with eternal fire.

They say, “We’re starting a war again.”

Dona nobis pacem. Amen.

Translated from Russian by Martha M. F. Kelly

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