ЗМІСТ

State of War / Anthology

Про книгу

Within this anthology, you'll find 35 texts from some of Ukraine's most renowned writers and intellectuals. Each of these texts delves into the current war's harsh and unsettling realities because we believe in the unbridled power of truth. We hold dear the memories and sentiments of those who bore witness to the first year of this war and strive to do all we can to ensure this war is never relegated to obscurity. We also hope that future generations who come across this book will understand that while war is one of the most devastating things to happen to humanity, there are times when we must fight and defend our home.


State of War
Meridian Czernowitz

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2023

Intro

To Readers in Ukraine and Around the World

The year 2022 is now part of history, and its memory will forever be etched in our minds. This was the year when the enemy plotted to destroy Ukrainian statehood, but thanks to the heroic efforts of our soldiers and the unwavering unity of our nation, the worst outcome was averted, and the horde was repelled. This is how history is created and how a nation of victors arises.

The true stories of the past year must be preserved and told to the world with a Ukrainian voice, recorded in memorable works for future generations. The truth is one of our most potent weapons, so I extend my gratitude to Ukrainian writers for upholding the cultural front, as demonstrated in this anthology.

I'd also like to highlight that the anthology includes pieces from writers who joined the Ukrainian Armed Forces. A century ago, their forerunner, the renowned poet and soldier of the Ukrainian National Republic army, Yevhen Malaniuk, posed the question, “A stiletto dagger or a stylus?” Today, these warriors carry on his legacy, bearing witness to the persistence of generations and carrying on a struggle that predates 2014. It's time to bring this struggle to an end, and writers have a gift for doing so.

Martial law — the state of war — refers to more than just a legal system that exists during wartime. It's also a reminder of the Cossack state, a military encampment that served as a fortress during wars and battles. Last year, our country became an unyielding fortress under the blue and yellow flag. I am confident that this fortress will reclaim all its territories thanks to the bravery and expertise of Ukrainian soldiers, as well as the solidarity of

Ukrainian society and the support of our allies worldwide. Glory to Ukraine!

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine General Valeriy Zaluzhny

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Alim Aliev is Deputy Director General at the Ukrainian Institute of Human Rights, a curator of educational and cultural projects, a researcher, a journalist, and a board member of PEN Ukraine. He co-founded the NGO Crimea SOS and is a co-author of the book *Mustafa Dzhemilev: Unbreakable*, which chronicles the life of the Crimean Tatars leader. Aliev has helped curate numerous art-related projects, such as the Crimean Fig literary contest, book, and festival, the Amazing Stories of Crimea art exhibition at Mystetskyi Arsenal, and the cultural program for the Crimea Platform Summit in 2021. He is also the founder of the Tamirlar digital museum, which documents the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people in 1944. Aliev has curated Crimea-related discussions at the Book Arsenal, Lviv Media Forum, and BookForum Lviv and has participated in advocacy missions at the Council of Europe, European Parliament, OSCE, and UN Security Council. He holds a Master's degree in Political Science from Taurida National VI Vernadsky University and completed the Summer Institute on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California in 2022. Additionally, he is an alumnus of the Open World program in 2014 and the Responsible Leadership Seminar at the Aspen Institute Ukraine in 2019.

Alim Aliev

Cenk

My war began on February 27, 2014, with the morning news of the capture of the Council of Ministers of Crimea and the Supreme Council of Crimea by “unknown individuals” in camouflage without insignia and armed with weapons. At the time, we didn’t explicitly refer to these events since “war” as the fighting was not concentrated around the peninsula. But Russia had been carefully preparing its machinery of repression to launch it immediately. Reshat Ametov, the first civilian victim, attended a peaceful protest in the central square of Aqmescit (Simferopol) against the occupation. A few weeks later, his beaten body was discovered in the woods, bearing signs of torture. The impact of this event was felt throughout the country and was difficult to process. Unfortunately, today, Ukraine finds itself in a similar situation with thousands of innocent people having lost their lives to Russian aggression. These stories of war crimes may seem like just statistics to some, but for us, each one is an open wound in our hearts and the numbers continue to grow every day.

Over the past nine years, Russia has been turning Crimea into its own colony through militarization, population resettlements, change of identity, destruction of cultural heritage, suppression of freedom of speech, and undermining of representative institutions of the indigenous people. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the peninsula has become one of the main launch pads for rockets aimed at other parts of Ukraine and a role model for the occupation of new territories.

The peninsula has become increasingly isolated from the mainland since the occupation. This has resulted in the people inhabiting different realities, with children born during the occupation already attending school. The Russian media has perpetuated propaganda, further entrenching a climate of

fear and mistrust created by the security forces. As a result, the population is forced to focus solely on their day-to-day concerns. The Crimean Tatar community, for whom the notions of dignity and freedom are essential, is left with the difficult choice of either losing their ancestral homeland once again or protesting and enduring constant repression.

The war has put Crimea back on Ukraine's agenda as well as to the consciousness of its residents, who sense that liberation is inevitable. The tectonic plates that were previously diverging are now rapidly converging towards each other. The acts of genocide committed by the Russians in Bucha and Mariupol are reflected in the painful inscriptions on benches in Sevastopol. People of advanced age read prayers (dua) for the dead, and families on the peninsula find ways to transfer money for volunteer initiatives. I also remember the September missile strikes in Novofedorivka, and then in other places on the peninsula, when my Crimean Tatar friends went from one to another for festive tea and shared the same memories as their compatriots in Kyiv or Dnipro. My unbreakable relative drank sweet homemade cherry liqueur on the porch. Meanwhile, people turned on the patriotic Ukrainian song "Oi u luzi chervona kalyna," at weddings, which ultimately resulted in arrests and fines.

In this abnormal normality, a free and subjective Ukrainian political nation is being formed, which is resilient and no longer views itself as the victim, becoming an example of struggle and courage for the world. For Ukrainians, this is a war for their existence and future state, and similarly for Crimean Tatars, who on both sides of the artificial border in Chonhar are struggling to protect their identity and land from the occupiers. There is no other option: either we defeat the enemy or we do not exist. In the Crimean Tatar language we call war "Cenk", which began in Crimea and will come to an end on the peninsula.

During this period of full-scale war, I often find myself having flashbacks to 2014. War can be brutal in its effect on human relationships. I've observed how family connections are torn apart, long-standing friendships disappear, and sometimes, strangers become closest to one another. In 2014,

I went through a process of re-evaluating my relationships and surroundings, which helped me understand the importance of the question “Who does Crimea belong to?” Some people worked the hotlines of our Crimean aid initiative and received hundreds of calls a day, others took people to pro-Ukrainian rallies. Meanwhile, there were those who started regurgitating Russian propaganda about Crimea and openly or quietly supported it, appearing at pro-occupation propaganda rallies as the leader of this or that collaborationist faction. Behind each of these examples are people who still are or were close to me.

In 2022, I discovered another question to “Who does Crimea belong to?” to help distinguish my own people in the whirlwind of events. The question is, “What are you doing for our victory?” and sometimes it yields unexpected answers. In early March, I needed to find a place for a large number of people to stay for one night in Vinnytsia. All the hotels and hostels were full, so I reached out to friends for help and was given some contacts. I called one number and explained that I needed to house eleven people for the night. After a brief pause, the person on the other end consulted with someone and responded, “Well, we can only take four people. We will put two to sleep in our room, and two more in my mother’s room.” I paused to confirm that I was speaking with someone at a hostel or shelter in Vinnytsia, but it turned out I had dialed a different number and was speaking with residents of a village in Central Ukraine! We laughed and I thanked them for their willingness to help from the first phone call.

This period of my life is focused on action, with little room for reflection. At times, my purpose becomes unclear, but thoughts of the future provide me with the motivation to keep going. I am driven by the prospect of the complex and interesting work that will come with the de-occupation of Crimea. I often imagine my first days back on the peninsula. My parents’ house will be bustling with the voices of family, my father grilling his signature barbecue, and my mother preparing manti and Napoleon cake. Amidst the commotion, my friends will grab me and take me to greet and listen to the sea. Afterwards, we’ll all gather around a large table in our

yard, where my people — who are currently in trenches, in captivity, in migration, and occupation — will be seated.

See you soon in our free Bakhchisarai! It no longer sounds like a mantra, but like a real plan.

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Sofia Andrukhovych, born in 1982, is a renowned writer hailing from the western Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivsk. Her body of work includes three books of short stories, three novels, essays, and even a children's book. Her 2014 novel, *Felix Austria*, was honored with the prestigious BBC Ukrainian Book of the Year award, and in 2015, she received the Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski prize. Her most recent novel, *Amadoka* (2019), is a poignant tale that weaves together the complex histories of the ongoing war against Russia, the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s, and the Holocaust in Ukraine. Andrukhovych's writing is as insightful as it is poignant, exploring the complex human experiences of the past and present.

Sofia Andrukhovych

Haka, or the Formation of Identity

The ancient Greek chorus of generators thundering around us made me think I had misunderstood Yulia's words. But she repeated loudly: "I never had such orgasms before the war!"

We'd spent the last two hours in a giant restaurant near Khreshchatyk. Before the war, the place was always crowded, but after passing through the tangled underground labyrinths and finally reaching the spacious hall, I noticed that I was the only one there. Candles flickered dimly, adding to the confusion and darkness. The vague shapes of servers could be seen moving in the shadows. I was seated in the place with the most natural light, next to the window that overlooked the arcade of the shopping center one level below. Yulia was running late, so I passed the time by checking out the holiday shop windows when it suddenly went completely dark. "This has never happened before," the administrator said worriedly. In companionable silence, she and I watched as the pale beams of smartphone flashlights reilluminated the boutiques, their once radiant glow promising a timeless sense of luxury that never failed to soothe. More powerful flashlights joined them, and soon I felt that I was watching the birth of galaxies in the blackness of the universe, the dance of lonely stars in the dark of eternity.

When Yulia finally came, we ordered some food. I chose the burrata on a bed of pumpkin mousse, and Yulia went for *vorschmack* in waffle cones and a glass of white wine. We exchanged personal news, and then I found a video on my smartphone that I'd begged my friend Nazar to send me.

A few years ago, Nazar and I set out to find the grave of Ukrainian writer and archaeologist Viktor Petrov at the Lukianivka Military Cemetery. Petrov's close friends and colleagues were met with repression in the 1930s — they were all shot, arrested, or exiled. However, Petrov lived a long life,

possibly due to his cooperation with the system. As a result, the writer, professor, and archaeologist was laid to rest among high-ranking military officers like generals and colonels.

At first, Nazar and I mistakenly searched for Petrov's grave across the street, among the lush greenery in the cemetery, which was abundant during the early days of summer. Eventually, we stumbled upon the grave of Kostya Zerov, the son of Petrov's beloved woman. Tragically, Kostya died suddenly from scarlet fever just as his father, the brilliant poet and translator Mykola Zerov — a close friend of Petrov — was undergoing intense persecution. The 10-year-old's grave serves as a symbol for the burial of Mykola, who was shot in the killing fields of Sandarmokh in 1937 during Stalin's Great Terror.

Nazar is a man of literature. Before the invasion, he worked in a bookstore, where he was known for making some of the tastiest filter coffee in Kyiv. He went to the Military Commissariat on the first day of the war. I saw him a week ago after he'd received leave from the front for a shrapnel wound and facial surgery. Nazar has a damaged auditory nerve, and he will have ringing in his ears for the rest of his life — his own personal air raid siren to remind him of what he'd witnessed, including the five soldiers who died before his eyes.

He didn't want to say anything about his military service. Instead, Nazar showed me a video from a few months ago, when he was sent to Great Britain for military training. There were several Maori instructors from New Zealand, and on the last evening, they performed a ritual haka dance for the members of the Ukrainian military.

Every time I watch it, I get goosebumps. This video is so captivating that I can't help but show it to others. The sight is beautiful and ugly, repelling yet impossible to look away from — the aggressive movements, vigorous leg stomping, bulging eyes, and fully extended tongues are perfectly coordinated. The leader, who set the rhythm and started the song, was shirtless, his face covered in dark paint. He held the Ukrainian flag in his hands.

The next thing Yulia said after she and I went out onto the icy hilly streets — more precisely, she didn't speak, but screamed, competing with the voices of the generators — was her confession. A beam of light from an elderly man's headlamp, who was navigating his way towards us like a searchlight looking for escaped prisoners, momentarily blinded us. Then Yulia added, "Maybe I shouldn't say such things out loud."

I took a closer look at Yulia. She seemed radiant amidst the darkness of the central streets of Kyiv. Her skin glowed, her dewy eyes sparkled with delight, and she licked her lips as if she still tasted her *vorschmack* she'd washed down earlier with a cool glass of wine.

She regaled me with tales of her clandestine rendezvous, divulging the intricacies and hues of her feelings, but the cacophony of the environment and the absolute darkness made it difficult to fully grasp her every word. Yet it seemed to me Yulia was recounting the height of her climaxes during missile strikes — the moment a missile hits its mark, or the exhilaration when it's shot down by the air defense system, the fragments spiraling through the air. She described the extravagant thrills she felt under the drone's rumbling, the rhythm and pulsating movements orchestrated by the wails of the air raid siren.

She told me about the intriguing peculiarities of hotel meetings during power outages: the administrators in cold lobbies lit by eerie spotlights; the secret side doors to stairways; the laborious climb to the seventeenth floor when elevators were out of order; the sounds of stealthy footsteps; the ambiguous shadows passing quietly; a mysterious glow swaying in the air, and a door skillfully propped open with a crowbar by a staff member as electronic keys were useless. All this in complete darkness, on the seventeenth floor, where you can imagine but not see the outlines of the city below.

She went on to describe meetings in rented apartments, including a memorable one where, at their most tender moment, they were interrupted by a sudden raid from the Office of Counterintelligence. A wary neighbor reported the suspicious visitors who had snuck into the building, believing

that they might be dangerous saboteurs.

“I probably shouldn’t talk about this out loud,” she repeated, her eyes shining happily.

She really was taking a risk by admitting something like that. In wartime, judgments and views leave no room for maneuvering, binding people into a single, rigid position, like an ossified corset. There are either heroes or enemies, with no in-between. There is no room for indulgence or softness — just demands, judgments, and relentlessness. It sets the highest bar of expectations with no recognition of individual features, weaknesses, and subtleties. The corset is fixed in place with phrases like “it’s not timely,” “to the very end,” and “identity formation.” Life gradually became imbued with the undeniable conviction that everyone has a reason to be controlled and judged, and this was deemed necessary by our society’s moral obligation and right to defend itself.

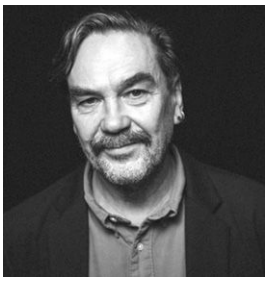
Pathos and tension became the go-to methods for achieving this. But they became an addiction, like a drug, and it was hard to achieve catharsis without them. Society’s perception became distorted, unable to see anything colorful in more neutral tones, unable to see anything that wasn’t about war. A milder tone was even seen as a threat, leading to aggression. Lack of aggression itself was seen as a source of aggression. The more intense the emotions, the greater the belief in the right to control and demand.

“Of course, Yulia!” I shouted. “This is not something you should talk about! This is not the time for such things!”

“I know!” Yulia shouted back to me. “That’s why I can only tell you about it!”

Under the infernal roar of generators rotating around their own axis on the streets of black ice, she assured me, as if she understood what she was doing was wrong. But that’s who she is, it’s part of her identity. All this sex is her haka: her ritual, her cleansing fire, her dance. And she will continue dancing to it.

“I’ll cum to the very end!” Yulia shouted just at that moment, when the windows of the houses illuminated the street, and the generators fell silent.



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Yuri Andrukhovych was born in 1960 in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. He studied at the Ukrainian Printing Academy (1977–1982) and Moscow Literary Institute (1989–1991). In 1985, he founded the literary performance group *Bu-Ba-Bu (Burlesk — Balahan — Bufonada* i. e. Burlesque-Bluster-Buffoonery). He has published five poetry books, seven novels and four books of essays. His books have been translated into 22 languages.

Andrukhovych is a laureate of several prestigious international literary awards, including Herder Preis (Hamburg, 2001), Erich-Maria Remarque Friedenspreis (Osnabrück, 2005), Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung (2006), Central-European Literary Award Angelus (Wrocław, 2006), Hannah-Arendt-Preis für politisches Denken (Bremen, 2014), Vilenica Award (2017) and Heinrich-Heine-Preis (2022).

Yuri Andrukhovych

What Pain We Should Expect

On February 10, 2022, I had business in Kyiv: a meeting with B., a poet who also happens to be one of my publishers and almost my peer. He'd collected some money from selling my books, which is customary to call by the nice Western word "royalties."

Entering B.'s office, I noticed my old friend's somewhat agitated, not to mention perplexed look.

"Do you think he'll attack?" he asked.

It was unnecessary to name the subject: in those days, everyone by default, understood that the subject's name was Putin. Well, or Russia, which, in the end, is the same thing.

"Very likely," I answered. "As far as I'm concerned, it's about to happen."

I really believed that the abscess of threats and unambiguous military preparations was ripe to burst.

B. became even more agitated and complained about his terrible prospects: to lose the country, freedom, and a relatively solid business, hard-earned over several decades of phenomenal publishing work — the loss of everything.

"My work has hit a bump in the road," complained B., "I can't concentrate on anything. Sales have dropped significantly, if not entirely. Why do people need books when he can strike at any moment?"

I found myself without any soothing words, at least not aloud. Instead, I kept my thoughts to myself, reflecting on how fortunate I was not to have any business ventures, especially in publishing. One did not envy poor B. in that situation.

Shortly after, he regained his composure and extended a customary invitation for lunch. This time we went to a plaza near the publishing house.

On the way, B. drew my attention to how dramatically the number of cars and pedestrians has decreased here, in the center of the capital. According to him, people had been leaving Kyiv en masse over the past few weeks. Some hurried off to Lviv, while others sought refuge in the mountains, and a few ventured even farther — perhaps abroad.

But gangs of looters were already forming in the city, which tracked down houses abandoned by their owners. I couldn't find out how B. knew about it.

Then he took up the subject once more. According to B., the only thing that could stop Putin was an extraordinary mystical event, given that Putin himself was a mystic with obvious mental deviations. B. also speculated that the ongoing Winter Olympics in China were holding Putin back, and the question remained whether it would be better for us that the Russians win, for example, in hockey, or that they lose. In both the first and second options, Putin could read a mystical encouragement to war.

"We would have to act in an unusual and preemptive manner," B. shared his ideas. "Let's say, destroy the Kerch bridge with missiles. Or hit the navy in Sevastopol. That would come as quite a shock to him and perhaps even make him reconsider."

I liked it. Non-standard actions were more to my taste. Planning ahead was the smartest thing to do, especially when it came to the Kremlin monstrosity.

The Italian restaurant we visited served the best cheesecake in Kyiv. Cheesecake, judging by the name, is not exactly an Italian dessert, but it was at this Italian restaurant you could find the best offering. At least that's what B.'s wife thought.

"She often comes here for the cheesecake," he shared confidentially.

I'm mostly indifferent to sweets, but somehow I remembered this detail.

The fact that the place was expensive was evidenced by the presence of young and very beautiful, model-looking women in the restaurant's interior. They quantitatively (and, of course, qualitatively) outweighed all other visitors, including us. I thought involuntarily that they might as well leave

Ukraine for some safer place. Reports of rape were not yet known then, but the memory of past rapes lurked in the subcortex, an inevitability when dealing with Russians.

The comfortable atmosphere and good food calmed my friend down quite a bit. He even abstracted a little from his catastrophic premonitions and began to talk about his plans to republish Hermann Hesse.

However, anxiety soon returned to its place inside B.

“The tip would be twice as much,” he told the waiter, “if you switched to Ukrainian at least once out of courtesy.”

“Well, I’m also against the Muscovites,” retorted the waiter. “Despite the fact that I am from Crimea, I’m also on Ukraine’s side.”

The tip amount seemed to have increased.

As we stepped out onto the boulevard and prepared to bid farewell, I made an effort to speak a little more candidly.

“You know, I’m not afraid,” I assured him. “We just have to remember our youth, all that Soviet crap. How lucky we are to have lived in Ukraine! What to say about life? That it turned out to be long! Our lives have been fantastically successful, and now it’s possible that... It’s not scary at all, not at all.”

“Well, that’s if they kill us outright!” objected B. “The problem is that they will mock our pain. Torture! They are so fancy about it. We have no idea what kind of pain to expect from them. That’s what I’m afraid of.”

And he added:

“We are all on their lists. People like you and I are probably in the first thousand.”

“So low? I’m probably in the second thousand,” I tried to joke.

The following weeks confirmed everything with regard to the lists. It was evident that British (or, after all, American) intelligence had not exaggerated, intimidated, or fabricated any information. The truth was that the Russians had been compiling blacklists of Ukrainians for years, if not decades, and had never truly ceased their efforts. In fact, they had been updating and augmenting these lists since the collapse of the USSR, not to

mention in more recent times.

Why? What was the meaning of it all?

A particularly valuable type of hostage? Intellectual, ideological, and civic leadership? Psychological (through physical) processing for the purpose of converting “repentant sinners” to the Russian world? An update of Eastern European practices of the second half of the 1940s? Another act of mind enslavement?

I believe it involves a little bit of everything. The most important is the last one, because, in addition to the conquest of territories, the Russian invasion has always been about the conquest of minds.

This war, this “special operation,” stems from the past. This is not even some historical continuity, but something worse — a reversal of time.

As I write these lines, it has been 240 days since the onset of the great Russian invasion. The epithet I just used did not come easily to me, for I have never had the desire to label anything Russian as “great.” Well, except for this continuous, massive, wild, Dostoevskyian crime, for which an even greater punishment is inevitable.

Stanislav Aseyev, born in 1989 in Donetsk, is an accomplished journalist, blogger, and member of PEN Ukraine. During the early years of Russia’s war in Ukraine, Aseyev remained in Donetsk and wrote articles under the pen name Stanislav Vasin, describing the on-the-ground reality in occupied Donbas for various media outlets. In 2017, he was kidnapped and wrongfully imprisoned by Russian forces, spending more than two and a half years as a captive in the notorious Isolation prison camp before finally being freed in a prisoner exchange in 2019. Aseyev went on to write *The Torture Camp on Paradise Street*, describing his time in captivity, and in 2020 he was the recipient of both the Free Media Award and the National Freedom of Expression Award. In 2021, he won Ukraine's most prestigious literary honor, the Taras Shevchenko National Prize, in recognition of his journalistic writings.

Stanislav Aseyev

Evil Must Have a Name