




Q U O T E S O N W A R

20 Ukrainian Writers Reflect on the War





Introduction

24 May 2022 – Today marks three months since Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. Thousands of civilians have been killed or injured in attacks by Russian forces who stand accused of war crimes, including summary executions, torture, and rape. At least seven journalists have lost their lives while covering the war. Over 14 million people have been displaced, with six million having fled Ukraine to other countries. The PEN Community utterly condemns the violence unleashed by Russian forces against Ukraine and urgently calls for an end to the bloodshed.

In solidarity with all those affected by the war in Ukraine, PEN International and PEN Ukraine are publishing 20 quotes by Ukrainian writers and members of PEN Ukraine, who reflect on the horrific events of recent weeks.

‘Russia’s war against Ukraine has brought destruction, atrocities, and deaths on an unimaginable scale. With this action, we reiterate our solidarity with our friends at PEN Ukraine and all those affected by the war. The Russian authorities must end their senseless war at once, and those responsible for human rights violations, including war crimes, must be brought to justice.’ Burhan Sonmez, PEN International president.

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Volodymyr Yermolenko

War shows you that individualism is an illusion. When human connections disrupt, you realize how much you depend on them.

The war changes the perception of time. Your life can change in one day, one hour, one minute. Delaying decisions until tomorrow can cost you safety or even life. Time is no longer a menu of options between which you choose; it is an unpredictable sequence of plains and abysses.

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Volodymyr Yermolenko is a philosopher, writer, journalist, and member of PEN Ukraine.

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Kateryna Kalytko

War does not abolish the power of tenderness
and love.

...

Kateryna Kalytko is a poet, translator, author and
member of PEN Ukraine

...

Vitaliy Portnykov

Until recently, what we are experiencing today could only be read in history textbooks. This is the classic struggle between good and evil, on which the very survival of mankind depends.

...

Vitaliy Portnykov is a publicist, writer, journalist and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Serhii Plokhii

What happened as a result of this war was not just that a Ukrainian identity strengthened, and Ukrainians connected more with their Ukrainian culture, but huge categories of people no longer see the idea of picking up arms for their country as radical.

...

Serhii Plokhii is a professor of history and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Ihor Kozlovsky

This is a terrible armed phase of the civilizational war of values, the existential struggle of the light of the future with the darkness of the past.

...

Ihor Kozlovsky is a historian, religious scholar, poet, writer and essayist. Former prisoner of conscience, he is a member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Andriy Lyubka

The enemy has stepped on our land and has woken up not just people but also the force that makes us who we are.

The main result of the war is clear today:
Ukraine has finally become Ukraine.

...

Andriy Lyubka is a poet, novelist, translator, and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Oleksandr Motyl

Wars create nations, and people's wars create
invincible nations.

...

Oleksandr Motyl is a writer and member of PEN
Ukraine.

...

Yaroslav Hrytsak

The Ukrainian victory will be the beginning not only of the new Ukraine but also of the new Europe.

...

Yaroslav Hrytsak is a writer, historian, public intellectual, professor and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Ihor Isichenko

The war is going on between the worlds of
love and hate.

...

Ihor Isichenko is the Archbishop of Kharkiv and
Poltava, and a member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Oleksandr Mykhed

We don't understand what day of the week it is,
but we count the days of the war. This is a war
of a whole nation.

...

Oleksandr Mykhed is a writer, curator of art projects,
literary scholar, and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Borys Khersonsky

Hope, of course, dies last. So we are hoping, and we know for sure that we are strong now. We are stronger than we were a week ago.

...

Borys Khersonsky is a poet, publicist, translator and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Ostap Slyvynsky

No one who lives in a peaceful country will understand anyone experiencing war from the inside, living under bombs and artillery shells, in an occupied city, where people who want to escape are fired on.

...

Ostap Slyvynsky is a poet, essayist, translator, literary critic and academic. He is the Vice President of PEN Ukraine.

...

Serhii Zhadan

They came to free us from ourselves. They don't even have a convincing version for the faint of heart. They want to simply destroy us, just in case, just like that.

...

Serhii Zhadan is a poet, novelist, translator, public activist, and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Volodymyr Dibrova

This is a real war for independence. It can never be lost.

...

Volodymyr Dibrova is a writer, translator, literary critic, preceptor at Harvard University, and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Yuri Vynnychuk

Hatred overflows me. Although I know that
hatred destroys a lot and does not create
anything.

...

Yuri Vynnychuk is a prose writer, poet, translator,
columnist, editor, compiler, and member of PEN
Ukraine.

...

Mykola Riabchuk

The Russian-Ukrainian war can certainly be interpreted as a clash of civilizations, political systems, and values of the past and the future, but also as a clash of reality and virtuality.

...

Mykola Riabchuk is a poet, translator, prose writer, essayist, and honorary President of PEN Ukraine.

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Iya Kiva

For eight years to be saying: I have a war at home.

To finally accept: my home is a war.

...

Iya Kiva is a poet, translator, journalist, and member of PEN Ukraine.

...

Olena Styazhkina

Our war is not about the dead. Because heroes
do not die.

...

Olena Styazhkina is a writer, publicist, professor of
history, and member of the Board of PEN Ukraine.

...

Andriy Kurkov

The more bombs and rockets that fall on Ukrainian cities, the more radically Ukrainian writers and cultural figures will respond to these requests. Not everyone will respond, it is true – only those who are still alive.

...

Andriy Kurkov is a writer, journalist, screenwriter, and President of PEN Ukraine.

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Oksana Lushchevska

War refers not to national, class, or race identifications – it makes all human beings equal.

...

Oksana Lushchevska is a children's books writer, translator, publicist, and member of PEN Ukraine.