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Not only «Stand with Ukraine» but also «Win with Ukraine»

WEDNESDAY, 3 APRIL, 2024

The Russia-Ukraine War has geopolitical significance. Russia's imperial aspirations, which are clearly seen in its history and culture through the centuries, reach far beyond the borders of Ukraine. Russia is a threat to the security of all Europe and the world. Ukraine is today paying a great price to hold back the enemy – tens of thousands of lives of Ukraine's best sons and daughters and millions of broken destinies and physical and spiritual wounds. How long will this last? Ukraine cannot win this war without the consolidation of the democratic world. Today it is not enough simply to stand with Ukraine – it's necessary to win with Ukraine!

Why does Russian culture, the culture of empire, threaten the whole world? –

Iryna Starovoyt, poetess, literary scholar, and assistant professor at the Culture Studies Department of Ukrainian Catholic University, explains.



It has happened historically that Russian culture was always Russia's «business card» in the world, but, in fact, it was a screen which covered so much evil and unpunished wrongdoing. Despite the aggressive, genocidal war which Russia has been waging against Ukraine since 2014, and even after the full-scale invasion of 24 February 2022, the world is still in admiration of Russian culture and often separates it from what the Russian government is doing. So, Russia's threat to Ukraine is not only that it has a population a few times larger but also that it is better recognized and known.

In this war, Russians have again shown their hatred of Ukraine, which has more than once been repeated in the history of the relations of both countries. And the question, rooted in various cultural discussions is: Is it necessary to «cancel» Russian culture in connection with Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine?

If we go back a few decades, or a little more than a century back, then we see that world classics already posed similar questions, though Russian classics very seldom did. American literary scholar Ewa Thompson in her book about imperialism in Russian literature [*Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*– ed.] writes about a painfully clear matter – literature in the Russian language can hardly not be imperial, for Russian authors wrote their works at the request of the empire, to a great extent for its service and promotion. The empire paid them honoraria, presented prizes and awards, and put certain names and texts into its canon. And what went into the canon, by definition, could not be not imperial. Another thing is how skillfully it was possible to create the illusion that these texts reflect the innocent quintessence of Russianness.

In 1922, the Soviet Union was created; by cultural indices, it was the heir of the Russian Empire but in every way denied its imperial nature and for the first few years did not demonstrate it. But this was all an illusion and in no way did Russia plan to let Ukraine go. Russia's idea was always that Ukraine and Ukrainians did not and could not exist.

Russia destroyed and destroys Ukraine's creators, and so they are not writing their best texts, not creating their greatest masterpieces and not making great discoveries. This is a tragedy.

Ukrainian culture is like Noah's ark: it has already a number of times sailed through very dark and terrible times, in which many material things did not survive. In the current war against the Russian Empire, Ukrainians have gone from tragedy to conflict. We must save our home and re-establish it.

Ukrainians earlier had no diplomatic representation abroad or were not even on maps of the world. The situation today is cardinally different. There is a desire in the world to find out who Ukrainians are and how they managed to hold out in the first days, weeks, months of the full-scale invasion. It seems to me that today the window of opportunities for Ukrainianization in the world is open as never before. And many people who previously had no connection to Ukraine want to come to us and study Ukrainian language and culture. We feel great interest, solidarity, and empathy.

The War in Ukraine



Estimates of costs
for rebuilding Ukraine
\$400 billion - 1 trillion

The war has shown that among the main challenges for Ukraine are the education and healthcare systems.

3793 **educational institutions**
have been destroyed or damaged

1449 **healthcare facilities**
have been destroyed or damaged in
Eastern and Central Ukraine

including **367** **hospitals**



Russia's global threat as unpunished evil

Ukrainian culture today is culture at the scene of the crime. It is known from the theory of collective trauma that trauma is surrounded by silence. In Ukrainian history, on the one hand, there was internal silence, because sometimes there were not words to comprehend and describe the ruinous reality. But, on the other hand, it was through external silence, censorship, which forbid speaking of terrible crimes of the 20th century like the Holodomor, the Holocaust, deportations... These traumas have not been processed or talked through, for

In the many centuries of suffering, detractors described Ukrainians as victims and did not expect from them independence, self-reliance, or vitality. To tell the truth, Ukrainians themselves thought this way about themselves. But in the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion, they did something incredible: they rejected the status of victims. This became a great surprise for the world. Today's war, in fact, forced the change of very many established stereotypes.

Ukrainian culture and literature chose for itself the mode of witnessing. Ukrainian poets and writers write about the difficult experiences of war, things about which their predecessors often did not want to speak, and they said: «You don't need to know that. We suffered through that so that nothing similar would ever happen to you.» But the motto of Western and Central Europe, "never again," already has no meaning, because the worst has happened again...

When they ask me what Ukrainian society should be most afraid of, I answer that the war will end but justice will not be achieved. Ukrainians are not afraid of the Terrible Judgment but rather terror not judged, because then unpunished evil can return again and again. Until a great trial happens in The Hague, for us «The Hague» is only in literature. Today so many important works are appearing which preach to the world. Ukrainians have finally understood themselves as a planetary culture. «The world» is not happening «there somewhere» but in Ukraine.

It is now extremely important that the world understand that it is not enough to stand with Ukrainians, but it's necessary to triumph together with them, not only «Stand with Ukraine» but «Win with Ukraine.» Otherwise, the Russian existential threat sooner or later will make its way to other countries. Ukraine now is Europe's shield.



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