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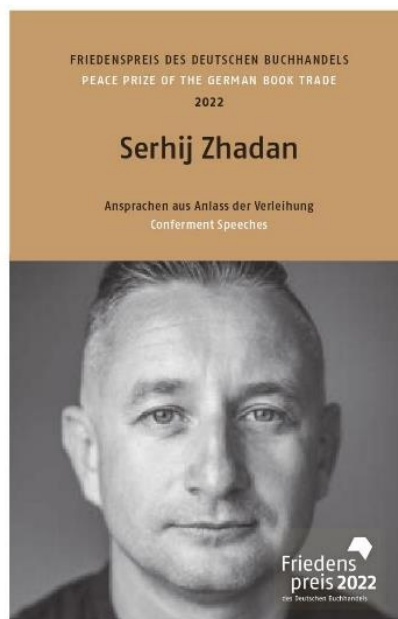
Serhij Zhadan

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2022

Speeches in English

Sunday, October 23, 2022

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Serhij Zhadan
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Ina Hartwig

Councillor for Culture and Science of the City of Frankfurt am Main

Greeting

On behalf of the City of Frankfurt, I would like to welcome you to the Church of St. Paul in Frankfurt for the awarding of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2022 to the Ukrainian author and musician Serhiy Zhadan.

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On the morning of 28 April 2022, just over two months after the start of the Russian attack on Ukraine, the German news website »Spiegel Online« reported the following: »According to Ukrainian sources, shelling in the Kharkiv region has killed at least three people and injured six, including a 14-year-old child. Local officials early this morning blamed Russia for the civilian victims. The regional military chief announced that two of the six wounded were seriously injured«.

Later that same day, at 5 : 27 pm, Serhiy Zhadan wrote the following: »There's a rockabilly concert in Kharkiv / The city rings out and refuses to surrender / Have a great night, everyone.«

In Zhadan's dispatches from his embattled hometown - recently published in German translation as »Himmel über Charkiw« (»Sky Above Kharkiv«) - we also read of the shellfire and the victims, of the daily struggle for survival and the terrible brutality of war. But we read of hope and confidence, too. Of a deceptive sense of normality in an apocalyptic setting. We read of the many people Zhadan meets as he makes his way through the city. And of a belief in culture: »It will continue to be a city of poets and universities, you'll see«, he writes.

Most of us living in Germany experience the war in Ukraine in mediated form. We encounter it, that is, via media reports and images, as the subject of political debates over arms shipments and in encounters with people who have fled Ukraine - those individuals torn between Germany and their homeland who can no longer lead normal lives regardless of

where they find themselves. For many members of an older generation who still carry the trauma, horrors and tremendous guilt of World War II in their bones, this new war in Europe has meant the terrible resurfacing of the repressed.

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On 6 March 2022 at 5 : 41 pm, Zhadan wrote: »Today, the sky above Kharkiv was high and clear and the clouds were somehow carelessly summer-like. Piles of heavy snow are falling from the rooftops. In the city itself, it's quiet, so whenever snow slides down, people turn around and look. In the city, it's spring. And in the city, there's war«.

In sentences like these, we hear a clear echo of the poetic voice that permeated, for example, Zhadan's collection of poems and prose, »Warum ich nicht im Netz bin. Gedichte und Prosa aus dem Krieg«, published in German translation by Claudia Dathe in 2016. It is a language that never fails to pay tribute to beauty, even amidst the greatest of horrors. A language of rapprochement and understanding that is always looking for the truth in everything it contemplates and grapples with. A language that seeks humanism and sometimes discovers its own abyss - hatred.

The truth of literature is different from the truth of the media. The latter is primarily concerned with facts and their classification. Poetry and prose, on the other hand, are more complex, more contradictory, sometimes even more hermetic. They speak to us in a different way. They touch us more deeply and sometimes in a more shocking way.

What truth does literature speak? What kind of demands do we place on literature - whether for right or wrong reasons? »Now there is only resistance, struggle and mutual support. There are no words. Simply none«, wrote Serhiy Zhadan on 3 April 2022,

the day images of the Bucha massacre went around the globe.

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The awarding of a prize for peace in a time of war is an earnest plea. Indeed, the creation of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade shortly after the end of World War II was a signal to the world that Germany intended to learn the lessons of its own history. And it would do so here in the Church of St. Paul, the site of the founding of German democracy, which we will celebrate next year on the 175th anniversary of the March Revolution. I cannot imagine a more worthy recipient of the Peace Prize this year

than Serhiy Zhadan. I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on receiving this award!

May it function as a greeting to the Ukrainian people that we wish them peace in a free and liberated country. Alongside peace, however, reconciliation will also have to be given a chance, there is no other way. In this spirit, I would like to conclude by quoting the great poet Nelly Sachs, recipient of the Peace Prize in 1965. She wrote: »Always / where children die / the quietest things become homeless«.

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

The Peace Prize of the German Book Trade was awarded for the first time five years after the end of World War II. In creating the award, Germany's publishers and booksellers sought to draw the country out of its cultural isolation and re-establish humanist ideas in society. Since then, more than 70 years have passed. In that time, the Peace Prize and its annual award ceremony have become key components in an ongoing discourse focussed on issues of war and peace and how to prevent crimes against humanity. Year after year, each successive recipient of the Peace Prize has added new dimensions to the discourse, initiating groundbreaking debates and positing alternatives to violence and conflict.

In 2022, the Board of Trustees once again took up the challenge of finding such a remarkable person, meeting for the first time on 23 February. On that day in very early spring, we asked ourselves how best to approach our task: Whose work and civic accomplishments could we imagine wanting to pay tribute to before the eyes of the world more than half a year later in the Church of St. Paul? Was there any particular signal we wished to send out by means of the Peace Prize in 2022? Little did we know that on the following day, 24 February 2022, the world would change irreversibly.

Peace. On that day in February, this word took on a different weight. The sound of the word changed. There is now a war going on. A war in Europe. A brutal, ruthless war of aggression that violates international law and forces us to confront fundamental questions. A war that unnerves us for the simple reason that it shatters many of the concepts we once thought incontrovertible. Thousands of human beings have since been killed in Ukraine. Soldiers. But also civilians. Women. Children. Violence and destruction have made their way into many cities and villages.

And our task was to award a prize for peace?

Our review of the names suggested as potential prize recipients was marked by searching questions. Plus, our consideration of each nomination was now also associated with finding the most effective means of opposing the war. Very early on, all of us on the Board of Trustees knew that we were not going to be able to sidestep the war in this year's decision-making process – nor did we have any intention of doing so. We knew we were going to have to address the issue, even though it was impossible to have any sense of how the situation might have changed by October.

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May arrived. Images of the war in Ukraine became more concrete, the horror ever more visible. Our discussions on the Board of Trustees helped us sort out our own scattered feelings as we tried to make sense of the war crimes and human rights violations. We tried to process questions to which we had no answers. We made inquiries, discussed, debated and sometimes disagreed. Still, when it comes to the Peace Prize, one argues with wise and quiet words. One considers everything carefully.

Of course, our discussions went hand-in-hand with enthusiastic reading. We read the novel »Internat« (tr. The Orphanage), published in the original in 2017, and were overcome by shame. If we had picked up this literary expression of everyday life in times of war earlier and read it more consciously, we might have been able to anticipate the current situation. We read the poems of this voice from Ukraine, and we listened to the music of the band known as Zhadan i Sobaki; for example, the song »Diti«, the lyrics of which – even in translation – rendered us speechless.

»From the night, the dark sky remains,
The war goes on, the children grow!
And you give them love, for except you
No one here will love them!«

Serhiy Zhadan inspired us – in his use of language, in his books and poems and in the music he makes. We were awed by his commitment to the people of his homeland. Today, he continues to play concerts in underground subway stations, help civilians escape gunfire and shelling, give poetry readings to packed halls and distribute aid in the city. »We are not supporters of the war«, says Serhiy Zhadan about himself and his fellow Ukrainians, »we yearn for a life of peace. ... Unfortunately, you can't win wars with poetry. But poets can bear witness to war.«

*

Serhiy Zhadan studied literature, Ukrainian Studies and German Studies in Kharkiv. He wrote his doctoral thesis on Ukrainian Futurism. Indeed, in the early decades of the 20th century, Ukrainian artists made valuable contributions to the international avantgarde. At the time, Futurism sought to establish a new culture. In his work, Serhiy Zhadan explicitly refers to this epoch, that is, to a golden age of Ukrainian culture.

Today, and for the past 241 days, he has experienced first-hand the extent to which this culture is being destroyed; how even theatres, cultural sites and museums are being bombarded in an attempt to destroy Ukrainian identity. He has seen books being burned. Seen people dying. Seen friends dying. In the 1970s, the friends of mine who refused to engage in military service here in Germany were confronted with hypothetical questions of conscience; for example, what would they do if their girlfriend was attacked, and the like. For Serhiy Zhadan, such questions are a lived reality. An experienced, hands-on reality.

His latest book, »Himmel über Charkiw« (tr. Sky Above Kharkiv), was published in German translation only a few days ago. It is a collection of his social media posts since 24 February, that fateful day that changed the world – for us and, far more radically, for Serhiy Zhadan! War changes everything. It changes people. In fact, it is in the words of this

usually so eloquent poet that we now get a deep sense of what war does to people; his literary voice has fallen silent. He continues to write on social media, but in a documentary tone. Supportive words of courage. Not works of literature.

What happens to an artist whose culture – and this is indeed Putin's aim – is being wiped out? What happens to an author whose language and power of speech are being taken from him? »At first, there was only speechlessness«, wrote 2016 Peace Prize recipient Carolin Emcke in her book »Echoes of Violence«. »How to convey my experiences in words in a way that would not disturb [my friends]? How to describe this encounter with death and destruction? How to explain that war and violence inscribe themselves on your soul and continue to live with you?«

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Since 24 February, the world has been looking for answers. And it is having a hard time finding them. It is particularly difficult for us Germans, well-known for having started two world wars. We know that we do not know what it is like to be attacked – and not to be the aggressor ourselves.

»Unfortunately, you can't win wars with poetry. But poets can bear witness to war.« Thank you, dear Serhiy Zhadan, for bringing us back to the essential questions through your work. Thank you for challenging us, for unsettling us. Thank you for undertaking the long journey, away from your fellow citizens whom you care for and on whose behalf you are tirelessly active – at the risk of your own life! Thank you for your novels, your poetry, your music. And thank you for your testimony. For bearing witness to war. Thank you, Serhiy Zhadan.

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

Sasha Marianna Salzmann

»Writing from the lungs«

Laudation

In his essay »The Artist's Struggle for Integrity«, James Baldwin writes that »[...] the poets (by which I mean all artists) are finally the only people who know the truth about us. Soldiers don't. Statesmen don't. Priests don't. [...] Only poets«. Artists have a social responsibility, yes, but they do not stand for election, they do not grant absolution, they do not take up arms. Their task is to describe what they see, what they witness, in an incorruptible way. Their task is not to judge or condemn. It is to search for words that will continue to be valid in a coming decade or future century. From out of the complexity of human feeling and experience, artists weave braids tightly bound to the scalp of the world. And in so doing, they hold the entire globe together.

We know about each other not from history books, but from art. We know about the inner side of humanity not from the sciences, but from images painted on the walls of Stone Age caves. We learn hardly anything about each other from the nightly news; indeed, life as it is actually lived does not make an appearance there. Instead, the nightly news is a place where we encounter shock moments, alarmism and escalation. There's nothing poetry can do about that. Nor is poetry responsible for providing moral support or serving as some kind of bringer of peace.

Peace is far too big a word to use as a metaphor these days. Can poetry bring about peace? Inner peace, perhaps. A moment to undertake repairs on the world. A moment in which a person can just breathe. A moment in which someone recognises themselves in a poem, a sentence or a scene. A moment in which that person suddenly sees a broader horizon rather than their own personal abyss. Poetry can alleviate – for a short time – the crushing sense that the world is falling to pieces. In the words of this year's Peace Prize recipient Serhiy Zhadan: »Of course books can't bring about the end of a war. But in times of war, books can help you stay

yourself, not lose yourself, prevent your own destruction.«

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»People used to call him the Ukrainian Rimbaud, but now he's [...] Zhadan«, writes Yurii Andrukhovych about his younger colleague: »[...] confident in tone, flawless in detail, [...] anarchic, uncompromisingly social and at the same time utterly poetic [...]«. How exactly does the Zhadan principle work? The poet places his finger on the pulse of the people around him. As readers, for example, we regularly find ourselves among such individuals as those who open the gates to the slaughterhouse in the early morning; we sit with them in the pubs in the evenings and sleep next to them in the barracks. But this author is far from a realist; he's much more a hopeless romantic – passionately describing the sky, the melting snow and the changing colours of the crowns of the trees. Moments of Futurism and mysticism flicker up now and again in his writing. Pop songs, Paul Celan and Georg Trakl all make appearances. Next to his dubious heroes and their often unmanageable everyday existence, angels have always had a prominent place in Zhadan's texts; for example, they are shot at and, subsequently, feathers from their wings rain down onto the world. Witches are hanged at the outskirts of the city, appeals are made to God and, time and again, the city of Kharkiv glistens as a cul-de-sac for happiness seekers – a cesspool that swallows everyone and everything in its rain-drenched gullet.

Indeed, next to his outlaw characters, it is Serhiy Zhadan's hometown itself that functions as an almost erotically charged source of inspiration. He describes Kharkiv as one would a lover, constantly seeking out new sides of it, worshiping it, damning it. Each of his protagonists attempts to conquer the city and somehow find their place in it; but this »Mesopotamia« – as Zhadan calls Kharkiv, »because

Mesopotamia stands for Babylon« – cannot be conquered.

Zhadan's many volumes of poetry, collections of stories, novels and essays affect us in the same way as do the paintings of Pieter Bruegel. The frenzied, hidden-object images of »The Fight between Carnival and Lent«, »Children's Games« and »A Peasant Wedding« are so exciting that we are unable to look away and cannot help but attempt to trace the paths of the characters portrayed. How did they get there? What happened to them along the way? What is the origin of that glistening light on their faces?

Similarly, Zhadan paints tableaux in which unforgettable minor characters drink and brawl their way into the reader's consciousness, chiselling themselves into the narrative of a Ukrainian society trying to orientate itself anew. When we read his »Anarchy in the UKR«, »Hymne der demokratischen Jugend« (tr. Hymns of the democratic youth) and »Die Erfindung des Jazz im Donbass« (tr. The invention of jazz in Donbas), we taste the blood of perestroika in our mouth. We get a sense, however slight, of the lives lived by those individuals who were separated from us by an iron curtain. And if you grew up on the other side of that curtain, you come to understand more about yourself. About the collective experience of the post-Soviet years.

»He made it possible for me to discover Ukrainian culture«, said a young woman at a recent concert by Serhiy Zhadan and his band Sobaki in Frankfurt. »He helped me realise that we even have such a thing in the first place«. This young woman undoubtedly speaks for those generations of Ukrainians forced to struggle to free themselves from the post-dictatorship rubble, the legacy of the Soviet Union. And, unfortunately, she also speaks for many of the rest of us who have largely ignored the great Ukrainian national culture for far too long.

Serhiy Zhadan is currently on tour throughout Europe, with his music and literature in tow, precisely so that the connection to the people forced to flee Ukraine is not severed. So that they, too, can experience a bit of normality in exile. It should be noted, however, that Serhiy Zhadan's humanist approach was there from the very beginning, long before the outbreak of the current horrific war.

The perspective a writer adopts in his observations reveals everything about his approach to the world. Zhadan, who exposes us to as many different biographies as possible in his work, never chooses a bird's-eye view. There is no distance ever to be found in his gaze.

In his debut novel, »Depeche Mode«, when the protagonist Dog is sent to the psychiatric ward, Zhadan tags along. He sits at his bedside, follows him to the head doctor's office, where Dog swallows »ethyl alcohol, ascorbic acid and all kinds of pills all at once«. He's there when his friend is found on the floor the next morning, at which point he tries to revive him.

In his collection of poems in German translation, »Warum ich nicht im Netz bin« (tr. Why I am not on the internet), the author visits with individuals like Yura, a historian who passes himself off as a Chechen woman, a sniper, on the internet. He »writes about her faith / writes about her doubts / writes about her subtlety, / keeps a tally of her gun stock [...]«. Yura shows Zhadan his posts. The two men sit in a dark, stuffy room lit only by the light of the computer screen, and Zhadan notes that there are, of course, no guns in Yura's flat. But he doesn't betray Yura. He listens to him and takes notes himself.

The first text in his collection of poems in German translation known as »Antenne« is a reflection on his own father, who, to Zhadan's great astonishment, keeps a diary, even though he doesn't otherwise read books (not even those written by his son) or write letters. His father's handwriting is noticeably poor and he makes strange entries about his life: »a kind of chronicle of time passing, [...] the places he went, [...] the people who called him on the phone«. After his father's funeral, the son asks: Who could possibly need such a diary? The answer is obvious: he does. It is unmistakably clear: he, Zhadan, needs it. Indeed, Serhiy Zhadan is the collector and inventor of many diaries. He keeps a diary on behalf of those individuals whose lives are not the stuff of heroes' journeys. On behalf of those of us who disappear unnoticed from human history. He dedicates his entire oeuvre to these individuals, both fictional and real.

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»I think all poets [...] are caught in a situation, which is a kind of pre-revolutionary situation, have a very difficult role to play«, James Baldwin once noted. »My own effort is to try to bear witness to something that will have to be there when the storm is over, to help us get through the next storm. Storms are always coming«. It is entirely possible that the seductive energy of Serhiy Zhadan's work stems from the illusion that the role he has taken on is not a difficult one. He is always in the midst of his people. He writes and speaks, as it were, from their lungs. In Zhadan's poetry, Ukrainian society is able to breathe. And not just Ukrainian society. Thanks to outstanding translations by Claudia Dathe, Juri Durkot and Sabine Stöhr, German readers can also acquire a sense of life in faraway Ukraine. But poetry does more than that: when it succeeds, it also weaves us together. We seek and find common experiences, if only the experience of a shared feeling. In poetry, the »other« becomes the experience of the self. As Toni Morrison noted, »We are not, in fact, »other«. We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self«.

In Zhadan's novel »Depeche Mode«, a character named Zhadan finds himself in the lungs of an angel in the very same moment that the angel is being beaten up. If we consider this image within the current political scenario, it inexorably takes on an even greater poignancy.

How can you achieve peace when you are being beaten up? How can a person write even one truthful line when the sound of shelling dominates the soundscape of their everyday life? How can a person convey this war? Is it even possible to convey the experience of war? In his most recent book, »Himmel über Charkiw« (tr. Sky Above Kharkiv), a kind of diary of the first months of the war in 2022, Zhadan notes the following: »Writing is a refutation of death. The desire to capture feelings and meanings, to outline narratives, to reiterate motifs, cannot be reconciled with the idea of destruction, annihilation, disappearance. We fall back on writing for its illusory possibility of capturing and preserving the contours of reality ... Is this illusion justified? Either way, it is unbroken.«

With his indomitable will to »capture the contours of reality«, the poet manages to keep reality intact. At least for a short time, he prevents it from disintegrating any further into individually punched-out parts. In an era where words, positions and judgments chafe us to the bone, this poet draws on a posture of radical humanity to create moments in which we can simply breathe.

But what does it even mean to be human? What does it mean to stay human in Dark Times? In Hannah Arendt's much-quoted words from her Lessing Prize acceptance speech, »Humanity is exemplified not in fraternity but in friendship«. Here the political theorist Arendt insists that what makes us human is *philia*. And that the true essence of friendship consists in discourse. In the act of discussion, she argues, we become humans: »The world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse«.

For an activist, the way to remain human is obvious, that is, in discourse with others. The entire world can follow on social media how Serhiy Zhadan helps to evacuate people in war-torn Kharkiv, cares for people in need, sings with his fellow citizens in underground stations. Even before the war escalated in February 2022, Zhadan was known for visiting military bases along the demarcation line of the occupied territories in the Donbas region, where he spoke and read his poems to the soldiers there.

But how does it work, this act of being human in poetry and literature?

Every single one of Zhadan's texts is characterised by an emphasis on dialogue, on the exploration of and confrontation with the external world around him. His poetry is never hermetically sealed, never closed in on itself. He always has one eye focused out into the world and one hand seemingly outstretched, waiting to draw us readers into the conversation.

Not a soldier. Not a statesman. And not a priest. No one is being absolved here. No one is standing for election, let alone able to actually win one. Yes, the poet sees what is happening. But he is no

seismograph who merely stoically logs the ongoing threat of an earthquake. He is a friend. Someone who understands. And when he doesn't understand, he's ready to listen. This is a person who sits down at the table and raises a glass. A person who joins in the dance at his desperados' weddings. A person who was present at every funeral he writes about. A person with the gift of enabling the voice of an individual to live on forever in his poetry. So that this voice will be valid and discernible in the coming decade, in a coming century.

The thing that prose, poetry and art in general cannot do is save the world. Art cannot win wars. It does not promise salvation, at least not if it is serious art. But what it can do is make possible a moment in which a person can exhale; a moment to breathe a sigh of relief, amazement or delight. And this brief lungful of air might just hold a moment of peace. Because drawing a breath is always a sign of hope.

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Serhiy, at a recent event, when asked what you thought you would do after the Ukrainian victory, you said: »Read. [...] And write. [...] It is a hunger«. I wish you a speedy return to the tranquillity of your reading and writing chamber. Surrounded by novels, paper, notebooks. May your hunger be satisfied. And, at the same time, may your hunger never be stilled, so that we may continue to know the joy of reading your work.

Mazel tov on receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade!

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

Serhiy Zhadan

»Let This Not Be About the War«

Acceptance speech

He has dark, labor-laden hands with grease ingrained in his skin and caked under his nails. Typically, people with hands like those know how to work and love it. Now, the nature of their work is a different matter altogether. Somewhat short, quiet, and anxious, he stands there and offers explanations about the situation on the frontlines, about his brigade, and about the vehicles he has to operate as their driver. Then he suddenly decides to try his luck.

»Hey, volunteers, buy us a fridge«, he says.

»What do you need a fridge for on the frontlines?« we asked, bewildered. »If you need one, though, let's head to the supermarket. You can pick one out, and we'll pay for it.«

»Nah, I meant that I need a vehicle with a big refrigerator. You know, a refrigerator truck. To collect the dead. We've been finding bodies that have been lying out in the sun for over a month. We've been using a mini-bus – can't breathe in there.«

He speaks about the dead like he's talking about his work – in a calm and measured manner, with neither bravado nor fear. We exchange contact information. A week later, we find a refrigerator truck in Lithuania and have it sent to Kharkiv. He and a whole team of fighters pick up the vehicle solemnly and take pictures with us for our report. This time, our friend is armed and dressed in clean clothes. If you take a closer look, though, you can see that his hands are just as dark. His daily labor is hard, and his hands are the best testament to that.

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What does war change first? One's sense of time, one's sense of space. The outline of one's perspective, the outline of temporal progression changes very quickly. People in a war-torn space try not to plan for the future or think too much about what the

world will be like tomorrow. What's happening to you here and now is all that matters, just the people and things that will be with you tomorrow morning – tops. That's if you survive and wake up. Staying alive and pushing forward another twelve hours or so is the most important task at hand. Then, after that, it'll be clear, it'll be obvious how to act, how to conduct yourself, what to rely on, what to push off of. This applies, to a great extent, to servicemen and those »civilians« (unarmed people, that is) who have remained in a zone edging toward death. This is the feeling that accompanies you from day one of a major war: the feeling of a temporal fracture, the absence of continuity, the feeling of air being compressed, that it's hard to breathe because reality is exerting pressure on you, trying to squeeze you out to the other side of life, to the other side of what's visible. There's this compression of events and emotions, this dissolution into a thick bloody current that envelops you and sweeps you up – what distinguishes the reality of war so drastically from the reality of peace is this pressure, this inability to breathe freely and just speak. Yet you have to speak. Even during times of war. Especially during times of war.

War unequivocally changes language, its architecture, the scope of its use. War, like an intruder's shoe, disrupts the ant colony of communication. Afterwards, ants, akin to the speakers of a disjointed language, feverishly attempt to restore its wrecked structure and tidy up what they were used to, what their lives had been. Eventually, everything slides back into place. Yet the inability to utilize the usual mechanisms – more precisely, being unable to use previous, peacetime, pre-war constructions to convey the state you're in, articulate your fury, your pain, your hope, is particularly painful and unbearable. Especially if you're used to trusting language, used to relying on its capabilities, which seem inexhaustible to you. Turns out, though, that language's

capabilities are limited - limited by these new circumstances, this new landscape, a landscape that's inscribed in the realm of death, the realm of disaster. Each and every ant is tasked with restoring the common cadence of collective communication, common sounds, and a common understanding. What does a writer become in this case? Another ant, just as mute as the rest of them. Since the onset of the war, we have all been trying to regain this disrupted ability, the ability to express ourselves so we're understood. We are all attempting to articulate ourselves, the truth, the outer bounds of our turmoil and trauma. Literature may have a slightly better chance at achieving this, since it's genetically tied to all our previous linguistic catastrophes and upheaval.

How can one talk about war? How can one manage all the desperation, fury, and rancor in one's tone, as well as all the energy and eagerness to stick by your fellows, not to retreat? I think we aren't the only ones struggling to convey what matters most. The world listening to us isn't always capable of understanding one simple thing - when we speak, the degrees of our linguistic tension, linguistic sincerity, and linguistic emotionality differ too drastically. Ukrainians shouldn't have to justify their emotions, but unpacking these emotions is worthwhile. What for? So as not to keep all this pain and all this anger bottled up, at the very least. We can articulate it; we can vocalize everything that has and will happen to us. We simply have to be ready for the fact that this won't be an easy conversation. Nevertheless, we have to begin it today.

The varying weight and color of our words seems crucial to me. This appears to be about having differing fields of vision, views, and perspectives, but most importantly, it's about language. Some

times it seems like as the world watches what has been transpiring in Eastern Europe for the past six months it has been using vocabulary and definitions that haven't been able to explain what's going on for a long time. For instance, what does the world (I understand the ephemeral and abstract nature of this term, but I'm going to use it anyway) mean when it speaks about the need for peace? You would think that this was about stopping the war, about ending this armed standoff, about the moment when the

artillery fire goes quiet and silence sets in. You would think that these things would bring us closer to a common understanding. After all, what do we Ukrainians want more than anything? For the war to end, of course. Peace, of course. For the shelling to stop, of course. Personally, as someone who lives on the eighteenth floor of an apartment complex in downtown Kharkiv, where you can see the Russians launching rockets from the neighboring city of Belgorod, I vehemently want the rocket attacks to stop, the war to stop, for everything to return to normal, to a natural existence. So what do Ukrainians find alarming about European intellectuals' and European politicians' declarations about the need for peace (which doesn't negate the need for peace, of course)? It's the fact that we understand that peace won't come merely because the victim of aggression has laid down their arms. The civilians in Bucha, Hostomel, and Irpin didn't have any arms at all, which didn't spare them from suffering terrible deaths. The people of Kharkiv aren't armed either, yet the Russians have consistently and chaotically fired rockets at them. What do proponents of a speedy peace at any cost think they should have done? For these proponents of peace, where is the line between supporting peace and not supporting resistance? The thing is, though, I'd say that when speaking about peace in the context of this bloody, dramatic war instigated by Russia, some people don't want to acknowledge a simple fact - there's no such thing as peace without justice. There are various forms of frozen conflict, there are temporarily occupied territories, there are time-bombs camouflaged as political compromises, but unfortunately, there won't be any peace, real peace that provides a sense of security and prospects for the future. And by castigating Ukrainians for being unwilling to surrender and perceiving that as an element of militarism and radicalism, some Europeans (I must note that this number is rather insignificant, but still) are doing a bizarre thing; by trying to stay in their comfort zone, they venture beyond the bounds of ethics. And this is no longer a question for Ukrainians - this is a question for the world, for its willingness (or unwillingness) to swallow yet another manifestation of utter uncontrollable evil in favor of dubious financial gain and disingenuous pacificism.

Thing is, for some, this has turned out to be a rather convenient form of reassigning responsibility - appealing to people who are protecting their lives, blaming the victim, shifting priorities, and manipulating good, positive messages. The situation is as simple as it gets, though. We're assisting our troops not because we want war, but because we really want peace. Soft, unobtrusive capitulation, which has been offered under the guise of peace, is not the path to a peaceful existence and the restoration of our cities. Ukrainians capitulating may help Europeans save money on their energy bills, but how will Europeans feel knowing, as they surely

will, that the heat in their homes has been paid for by the destroyed lives and houses of people who also wanted to live in a calm, peaceful country?

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It all comes down to language - I'll say it again. It comes down to how precisely and aptly we use certain words, how measured our tone is when we speak about teetering on the edge between life and death. How sufficient is our previous vocabulary, the vocabulary that enabled us to encapsulate the world quite well just yesterday, how sufficient is it now to talk about what hurts or to give us strength? Thing is, verbally, we have all found ourselves in a spot we haven't ever spoken from before. Therefore, we have a shifted system of assessment and perception; the coordinates of meaning have changed, and the boundaries of expediency have changed. What may look like talk about death from the outside oftentimes is a desperate attempt to cling to life, to its opportunities, to its continuity. After all, in this new, fractured, shifted reality, where does war as a topic of conversation end and where does the domain of peace begin? A refrigerator truck full of dead bodies - is this about peace or war? Taking women to places away from the shelling - what is this in support of? A peaceful resolution to the conflict? Buying a tourniquet that saves a serviceman's life - is this humanitarian aid or aid for combatants? And in general, assisting those who are fighting for you, for civilians in basements, and children in the metro - does this reach beyond the confines of pleasant conversation about kindness and empathy? Do we have to remind

others about our right to keep existing in this world or is this right obvious and irrefutable?

It turns out that these days a lot of things, phenomena, and concepts need to be explained, or, at the very least, they need a fresh reminder, they need to be re-articulated and embraced again. Typically, war shows what people have been trying not to notice for a long while; war is a time of uncomfortable questions and tough answers. This war launched by the Russian army has suddenly put forth a slew of questions that reach well beyond the context of Russo-Ukrainian relations. Like it or not, in the upcoming years, we will have to talk about things that make us uncomfortable: populism and double standards, a lack of responsibility and political conformism, ethics, which, as it turns out, have hopelessly disappeared from the vocabulary of those who make crucial decisions in the modern world. One could say these things pertain to politics, that we'll have to speak about it, about politics. Nevertheless, in this case, politics is merely a screen, a cover, a chance to avoid bumping into any sharp edges and avoid calling a spade a spade. But that's just what's needed - calling a spade a spade. Criminals being called criminals. Freedom being called freedom. Deceit being called deceit. During times of war, these lexical units sound particularly sharp and expressive. Avoiding them without getting cut is very hard. They shouldn't be avoided. They really shouldn't be.

It's sad and telling that we're speaking about a peace prize at a time when there is a war going on in Europe. Going on not too far from here. And it's been going on for years, actually. This peace prize has been awarded for all the years it has been going on. Naturally, this isn't about the prize itself. It's about how willing Europe is to accept this new reality: a reality with destroyed cities (where they could have had joint business ventures), a reality with mass graves (where citizens of Ukraine lie, citizens who just yesterday could travel to German cities to go shopping or visit museums), and a reality with filtration camps for Ukrainians who have come under occupation (camps, occupation, collaborators - these are all words that are hardly used by Europeans on a daily basis). Also, it comes down to how we will all go about living in this reality with ruined cities, burnt schools, and destroyed books. And first and

foremost, with the thousands of dead and with those who, just yesterday, were wrapped up in their regular, peaceful lives, making plans, and relying on their own sense of memory.

It's important to mention our memories, and here's why. War isn't just a different experience. When you speak in those terms, you speak about superficial things, about what is on the surface, which describes a great deal, yet explains very little. Actually, war changes our memory and fills it with excessively painful images, excessively deep traumas, and excessively bitter conversations. You can't rid yourself of these memories; you aren't able to fix the past. It will always be a part of you. Hardly your best part. This process of falling into a stupor and catching your breath, this experience of falling silent and searching for a new language, is too painful for you to go on talking, carefree, about the sublime world outside the window. Poetry after Bucha and Izium is still undoubtedly possible. Moreover, it's necessary; however, the specter of Bucha and Izium, their presence, will weigh too heavily in this postwar poetry, which, to a great extent, will determine its content and tonality. This painful, yet necessary realization - that mass graves and bombed neighborhoods will provide context for the poems written in your country - does not fill you with optimism, of course, yet it makes you understand that language requires our daily labor, our constant involvement, our engagement. After all, what do we have in order to make our point, to express ourselves? Our language and our memory.

Since the end of February, since the start of this massacre, that is, there's this distinct feeling that time has lost its usual cadence, its flow. It has become akin to a channel in the winter that freezes to its very bottom, stopping the rush of the water and paralyzing everyone who has found themselves amid this unmoving current. We have found ourselves in this frozen state, amid cold timelessness. I remember this feeling of helplessness very well - when you can't feel movement, when you're lost in silence, unable to discern what's up ahead, in front of you, in the gloom and silence. Wartime truly is a time with a disjointed panorama, disrupted communication between the past and the future; a time when you feel the here and now with maximum acuteness and

bitterness, when you immerse yourself in the space that surrounds you and focus on the moment that overwhelms you. There are certain elements of fatalism to this - when you stop making plans and thinking about the future, as you try, first and foremost, to root yourself in the here and now, under the skies that unfurl above you, and the only thing that reminds you that time is passing is the fact that days turn to nights, summer follows spring without fail, and despite the frozen nature of your feelings, despite the stupor, life goes on; it doesn't stop for a single instant, and it encompasses all of our joys and fears, all of our desperation and all our hope. It's just that the distance between you and reality has changed. Reality is now closer. Reality has become more dreadful. And now you have to live with this.

What else has changed for us, besides language and memory? What will distinguish us in any group of people, in any crowd? Our eyes, perhaps. They absorb the external flame; they'll always have this glint to them. We'll have the gaze of people who have looked beyond what's visible, who have stared into the darkness and managed to discern something over there. Our gaze will always differ from others' as it reflects things of the utmost importance.

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In the spring - sometime in May - my band and I performed at a military base for servicemen who were resting after several hard, lengthy battles. We have known them awhile. We have performed for them consistently since 2014. Outskirts of Kharkiv, brisk greenery, soccer field, a small auditorium. We know a lot of the fighters personally. A lot of my old friends - people from Kharkiv - went off to fight this spring. Seeing them wearing military fatigues and holding weapons feels unusual. And their eyes are unusual, too - they're like cooled metal, like glass reflecting a fire. It was month two of this full-on war; they had already been bombarded by Russian shelling in the trenches. But there they stood, smiling and joking around. And those eyes - you could glimpse two months of hell in them.

»I already spent some time in the hospital«, one of them said. »The Russians dropped phosphorus bombs, and I got hit. No biggie, though - I'm still alive and kicking. Back to the frontlines soon.«

This is one of those cases when you simply don't know how to respond. Language betrays you, you lack language, and you are left merely searching for the right words. They are sure to turn up, though, eventually.

What will our language be like after the war? What will we have to explain to each other? First and foremost, we will have to say the names of the dead aloud. They must be named. Otherwise, there will be a major fragmentation of language, a void between voices, and a fracture in our memories. We will need tremendous strength and faith to speak about the dead, as their names will shape our vocabularies. Yet we will need just as much strength, confidence, and love to speak about our future, to articulate, vocalize, and outline it. Like it or not, we will have to renew our sense of time, perspective, and continuity. We are fated to have a future. Moreover, we bear responsibility for it. Now, it is shaped by our visions, our convictions, our willingness to take responsibility. We will work at returning our sense of the future, since there's just so much in our memories that demands our involvement tomorrow. We are all linked by this current that carries us, that won't let us go,

that unites us. We are all linked by our language. Even if, at a certain moment, its capabilities seem limited or insufficient. Nevertheless, we will be forced to return to it and its capabilities which give us hope that, in the future, there will not be any misunderstandings or anything left unsaid. Sometimes language seems weak. Actually, though, in many cases, it is a source of energy. It can step away from you for some time, but it isn't capable of betraying you, which is what matters most. As long as we have our language, we have, at the very least, the vague chance to articulate ourselves, speak the truth, and tidy up our memories. So we speak and we go on speaking. Even when words hurt our throats. Even when they make us feel lost and empty. The possibility of truth is behind our voices. And it's worth taking advantage of this opportunity. This may be the most important thing that could happen to us.

Translated into English by Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler and Reilly Costigan-Humes.

Kontakt

Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.
Geschäftsstelle Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels – Martin Schult
Schiffbauerdamm 5, 10117 Berlin
Telefon 030 2800 783-44, Fax 030 2800 783-50
Mail: m.schult@boev.de
Internet: www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de



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