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Writing on the Edge: A Strategic Map of Contemporary Ukrainian Dramaturgy

Abstract. This article presents a large array of fictional texts about the war created by Ukrainian playwrights in 2022 and 2023. The study pays due attention to the strategies of playwriting catalyzed by a full-scale war: the formation of combatant drama, the creation of the unifying map of Ukraine through cataloging its topoi, the designation of new places of power, the movement of the previously peripheral discourses of the dramatic world picture towards the center. Ultimately, the study looks at interesting unifying initiatives and a collective dramatic text about the war differently interpreted in the published drama anthologies: *The Unnamed War*, *Anthology 24*, *Drama Panorama 2023*, and *This Day Lasts an Eternity*.

Keywords: Ukrainian drama about war; playwriting strategies; combatant drama; territory of common memory; collective text.

1. Introduction

Ukrainian dramatic writing has changed considerably since February 24, 2022. Paradoxically, Russia's aggression in the territory of Ukraine started in February 2014, when Crimea was annexed and a part of Ukrainian territory in Donetsk and Luhansk regions was occupied. However, in 2014–2021, the majority of Ukrainian playwrights wanted to avoid depicting the war as much as possible, and Ukrainian theatres tried not to include contemporary Ukrainian texts about the Maidan and the war in their repertoire.

Ukrainian drama did not pay due attention to the annexation of Crimea; there are few texts about it, for instance, *Krym* [Crimea] by Serhii Vasyliiev – a drama with pronounced satirical subtext. At the same time, Ukrainian playwrights belonging to different drama centers portrayed the war events in Donbas from different perspectives.

For instance, in her play *Kytska na spohad pro temin* [The Kitty in Memory of Darkness], Neda Nezhdana shows a pro-Ukrainian woman who refuses to collaborate with the occupiers and their local henchmen, thereby refuting the myths of Russian propaganda that all Donbas residents were pro-Russian and wanted to return to the empire. Oleh Mykolaichuk, creating the text of the play *Kashtan i Konvaliia* [The Chestnut and the Lily of the Valley] depicts characters on both sides of the armed conflict in Donbas, clearly labelling them as those who defend their country from the aggression, and those who betray it groveling before the enemy.

The Nataliia Vorozhbyt's drama *Pohani Dorohy* [Bad Roads] equates the wrongness and sacrifice of Ukrainian defenders and pro-Russian separatists during the war trying to create a “non-ideological” play about Donbas, actually broadcasting Russian narratives about “civil war” in this Ukrainian territory, with no word written about the presence of Russia and its weapons. Yana and Den Humenni, the authors of the play *Dontsi Mashi kupyv velosyped* [I Bought a Bike for My Daughter Masha], deliberately written in Russian, seek to understand and justify a Donetsk separatist, who commits war crimes in Donbas on the Russians' side to give financial support to his family, and then leaves for the capital of Ukraine and applies for a refugee status. The plays by the Humennis and Vorozhbyt blur the boundary between good and evil, portraying the executioner as a victim of circumstances and seemingly rising above the ideology of the essence of the armed conflict in Donbas, affirming the ideologically marked, anti-Ukrainian narrative of “understanding and forgiveness”, according to which it is Ukraine

and Ukrainians who must “hear” and accept anti-Ukrainian viewpoints of pro-Russian people, even if they have committed serious crimes and forgive them for those crimes, and in addition sympathize with the criminals since it was due to the war. The “non-ideological” turned into its opposite in this context, making the drama voices mouthpieces of the destruction of Ukrainian identity.

In his play *Khlibne peremyria* [The Bread Truce], Serhii Zhadan explores the life of civil Ukrainians in Donbas, in the village near the frontline. His characters seem to be stuck between countries and epochs, have fallen out of time, lost their identity and have not acquired a new one, and “the war between the TV and the refrigerator” (the metaphor used in the post-Soviet territories to denote loyalty to the imperial propaganda outside the former empire’s center existing as long as people have moderate means of subsistence) is won by neither of these appliances-concepts, since both of them are deprived of their functions due to a lack of electricity in houses. The author himself, sympathizing with the characters who temporarily lost their identity and “belonging”, leaves them in a fiery trap in the end of the play, giving each of them a tiny chance to “purify themselves” through fire.

In his text *Spetsoperatsiia* [Special Operation], Piotr Armyanovsky uses stories of former prisoners of the Russian concentration camp “Isolation”, where Russians have been torturing pro-Ukrainian people with particular cruelty since 2014, and asks the question: “Could I survive such cruel tortures?” (Armyanovsky, 2021, p. 232)¹.

Kateryna Penkova superimposes two matrices of Donbas colonization writing in her play *Hotel “Velykobrytaniia”* [The Great Britain Hotel] about the activity of the Welsh entrepreneur-innovator John Hughes, who bought land near Donetsk and started a business inviting Europeans to work, and about the military occupation of this territory by Russian soldiers and separatists armed by them. The author ethically equates both forms of colonization, thereby mitigating an acute reaction to Russian aggression; and the situation of comprehension is blurred in the play by the fact that its events happen during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevents leaving the outlined occupied territory.

Furthermore, at the initial stage of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, there was an urgent need to create a new pantheon of Ukrainian he-

¹ «Чи витримав би я такі жорстокі тортури?»

roles. However, given little general attention of playwrights to the war on the whole, we can speak about single isolated examples rather than about a trend or discourse. Neda Nezhdana's play *OTVETKA@UA* [OTVETKA@UA] is such an example of glorification of heroic figures. It is dedicated to the outstanding Ukrainian Vasyl Slipak – a soloist of Paris National Opera who returned to Ukraine after the beginning of Russian aggression to defend the country on the front and perished in summer 2016 near Bakhmut. The text of Dario Ferialio and Olena Ponomareva, *Liudy i kiborhy* [People and Cyborgs], dedicated to the defenders of Donetsk Airport, can be taken into consideration as an example of dramaturgical comprehension of collective heroism.

Since February 22, 2024, new strategies for writing about war have been rapidly developed in Ukrainian drama because the war is no longer localized and is becoming total. Instead, accordingly, the general perception of it is changing, the system of values is transforming, new criteria for realizing one's own belonging/non-belonging are emerging, and the attempts to reduce the scales of aggression or manifest loyalty to the enemies and/or their supporters are being abandoned. As a matter of fact, we are going to pay attention to some of these new strategies used for dramatic writing about war.

2. Writing as a way to overcome trauma: promptness, fixing, and documentation

The reaction of Ukrainian Drama to the outbreak of Russian full-scale aggression was instant and massive.

At the end of March 2022, the Theater of Dramaturgs announced its own project "About the War: Ukrainian Dramaturgs Talk about Life during Russia's full-scale Invasion", launched in March 2022 in cooperation with Literarisches Colloquium Berlin and Birkbeck, University of London. Playwrights such as Oksana Savchenko, Andrii Bondarenko, Olha Matsiupa, Liena Liahushonkova, Natalka Blok, Liudmyla Tymoshenko, Natalka Vorozhbyt, Yuliia Honchar, Oleksii Dorychevskyi, Oles Barlih, and Anastasiia Kosodii prepared texts for reading at theatres of Germany and Great Britain (the texts were translated into German by Lidiia Nahel and Yuliia Honchar, into English – by Helena Kern, Molly Flynn and Jack Clover), theatrical readings were also announced in London on April 1 (Royal Court Theatre), in Berlin – on April 7 (Gorki Theater), in Munich – on April 9 and 29 (Münchner Kammerspiele, Werkraum stage).

In April 2022, the virtual project *Na chasi* [On Time] started being filled with plays on the website of the National Centre of Theatre Arts named after Les Kurbas. It was somewhat spontaneous at the beginning, and then, it was organized in the full-fledged virtual anthology *Nenazvana viina* [The Unnamed War], consisting of plays by professional playwrights Andy Iva, Olha Annenko, Anna Bahriana, Ihor Bilyts, Aleks Borovenskyi, Oleksandr Viter, Inna Honcharova, Oleh Drach, Nina Zakhochenko, Artem lebediev, Oleh Mykolaichuk, Oleh Mykhailov, Neda Nezhdana, Volodymyr Serdiuk, Maryna Smilianets, Svitlana Spasyba, and Dmytro Ternovy.

In April 2022, the thematic collection *Viina. 24 liutoho 2022* [The War. February 24, 2022] was created on the electronic resource *UKRDRAMA-CHUB*. It included 62 texts by 38 authors, did not have a compiler, and was formed spontaneously; therefore, it comprises texts of absolutely different quality – from short notes and reflections to full-fledged dramatic works.

Moreover, in April 2022, the launch of a contest-anthology was announced by the artistic cross-sectoral project Parade-fest, relocated from Kharkiv to Lviv. By the end of April, over 100 texts had been submitted to the contest, and 24 texts-winners selected by readers formed the virtual corpus *Antolohiia 24* [Anthology 24].

Writer Volodymyr Serdiuk opened a virtual territory *Viina. WAR* [WAR] on his own resource “Dramaturg”, positioning it as a collection of texts about a new stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war (the texts dedicated to the beginning of the war in 2014 were not included, but remained on the authors’ pages). The website contained Ukrainian and English versions of the plays, since Serdiuk himself is a professional translator.

In order to promptly translate contemporary dramatic texts about the war into different European languages, the Ukrainian Institute, with the support of the Worldwide Readings Project and Birkbeck Center for Contemporary Theatre, quickly created the virtual territory *Ukrainian Drama Translations*. This digital library of translations of Ukrainian drama allowed for fast translation of the works of contemporary Ukrainian playwrights dedicated to the interpretation of the war into different languages and dissemination of them in the format of stage readings and performances on different continents to involve people and governments in supporting Ukraine.

Many dramatic texts, which instantly appear in the public domain, immediately find their way to theatre stages in Ukraine. In the middle of the summer 2022, there was a so-called “military-field opening” of the Theatre

of Dramaturgs, where new dramatic texts of its authors and fans were read. At the end of 2022, this institution organized stage readings and presented the virtual anthology *Bez nykh* [Without Them], in which playwrights who had supported Russia or had shown excessive loyalty to its culture and political narratives before February 24, 2022 (Andrii Bondarenko, Iryna Harets, Olena Hapeieva, Yuliia Honchar, Oksana Hrytsenko, Tetiana Kyt-senko, Olha Matsiupa, Kateryna Penkova, Oksana Savchenko and Liudmyla Tymoshenko) said a demonstrative farewell to the “Russian world”. The texts of the collection *Antolohiia 24* [Anthology 24] were presented in the format of stage readings on different theatre stages of Ukraine in the second half of 2022 and at the beginning of 2023. The virtual anthology *Nenazvana viina* [The Unnamed War] was staged as part of the art-week “FIERCE FEBRUARY 2014–2023”. The texts about the war were also staged within the framework of the project “DramPost” in Ukraine (the National Center of Theatre Arts named after Les Kurbas), “Art Staff” (Ivan Mykolaichuk Center), “Readings of Ukrainian Drama about the War” (ProEnglish Theatre), and in the world – at numerous events founded by John Friedman “The World Readings of Contemporary Ukrainian Drama”.

In general, promptly created dramatic texts about the war contained many personal reflections of playwrights, eyewitness accounts, retold stories, and “voices”; hence, many of the artists deliberately minimized fictionality of their works, preferring to fix and capture a moment, retaining its anthropological nuances and details.

3. Combatant drama

To the credit of Ukrainian playwrights, there are those who stood up for Ukraine at the stage ATO/OUF and at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. They include Andrii Ivaniuk (Andy Iva), Dmytro Korchynskyi, Valerii Puzik, Volodymyr Surai, Halyna Liutikova, Oleksii Dorychevskyi, Yevhen Stepanenko, and Dmytro Mamchur.

Thus, we have contemporary combatant drama (*Boiatysia nemaie sensu* [There is No Point in Being Afraid] by Andrii Ivaniuk, *Posttravmatychna rapsodiia* [Post-Traumatic Rhapsody] and *Vzvodny oporny punkt* [Platoon Stronghold] by Dmytro Korchynskyi, *Zoshyt viiny* [War Notebook] and *Pryvydy u hilkakh* [Ghosts in the Branches] by Valerii Puzik, *Ya, dim ta inshi rechi* [Me, Home and Other Things] by Volodymyr Surai, *Try spro-*

by *pokrashchyty pobut* [Three Attempts to Improve Daily Life] by Maksym Kurochkin).

Andrii Ivaniuk creates a kind of motivational text showing his own path of a volunteer from the decision to stand up for his country to extreme combat situations immediately on the frontline. He questions masculinity and male dignity of those who avoid fulfilling their civic duty and perceives participation of a mobilized artist in defending others not only as a tribute to their country, but also as an additional bonus of mastering materials for future artistic reflections. On the one hand, we can see the total unpreparedness of some Ukrainians to defend their country (at the theatre, adult men try to negotiate with the director to confirm a reservation for somebody; in the military commissariat in the center of Kyiv, many well-built young people learn how to simulate illness or disability in the corridor to be considered unsuitable for the army at a medical examination); on the other hand, we can see those who realize that Ukraine will not survive if everyone “escapes”². The narrator of the drama avoids pathos and high patheticness. He recollects many funny adventures, is perfect at youth’s slang, but, at the same time, aptly inserts reflections about the Ukrainian government’s mistakes in his narration, presents his own experience of equipping a combat position in Rubizhne. Moreover, he casually and optimistically tells the story about the combat “zero” – “when you can see them and they can see you” (Iva, 2023, p. 46)³, and also shares witty combat life hacks and acts out true army micro-stories, demonstrating strength, courage, humor, and disposition of his comrades who simply become heroes at the crucial moment.

Some characters of Dmytro Korchynskyi, who are similar to Andrii Ivaniuk’s protagonist, believe that “the truth is broadcast not on television, but through a thermal imager” (Korchynskyi, 2019, p. 69)⁴ and voluntarily join the ranks of their country defenders at the turning points of liberation history, despising those who hide from the war and ignore its challenges.

On the contrary, Maksym Kurochkin shows how difficult it is to adapt to war for an artist who has never intended to participate in hostilities, however, voluntarily stands up for the country at a critical moment. Such an author should always seek internal resources to accept the new reality, and he finds a temporary consolation in imagining himself as a character from the paint-

² «Відкосять».

³ «це коли ти бачиш їх, а вони тебе»

⁴ «істина не транслюється через телевізор, тільки через тепловізор»

ing of his favorite artists, for instance, Andrew Wyeth, but at the same time, he dreams of being ready to shoot first in case of danger.

Valerii Puzik creates a drama in the form of a “notebook” in which he registers his reflections, letters to his son, poems dedicated to his wife and children of war, his own memories, records certain days of the war with the strongest impressions, and comprehends his falling out of time:

I don't know what day it is today. The war has reset all calendars. Everything has changed over these days. At night the city turns into a wasteland, the city waits. In the darkness, patrols are formed, briefings are given, passwords are said, people with weapons and without them go out. [...]

We walk. In almost empty city, our city.

The phrases are short. Capacious. Details are not necessary. Everything is clear.

There are long pauses. And they, these pauses, say more than hundreds of words. (Puzik, 2022, pp. 393–394)⁵.

Given that Valerii Puzik has also written several other works in the genre of battle prose and poetry, his playwriting should be taken into consideration in the analysis of his literary works.

The works mentioned in this article are definitely worth a separate literature research – it is not only a new page of Ukrainian drama but also the minimum we can do to honor our playwrights defending the country.

4. Cataloguing toposes as creation of the area of common uniting memory

The array of plays created in 2022 has demonstrated an interesting trend of an absolutely new perception of Ukraine's map by playwrights: there are many texts in which narrators or characters strive to mentally cover the entire map of Ukraine with their sight or mind mentioning various cities of the country in this or that stage situation and in different sequences, and some-

⁵ «Я не знаю, який сьогодні день. Війна обнулила всі календарі і за ці тижні усе змінилося. Вночі місто застигає ніби пустка, місто чекає. У темряві формуються патрулі, йдуть інструктажі, називаються паролі, люди зі зброєю і без виходять на вулицю. [...] Ми ходимо в майже порожньому місті, нашому місті. Фрази короткі. Ємки. Деталі не потрібні. Все зрозуміло. Западають довгі паузи. І вони, ці паузи, говорять більше, ніж сотні слів».

times even presenting it as a single body, each part of which can unbearably ache – we can see it in the play of Aleks Vud *Chastyny nashoho tila* [The Parts of Our Body].

The most distinguishing feature of playwrights is their desire to emotionally “color” Ukraine’s map, in the way cities and regions are marked on it with different colors when air raid alerts are announced. In his play *Syndrom vtsililoho* [The Survivor’s Syndrome], Andrii Bondarenko catalogues cities in which many Ukrainians perished or lost their homes at the beginning of the war, and states that this is what his geography looks like now. In her play *Khroniky evakuiovanoho tila i zahublenoi dushi* [Chronicles of the Evacuated Body and the Lost Soul], Anna Halas complicates principles of cataloguing Ukrainian cities, imitating a change in the colors on the online map of air raid alerts, collecting plots about massive atrocities of the Russians committed in the occupied territories or about missile attacks or air strikes targeted at large groups of civil Ukrainians. Cities are marked as places of successive missile attacks in the play of Iryna Harets, *Ne pro Yenota* [Not about the Raccoon], and in her work, *100 dniv* [100 days], Eleonora Tymoshenko seemingly organizes “competitions” between Ukrainian regions by the criterion of duration of air raid alerts in them, and Luhansk region “wins” this competition because the air raid alert has not been cancelled since February 24, 2022.

The plays of 2022 testify to the formation of a common trauma of Ukrainians which consolidates the nation and clearly outlines not only the internal solidarity and belonging/involvement of Ukrainians but also draws clear contours of the image of the existential enemy who wages a genocidal war to destroy Ukraine and kill Ukrainians. It is considered very important since Ukrainians from different regions have not had such a common trauma and common historical memory so far. Moreover, a constant metaphoric threat from the sky not only makes people go to the underground space of shelters and hiding places which seem relatively safe: many playwrights resort to the transgenerational memory of their own families, and, as it turns out, there are existential confrontations with the Russians and family conflicts with them in many families’ histories. An updated map of general historical memory is created in this way, and playwrights give their characters a chance to eventually speak about the long-standing family traumas which have not been discussed neither in families nor in society. Many authors believe that the war became a catalyst for changes in the social consolidation

of Ukrainians as a community and actualized the idea of national cohesion of the nation:

Now we are experiencing a great horrible war and at the same time we are in the epicenter of dynamic changes which are uniting the Ukrainian society. These changes are based on the values of civil society which we fight for and defend (Kebuladze, 2024)⁶.

Playwrights' interpretation of the entire map of Ukraine as an indivisible territory of common grief, pain, and at the same time resistance and support where the categories of the center and the periphery cease to exist, where there is no division into regions, into the east and the west, the north and the south, where it hurts a small town as much as the capital or a frontline city, on the one hand, demonstrates strength and resilience of Ukrainians as a civil nation, and, on the other hand, completely cancels propagandistic Russian narratives about separability of the Ukrainian mental-geographical space and radically differs from how a considerable portion of the Ukrainian society perceived the war stage localized in Donbas.

5. Sites of resistances as new places of strength and resilience

Thus, the places where civil people resist aggressors are also scattered across the Ukrainian map according to the war events. Playwrights focus their attention on the seized Kyiv (*Duby, shcho trymaiut nebo* [Oaks Holding the Sky] by Liudmyla Tymoshenko, *Chy ya zastaryi dlia viiny* [Am I Too Old for War] and *Hamardzhoba* [Hamardzhoba] by Volodymyr Serdiuk, *Yak ne staty katsapom* [How not to Become a Katsap] by Oksana Hrytsenko, *Robinson* [Robinson] by Vitalii Chenskyi), different parts of Kyiv region (*Zakryte nebo* [The Closed Sky] by Neda Nezhdana, *Moia Tara* [My Tara], *Moia mama chainyk* [My Mum is a Kettle] by Liudmyla Tymoshenko, *Khrest* [The Cross], *Baba Toma* [Granny Toma] by Tetiana Kytsenko, *Borshch. Retsept vyzyhvannia moiei prababtsi* [Borshch. My Great-Grandma's Recipe of Sur-

⁶ «Зараз ми проживаємо досвід великої, страшної війни і водночас перебуваємо в епіцентрі динамічних змін, що зумовлюють єднання українського суспільства. Ці зміни засновані на цінностях громадянського суспільства, які ми виборюємо й захищаємо».

vival] by Maryna Smilianets, *Liuby-mene-ne-pokyn* [Love-Me-Not-Leave-Me] by Olha Annenko, *Ya norm* [I'm OK] by Nina Zakhozhenko, *Try sproby pokrashchyty pobut* [Three Attempts to Improve Daily Life] by Maksym Kurochkin, *Chuzhesranka* [The Alien] by Iryna Feofanova, *Yak ne staty katsapom* [How not to Become a Katsap] by Oksana Hrytsenko, *Mobilni chvyli buttia* [Mobile Waves of Existence] by Volodymyr Rafeienko, *Poker z doleiu* [Poker with Fate] by Kateryna Kholod, the frontline Kharkiv (*Naperedodni* [On the Eve] by Dmytro Ternovyi, *Ya, viina i plastykova hranata* [Me, War and a Plastic Grenade] by Nina Zakhozhenko, *Choho boitsia Ruddi* [What is Ruddy Afraid of] by Kira Sytnikova, *Dva sketchi pro viinu* [Two Sketches about War] by Yulita Ran, *Kosmonavty* [Spacemen] by Iryna Bezchetnova, *Zhyraf Mons. Kharkivska istoriia voiennoi vesny* [Giraffe Mons. Kharkiv Story of the Spring War] by Oleh Mykhailov), the encircled Chernihiv (*Turi-Ruri* [Turi-Ruri] by Yuliia Nechai), the frontline Zaporizhzhia (*Vino* [Wine] by Nataliia Ihnatieva), the occupied Kherson and Kherson region (*Platany Khersona* [Plane Trees of Kherson], *To sny pid chas viiny* [Dreams during wartime], *Zhyttia ne zupynyty* [Life cannot be Stopped], *Nashi dity* [Our Children] by Natalka Blok, *Slovnyk emotsii voiennoho chasu* [The Vocabulary of Wartime Emotions], *Shchodennyk okupatsii* [The Diary of Occupation] by Olena Astasieva, *Dekolonizui sebe* [Decolonize Yourself], *Memel-Dnipro* [The Memel-Dnipro] by Artur Sumarokov, *Kherson* [Kherson] by Vitalii Havura, *Stikery* [Stickers] by Ihor Nosovskyi, *Molochainyk* [Spurges] by Oksana Hrytsenko), the frontline Mykolaiv (*Pereviznyk* [The Carrier] by Nina Zakhozhenko, *V zemli* [In the Ground] by Olena Hapeieva), the entirely encircled Mariupol which the Russians try to raze to the ground (*Mariupolska drama* [Mariupol Drama] by Oleksandr Havrosh, *Trubach* [The Trumpeter] by Inna Honcharova, *Desiat kilometriv* [Ten Kilometers] by Iryna Feofanova, *Misto Marii: Shchodennyky oblohy* [The City of Mariia: Diaries of the Siege] by Andrii Bondarenko, *Oblychchia koloru viina* [The Face in the Color of War] by Oleksii Hnatiuk, *Vse lyshylos v Mariupoli* [Everything has been Left in Mariupol] by Tetiana Kytsenko, *Marafon "rosiiska ruletk"* [The Marathon "Russian Roulette"] by Kateryna Penkova, *Prosto neba* [Under an Open Sky] by Anastasiia Prykhodkina, *Pryhadaty maibutnie* [To remember the Future] by Oleksandr Viter, *More zalyshytsia* [The Sea will Remain] by Oleh Mykhailov).

Places of power are marked with tragedies and personal losses, the people's resistance is largely spontaneous, but it becomes inevitable and demonstrates that unique civil self-organization, which distinguishes the Ukrai-

nian society in the times of conflicts and great challenges, reveals a stable system of its collective values. Resistance is incentivized by the fact that people stay in their cities, towns, and villages for different reasons or accidentally find themselves in the places where they feel the need to act, take responsibility, help others, risk their lives, but not to grovel before the enemy in any way. The characters of the above mentioned plays are people of different age, from teenagers to the elderly, with different life experiences, they do not consider themselves heroes and do not regard their actions as heroism. However, even the number of plays recording this everyday “non-heroic heroism” of many people testifies the large scale of the resistance of civil Ukrainians to Russian aggressors, and this resistance becomes one of the key factors of the full-scale war which allows Ukraine to hold on in spite of everything.

6. (Non)peripheral discourses: movement towards the center

Significantly, Ukrainian drama of 2022–2023 against the backdrop of the war pays special attention to the discourses which were peripheral for it before.

In particular, feminine discourse of the war is considerably expanding, and women are no longer regarded only as keepers of the home who wait for their husbands or as victims of attackers, though this tendency can be observed in playwriting at the level of sexual violence against women (*Zakryte nebo* [The Closed Sky] by Neda Nezhdana, *Borshch. Retsept vyzhyvannia moiei prapabtsi* [Borshch. My Great-Grandma’s Recipe of Survival] by Maryna Smilianets, *Memel-Dnipro* [The Memel-Dnipro] by Artur Sumarokov, *Molochainyk* [Spurges] by Oksana Hrytsenko, *Turi-Ruri* [Turi-Ruri] by Yulia Nechai).

In these plays, women lose their families, homes, and country. However, in the contemporary war drama, women are often assigned roles which were traditionally assigned to men in military literature. They put on military uniforms and go to the front (*Vona + Viina* [She + War] by Svitlana Spasyba and Kateryna Chepura, *Prynts i Zhinka* [The Prince and the Woman] by Anna Bahriana, *Pozyvni z toho zhyttia* [Call Signs from That Life] by Oleh Mykolaichuk, *Vzvodnyi oporny punkt* [Platoon Stronghold] by Dmytro Korchynskyi), demine territories (*Oberezhno, mina* [Beware of Mines] by Yulia Hudozhnyk), volunteer (*Liuby-mene-ne-kyn* [Love-Me-Not-Leave-Me] by Olha Annenko), know how to handle weapons (*Zakryte nebo* [The Closed

Sky] by Neda Nezhdana), collect intelligence about the occupiers' dislocation (*Molochainyk* [Spurges] by Oksana Hrytsenko, *Baba Toma* [Grandma Toma] by Tetiana Kytsenko), take care of the wounded (*Marafon "rosiiska ruletk"* [The Marathon "Russian Roulette"] by Kateryna Penkova, *Trubach* [The Trumpeter] by Inna Honcharova, *Posttravmatychna rapsodiia* [Post-Traumatic Rhapsody] by Dmytro Korchynskyi), head the local self-defense, stopping the column of Russian tanks moving towards Kyiv (*Chuzhesranka* [The Alien] by Iryna Feofanova), accompany foreign journalists to the liberated Bucha (*Yak ne staty katsapom* [How not to Become a Katsap] by Oksana Hrytsenko), and cautiously add poison to food and alcohol for the occupiers (*Pereviznyk* [The Carrier] by Nina Zakhozhenko); in other words, they are maximally involved in defending their country and fighting for its victory in the war.

Contemporary playwrights also interpret the war through the lens of children (*10 kilometriv* [10 Kilometers], *Marharyta ta vedmedyky* [Margarita and Small Bears] by Iryna Feofanova, *Neperemozhniasha* [The Unwinnable] by Iryna Harets, *Marichka ta huseniatko* [Marichka and the Gosling] by Liena Liahushonkova and Kateryna Penkova, *Odnoho razu, v Ukraini* [Once upon a time, in Ukraine] by Andrii Vodov, *Koly chervoniie kalyna* [When the Viburnum Gets Red] by Serhii Oliinyk), animals (*Smak sontsia* [The Taste of the Sun] by Oleksandr Viter, *Koty-bizhentsi* [Cats-Refugees] by Maryna Smilianets and Liudmyla Tymoshenko, *Nas (ne) kynuly* [We were (not) Abandoned] by Kristina Bahaieva, *Zhyraf Mons: kharkivska istoriia voiennoi vesny* [Giraffe Mons: Kharkiv Story of the War Spring], *Dyvna vesna* [Strange Spring] by Oleh Mykhailov), queer-communities (*Khronolohiia* [Chronology] by Liutsiia Lisova, *Ya, viina i plastykova hranata* [Me, War and a Plastic Grenade] by Nina Zakhozhenko, *Velychne stolittia. Vesele* [The Grand Century. Merry] by Serhii Kulybyshev), from anti-ageist points of view (*Chy ya zastaryi dlia viiny* [Am I Too Old for War], *Riven tysku, chastota pulsu* [Blood Pressure Level, Heart Rate] by Volodymyr Serdiuk, *Molochainyk* [Spurges] by Oksana Hrytsenko, *Baba Toma* [Grandma Toma] by Tetiana Kytsenko), and also pay due attention to people with special needs and diseases, who become absolutely helpless in war situations and need care of others (*Vertep* [Vertep] by Artem Lebediev, *Stikery* [Stickers] by Ihor Nosovsky).

Animals' perception of the war in drama is similar to the perception and behavior of civil people. Animals suffer, leave dangerous places, confess to each other and dare to do touching or desperate things to help their friends or people they live near. Eco-critical contexts of the war are tightly installed

in the mental matrices of the Ukrainian civic identity, the plots of such plays become a new way of emotionally living/experiencing the war and metonymically transfer thoughts, feelings, emotions, and traumas of people into the stories and reflections of animals. In this way, animals are actively engaged in the Ukrainian resistance to the Russian aggression and become full-fledged “co-authors” of the future victory, and playwriting itself starts demonstrating characteristics of a relational eco-critical system. We can see how this system is confidently drifting towards convergence with linguistic cognitive science, cultural anthropology, memory studies, theory of identity/identities, and studies of the Other.

The contexts of “Non-Alien Other” also includes stories showing that the Ukrainian victory is being won by everybody including people with non-traditional self-identification, children who grow up quickly and take responsibility, elderly people who try to be useful for their community and the country in the way they can do it. In other words, drama demonstrates shifts in the world picture caused by the war and shows how peripheral discourses are rapidly moving towards its center losing their peripheral status.

We can see how contemporary Ukrainian drama expands its semantic field in interpreting the war and embeds zones which are relatively new for military literature, though previously explored, mainly in prose.

7. Collective text about War

The essential transformational feature of the Ukrainian drama of 2022–2023 is its presentation outside as a global collective text in which individual writers’ voices matter as a unit of a whole. We have already seen it at the beginning of our discussion on the example of the rapid formation of collective virtual playwriting resources, but we also have interesting book versions of new drama anthologies about the war compiled by different principles. This trend fits in the general innovation of presenting Ukrainian literature about the full-scale war through anthologies in other literature genres – poetry, short prose, and essays, and many such anthologies were published in 2022–2023, thereby creating a stereoscopic artistic palette of the war.

Comparing the dramaturgical anthologies 2022–2023 with the previous ones published in 2015–2019, one may notice that in the anthology *Maidan. Do i pislia* [The Maidan. Before and After], the war is represented only in two dramatic texts out of nine works, whereas the anthology *Labirynt iz kry-*

hy ta vohniu [The Labyrinth of Ice and Fire] comprises five texts dedicated to the war out of nine works; in other words, the war does not become an all-consuming discourse, it is interpreted against the background of the Maidan events of 2013–2014 and in the contexts of renewed discussions about the Ukrainian civic identity.

The anthologies of 2022–2023 are formed as corpora of texts only about the war – without any other additional modus. The principles of compiling them and, accordingly, texts included in them differ significantly.

The paper *Antolohiia 24* [Anthology 24] of the project Parade-fest completely duplicates the electronic corpus of texts of the same name compiled by a creative team of the hastily organized competition in 2022. The leading criteria for entering the final contest were promptness and captured emotion, since even the starting requirements of the competition itself implied not plays or dramas, but texts for the theatre or “statements”, mainly suitable for rapid stage readings, because such texts were in demand abroad in the first months of 2022. The competition itself was announced as a project of rapid reaction (in fact, it concerns the events of the first two months of the full-scale war since one of the requirements was to interpret the events after February 24, 2022, and the texts for the competition had to be submitted before the end of April 2022) and transformation of the pain of war into emotion and the power of words. Thus, most texts of this anthology are not plays; we can find modified dramatic genres, diaries, chronicles from social networks, verlibre, monologues, dialogues of split protagonists with themselves, quests, and other prompt formats of texts or statements about the war. Contemplating the war, all the authors of the anthology (Yuliia Honchar, Nina Zakhozhenko, Den Humennyi, Yulia Nechai, Kira Sytnikova, Anna Halas, Yulia Hudozhnyk, Andrii Bondarenko, Liena Liahushonkova, Serhii Shynkarchuk, Renat Siettarov, Iryna Feofanova, Liutsiia Lisova, Khanna Nevidoma, Kateryna Hodik, Yaroslava Muravetska, Natalka Blok, Yulita Ran, Oleksii Minko, Liudmyla Tymoshenko, Viktor Solodchuk, Valerii Puzik, and Iryna Harets) direct their conversation towards the realm of values. In other words, it is a rather provocative art project, finalized in the format of rapid project reaction to the urgent social demand.

The book version of the anthology *Nenazvana viina* [The Unnamed War] from the National Center of Theatre Arts named after Les Kurbas only partially duplicates the virtual anthology of the same name, since the corpus of texts has undergone significant transformations in its paper version: it is decorated with prefaces and the afterword, the war photos given by the Center’s

staff, and the structure of this corpus of texts implies its internal dramaturgy – from releasing fears to surviving the war, looking into the otherworld, working with memory – to believing in the future victory. The anthology is regarded as a kind of dramatic metatext about the war – with the Prologue and Epilogue, with its own logics: from the beginning of the events which were wrongly considered a local conflict, to the great war unfolding in the center of Europe, which can be seen both through one's own eyes and through the "Other's eyes". This metatext comprises the works only of professional Ukrainian playwrights (Andrii Ivaniuk, Oleh Mykolaichuk, Maryna Smilianets, Dmytro Ternovyi, Ihor Bilyts, Nina Zakhozhenko, Artem Lebediev, Svitlana Spasyba, Kateryna Chepura, Anna Bahriana, Olha Annenko, Neda Nezhdana, Oleksandr Viter, Volodymyr Serdiuk, Oleh Drach, Inna Honcharova, and Oleh Mykhailov) who present not only commonplace masculine voices of war, but also feminine voices. The characters of these plays watch the ruins of the previously peaceful life not only through their own eyes, but also through the eyes of animals, destroyed architectural structures and peculiar characters, look beyond the horizon of their own world to get answers to numerous painful questions and become stronger. In this corpus of texts written by professional theatre playwrights, there is also Theatre as an invisible hero, because this collective conversation about the war involves different theatre characters (Playwright, Actor, Singer, Musician, and Trumpeter) and an extended theatre intertext which creates a necessary semantic distance for unbiased interpretation of the war events, the codes of humanity, philosophicity, poetry, gender equality, inclusion, faith, and many other things which can transform our life into an interesting theatre.

The anthology *Drama Panorama 2023* [Drama Panorama 2023] was compiled as the first attempt "to establish the right mechanisms of promoting the contemporary drama, absolutely transparent, understandable, and workable for everyone" (Haishynets, 2023)⁷; thus, it presents 10 dramatic texts which won different playwriting competitions in 2023 ("Drama.UA", "Actual Plays Week", "July Honey", "Aurora" (Poland), and "Reboot Festival" (Great Britain)), thereby starting the formation of the annual drama anthology of new Ukrainian plays as the TOP 10 of the year when texts are randomly included in a common corpus being selected by different teams of readers of prestigious playwriting competitions. There are no amateurs among the

⁷ «закласти правильні механізми просування сучасної драматургії, абсолютно прозорі, зрозумілі й робочі для всіх»

authors of the anthology, all the ten playwrights (Kateryna Penkova, Liena Kudaieva, Oksana Savchenko, Oksana Hrytsenko, Andrii Bondarenko, Ihor Nosovskyi, Artur Sumarokov, Nina Zakhozhenko, Anna Halas, and Liena Liahushonkova) have experience of cooperation with playwriting contests, theatre festivals, and theatres. It is worth noting that there was a tendency for plays about the war to win in different playwriting contests in 2023, both in Ukraine and abroad. Thus, the war is an idea unifying dramatic texts of different genres and stylistics and binding them in a single corpus of texts which significantly complements the range of already published book anthologies and virtual anthologies of this problematic and thematic register.

We also have a new unique example of a collective text about the war which includes drama as a self-contained genre segment – the anthology “*Vichnist tryva tsei den...*” *Khudozni khroniky viiny* [“This day lasts an eternity...” Artistic Chronicles of the War] of different genres which presents texts created after February 24, 2022 (poetry, short prose, and interview), compiled by the professionals of the Taras Shevchenko Literature Institute. It is noteworthy that the dramatic voices of Iryna Harets, Olena Hapeieva, Iryna Bezchetnova, and Nina Zakhozhenko in this corpus of texts testify that Ukrainian Drama has not avoided creating a general artistic canvas of the war.

As we can see, against the backdrop of the full-scale Russian aggression, in the Ukrainian playwriting and theatre environments, there are different unifying initiatives and projects representing new drama anthologies as a collective text about the war in which each voice is important not only individually, but rather as a necessary instrument of the metaphorical harmonious symphony orchestra.

8. Conclusion

Since February 24, 2022, Ukrainian drama has demonstrated general involvement of the vast majority of authors in recording, comprehending and interpreting the war which has outlined the leading issues of the drama discourse. This situation is very different in comparison with Ukrainian playwrights’ interpretation of the previous stage of the war focusing on its certain aspects. In spite of the diversity of the authors’ voices and individual writing manners, we can speak about new strategies of Ukrainian playwriting about the war developed in 2022–2023. First of all, it is worth studying the combatant drama created by Ukrainian playwrights directly involved in

the armed defense of Ukraine, and it was mostly a voluntary decision of each of them. At the beginning of 2022, the playwrights strived not only to create full-fledged fictional texts, but also capture moments, record their emotional states, reveal the witnesses' voices, and keep anthropological nuances and details. Later, full-fledged dramatic works appeared, presenting the resistance of civil Ukrainians to the Russian aggression as unique self-organization and sacrifice of Ukrainians who are always ready for it in emergency situations. In drama, the places of resistance are positioned as locations of heroism and strength, and a unique interpretation of Ukraine's map as new territory of common memory is created. Dramaturgy starts moving those discourses which have been peripheral for it before – women's, children's, animalistic, queer, problems of people with special needs – to the center of its world picture. The published drama anthologies of 2022–2023 dedicated to the war present a new dramatic field as a global collective text about the war.

We have not paid due attention to the mystical codification of the war, its memorization, the potential of drama and theatre as collective psychotherapy, comprehension of the new Ukrainian emigration caused by the war, the opening of portals and transition zones between the worlds, and other potential strategies of contemporary drama about the war. The research and conceptualization of these issues are considered to be our tasks for the future.

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