Studia Ucrainica Varsoviensia 14
ISSN 2299-7237, e-ISSN 2545-157X
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https://doi.org/10.31338/2299-7237suv.14.6

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Flesh-Witnessing, Poetic Testimonies and Diaries of Ukrainian Women in War

Abstract

This article examines literature as a form of first-hand war testimony, focusing on how Ukrainian women poets use storytelling, media, and poetic practice to process and bear witness to war, preserve identity, and resist cultural erasure. It highlights literature's distinctive capacity to validate and convey wartime experience. Key themes include the challenges of witnessing and writing about war from the perspective of poets who are both citizens and participants; the concept of "flesh-witnessing" as a mode of articulating embodied experience and emotional states; and the emerging features of contemporary Ukrainian women's poetry.

Keywords: affective state, citizen-participant, emotion metaphor, flesh-witnessing, memory episode, testimony, women's poetry.

[...] I already know everyone in this city
and all of its dead are my dead
and all the survivors are my sisters[1]

Introduction

In this article, the author considers Ukrainian female poets whose popularity is connected with war, and explores their poetic testimonies to the experience of war – both printed and posted in virtual space – from the role of literary production

[1] V. Amelina, "Testimonies" [in:] V. Amelina, *Three poems,* trans. by Larissa Babij*, London Ukrainian Review*, Special Issue 3, 24 August 2023, https://www.londonukrainianreview.org/posts/three-poems.

in framing the testimonies of what war does to the perception of language (linguistic decomposition and a "dictionary of war") to the study of how the war is being diarized in the works by women citizen-participants through the themes of empathy, remembrance, survival, and grievance. The paper will focus on the post-February 24, 2022, Ukrainian poetry published on the internet and women-poets who have been active on social platforms and who largely took over the journalists' function – to record history as it happens.

All the poems and other writings mentioned and analyzed in this article are written by women who have experienced or are experiencing Putin's war against Ukraine with their own bodies in real time. This makes them bodily witnesses of the war, and their poetic reflections on the wartime events and places have the historical qualities of documentary texts, testimonies, and personal chronicles of the war.

Despite the area being relatively under-researched, the writings of Ukrainian women from the independence era have become the focus of significant scholarly attention. A book by Oleksandra Wallo, *Ukrainian Women Writers and the National Imaginary: From the Collapse of the USSR to the Euromaidan* (2019; in English), is illustrative in this regard. Research focusing on the Russia-Ukraine war, authored by Ukrainian women, can be illustrated by the book of Ganna Uliura, *To Write a War* (2023; in Ukrainian). The genre of war diaries written by women authors is best exemplified by Olena Stiazhkina's book, *Ukraine, War, Love: A Donetsk Diary*, which was initiated in February 2014 and subsequently published in fragments in English translation by Anne Fisher in 2024. The diaries that will be examined in more detail in this article are the books by Larissa Babij, *A Kind of Refugee. The Story of an American Who Refused to Leave Ukraine* (2024) and Victoria Amelina, *Looking at Women, Looking at War. A War and Justice Diary* (2025).

Research on literature as testimony is limited. Below is a list of authors and titles relevant to this subject: Heidi Bollinger, "A Chorus of Witnesses: The Hybrid Genre of Testimonial Literature";[2] Donna Bickford, "Using testimonial novels to think about social justice"[3] and "The (Potential?) Power of Testimonial Fiction: Torture, Truth, and the Testimonial Novel";[4] Laura Webb, "Testimonio, the Assumptiom of Hybridity and the Issue of Genre;"[5] Beatrice Mazzi,

[2] H. Bollinger, "A Chorus of Witnesses: The Hybrid Genre of Testimonial Literature" Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York 2010, https://urresearch.rochester.edu/institutionalPublicationPublicView.action?institutionalItemId=12258&versionNumber=1.

[3] D. Bickford, "Using testimonial novels to think about social justice" [in:] *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, no. 3(2), 2008, pp. 131–146, first published online 1 July 2008, https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197908090078.

[4] D. Bickford, "The (Potential?) Power of Testimonial Fiction: Torture, Truth, and the Testimonial Novel" [work in process], no date, https://www.academia.edu/3583743/The_Potential_Power_of_Testimonial_Fiction_Torture_Truth_and_the_Testimonial_Novel.

[5] L. Webb, "Testimonio, the Assumption of Hybridity and the Issue of Genre" [in:] *Studies in Testimony*, no. 2, 2019, pp. 3–23, https://studiesintestimony.co.uk/issues/volume-two-issue-one-2019/testimonio-the-assumption-of-hybridity-and-the-issue-of-genre/.

"Becoming a Witness: Impegno and Testimony in Contemporary Italian Literature and Culture."[6]

In this regard, the role of literature as a form of testimony has been examined from the perspectives of literary theory and educational methodology. However, this concept has not yet been applied to the context of poetry. The purpose of this article is to examine the distinctive characteristics of contemporary Ukrainian poetry written during wartime. We will explore how poets in Ukraine use their first-hand experience of the war to document events as active participants. The contemporary Ukrainian poetic genre is characterized by a focus on the function of testimonial expression, which is linked to concrete imagery of war experiences. This approach differs from the pre-war tradition of intellectualist, metaphorical abstractions. Testimonial Ukrainian poetry and dictionary-style non-fiction prose reflect a variety of emotional (affective) states caused by different episodes of war. Diarist writings also contain a great deal of descriptions of affective states. Metaphorical imagery is not entirely absent from Ukrainian war poetry, but it is linked to the concrete imagery of emotional states, which are fixed in the mind as eventful episodes precisely because of this connection to specific images.

Theoretical framework for discussion: Flesh-witnessing

The concept of "flesh witnessing" aligns with Yuval Noah Harari's exploration in works such as "The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000,"[7] in which he examines how personal experiences of war, particularly the visceral and emotional aspects, have shaped modern war culture. Harari draws parallels between the shift in how war is perceived and cultural movements such as the Enlightenment's culture of sensibility and Romanticism, which emphasized individual emotional experience and the sublime nature of suffering or heroism. "Flesh witnessing" refers to the direct, embodied experience of war's horrors or glories, as opposed to abstract or strategic views of conflict. Harari ties this to Romanticism's focus on intense personal experiences. For Harari, thus, the concept of "flesh witnessing," i.e., the witnessing of individual affective experience of war, is rooted in the culture of sensibility and Romanticism. In light of Harari's insights, it is notable that the shift from dispassionate descriptions of actions in martial memories to first-person emotional accounts is particularly characteristic of women.

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[6] B. Mazzi, "Becoming a Witness: Impegno and Testimony in Contemporary Italian Literature and Culture" Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University Libraries, Columbia: Academic Commons, 14 May 2025, https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/ambv-sv36.

[7] Yu. N. Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000,* London 2008.

In his work on military history, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship,"[8] Harari introduced the concept of flesh-witnessing directly in the title, as opposed to the concept of eye-witnessing, to describe a shift in how soldiers recount their wartime experiences. Harari proposes that the emphasis on a soldier's personal, internal and transformative experience, or the authority of flesh-witnessing, explains the enduring appeal of war narratives.

While eyewitnesses provide factual accounts based on objective observation of events, flesh-witnesses focus on their inner experience, describing how they felt during combat rather than just what they did. The concept of flesh-witnessing is rooted in the value placed on individual experience and sensory input. It highlights the perceived "privileged truths" gained through intense personal and bodily experience and emphasizes the transformative and indescribable nature of combat.

Building on the contributions of Lilie Chouliaraki and Omar Al-Ghazzi, I suggest extending the concept of flesh witnessing from the sphere of bodily experience in battle to the experience of civilians and the domain of citizen media.[9] These scholars refer specifically to content created by non-military users through mobile devices (cell phones). This content is often referred to as "user-generated content" that has made it possible for ordinary voices of war to appeal to the world for attention and action.

Chouliaraki and Al-Ghazzi interrogate the use of user-generated content as "testimonial material in the war reporting of Western media." They understand such user-generated content "to be an act of media witnessing, which presents conflict as a scene of suffering and relies on western news platforms to globally amplify such suffering as both authentic and morally urgent storytelling to news publics."[10] These authors ground user-generated content "onto the body as an existential dimension of ordinary testimonies of conflict," what they theorize as *flesh witnessing.*[11]

Building on this, I will expand on the concept of citizen media as *flesh witnessing* by offering an additional perspective: the acts of war testimonies by citizen-poets.

Tracing the path of Ukrainian women poets shows the clear shift from a state of disintegration and confusion at the beginning of Russia's war on Ukraine in 2014 to confidence in their authority and mission after the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

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[8] Yu. N. Harari, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship" [in:] *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas,* vol. 7, no. 2, 2009, pp. 213–228, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pan.0.0147.

[9] L. Chouliaraki and O. Al-Ghazzi, "Citizen Media as Flesh Witnessing: Embodied Testimonies of War in Western News Journalism" [in:] *Postcolonial Publics: Art and Citizen Media in Europe*, edited by B. B. Blaagaard, S. Marchetti, S. Ponzanesi, and Sh. Bassi, Venice, 2023, pp. 5–20, http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-677-0.

[10] L. Chouliaraki and O. Al-Ghazzi, "Beyond verification: Flesh witnessing and the significance of embodiment in conflict news" [in:] *Journalism*, vol. 23, Issue 3, 2021, pp. 649–667. Original work published 2022, p. 1, https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211060628.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 6.

I will demonstrate how Ukrainian women poets became important participants and first-hand/flesh witnesses to historical events.

The Muses are not silent

The initial testimonies of the state of disintegration and confusion, and of the impact of war on language perception (illustrated by linguistic decomposition as a reflection of the physical breakdown of part of Ukraine under Russian occupation) can be most clearly observed in Lyuba Yakymchuk's poem "Decomposition" from 2014 (Lyuba Yakymchuk is an internally displaced person from Luhansk).

And not only do the names and physical images of cities and towns decompose in the poem, but also the name and body of the speaking persona are being degraded. Consider the ultimate stanza of the poem:

> I stare into the horizon
> it has narrowed into a triangle
> sunflowers dip their heads in the field
> black and dried out, like me
> I have gotten so very old
> no longer Lyuba
> Just a *ba*[12]

The stanza's structure is formed into the shape of an inverted staircase, descending downwards.

In contrast to the previous years of Russia's hybrid war on Ukraine, the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022 had a consolidating effect on the moral strength of the Ukrainian armed forces and the creative community. It also strengthened the confidence of poets in their authority and mission as civil activists. During wartime, many of Ukraine's female poets gained prominence, playing a significant role in the volunteer movement and the citizen media. In their war diaries, media posts of testimonial poetry, countless public talks and volunteer reports, they provided first-hand reflections and accounts of the events that transpired.

A series of public events, including the All-Ukrainian Academic and Artistic Forum, which took place from 20 to 25 June 2022 and was entitled "Muses are not silent!," saw the scholars and creative community come together. The outcome of this significant public event was the publication of the first anthology of war poetry, entitled *This Day Lasts Forever. Literary Chronicles of the War* (Ternopil,

[12] L. Yakimchuk, "Decomposition" [in:] *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine,* edited by O. Maksymchuk and M. Rosochinsky, Boston 2017, https://www.wordsforwar.com/ Decomposition – Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine.

2023). The woman-illustrator of this publication, Dasha Khrisanfova, a brilliant artist from Kharkiv, deliberately chose to place a picture of ripe apples on the collection cover page, symbolizing hope for the coming of peace.

Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014, and particularly since 24 February 2022, Ukrainian poets have broadened the scope of their aesthetic reflections. They have challenged traditional ideas about poetic metaphor, showing that poetry does not have to wait for a post-traumatic renaissance in the distant future, "after Auschwitz."[13] Ukrainian poetry did not vanish with the onset of Ukraine's own Auschwitz; rather, it underwent a transformation, becoming a vessel of testimony.

The muses did not fall silent. "Poetry exists," affirms young Ukrainian poet Inna Honchar – a graduate of the Institute of Philology at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv – in her 2022 spring poem, "The Muses Are Not Silent."[14] In Ukrainian, this poem was published as an epigraph to the article "A Few Touches to Modern Lyrics Under Fire."[15]

Another young award-winning poet and prose writer, member of the National Writers' Union of Ukraine, Svitlana Didukh-Romanenko, who was born in the town of Boryspil near Kyiv, writes about the feelings of the refugee women during the first months of the Russian invasion:

> […] each of us is now a hard disk,
> Data carrier, memory card for hundreds of terabytes,
> Which cannot be formatted by daily bombardment.
> We are witnesses of war crimes[16]

A recognized woman-poet from the bombed-out city of Kharkiv who, regardless of the danger of frequent bombardments, stays in her hometown, Natalka Marynchak lives and volunteers in the city of Kharkiv. In her poetry, she expresses her love for her city, the people, and country, as well as her appreciation of life, even (or particularly) during the war.

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[13] "Poetry after Auschwitz" is considered to have emerged at least seven years after WWII, with the appearance in 1952 of the collection of poems *Poppy and Memory* by Paul Celan.

[14] I. Honchar, "The Muses Are Not Silent" [in:] *The war in Ukraine through the lens of women-poets.* Poetry by Halyna Kruk, Inna Honchar, and Svitlana Didukh-Romanenko. Trans. from Ukrainian by Lada Kolomiyets, *Versopolis. Poetry Expo 24*, 25 February 2024, https://www.versopolis.com/initiative/poetry-expo-24/content/1524/the-war-in-ukraine-through-the-lens-of-women-poets.

[15] Yu. Kovaliv, "Kil'ka shtrykhiv do suchasnoyi liryky pid obstrilamy" [A Few Touches to Modern Lyrics Under Fire] [in:] *Bukvoïd*, 5 July 2022, http://bukvoid.com.ua/events/culture/2022/07/05/112454.html.

[16] S. Didukh-Romanenko, "We were told: 'Export only the most valuable!'" [in:] *The war in Ukraine through the lens of women-poets. Poetry by Halyna Kruk, Inna Honchar, and Svitlana Didukh-Romanenko.* Trans. from Ukrainian by Lada Kolomiyets, *Versopolis. Poetry Expo 24*, 25 February 2024, https://www.versopolis.com/initiative/poetry-expo-24/content/1524/the-war-in-ukraine-through-the-lens-of-women-poets.

The everyday physical heroism of testimony and love – for home, land, children, and people – this is the pivot of the wartime Ukrainian poetry. Natalka Marynchak's untitled poem, dated 9 March, 2022, opens with the line, "And each of us will have a separate war," which addresses the unique nature of the war experience for each individual.[17] This poem is indicative of a psychological transformation that is clearly manifesting physically. The poem concludes with the following lines:

> everyone will have their own story
> of broken paths and breathlessness
> everyone will have their own defended territory
> of roaring and laughing
> I now have a heart
> of reinforced concrete
> it knows neither pity
> nor comfort[18]

It is also pertinent to bring another publication to the discussion here, *The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac*, which is a poetry anthology that appeared during the full-scale war. The anthology is divided into three volumes, covering the period from 2022 to 2023.[19]

While male voices are featured in this Almanac, it is notable that women's voices are more prevalent. The series showcases established poets such as Liubov Holota, Natalia Dziubenko-Mace, and Antoniia Tsvid, alongside emerging talent. Of particular note are the poems that detail the escape from the occupation (Mila Soniachna, "I Had to Be Cowardly…"[20]) and the geography of internal displacement (Zhanna Dmytrenko, "The Displaced"[21]). A significant number of poems adroitly interweave the images of spring as a symbol of hope for peace with the unrelenting reality of war's wounds and destruction, as exemplified by Halyna Slyvka's poem "Wounds are bandaged with April snow..."[22]

A significant proportion of the poems in this series make reference to the domain of authentic characters: individuals whose stories have been extensively exposed

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[17] N. Marynchak, "and each of us will have a separate war..." [in:] *Everyone will have their own story. Poetry by Natalka Marynchak.* Trans. by Lada Kolomiyets, *Versopolis,* 11 January 2024, everyone will have their own story | *Versopolis Review.*

[18] *Ibidem.*

[19] N. Shavarska, ed., *Neskorena Ukraina. Almanakh.* [The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac], Book I, Zhytomyr 2022; *Idem*, *Neskorena Ukraina. Almanakh.* [The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac], Book II, Zhytomyr 2023; *Idem*, *Neskorena Ukraina. Almanakh.* [The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac], Book III, Zhytomyr 2023.

[20] In N. Shavarska, ed., *Neskorena Ukraina. Almanakh.* [The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac], Book I, Zhytomyr 2022, p. 88.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 29.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

through media reports and photographic documentation, including those who have endured torture and were killed, or fortuitously escaped occupation, such as one elderly man who traversed a distance of 200 kilometers on foot from the occupation zone. The following examples may be cited as illustrations of the tragic war episodes and scenes of dead bodies depicted in the poems from this almanac: the poem entitled "Red Manicure Froze on the Asphalt" by Oksana Handurska-Pavlenko,[23] and the poem entitled "Earrings in the Snow" (Mural of Memory) by Iryna Rodchenko.[24]

The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac comprises discrete poems-chronicles dedicated to specific individuals, including the volunteer Mykola Nazarovets (the poem "Trailblazer" by Lidia Ryzhkova[25]), and particular cities that have been victims of Russian assault and occupation (in particular, the poem "Izium" by Oksana Dnistran[26]). The Almanac is notable for its references to geographical and historical realities, as well as episodes, situations, and emotional states experienced by ordinary Ukrainians during wartime. The new realities of wartime are thoroughly and comprehensively documented here. These include the occupation, trenches, weapons (such as Bairaktar), air raids, Shahed attacks, bombings, and bomb shelters. The title of Nadiya Humeniuk's poem, "Born in a Bomb Shelter,"[27] is particularly telling. This Almanac-triptych is a poetic document of war, with its numerous references to and depictions of wartime scenes, war episodes, geographical symbols and wartime images. All poems in the first two volumes of this three-volume collection are signed with a specific date of creation (month, day, year), emphasizing the chronological structure of the almanac as a collective poetic diary of the war. Furthermore, some poems in the first volume of the almanac date back to before the full-scale Russian invasion, which attests to the longevity of Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in February 2014.

The search for a new form of literary expression has become a key issue in contemporary Ukrainian women's poetry. As Larysa Petrova writes in the Almanac: "Немає слів... Розбіглися кудись /Епітети, метафори і рими..." [There are no words to express... Epithets, metaphors and rhymes have been rendered obsolete].[28]

The metaphorical style of contemporary Ukrainian poetry has evolved to approach a form of testimony. In her address at the opening of the Berlin poetry festival in June 2022, Halyna Kruk – a distinguished Ukrainian author, translator from

[23] In N. Shavarska, ed., *Neskorena Ukraina. Almanakh.* [The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac], Book II, Zhytomyr 2023, p. 24.

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 78.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 75–77.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 33.

[27] In N. Shavarska, ed., *Neskorena Ukraina. Almanakh.* [The Unconquered Ukraine. Almanac], Book III, Zhytomyr 2023, p. 28.

[28] *Ibidem*, 76.

Lviv, and member of PEN Ukraine – remarked that metaphors falter in the face of lived reality.[29]

However, if new writings are entirely devoid of metaphors, how can they be so captivating? The voice of the *diarist* of wartime experience has been the most important feature of literary expression since February 2022, as well as the evidence that art can create vital energy amidst the genocidal Russian war on Ukraine. The diversity of war experiences is broadly reflected on public platforms through the personal voices and life stories of Ukrainian women-poets.

Testimonial function of poetry

Confronted with the density of war, the poet finds that aspects of pre-war verse now resonate as a "late style," echoing Edward Said's formulation: "Late style is what happens if art does not abdicate its rights in favor of reality."[30] The inappropriateness of traditional metaphors is indicative of the inability to apply traditional imagination to the atrocities committed against the Ukrainian citizens. In her Berlin speech, Halyna Kruk attempts to convey the profound emotional impact of irreparable human loss of "men and women, someone's parents, someone's children, who were killed by Russia."[31] Kruk explains:

> These people were not born to die in war, nor did they acquire a higher education or a rare profession to die in war or cultivate their talents to die in war. We will always have a gaping wound from the loss of these people – in our souls, in our culture, science, economy, industry, society. This is not a metaphor.[32]

Kruk says she does not know any poetry that can heal this wound, and then she speaks on behalf of the collective "we," thereby representing the voice of the community:

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[29] Halyna Kruk's speech at the opening of the poetry festival in Berlin was published in German: Halyna Kruk, "Krieg ist keine Metapher" [in:] *Zeit Online*, 18 June 2022, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2022-06/halyna-kruk-poesiefestival-berlin-uk.

[30] E. Said, "Thoughts on Late Style" [in:] *London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 15, 5 August 2004, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v26/n15/edward-said/thoughts-on-late-style.

[31] H. Kruk, [Promova]. "Promova Halyny Kruk na vidkrytti poetychnoho festyvalyu v Berlini (23 Poesiefestival Berlin)" [Halyna Kruk's speech at the opening of the poetry festival in Berlin] [in:] *Forum Vydavtsiv* [Publishers' Forum], 19 June 2022, https://www.facebook.com/144908868860093/posts/7860820820602154/?locale=ms_MY. All excerpts from Kruk's Berlin speech cited in this article have been translated into English by the present author.

[32] *Ibidem.*

> This war is killing us all, each one in their own way, although we may look whole and unharmed on the outside, but we move in short jogs through life now, even in the open space, we startle at loud noises and our little children, who have experience sitting in basements under fire, do not cry out of fear. Even at such a young age, they understand that crying can cost lives. And this is not a metaphor either.[33]

The phrase "this is not a metaphor" is used repeatedly to establish a framework of distressing reality for the collective "we," a reality which was unimaginable in the pre-war period.

As Larissa Babij, an American citizen residing in Ukraine during the war, documented in her book *A Kind of Refugee. The Story of an American Who Refused to Leave Ukraine*:

> There is a difference between "I cannot imagine" and "unimaginable." Russia's unjustified invasion and ongoing brutal assault of Ukraine, with its barbaric genocidal attack on civilians and soldiers outside existing international conventions of war, has drastically moved the threshold for what can be called "unimaginable." 21 April, 2022, Lviv.[34]

In her diary note dated the same day, 21 April 2022, Babij explains the importance of not losing "touch with the war" and maintaining the citizen-participant's record of the concrete events of war in any attainable way and mode: by "going to the place where it happened, talking to a person who lived through it, formulating a question and looking for the answer, taking a walk or a shower, and remembering where you are and what you are doing."[35] The recording of wartime events is essential for ensuring a sense of reality, which is contingent on connection with the war. Keeping "touch with the war" is crucial for the wartime writer. This means avoiding both an exaggerated sense of security and an exaggerated sense of danger. This point is elaborated by Larissa in the following paragraph:

> There are two ways to lose touch with the war: one is by feeling safe and comfortable and unperturbed (secure in what you know), while the other is by entertaining threats and potential dangers (including that of nuclear attack) so that your senses become garbled and clouded by fear.[36]

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[33] *Ibidem*.

[34] L. Babij, *A Kind of Refugee. The Story of an American Who Refused to Leave Ukraine*. With a Foreword by Vladislav Davidzon, Ibidem-Verlag, vol. 53, Stuttgart 2024, p. 65.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 66.

[36] *Ibidem*.

Halyna Kruk ended her Berlin poetry festival address by redefining Ukrainian poetry as *testimony* rather than art: "The war makes everything unambiguous to such an extent that there is practically no room left for poetry. Just for testimony. [….] I'm sorry that poetry doesn't kill."[37] In this lament, poetry becomes her sole weapon in a personal war of witness.

Literature speaks with emotions. In testimonial literature, what is actually documented are emotional responses to the episodes of war. The wartime literary texts have an important epistemological value as storage spaces of the knowledge about affective states and the memory of war. The affective responses to current events, including the context of the war in Ukraine, are considered in a new collective volume: *Power of Emotions: On the Affective Constitution of Political Struggle: A Multidisciplinary Approach*.[38]

Emotion metaphors in the time of war

As Kathrin Bethke states, "metaphors derived from the source domain of the body, in particular, can have historically variable functions as emotion metaphors."[39] In the wartime Ukrainian literature, traditional cognitive metaphors for war, acting in the symbolic space, gave place to emotion/bodily metaphors, which express new nuances of emotions as reactions to the present-day reality. For instance, the non-fiction diary *A Dictionary of Emotions in A Time of War* by Olena Astaseva (2023) describes complex affective states for which it may be difficult to find labels in the traditional emotion lexicon, both in Ukrainian and English. Astaseva's work, written in the genre of diary notes, involves the creation of new "objective correlatives"[40] for complex emotional states. These correlatives are the terms that provisionally encompass a wide range of human experiences. Serving as entry words, or lemmas, in Astaseva's *Dictionary,* they include such terms as *panic, fear, hunger, cleaning, betrayal, hatred, love, irritation, guilt, choices, time, weather, the sensation of loss, bitterness, de-realization, tears, PTSD, disillusionment, anger, emptiness, despair, expectations,* and *faith.*[41]

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[37] H. Kruk, *Op. cit.*

[38] A. Ventsel and P. Selg, eds., *Power of Emotions: On the Affective Constitution of Political Struggle: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (*Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences*), Springer 2025.

[39] K. Bethke, "Emotion Metaphors and Literary Texts: The Case of Shakespeare's Sonnets" [in:] *The Rhetoric of Topics and Forms*, edited by G. Zocco, Berlin 2021, pp. 15–27.

[40] T.S. Eliot used this phrase to describe "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" that the poet feels and hopes to evoke in the reader (T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems" [in:] T. S. Eliot. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, pp. 87–94. London and New York 1920, p. 92).

[41] O. Astaseva, "A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War" [in:] *A Dictionary of Emotions in A Time of War: 20 short works by Ukrainian playwrights,* edited by J. Freedman, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 2023, pp. 41–66.

The terms for affective states, such as *panic, fear, hatred, love,* alongside emotionally neutral words, like *choices, time, weather,* represent the new associative labels through which the memory of a historically particular episode with its affective state is encoded. Each of these entry words serves as both an emotion word and, more broadly, an emotion metaphor for the unique affective states to which they are attached.

Reconsidering metaphors of emotion, with a particular focus on their function in literary texts, Kathrin Bethke argues that poetic metaphors of emotion (and we can talk here about all kinds of literary texts, not just poetry) can

> […] capture affective states that have no stable place in the English emotion lexicon, such as the feeling of "heaviness" described in Shakespeare's sonnet 50 or the feeling of "worthlessness" described in sonnet 87. Even though poetic metaphors may be derived from basic conceptual metaphors, they can potentially function as absolute metaphors that make historically as well as culturally remote affective states accessible to the intellect.[42]

If viewed as metaphors of emotion connected with a particular war episode, certain entry words in Astaseva's *Dictionary* can serve as absolute metaphors, *actually* creating nuances of emotions or affective dispositions, different both from the emotion concepts we used in our everyday language before the war and from the metaphors of emotion known earlier in literary tradition.

New associative meanings of the entry words in Astaseva's *Dictionary* renew our emotion lexicon by "capturing subtle and often nameless affective states,"[43] well illustrating the following argumentation by Bethke that poetic metaphors are not simply variations and extensions of basic conceptual metaphors that structure everyday language:

> Additionally, […] emotion concepts, once they are correlated with the phenomenality of the literary text, can invoke subtle affective states that would not be accessible to us by way of mere conceptualization.[44]

In the episodes like the one rubricated as "De-realization"[45] a new, unpredictable meaning of the concept-heading is introduced. In psychology, as a type of dissociation, "derealization" is a mental state where an individual feels detached from their surroundings, perceiving them as unreal, dreamlike, or distorted. This is a feeling

[42] K. Bethke, *Op. cit.,* p. 15.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 16.
[44] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[45] O. Astaseva, *Op. cit.,* p. 57.

of being emotionally disconnected from the world and other people.[46] In Astaseva, the speaking "I" is not emotionally disconnected from the present-day reality. On the contrary, the speaker's high emotional connection to what is going on in Ukraine distinguishes her "de-realization" as a nuanced feeling of contrast between two present-day realities. To be more specific, this is a combination of the feeling of bitter irony towards the reality of a peaceful "fake world filled with toys" represented by Western Europe with its "sweet little houses" and the emotion of suffering at the thought of the reality of war in Ukraine: *"Are there still women and children in Kyiv? I thought there were only soldiers there. I don't watch the news anymore. It's too hard."*[47]

Therefore, the concept of "de-realization" is used here emotionally, and as emotion metaphor, it evolves into an absolute metaphor, with its capacity of not just illustrating, but actually creating a nuance of emotion/affective state, which is not registered in our emotion lexicon. Absolute metaphors have the power of making accessible the intricate facets of particular emotional states that enrich Ukrainian affect culture at the time of ongoing Russia's war on Ukraine, when some words, like the word "war," moved from the symbolic space to the real space. Amidst the war, when the real space is rearranged around affective states, the writer's task is to search for the words that best reflect the affective state.

In the context of new emotional situations and states of mind connected with war, the initial connotations of certain common words have changed. Wartime Ukrainian literature has shifted from conceptualization and abstract thought to the phenomenology of feeling. This has resulted in new and uncommon associations emerging within literary works for words that had previously held familiar connotations. Emotionally neutral words may become emotional metaphors in new literary texts and imbue bits of new existential experience, like they did as the entry words/lemmas in *A Dictionary of Emotions in A Time of War* by Astaseva, exemplifying complex affective states for some of which it may be hard to find labels in the Ukrainian (and English) emotion lexicon. This literary work establishes "objective correlatives," or positioning in a specific context, for a range of emotions, which could be classified as *panic, fear, hunger, cleaning, betrayal, hatred, love, irritation, guilt, choices, time, weather, the sensation of loss, bitterness, de-realization, tears, PTSD, disillusionment, anger, emptiness, despair, expectations,* and *faith*, among others.[48] Astaseva's entry words are inseparable from the texts they rubricate, serving as a means of remembering historically particular episodes of objective reality.

The employment of cognitive metaphors from symbolic space (the "old-style" metaphors, in Said's sense), such as the metaphor of war, has been superseded by the

[46] N. Slivinski and S. Booth, "Derealization Explained" [in:] *WebMD*, 11 August 2024, https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-derealization-overview.

[47] O. Astaseva, *Op. cit.,* p. 57.

[48] *Ibidem.*

pressure of affects, with emotional metaphors from real space assuming their place. The real-world affective states seek non-symbolic, direct reflection in words. At that, any word can become imbued with emotion when employed for the purpose of reflection. This phenomenon manifests particularly in the context of a war experience, where the image of that experience becomes saturated with real-life emotion.

The term "affective word" refers to words that serve as new metaphors. Such words originally possess both denotative and abstract meanings, as is exemplified by the word *fire*. However, when connected to a specific affective situation, they become metaphorical representations of that situation, thereby losing their abstract content. In their capacity as emotion metaphors, affective words are inextricably linked to their empirical, bodily context.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that there has been a tendency among Ukrainian writers to "compile" *dictionaries* of war, in which familiar words appear with unexpected interpretations and altered first associations. In this regard, it is pertinent to refer to the non-fiction book of live stories of wartime experience and resistance, entitled *A Ukrainian Dictionary of War*, a compendium of more than 70 monologues compiled by Ostap Slyvynsky and published in English translation by Lost Horse Press in 2024. A total of 78 monologues, each of which is presented by a Ukrainian citizen-participant, are arranged under separate entries in the *Dictionary*. Slyvynsky's technique as a compiler of the collection of people's voices can be regarded as narrative volunteering. These accounts detail first-hand experiences of survival, volunteering work with internally displaced people and communication with fellow citizen-participants during Russia's intense military actions against Ukraine, including observations, auditory experiences and direct participation. The following commonly-used words are employed as dictionary entries, or lemmas: *bus, cherry plum tree, grannies, pain, lightning bolt, pregnancy, bath, bear, wedding, street, mushroom, thunder, ringtone, far/near, home, shower, housing, life, land, star, teeth, stories, food, cocoa, calendar, canary, duckling, tickets, room, cat, keys, colors, horse, romance, beauty, chalk, blood, bullet, lamp, letters, love, madeleine, grill, city, prayer, sky, news, foot, license plate, caves, cellar, Prague, farewell, radio, joy, fish, freedom, warehouse, trash, dreams, sweets, sun, singing, article, sign, taboo, tank, animals, Tetris, silence, body, dough, cake, corpse, tail, numbers, apples.*[49] Each lemma organizes a segment of war experience into a discrete episode. Retaining the episode as a standalone unit enables the emotional experience to be recalled with greater ease, facilitating the cohesive integration of separate events into the overarching memory. The dictionary-style writing employed here serves to facilitate the process of remembrance and helps to construct a series of images and a logical sequence of events in our memory of war.

[49] O. Slyvynsky, *A Ukrainian Dictionary of War,* trans. from Ukrainian by G. Mahoney and T. Malkovych, Scio 2024.

The entry words in the *Ukrainian Dictionary* function as portals to emotions, born from the experience of war. In a broader sense, the terms can be regarded as metaphors for war. However, it should be noted that the decipherment of these metaphors is only possible in conjunction with the stories to which they refer as entry words. These stories offer a multifaceted perspective on the experience of war, with each heading or entry word bearing a unique meaning, intricately tied to the narrative it represents, along with its emotional and affective implications. It can thus be concluded that the efficacy of the story headings is evidenced by their function as emotional metaphors, with some of them operating as absolute metaphors. This fusion underscores the fundamental interconnectedness between the natural world and the realm of language.

For instance, the heading-term "Calendar" is a metaphor for the antinomy of life in peacetime, with its weekends and holidays, and the loss of the sense of calendar time during wartime, which is "a different kind of time space – dense and corrosive – with its own characteristics marked in days of war, curfew hours, days and nights of air-raid sirens."[50] This different kind of time "doesn't measure out in weekdays on a calendar."[51]

Slyvynsky provides only the name and place of residence of the person whose voice is used to tell a brief story or reflection. These are arranged like dictionary entries under a separate heading, given in alphabetical order. In particular, the aforementioned reflection entitled "Calendar" is Larysa's, who is based in Kyiv. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of entries in the *Ukrainian Dictionary* have been contributed by women.

The emotional connection between an object and a specific wartime experience is unique to each individual, yet it may also be shared by millions. For instance, the red-white-blue bag, most commonly known as the "China bag," or inexpensive Chinese-made plastic-weave bag, has become synonymous with migrants and refugees worldwide. Conversely, a bath towel received as a gift in a host country may be associated with a new home that a refugee is desperately seeking. In this case, the towel could be interpreted as a metaphor for home.

Entry words serving as metaphors provide a clear framing of the memories of war into separate episodes. Since, according to the latest neurological data, despite the continuity of our experience, memory stores it in the form of separate episodes,[52] this strategy is the best way to remember the war as a series of episodes in order to keep it in memory longer. Some of these framing metaphors represent peculiar affective states and function as absolute metaphors in this regard.

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[50] *Ibidem*, p. 91.

[51] *Ibidem.*

[52] D. Clewett, S. DuBrow and L. Davachi, "Transcending time in the brain: How event memories are constructed from experience" [in:] *Hippocampus,* vol. 29, Issue 3, 2019, pp. 162–183, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hipo.23074.

Neuroscientist David Clewett and his colleagues study how the brain transcends time to transform everyday experiences into meaningful memory representations. Holly Ober writes in the review of the publication by David Clewett, Ringo Huang and Lila Davachi[53] that

> [a]lthough life unfolds in a continuous flow, our memories don't capture it that way. We don't recall the past as one seamless timeline but rather as a sequence of distinct, meaningful moments – much like how sentences are broken up with grammar and punctuation. This mental structure gives our experiences clarity and helps us understand both what happened and when it occurred.[54]

The *dictionaries* of war, written by Ukrainian authors since 2022, divide experiences of war into framed episodes and help "punctuate" memories of war. Ober emphasizes that stress "may block the memory's ability to mark new experiences."[55] My point is that the entry words in the aforementioned *dictionaries* are important as picture frames or "event boundaries" for separate memory episodes. The purpose of these words is to establish an associative context, thereby enhancing an individual's capacity to recall specific events in situations where there is confusion due to elevated levels of stress.

Speaking for those who cannot speak

In wartime Ukraine, the primary role of journalism is to document history in real time. Yet this function extends beyond reportage – it becomes the central task of creative writing and all forms of verbal and non-verbal art during an existential war. This urgency is compounded by the psychological reality that survivors of occupation often find it profoundly difficult, if not impossible, to articulate their experiences publicly. Halyna Kruk emphasizes the writer's testimonial role – to give voice to those silenced by trauma, to bear witness where direct speech fails. As she poignantly observes, "someone who has experienced all this will not write a book. There is no such strength to survive all this and retain the ability to explain your pain to others."[56]

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[53] D. Clewett, R. Huang and L. Davachi, "Locus coeruleus activation 'resets' hippocampal event representations and separates adjacent memories" [in:] *Neuron,* 6 August 2025, DOI: 10.1016/j.neuron.2025.05.013.

[54] H. Ober, "Scientists Discover the Brain's 'Reset Button' That Separates Your Memories" [in:] *SciTechDaily Newsletter,* 9 August 2025, https://scitechdaily.com/scientists-discover-the-brains-reset-button-that-separates-your-memories/.

[55] *Ibidem.*

[56] H. Kruk, *Op. cit.*, https://www.facebook.com/144908868860093/posts/7860820820602154/?locale=ms_MY.

Since February 2022, the diaristic voice has emerged as the defining mode of literary expression in Ukraine. Poetry-journalism, which has taken on the urgent task of documenting the brutal realities of war, now faces an even greater challenge: how to communicate the inexpressible dimensions of trauma to audiences beyond Ukraine's borders. Once again, I turn to Halyna Kruk's address at the Berlin poetry festival, distinguished by its precision and clarity of thought:

> War creates a gap between those who have experienced it and those who are far from it […] We speak in an increasingly incomprehensible language; we are not into poetry. […] *Poetry then acquires very peculiar forms – a spontaneous prayer, a stingy testimony, a lament or even a curse to the enemy.* These are not the forms of poetry to which modern European culture is accustomed, they are functional and ritualistic, too primeval in their emotional coloring, too subjective, too pathetic, and intolerant.[57] (My italics)

In his address at the Lviv Book Forum in September 2022, Ukrainian writer and translator Oleksandr Mykhed astutely observed that the language of war is characterized by its emotional and affective nature. This observation aligns with those of Halyna Kruk. "The language of war is the flow of speech in which trauma speaks. Trauma cannot be silent."[58] The writer also notes, "The war engenders a return to the simplest means of communication."[59] Poetic testimonies are characterized by their ability to transcend the boundaries of genre. Poets are known to embrace new emotional experiences and find new absolute metaphors for their expression. They have become chroniclers of affective states, or emotional and bodily reactions to war, which itself is no longer a metaphor, but a reality.

What are the key factors that make contemporary Ukrainian wartime poetry so captivating to read? Each poet represents an individual and concurrently collective emotional response to trauma. Old metaphors have been replaced by more direct emotional vocabulary. Certain words from the non-emotional lexicon step in to fill the gap and become new metaphors of affective states. The reality of war is being approached from new epistemological angles, which were previously unknown or forgotten.

In her poem "To and Back," Kruk examines the uneasy fit of war within Western frameworks of understanding. Though those who have endured its violence may find language to express their trauma, that language often struggles to bridge the perceptual gap between lived experience and distant spectatorship:[60]

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[57] *Ibidem.*

[58] O. Mykhed, "Oleksandr Mykhed's speech at the festival BookForum" [in:] *Suspilne Kultura,* 19 October 2022, p. 3, https://suspilne.media/297730-the-kill-bear-witness-evil-oleksandr-mykheds-speech/.

[59] *Ibidem.*

[60] "війна не пасує до решти світу /як каліцтво до вечірньої сукні /надто важкий погляд / надто гостра мова, /надто брутальні деталі." From: "туди їхала – на заспокійливих, назад –

> war does not fit in with the world in peace
> as mutilation with an evening dress:
> too heavy a look
> too sharp a word
> too brutal a fact[61]

The irreconcilability of war and peace – and of poetry with war – demands that memory take precedence over imagination. Each open wound becomes a piercing lament, voiced by muses who have transformed into diarists and witnesses of devastation. The restorative and transformative power of testimonial poetry – as a witness to the war crimes committed in Ukraine – is embedded in Kruk's verse, especially in the following lines:

> we will come out of what has happened different, we will come out. howl,
> Siren, with your shrilling voice between Scylla and Charybdis
> we're the crumbs from Lord's table, the bones from an ancient crypt,
> we're the bats of underground temples, the faces of saints…[62]

Halyna Kruk's poetry often adopts the collective "we" to give voice to shared suffering, positioning a communal poetic persona as the conduit for expressing collective trauma. What distinguishes these works is their reliance on a plural speaker, through which individual experience is subsumed into a broader social narrative. This approach may be understood as a form of narrative volunteering, wherein the poet, as a citizen-participant, steps forward as a spokesperson for those whose voices are silent, muted or dispersed.

Further, I will briefly analyze Victoria Amelina's narrative approach, the gendered lens of her observations. Amelina was an award-winning Ukrainian poet, writer, and civil activist who saw the Russia-Ukraine war first-hand. And she was there, a flesh-witness, when the war ultimately took her life.[63]

на знеболювальних…" Галина Крук | Українська поезія ["I rode there on sedatives, back on painkillers…" Halyna Kruk | Ukrainian poetry]. *Telegram Store*, https://uk.telegram-store.com/catalog/channels/poetryukraine/932.

[61] H. Kruk, "To and Back," trans. from Ukrainian by Lada Kolomiyets, [in:] *The Common Online*, 3 July 2024, Translation: to and back | The Common (thecommononline.org).

[62] H. Kruk, "we will come out of what has happened different..." [in:] *The war in Ukraine through the lens of women-poets. Poetry by Halyna Kruk, Inna Honchar, and Svitlana Didukh-Romanenko.* Trans. from Ukrainian by Lada Kolomiyets. *Versopolis. Poetry Expo 24*, 25 February 2024, https://www.versopolis.com/initiative/poetry-expo-24/content/1524/the-war-in-ukraine-through-the-lens-of-women-poets.

[63] Victoria Amelina started out as a writer with the novel *The Fall Syndrome, or Homo Compatiens*, which narrates the events at Maidan during the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. In 2015, the novel was reprinted and made the shortlist for the Valerii Shevchuk Prize. In 2016, Amelina's kids'

In 2021, Amelina established the New York Literature Festival, which was hosted by a small town in the Donetsk region. The town was renamed New York in that same year, having previously been known as Novhorodske. However, since the end of September 2024, the town has been under Russian occupation. In 2022, the festival organizers were compelled to make significant changes, including the launch of the "Fight Them with Poetry" initiative, which sought to provide support to the Ukrainian Army instead of the festival.

During wartime, Amelina wrote poems that focused on the experiences of Ukrainian women, their profound losses, sacrifices, and displays of heroism, as well as their unique ability to bear witness. In the concluding line of her poem "Testimonies," which was translated by Larissa Babij, the poet exhorts the reader to "go and talk to the women."[64]

Since 2022, Amelina has been working with Ukrainian teams to document Russian war crimes and make sure the international community holds the Russian Federation and its troops accountable for the crimes they have committed on Ukrainian soil. On 27 June 2023, she was deadly wounded in a rocket attack on Kramatorsk by Russian troops. On that day, Victoria was in the city center meeting with a bunch of foreign journalists and writers. Three days later, she died in a hospital in Dnipro.[65]

Amelina's non-fiction book project, *Looking at Women Looking at War: A War and Justice Diary,* was not finished at the time of her death and was published in English in its incomplete form in 2025. In the diary, the author navigates her evolving role from a novelist to a war crimes researcher amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The diary chronicles the emotional and psychological toll of the war, seeking purpose through documenting the resilience and courage of Ukrainian women. Through encounters with women affected by the war – survivors, volunteers, and resistors – Amelina combines personal reflections with observations of atrocities, highlighting the resilience of women who reject victimhood while underlining the ethical obligation to document war crimes for accountability. Her narrative highlights the shared trauma experienced by Ukrainian society and her own personal journey as she navigates a nation under attack.

The author writes in the introduction to her *Diary:* "While this book began as the war diary of a Ukrainian novelist turned war crimes researcher following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it has evolved into a story about a number of extraordinary women."[66] Among the heroines of Amelina's *Diary* are Evhenia

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book, *Somebody, or Waterheart,* was published. Her novel *Dom's Dream Kingdom* was published in 2017; it was shortlisted for the 2017 LitAccent Prize, the UNESCO City of Literature Prize and the European Union Prize for Literature.

[64] V. Amelina, *Three poems,* trans. by Larissa Babij, [in:] *London Ukrainian Review,* Special Issue 3, 24 August 2023, https://www.londonukrainianreview.org/posts/three-poems.

[65] See: *Amelina Victoria: Ukrainian writer, author of novels and short stories,* https://pen.org.ua/en/members/amelina-viktoriya.

[66] V. Amelina, *Looking at Women, Looking at War. A War and Justice Diary.* With a Foreword by Margaret Atwood. St. Martin's Press, New York 2025, p. 1.

Zakrevska (a lawyer turned soldier), Yulia Kakulya-Danylyuk (a librarian who helped uncover the abduction and killing by the occupiers of a children's writer) and Oleksandra Matviichuk (a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2022), to name just a few. The names of the heroines are of particular significance in the context of the history of this war: to honor the memory of those who died on the battlefield and to highlight the daily resistance and struggle of those who survived.

This book is, firstly, a historical document, and secondly, it is a psychological document of war. The book is skillfully crafted, with numerous individual fragments subtly yet sincerely conveying the intricacies of female psychology and emotional responses during wartime. For instance, the following observation pertains to the role of laughter and humor in maintaining psychological well-being in the context of multiple war traumas:

> It is striking how much we all laugh during this horrible war. We may not do it that much in front of the foreign reporters, who mostly expect to see Ukrainian women's despair or heroism. The truth is, sometimes, tired of crying or of being unable to cry, we laugh like crazy as if proving that here we are, Ukrainians, still alive.[67]

Conclusion

The poetic and diaristic works of Ukrainian women poets, as explored in this article, serve as powerful testimonies to the visceral realities of Russia's war on Ukraine, embodying the concept of "flesh-witnessing." Through their embodied experiences, poets such as Lyuba Yakymchuk, Halyna Kruk, Natalka Marynchak, and Victoria Amelina transform poetry into a medium of immediate, emotional documentation, capturing the affective states of trauma, resilience, and resistance. These works, in conjunction with collections such as *The Unconquered Ukraine Almanac* and non-fiction diaries including Olena Astaseva's *A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War*, serve to redefine traditional metaphors. The symbolic abstractions that are characteristic of such metaphors are replaced by direct bodily emotion metaphors, which serve to frame war experiences as discrete, memorable episodes. This transition from pre-war intellectualism to a raw, testimonial style underscores the role of poetry as a chronicle of survival and a voice for those silenced by trauma. Through the weaving of personal and collective narratives, Ukrainian women poets have been instrumental in preserving national identity in the face of cultural erasure. Their work also serves to assert their authority as citizen-participants, contributing to a global understanding of the human cost of war. The work of these artists is rooted in the Romantic ethos of individual experience, and it highlights the enduring power

[67] *Ibidem*, p. 136.

of literature to heal, document and resist. This ensures that the muses remain vocal amidst the chaos of conflict.

In works such as Astaseva's *A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War,* and Slyvynsky's *A Ukrainian Dictionary of War*, each dictionary entry encapsulates a personal experience, with the entry word functioning as an emotion metaphor that enfolds emotional states, bodily experiences, and psychological responses, providing structure to the narrative within the entry. As a metaphor, the entry word organizes thought by framing the account, contributing to an encyclopedia of emotional states and lived experiences. Unlike traditional metaphors, which draw comparisons between two similar entities, these entry words connect a single term to a complex interplay of elements: emotions, bodily practices, (traumatic) experiences, and conflict-related events. Each entry unfolds as a linear narrative, with the heading word serving as an emotion metaphor that captures a person's immersion in the visceral reality of war and its multifaceted conflicts, rather than merely linking objects as conventional metaphors do. The seemingly "arbitrary" entry word becomes a metaphor, uniquely tied to its narrative text, representing a distinct fragment of this immersive experience. The metaphorical significance of the entry word emerges only through engagement with its corresponding text, which reveals its metaphorical nature.

In summary, following February 2022, there was a shift in the style of Ukrainian poetry, with a move away from symbolic or figurative modes and an adoption of a more testimonial function. Poems thus became a form of firsthand/flesh-witnessing documentation of the quotidian experiences endured during periods of bombardment, displacement, and resistance, bearing a striking resemblance to the act of sharing personal entries in real time. This transformation is indicative of the pressing need to preserve memory and affirm truth in the face of disinformation. As Halyna Kruk and others have highlighted, poetry evolved into a medium for moral witnessing, serving to both document and embody experiences of trauma and resilience.

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