

# THE PHENOMENON OF THE WORLDWIDE UKRAINIAN PLAY READINGS

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**Abstract.** The article describes and analyses the initiative Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings. Based on a similar smaller-scale initiative launched in Belarus in 2020, the initiative has offered financial support as well as a virtual platform for contemporary Ukrainian playwrights, many of whom are connected with the Kyiv Theatre of Playwrights, to create and share new writings inspired by Ukraine's fight against the Russian aggression. The article opens with a narrative overview of the history and broader context and significance of the initiative, which was started by playwright Maksym Kurochkin and theatre critic John Freedman in March 2022. The article then analyses the choice and efficacy of the different forms that the initiative has assumed and the ways it has reached audiences and readers. An anthology with twenty of the most popular dramatic texts translated into English was published as *A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War* by Laertes Press in the United States in 2022 and re-published in 2023. As the texts are most often performed as so-called play readings or stage readings, with actors sitting or standing on stage and reading from a script, it is possible to organise performances in a variety of venues. The need for rehearsals as well as for technical support such as lighting, sets, or stage props is greatly reduced because the actors simply read the scripts instead of memorising and fully acting them out. The article concludes with two short case studies of dramatic texts that have featured prominently both in the printed collections and readings conducted in many different countries and languages: *The Russian Soldier* by Ihor Bilyts and *Survivor's Syndrome* by Andriy Bondarenko. The case studies focus on the challenges faced by translators translating the original texts into English, including the translation of proper names and the elements of the Russian language present in the original texts (e.g., when Russian characters speak).

**Keywords:** Ukrainian drama, play reading, stage reading, translation, war, Russian invasion of Ukraine

## Introduction

The Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings offer potent proof that the Latin dictum “inter arma silent musae” (at times of war, muses are silent) does not hold in the case of the ongoing aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Over the three years of the initiative's existence, more than 300 texts have been created, and more than 660 events have taken place in 40 countries, including Ukraine (Center for International Theatre Development, 2024). The Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings is part of a broader trend, as Ukrainian artists in virtually all other branches of the arts have continued to be productive despite the incredible challenges presented by the full-scale Russian invasion that started on February 24, 2022.

When a group of prominent Ukrainian academics came together in June 2022 to hold a five-day online forum dedicated to contemporary Ukrainian culture in wartime, which featured some of Ukraine's best-known writers, musicians, and visual artists, they chose to call their epic event by no other name than *Музи не мовчать* (Muses Are Not Silent) (Institute of Literature, 2022). The programme included Iryna Harets reading her play *Planting an Apple Tree* (Садити яблуні), which had at that point already become one of the most popular texts of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings, showing that only some three months after its launch, plays connected with the initiative were already on Ukraine's cultural radar. *Planting an Apple Tree* is a dramatic monologue that mixes bits of news, rumours, and the author's personal observations from the first days of the full-scale war with snippets of instructions for planting and nurturing a young apple tree and so can be read as a metaphor for the struggle to hold on to one's identity and sanity in the face of the chaos and destruction brought by the war. It concludes with: “When watering the apple tree, take care with the supports under the fruit-laden branches” (Harets, 2022, p. 222), insisting, however subtly and poetically, that Ukraine has a future which will see it survive and thrive, just as President Zelensky declared in his historic address by video-call to the European Parliament on March 1, 2022, that “Life will overcome death and light will overcome darkness” (European Parliament Media Centre). Harets read the piece in the original Ukrainian for the Muses Are Not Silent forum. Still, most of the public readings and performances of her play on record as of February 2025 have been in other languages. The play text is available in translations into English (by John Freedman and Natalia Bratus), German (by Lydia Nagel), French (by Ian Stephens), and Romanian (by Raluca Rădulescu) (Ukrainian Institute, 2022). Altogether, over 20 different public readings and performances of the play have taken place in Austria, Canada, England, France, Germany, Moldova, Romania, the United States, and Ukraine (Thompson, 2025).

This kind of reach is representative of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings since the initiative has been a fundamentally international undertaking from the very beginning, not only supporting the creation of new Ukrainian drama that documents the war and reflects on it but, equally importantly, supports and facilitates translations of this new drama into other languages and its subsequent dissemination and impact beyond Ukraine. The international grounding, which ensures that all the plays become promptly available in translations into English as well as other languages, is an essential feature of the whole initiative. Andrey Kurkov (2022) writes in the foreword to his *Diary of an Invasion*: “The War has made Ukraine more understandable to the world – more understandable and more acceptable as one of the states of Europe” (p. 15). If the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation indeed stands at the beginning of this long overdue rapprochement between Ukraine and the democratic world, then the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings represent one of the more tangible pathways through which such rapprochement has been taking place. This article is intended as a modest contribution to this same process. By providing an analytical appraisal of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings, the author would like to help spread awareness about this remarkable initiative and, by extension, about the incredible power and resilience of Ukraine’s cultural front.

**The object of the research** is the initiative Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings.

**The study aims** to describe and analyse the phenomenon of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings.

**The research objective** is to offer a short yet comprehensive overview of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings with an emphasis on the initiative’s global reach and impact and the centrality of translation to the initiative’s success.

**The research methods** used are a narrative history of the initiative assembled from a variety of sources (scholarship, interviews, play texts), qualitative analysis of the formats and channels through which the initiative operates (electronic databases, printed volumes, play and stage readings and their recordings), as well as a brief qualitative analysis of two plays popular plays from the initiative and their English translations.

**Research limitations.** The scope of a single article does not allow for a more in-depth analysis of the whole initiative (which, as of early 2025, included over 300 dramatic texts read or performed at over 660 events in 40 countries) or for a study that would uncover and analyse broader trends and developments within the initiative and its impact on readers and audiences. A comprehensive study of how audiences in different locations and at different points in time have responded to the initiative and whether the initiative has achieved the desired effect of informing audiences about the wartime conditions in Ukraine and countering pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation would be particularly useful.

## **Beginnings: The Invasion, The Theatre of Playwrights, Insulted. Belarus Worldwide Reading**

The initiative is literally as old as the, as of late February 2025, still ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. John Freedman (2022) recalls how shortly after the beginning of the invasion, he was contacted by his friend William Wong, who had been participating with him in a play-reading initiative supporting the pro-democracy movement in Belarus, The Insulted. Belarus Worldwide Reading Project, and who suggested that a similar project could be set up to help Ukrainians (pp. 10-11). Freedman immediately liked the idea and began contacting theatre practitioners, scholars, and translators who might be interested. Maksym Kurochkin, one of Ukraine’s most prominent playwrights, shared Freedman’s and Wong’s enthusiasm and became the main point of contact for the initiative inside Ukraine (Freedman, 2022, p. 11). The initiative has, therefore, been from the very outset truly international: Freedman is an American theatre critic living in Crete, while Wong is a theatre director from Hong Kong, and Kurochkin was originally in Kyiv, but since the beginning of the full-scale war has been serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Others, including the London-based translator John Farndon and London-based American theatre scholar and practitioner Molly Flynn, as well as Natalka Vorozhbyt, another prominent Ukrainian playwright, soon joined the team that brought the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings into existence (Freedman, 2022, p. 11). The initiative has, at the same time, remained fundamentally Ukrainian, featuring texts written by Ukrainian authors about Ukraine. Kurochkin, moreover, insisted that the focus of the initiative should be on new work written after February 24, 2022, rather than on texts composed prior to this watershed date, even though some of these older texts deal with the Russian aggression against Ukraine that started in 2014 or with the events that immediately led to it: “They [earlier plays] already belong to another, pre-war era... I think it would be logical for the theatres of the world to commission from Ukrainian playwrights hastily written plays about the day-to-day situation... This way, we will retain control of the discourse” (qtd. in Freedman, 2022, p. 11). The Center for International Theatre Development in Baltimore and Sputnik Theatre in London, both of which have a long history of supporting theatre in East-Central Europe, provided the funding for commissioning this initial core group of plays envisaged by Kurochkin (Freedman, 2022, p. 12).

Most of the resulting plays were indeed written very quickly, even though Kurochkin referring to them as “hastily written” does not perhaps do full justice to the beauty and urgency of these texts, especially considering that many of the authors were working on them through air raids, power outages, food and medication shortages, or Russian occupation. The first group of plays was commissioned on March 10, 2022, and the first readings of them were already taking place in Bratislava in Slovakia, Exeter in England, and online later that month; dozens of readings and performances followed in April and May 2022 (Thompson, 2025). What made such an impressive timeline possible, in addition to the dedicated international team spread across Europe, America, and beyond, were links with already existing theatrical enterprises.

The first of these links is the Theatre of Playwrights, founded as a virtual platform in 2020 by a group of Ukrainian playwrights, including Kurochkin, and finally launched as a physical theatre in Kyiv’s Podil district in June 2022, after the initial launch, scheduled for March 6, had to be postponed due to the invasion (Theatre of Playwrights, 2025). Kurochkin was its artistic director when the war started and was able to mobilise an impressive group of his peers from the theatre, who were willing to rise to the challenge of creating at a very short notice a set of brand-new plays responding to the full-scale war. The second link is the already mentioned Insulted. Belarus Worldwide Readings Project, initiated in 2020 by John Freedman and the prominent Belarusian playwright and director Andrei Kureichik. It consisted of both readings and full performances of a single play: Kureichik’s *Insulted. Belarus*, a powerful political allegory about the ultimately failed revolution against Alexander Lukashenko’s dictatorship, written originally in Russian and translated into English by John Freedman (Insulted. Belarus, 2022). It was written in August and September 2020 and premiered in Kherson, Ukraine, on September 12, 2020. As of 2024, over 250 individual events (mostly performances and readings but also art projects, video installations, and publication launches) connected to the play took place in 30 countries in 22 languages (Freedman, 2023, p. 11). *Insulted. Belarus* opens with a rant against theatre by “Oldster”, the play’s proxy for Lukashenko: “I hate theatre. Never been attracted. It’s a bunch of crap. Bullshit.... what good comes of some painted guy wiggling his ass on a stage?” (Kureichik, 2020/2023, p. 37). The play’s author, Andrei Kureichik, has become one of the most prolific voices of the Belarusian cultural exile, and these lines have now resounded in countless venues on different continents, entertaining and educating audiences, proving that theatre can indeed be politically powerful. It is not hard to see how the idea was born that the kind of impact could be scaled up if a larger number of plays by multiple authors were created and facilitated within a comparable international framework.

## Play Readings and Stage Readings

Play and stage readings have long been used as tools of text and production development and are usually subsumed into the rehearsal process as a step on the way to a full production. Fran Montano (2019a) explains the difference between play and stage reading as follows: at a play reading, the actors “remain seated the entire time and the performances are done through their voices”. At a stage reading, by contrast, although the actors are still reading from a script, they are not necessarily stationary as a stage reading “‘shows’ the material being performed... Therefore, it has movement, direction, props, and actions” (Montano, 2019b). The events organised through the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings initiative straddle this boundary between play and stage reading as some readings are done in a minimalist style without any props, sets, lighting, or actors’ physical movement, while others might add the odd prop or dress the stationary actors in costumes, and still others might have everything a full production would, except for the fact that the actors are reading from scripts rather than speaking from memory. Full productions of some of the plays have taken place, too. It is also important to note that both play and stage readings can function as end products rather than as mere intermediary steps on the way to full productions because this is exactly how the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings have appropriated the play and stage reading formats, with all readings treated as artistic events in their own right.

*Refugee Cats: Cat Therapy for Children and Adults* (Коти-біженці: кототерапії для дітей та дорослих) by Liudmyla Tymoshenko and Maryna Smilianets, one of the most frequently performed texts from the initiative, offers a useful example of how different readings and productions can approach a single play. *Refugee Cats* features the characters of four anthropomorphised cats who find themselves in a shelter somewhere in Europe after getting separated from their owners when fleeing the war in Ukraine. The readings of *Refugee Cats* often incorporate various puppets or toys of cats held or manipulated by the actors while reading, or the actors themselves wear costumes, make-up, masks, or other accessories to make them look like their respective feline characters. The play text includes several songs, and, while these are sometimes simply recited, most readings will have the actors singing and sometimes accompanying themselves on musical instruments. The premiere of the play, which took place on July 8, 2022, in Riga, was devoid of sets, costumes, or props but included some

movement by the actors as well as singing and guitar music (Katzl Riga, 2022). At a reading at the Rivne Academic Regional Puppet Theatre in Rive, Ukraine, on February 27, 2023, the actors remained seated throughout but wore tiaras with cat ears, and the production also used lighting and video projection on the wall behind the actors (Rivne Theatre, 2023). In May 2023, the same theatre offered a visually striking touring production aimed at internally displaced families that have relocated to the region, which featured colourful hand-held cat puppets and a portable stage set consisting of cat trees and cat beds (Suspilne Rivne, 2023).

The Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings cover a broad spectrum from play readings, which require literally no technical or material support and which can be done with little to no advance preparation in any space capable of holding the actors and spectators, or even online, to full productions staged in professional theatres. When the initiative was launched in the spring of 2022, the play or stage reading formats made it possible to start organising readings as soon as a play text (or its translation) became available. This immediate sense of urgency has perhaps subsided somewhat as the war has continued and as it has become clear that the plays will remain relevant for a long time to come, regardless. The play and stage reading formats have nevertheless proved to be useful beyond the first months of the war, as they have continued to bring the plays to life in circumstances where resources, whether they be a lack of space, time, finances, or professional training, would not make a full production of a play practical or feasible. New plays are still being added to the database, new translations into different languages are being crafted, and new events are being organised around the world, with plans for more readings and performances throughout 2025 and beyond. The Read Not Dead initiative by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, which puts on readings of little-known English plays written between 1567 and 1642, has been running since 1995 (Shakespeare's Globe, 2025), showing that a play-reading initiative can have a longevity spanning decades.

## Play Texts

While the play and stage reading formats have been making the plays available across a broad range of performance settings, the play texts themselves, too, are easily accessible in both electronic and print formats. The initiative's organisers have been administering an electronic database holding both the originals and their translations in different languages. It now includes some texts which were written before the start of the full-scale war but are still thematically connected to the more recent texts as they deal with Russian interference and aggression against Ukraine prior to 2022, such as Neda Nezhdana's *Maidan Inferno* (2014) about the events of the Revolution of Dignity, which led to the ousting of the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, or Natalka Vorozhbyt's *Bad Roads* (2017), six short plays set in the frontline regions in the east of Ukraine during the war in Donbas. These earlier texts provide a crucial context for the events depicted in the plays written after February 24, 2022. Thus, it is not surprising that they often appear in play and stage reading programmes alongside more recent plays. Although this database is not available online, those organising readings or productions can ask the administrators for access. As of February 2025, there are over 170 individual plays and over 330 texts in total, including the translations. In addition, many of the plays are available in the open-access Ukrdramahub: Portal of Contemporary Ukrainian Dramaturgy (<https://ukrdramahub.org.ua/>), and many of the translations are available in a subsection of the portal dedicated specifically to Ukrainian Drama Translations (<https://ukrdrama.ui.org.ua/>).

The play texts originally commissioned by John Freedman in the spring of 2022 have also been published in English translation in an anthology entitled *A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War: 20 Short Works by Ukrainian Playwrights*. Named after Olena Astaseva's play, with which the volume opens, the anthology represents an important milestone as it brings plays that have been at the heart of Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings to readers around the world. The first edition of the anthology, published in autumn 2022, features nineteen plays and an introduction by John Freedman; the twentieth missing text by Yevhen Markovskiy, who had committed to write a piece for the anthology but was not able to deliver it on time, as he was living in hiding in the occupied Kherson at the time, is represented by a single page with his name and a note by Freedman (2022) explaining the absence: "Yevhen Markovskiy had every intention of writing a short text for this anthology.... But I never received a text. Markovskiy was in the city of Kherson when it was overrun and occupied... This empty page stands as a sign that we are waiting for a text from Yevhen Markovskiy" (p. 245). The second edition of the anthology, published in October 2023, features an updated introduction as well as Markovskiy's contribution, *Eight Songs*, consisting of eight short song lyrics inspired by life under the Russian occupation. The addition of Markovskiy's songs is deeply symbolic because, between the submission deadlines for the first and second editions, Kherson had been liberated, and Markovskiy was able to rejoin Ukraine's artistic community and fill in that poignant gap marked by the empty page in the first edition, inserted into the anthology at a time when its editors were not even sure if he was still alive.

The British newspaper *The Telegraph* included *A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War* on its list of 50 Best Books of 2023 at number 21 (Telegraph, 2023). *A Dictionary of Emotions* was one of two books on the list with a focus on Ukraine, the other one being Serhii Plokhyy's *Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (published by W. W. Norton & Co.). While Plokhyy's volume has enjoyed a broader circulation and more interest from reviewers, the two books can be regarded as complementing each other, with *A Dictionary of Emotions* offering a series of perspectives reflected and sharpened through the prism of drama and the voices of multiple dramatists, on the same events discussed and analysed from a historian's vantage point in *Russo-Ukrainian War*.

## Translations and their Challenges

Translation has been at the heart of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings since the start, as the initial vision already included concrete plans for translating the newly produced plays into English and other languages to make them readily accessible to non-Ukrainian audiences. Just as the whole initiative very much relies on the input of many individuals, from the organisers and playwrights to the directors, actors, and everyone else making the readings and productions happen, the translations of the original play texts are the work of translators from around the world. The twenty texts that were commissioned by John Freedman in March 2022 and eventually published as *A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War* were translated into English by Natalia Bratus, John Farndon, John Freedman, and Evgenia Kovryga. The translators who have contributed to the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings database are too many to list here; as of February 2025, there are over 230 translations into 12 languages (2025, Thompson). In addition to the need to produce the translations quickly, particularly in the early stages of the war, the challenges the translators have faced are generally connected to the geopolitical realities depicted in the play texts and the different ways in which these realities can or cannot be easily rendered in a different language for readers and audiences unfamiliar with these realities. Below are two brief case studies illustrating these challenges.

### *The Russian Soldier* by Ihor Bilyts

The play consists of a dialogue between the ghost of a Russian soldier and his pregnant wife; the couple's young son and an agent of the FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation) also make brief appearances. The unnamed soldier surprises his wife by appearing at the kitchen table in the middle of the night, even though he is supposed to be fighting in Ukraine, where, as it transpires during the exchange, he has, in fact, died. *The Russian Soldier* presents a challenge that is common to a number of the plays, namely, how to represent the Russian language. Since all the plays deal with the Russian invasion to some extent, they often feature characters of Russians. Such plays most often adhere to what can be described as linguistic realism, and the lines of the Russian characters speaking in them are mostly written in Russian. Bilyts's play, however, adds an extra twist to this pattern. Instead of having the Russian characters simply speak Russian, the text transliterates their Russian words through the Ukrainian alphabet. Even the play's original title works this way, rendering the Russian Русский военный into the Ukrainian version of the Cyrillic alphabet as Руський війнний (Bilyts, 2022a). The Russian-to-Ukrainian transliteration creates a radically hybrid text, awkwardly poised between the two languages, just as its titular character is awkwardly poised between life and death, between the kitchen table somewhere in Russia, where he is talking with his wife throughout the play, and the Ukrainian battlefield where he has died: "I'm not here .... I'm lying near Chernihiv, fuck it" (Bilyts, 2022b, p. 231), he responds, when the surprised wife asks, if it is him. The transliteration device successfully inserts Ukrainian into the play, which is populated entirely by Russian characters and is taking place in Russia, without allowing any of them to speak Ukrainian.

Yet the Ukrainian language element is present only at the play's textual level. When the text is read out or performed, all the lines sound as if they were simply written in Russian. The original text's linguistic hybridity also does not make it into any of the available translations of the play. John Freedman renders the play into English that reflects the colloquial profanity-laden register of the original but does so without an indication that the original combines the two different languages or that it does so at all. Raluca Rădulescu's Romanian and Lydia Nagel's German translations chose this approach, too (Ukrainian Institute, 2022). In this respect, the translations of *The Russian Soldier* follow the same trend as most of the translations of the other plays from the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings, which generally translate homogenously into the target language without drawing attention to any portions of the originals that were in Russian rather than Ukrainian. Individual readings or productions can, and sometimes do, include this kind of information about the linguistic nuances of the original texts, for instance, by mentioning it in a programme note or by incorporating it into the stage directions

(e.g., “Speaks in Russian”), when these are read out as part of the reading. The monolingual tendency of the translations of what are partly bilingual texts is a reminder that a translation virtually always must sacrifice something and, to appreciate the full linguistic nuance of the plays, the original play texts need to be consulted.

### ***Survivor’s Syndrome* by Andriy Bondarenko**

Andriy Bondarenko’s *Survivor’s Syndrome* is a dramatic monologue that offers a haunting account of the disorienting experience of the first days of the war. It opens with:

*Every one of us was killed  
already that morning.  
We are no longer  
what we were then.  
We died.  
On February 24  
of the year 2022  
a neighbouring country killed  
us all* (Bondarenko, 2022, p. 77)

Although translators of this text do not face the bilingual conundrum discussed above since the whole play is written in Ukrainian, it nevertheless offers an interesting insight into the challenge posed by proper names and, more specifically, by place names. Towards the end of *Survivor’s Syndrome*, the speaker recites a list that opens with Mariupol and continues with eighteen more Ukrainian cities, plus Crimea, that were either already occupied or under Russian siege at the time of the writing of the play in the spring of 2022. The list has a spell-like quality to it and, in being enumerated, the names of the cities seem to hold a vital link between the past, the present, and the future:

*These are the words I  
remember now. Which I will  
not forget. I will not forget anything or  
anyone. Nothing and no one.  
Nothing that happened in the  
dark and in the fire. This is  
my sole bridge across the  
abyss now [...]  
These are word-cities. In  
them live all the people who  
have died, who disappeared,  
who were left homeless. This  
is my geography now* (Bondarenko, 2022, pp. 96-97)

The text powerfully affirms the existence of the cities, even as many of them were being bombed to the ground, as well as their Ukrainian identity, even as the occupiers were erasing their Ukrainian names on road signs and maps and replacing them with Russian ones. Yet, the fact that all the place names on Bondarenko’s list are in Ukrainian may not immediately come across in the play’s translations. Mariupol, the first city on the list, is transliterated into English identically from either the Ukrainian or Russian versions of the name, for instance. In Freedman and Bratus’s English translation, Crimea appears in its anglicised form, probably because anglophone audiences would not as readily recognise the romanised Ukrainian word. A few odd letters from the Russian versions of the city names find their way into their list: Irpen instead of Irpin, Slaviansk instead of Sloviansk, and Energodar instead of Enerhodar (Bondarenko, 2022, pp. 95-96). The translation nevertheless accurately transliterates the majority of the names from the original, including Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Hostomel. Freedman and Bratus, moreover, correct what seems to be a typo in the original as they transliterate the original’s “Макаров”, which happens to be the Russian version of the town’s name, as “Makariv” and so offer the correct romanised version of the town’s Ukrainian name Макаріїв (Bondarenko, 2022, pp. 95-96). The existence of Russian versions of virtually all Ukrainian city names is, of course, one of the consequences of the Russian colonisation and Russification of Ukraine, as is the fact that the Russian versions often prevailed and sometimes continue to prevail in international usage. The list of

Ukrainian place names in *Survivor's Syndrome* can ultimately be interpreted as actively working against these forces, as every reading or performance affirms and presents to the audiences the Ukrainian names. The small degree of instability in the spellings of the place names, both in the English translation and the original, is almost certainly a function of the challenging conditions under which both texts were crafted in 2022. It can also be read as inadvertently reflecting the precarious existence of the cities themselves, some of which are still occupied or have been largely destroyed, while the rest, as of February 2025, continue to be targeted by Russian missiles and drones.

## Conclusions

The Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings initiative has managed to turn the humble forms of play and stage readings into powerful weapons against indifference, ignorance, and disinformation. The plays represent a wide variety of styles and perspectives, and the authors range from well-established figures on the Ukrainian cultural scene to younger newer voices. However, the one thing that the plays have in common is making the lived reality of Russia's war against Ukraine more readily available and understandable to audiences and readers outside of Ukraine. While it is difficult to assess the initiative's impact in any objective terms, in part because both the initiative and the war that gave rise to it are still ongoing, the large number of events it has generated, its impressive global multilingual reach, as well as the existence of the anglophone anthology showcasing the core texts, all serve as a testimony to its success.

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## UKRAINIETIŠKŲ PJESIŲ SKAITYMO FENOMENAS PASAULYJE

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje aprašoma ir analizuojama iniciatyva „Teatralizuoti ukrainiečių pjesių skaitymai pasaulyje“. Remiantis 2020 m. Baltarusijoje pradėta panašia, bet mažesnio masto iniciatyva, ši iniciatyva šiuolaikiniams Ukrainos dramaturgams, kurių daugelis susiję su Kijevo dramos teatru, suteikė finansinę paramą ir virtualią platformą kurti ir dalytis naujais, Ukrainos kovos su Rusijos agresija įkvėptais, kūrinių. Straipsnis pradedamas pasakojimu apie iniciatyvos, kurią 2022 m. kovo mėn. pradėjo dramaturgas Maksimas Kuroškinas ir teatro kritikas Johnas Freedmanas, atsiradimą, platesnį kontekstą ir reikšmę. Analizuojamas įvairių formų, kurias iniciatyva įgijo, pasirinkimas ir veiksmingumas bei būdai, kuriais ji pasiekė skaitytojus ir auditoriją. 2022 m. *Laertes Press* leidykla Jungtinėse Amerikos Valstijose išleido antologiją „A Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War“ („Karo meto emocijų žodynas“) su dvidešimčia populiariausių dramatiškų tekstų, išverstų į anglų kalbą. 2023 m. knyga išleista pakartotinai. Kadangi aktoriai tekstus dažniausiai skaito sėdėdami arba stovėdami scenoje, tokius vaidinimus galima rengti įvairiose aplinkose. Labai sumažėja repeticijų ir techninio aprūpinimo, pavyzdžiui, apšvietimo, dekoracijų ar scenos rekvizitų, poreikis, nes aktoriai, užuot mokęsi tekstus mintinai, juos tiesiog vaidina. Straipsnio pabaigoje pateikiamos trumpos dviejų dramatiškų tekstų (Ihor Bilyts „Rusų kareivis“ ir Andriy Bondarenko „Išgyvenusiojo sindromas“), užėmusių svarbią vietą tiek spausdintuose rinkiniuose, tiek įvairiose šalyse ir įvairiomis kalbomis rengiamuose teatralizuotuose skaitymuose, atvejo studijos. Jose daugiausia dėmesio skiriama iššūkiams, su kuriais susiduria vertėjai, verčiantys ukrainietiškus tekstus į anglų kalbą. Tarp jų – tikrinių vardų vertimas ir originaliuose tekstuose esantys rusų kalbos elementai (pvz., kai kalba rusų personažai).

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** ukrainiečių drama, raiškūs skaitymas, sceninis skaitymas, vertimas, karas, Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą

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