

500 Thousand Crimes Against Humanity

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At the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine, I told my mother that if she died because of the shelling, I would take revenge. I was leaving Kyiv, and persuaded her to go with me. My mom said that if she dies, rather than devote my life to revenge I should continue living in memory of her. Through these words I felt her love for me. The words of the government – “go and die for me” – make me feel nothing but in danger.

The famous writer Leo Tolstoy considered war a manifestation of human stupidity and selfishness. But if this is so, then how can war produce heroes? Laziness does not breed productivity. Then why does war, being stupid and selfish, become proof of heroism?

Tolstoy also wrote that war prevents a person from achieving true progress and prosperity. But he died more than a century ago. Both the First and Second World Wars happened after his death. After his death, too, the European Union came to be. After his death, the Soviet Union was formed and collapsed. In a post-Soviet space, Leo Tolstoy’s portrait is required furnishing in school literature classrooms. Once an idol of intellectuals, he turned into thousands of identical old-fashioned portraits hanging in identical classrooms in identical post-Soviet schools.

The lesson sounds easy: if you want to kill something, make it holy. Today Leo Tolstoy is more synonymous of boredom than he is an idol. Anyway, he wrote a lot of wonderful things. And that’s it, this life hack works flawlessly: if you want to kill it, make it holy. For some reason it didn’t work with the war. Not with this one.

No matter how war is portrayed in the news or art, even now there are those who go to war voluntarily and talk about it as an act of heroism. But in Ukraine, the volunteers ran out after the first few months, everyone else has been forced to go to war for 2 years now, although the media say we have democracy and free will.

Classics do not become obsolete; the creators certainly do. Therefore, it is easy to reassess values when the one who inspired them has been reduced to a stupid portrait. Therefore, it was easy for my generation to forget that war is a manifestation of stupidity and selfishness, and it was also easy to say out loud the following before 2022: “We are unhappy because not a single great historical event has befallen our lives.”

Why did the rise of cinema lead us to films without ideas? Why is great literature a thing of the past? Why do poets’ performances take place in cramped cafes, and not in stadiums, as it used to be in 60s? We knew the answer. The absence of a great historical event is what made our reality contemptuously flat. But we needed this event, merciless in its grandeur. We missed

the Great Depression. Missed a war. A new dictator. Protracted political conflict. We dreamed of doing something heroic, knowing it also required a big evil.

The scale of a person is determined by the scale of his problems, and the same is true for a generation. Well, we got our war. But we quickly had to realize that war does not need culture. War nullifies everything, makes it meaningless. Culture is created not because of war, but in spite of it. We realized this too late. And yet, it is more pleasant to read about even the naivest love than about a young man's eyelids burned out as a result of a bomb explosion on the battlefield.

Yes, we've been dreaming about a big historical villain for a long time. As big as the biggest rainy cloud or KFC's advertising budget. After all, only a cloud or an infinitely huge number could embody our valor.

We dreamed of becoming heroes for so long without becoming them that we were simply tired of dreaming about it. We got fed up and locked ourselves in offices. Allowed our posture to become distorted. We began to communicate with doctors more often than with relatives. And then the villain appeared. It burst into our homes through crime scene reports, when the first bombs exploded loudly in Kyiv and Kharkiv. Then, it turned out, our problem was with ourselves, and not in the absence of an enemy.

The problem was that we believed that economic freedom was the basis of other freedoms. It's as if human rights will automatically grow on us like an additional layer of warm clothing the moment we have money. But this did not happen. Oil prices have increased. Money appeared in Russia, but not rights. In Ukraine there were neither rights nor money. Although I damn well want to believe that life was good before the war. And this is what propaganda claims today, but this is just one of its levers.

We are used to talking about Russian propaganda, but we don't like to talk about Ukrainian one. If Russian propaganda is aimed at making Ukrainians a target, then Ukrainian propaganda is aimed at forcing this target to voluntarily or forced-voluntarily enter the battlefield. But what should I do if I don't want to be a target? Or a sniper. I don't want to kill anyone at all. Why am I denied this right? Facing this choice is tantamount to exposing your chest to a bullet.

I can't imagine how Jean-Paul Sartre wrote philosophical works while being a prisoner of war during WWII, because I see that war tends to simplify reality, and suppresses any analysis of it other than the official one. During a war, the ruling political party becomes the maximum personification of the country. To some extent, a political party becomes a country, and one of the goals of propaganda is to make you realize that a person who disagrees with a political party does not agree with the entire country, which means that such person is a traitor.

From the first day of the war, men were forbidden to leave Ukraine. Soon new restrictions were enacted. For example, a man in Ukraine cannot sell an apartment or obtain a driver's license without notifying the military registration office. If a man voluntarily goes there, he will not return. If a man visits a hospital, the doctor is obliged to inform the military registration office about this. If you disagree, you are a traitor, so it is better to remain silent.

Employers must declare their male workers to the military registration office. Police and representatives of the military registration office catch men near the metro and at public transport stops. I have to run away. Hide. Ask girls to bring me some food. Girls are threatened only by missiles, but guys are threatened by missiles and Ukrainian police, as well as patriots and old people whose boys have already died, but you dared not to. Nah, you can't trust anyone. Is this the great historical event that we so lacked before culture could become great again?

While democratic countries are collecting money and weapons for Ukraine, Ukraine is destroying its own democracy. Human rights are on hold. Paused! Damn. What are these rights worth if they can be paused so easily? Everyone suddenly owes their life to their homeland. But what did I do that caused me to have such a large debt? Be born there? Just this? But I didn't choose where to be born. Does this have anything to do with racism? Gender discrimination? My state had to protect me with a private army, but in the end I myself need to defend myself from my own state. And no one can do anything. Everybody just watching. So funny.

One human rights is to seek asylum in another country if a person is in danger in his own. But the borders are closed. To leave Ukraine, a man needs to pay about 10 thousand dollars. And as usual, we all pretend that we don't know anything about this "exit tax".

In order for peace to come, it is necessary to fight not only the aggressor, but also the image of war. Our cinema, our poetry and literature are completely stuffed with the idealization of military operations. War does not create heroes; it maims and kills. It is necessary to show how senseless and cruel the war is, so that a person does not even think about joining the army.

To hell with the medals. To hell with heroism. All this is not worth human life. The current war is not about people, but about borders. The cities will be rebuilt, but the people will never be brought back to life. So, it turns out that a great historical event does not create, it kills. Those who could have become great writers or directors – turned into silent corpses with burnt eyelids.

In 2024, 500 thousand men will be mobilized in Ukraine. 500 thousand crimes against humanity will merge into the word "war" and will be justified by it. At best, they will turn into a monument, at worst, they will be forgotten. Recently I saw a video of a guy with amputated legs asking for money for prosthetics. He has given more for the state than he could afford to give.

Have you ever kissed a burn? Have you seen eyelids that, when closed, cannot completely cover the eye? Leo Tolstoy considered war a manifestation of human stupidity and selfishness. Ask a guy with burnt eyelids what he thinks about that.

Remember, if you want to kill something, make it holy.

Put it to a frame.

Hang it on the walls of classrooms.

Keep it this way and you'll see how the idol turns into the personification of boredom.

What did he write about war? Don't you remember, ha?

One year ago, on May 18, 2023, the Leo Tolstoy station in the Kyiv metro was renamed the Square of Ukrainian Heroes.

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