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Opening lecture

Writers and nations :

a cultural and political relationship

**Symposium *Words and Violence : Literary intellectuals between
democracy and dictatorship (1933-1945)***

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"I do not believe that Europe can have any living reality if it does not include France with its French, Germany with its Germans, Italy with its Italians, etc. Dante, Goethe, Chateaubriand belong to the whole of Europe, insofar as they were respectively and eminently Italian, German and French. They would not have served Europe much if they had been without a fatherland and had thought and written in some integrated Esperanto or Volapuk. "

(Charles de Gaulle, Press Conference, May 15, 1962)

"Anyone who has read a little Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol and so many others finds in Putin the lines of force of the Russian soul." (Nicolas Sarkozy, *La France pour la vie*, Plon, 2016.)

These two declarations by French politicians correspond to contemporary commonplaces about the relationship between a nation and its writers:

- 1) a writer's work is deeply imbued with his or her national belonging;
- 2) the literature of a nation allows us to understand the members of that nation (and its leaders!).

Indeed, writers have played a decisive role in the formation of modern national identities. Conversely, they have come to be seen as expressions of the national soul, of the national spirit.

In a book entitled *The Creation of National Identities in Europe - XVIII°-XX° century*¹, I attempted to show the importance of cultural creation in the formation of contemporary nations, since the nation, in its modern sense, is both a political body holding sovereignty and a community of culture. I had stressed that, despite appearances, there is nothing more international than the formation of national identities. The national cultures present themselves to us as all specific - this has been the objective of their formation for two centuries - but this objective of specificity has only been achieved through intense international exchanges, mutual observations, imitations, and transfers.

The political rise of nationalisms in the 19th century was associated with an intense nationalization of culture, and thus of literature: this nationalization concerned contemporary literature as well as, in retrospect, the literature of earlier centuries. The status of literature and writers has thus been profoundly transformed, with complex consequences. I propose to return to this process, since it can be useful for the study of periods of major crisis, such as the wars of the 20th century.

Literature as representation, "soul" and self-consciousness of the nation

The national age, which begins at the end of the 18th century, corresponds to a process of secularization. Culture replaces religion as a form and meaning of individual and collective identities. With the progressive democratization of the practice of reading, literature becomes a major mode of experimentation of the "me" and the "us". To the nation was henceforth attributed a "soul", a collective spirit, no longer religious but cultural.

"A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle."²

Literature is presented as the shrine of this "national soul":

"What then is this French soul, this new thing that reveals itself in this nascent literature?"³

¹ *The Creation of National Identities in Europe - XVIII°-XX° century*, Brill, 2019 for the English version ; original version *La Création des Identités nationales, Europe XVIII°-XX° siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 1999.

² Ernest Renan, " Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ? ", Speech delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11, 1882, published *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1882, 30 p. pp 26-27)

³ Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la Littérature française*, Paris, Hachette, 1920, p.3 (1st edition 1895).

Furthermore, the literature of the national age opens the access to a huge repertory of knowledge and concepts, sensations and emotions, questionings and perspectives. Following Benedict Anderson's famous phrase, nations are "imagined communities", communities put into images, sounds and texts. Since the 19th century writers have played a fundamental role in the textual shaping of the nation. They have illustrated the history, described the society, the landscapes, the symbols of the nation.

The modern nation has been formed as a grand narrative weaving individual destinies and knotting the common history :

"Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depends for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role"⁴

A new principle took shape in the 19th century: no true nation without literature, no true literature that is not national. This principle concerned not only the great literary nations but also the emerging nations in the Habsburg and Tsarist Empires, in Scandinavia, in the Balkans. In the case of nations in the process of assertion, literature has often constituted the first "public space" of the nation. Literature has also often contributed to the elaboration and dissemination of a national language, as it was the case in Finland, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Norway, etc.. Among the many examples we can mention, do not forget that, at the end of the 19th century, the affirmation of a Jewish nation in Europe or, alternatively, in Palestine, led to the intense patriotic commitment of young intellectuals to the creation of a literature in Yiddish or in modern Hebrew.

Literary history as proof of national existence and demonstration of power

Literary histories were decisive means in the process of nationalizing writers. The first ones were published in the 1830s, in connection with the writing of the first national histories. Literary histories are actually geographies, intended to establish cultural boundaries on which political boundaries are to be based. They have in fact a de-historicizing function, since they establish continuities or filiations between works that are centuries apart, but supposedly determined by the same "national spirit" or "national soul". On the other hand, they establish

⁴ Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form", in: Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 49.

ruptures in synchronic sets (a 19th century novel is put in direct relation with a medieval poem of the same nation, rather than with contemporary foreign novels).

According to 19th century conceptions, still in force today, the corpus of works selected to establish a national literary history must correspond to the national soul, be its most perfect expression. Therefore, the selection of national writers and literary heritage plays a great role in the confrontations not only within the literary field but also in ideological conflicts. Indeed, literary history, from the 19th century onwards, has been invested with a mission of civic education. It must educate the population to the knowledge and love of the literary heritage, and through it, of the national soul. From the 19th century onwards, chairs of national literature have been created in the universities, the teaching of national literature has been introduced in secondary and even in primary education. The composition of the national literary corpus is still a political issue today: Hungary recently provided an example. In 2020, the government of Victor Orban, as part of its nationalist *Kulturkampf*, announced a reform of the Hungarian high school curriculum. Imre Kertész, Hungary's Nobel Prize-winning writer and Holocaust survivor, was eliminated from the curriculum, as was the well-known novelist Peter Esterházy. Conversely, nationalist anti-Semitic authors such as József Nyíró, a great admirer of Goebbels, and Albert Wass were introduced into the curriculum. Orban's party has for years erected monuments to these writers and named streets after them.

Literary history, since the 19th century, is also an affirmation of power in the international space. The older the literary heritage, the more important it is, the more it is recognized on the international scene, the more vigor and prestige the nation has. From the 19th century until the Cold War, British and French intellectuals declared that the United States had no real national literature, and therefore did not form a real nation

“If (...) we inquire why, for example, the United States of America, with all its intellectual vigour and its tremendous achievements in other directions, has not been able as yet to produce a literature which can in any sense be called national, we find the explanation in the fact that its origins are too recent and the occupations of its people too 'modern' to have taken upon them that colouring of the imagination which must lie upon the poet's palette before he can make them the objects of his art.”⁵

⁵ *The Newbolt Report, The Teaching of English in England*, London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1926, 380p. p. 258

In fact, American writers had long been aware of the relationship between the power of national literature and domination on the international scene:

No American writer should write like an Englishman, or a Frenchman; let him write like a man, for then he will be sure to write like an American. Let us away with this Bostonian leaven of literary flunkeyism towards England. If either must play the flunkey in this thing, let England do it, not us. And the time is not far off when circumstances may force her to it. While we are rapidly preparing for that political supremacy among the nations, which prophetically awaits us at the close of the present century, in a literary point of view, we are deplorably unprepared for it. »⁶

In the 19th century, the great rival European powers (United Kingdom, France) and the rising power (Germany) competed to present the most extensive literary heritage. The promoters of national history often used war metaphors to present this competition between literary heritages. At the end of the 19th century, series entitled "The Great Writers of the Nation" were launched, with dozens, sometimes hundreds of volumes. In the case of less powerful or emerging nations, the promotion of the national literary heritage has also been very important to affirm the existence and value of the nation.

The national writer: a collective and singular genius

During the so-called "Awakening of nationalities", the national writers were considered as the bearer of the national Gospel :

"Schiller's word goes like the sound of bells through the German countryside; his muse is the conscience of the nation."⁷

In the 19th century some writers even entered the patriotic armed struggle, like the Hungarian poet Sandor Petöfi, hero of the 1848 Revolution, who disappeared while fighting against the Austro-Hungarian and Russian imperial armies.

"On your feet, Magyar, the homeland calls!
The time is here, now or never!
Shall we be slaves or free?
This is the question, choose your answer! -By the God of the Hungarians
We vow,

⁶ Herman Melville « Hawthorne and His Mosses », August 1850.

⁷ Gustav Kühne, "Schiller als Prophet. Festrede. 1852," Schiller-Verein zu Leipzig, Leipzig, 1855, quoted in Pierre Boudrot, *L'Ecrivain éponyme*, Paris, Armand Colin, collection Recherches, 2012, 497 p.

We vow, that we won't be slaves
any longer!"⁸

We can also mention the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. Born into serfdom, "bought" from his landlord by artists who admired his painting skills, Taras Shevchenko played a major role in the formation of the Ukrainian literary language and in the Ukrainian National Awakening, as shown in his famous poem "Testament" :

When I am dead, bury me
In my beloved Ukraine,
My tomb upon a grave mound high
Amid the spreading plain
So that the fields, the boundless steppes,
The Dnieper's plunging shore
My eyes could see, my ears could hear
The mighty river roar.
When from Ukraine the Dnieper bears
Into the deep blue sea
The blood of foes ... then will I leave
These hills and fertile fields –
I'll leave them all and fly away
To the abode of God,
And then I'll pray But till that day
I nothing know of God.
Oh bury me, then rise ye up
And break your heavy chains
And water with the tyrants' blood
The freedom you have gained.
And in the great new family,
The family of the free,
With softly spoken, kindly word
Remember also me.⁹

Shevchenko is currently a very important identity reference in Ukraine.

In fact, many writers of the 19th century have explicitly assumed the role of awakener of national consciousness, educator of the nation, spokesman of its aspirations, representative of the people.

⁸ Sandor Petőfi, "National Song", read aloud on the steps of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, March 15, 1848

⁹ Tarass Tchevtchenko, "The Testament", December 25th, 1845

It might be argued that literature since the 19th century has not been limited to the representation of national communities. Indeed, the national age is also the age of the individual, of the affirmation of his rights and freedoms. This is the paradox intrinsic to the conception of the nation as a community of individuals.

The modern principle of the evaluation of cultural works consecrates the originality, the innovation. A great work is considered as the manifestation of a specific, particular genius. This is reflected in a new interest in the writer as an individual. Shakespeare's life has left little trace other than his works. But from the 19th century onwards, the biography of the writer aroused a strong interest, which concerned not only his cultural universe but also his loves, his residence, his clothes, his food tastes and even his pets.

National genius and individual genius: these two new principles of literary consecration would seem to be in radical opposition. But they have in fact been synthesized in a hybrid figure between creative individuality and collective identity: the national writer¹⁰.

The national writer is a perfect oxymoron, celebrated both as the manifestation of the most exceptional individuality and as the quintessence of the nation. He is envisioned as an individual who freely and totally commits himself to his work, while being the purest crystallization of the national spirit. In celebrating him, the nation celebrates itself.

The first major international Prize for literature, according to the will of its founder, As expressed in the speech of one of the first laureates of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Henryk Sienkiewicz, the Prize rewards together an individual and his nation :

“Nations are represented by their poets and their writers in the open competition for the Nobel Prize. Consequently the award of the Prize by the Academy glorifies not only the author but the people whose son he is, and it bears witness that that nation has a share in the universal achievement, that its efforts are fruitful, and that it has the right to live for the profit of mankind. If this honor is precious to all, it is infinitely more so to Poland. It has been said that Poland is dead, exhausted, enslaved, but here is the proof of her life and triumph. Like Galileo, one is forced to think "E pur si muove" when before the eyes of the world homage has been rendered to the importance of Poland's achievement and her genius.

This homage has been rendered not to me - for the Polish soil is fertile and does not lack better writers than me - but to the Polish achievement, the Polish genius. For this I should like to express my most ardent and most sincere gratitude as a Pole to you gentlemen, the members of the Swedish Academy, and I conclude by borrowing the words of Horace: "Principibus placuisse non ultima laus est".¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La Fabrique de l'écrivain national, entre littérature et politique*. Paris, Gallimard, 2019.

¹¹ Henryk Sienkiewicz's speech at the Nobel Banquet at Grand Hotel, Stockholm, December 10, 1905 Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967, Editor Horst Frenz, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1969

Since Romanticism, what is designated as opposed to the literary universal is not the personal and national literature but the so-called commercial literature. This literature, declared to have no real author or homeland, would be a mere product for the international market.

The cult of cultural saints

The conception of the author as an expression and embodiment of the national community is at the heart of the writers' cults practiced since the 19th century¹². Their rise is the result of the transfer from the religious to the cultural that is characteristic of the national age. Writers have been promoted to "secular saints", objects of public devotion. They are credited with a double function of representation of their nation: -first, by their work, which gives the nation an awareness of itself and illustrates it on the international scene; -also by their person, by their life and by their very body.

It was around Shakespeare that began a cult of the writer involving not only an aristocratic elite but a much more socially diverse public. In 1769, the actor David Garrick organized the Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford-on-Avon. On this occasion a bust of Shakespeare was unveiled. The program offered the crowd three days of diverse performances, from horse racing to fireworks, with a parade of Shakespeare characters in costumes. The event had a wide impact in European literary circles and it made Stratford a tourist destination.

Until then, statues in public spaces were only of religious saints, monarchs or military leaders. In the following decades, statues celebrating "cultural heroes" proliferated. These cults of writers were often initiated not by state powers, but by associations of admirers. These associations organized festivities, in some cases grandiose, often on the occasion of the birth and death anniversaries of these writers. The statues of writers in changing urban spaces had a patriotic function. The statue of Schiller in Stuttgart, unveiled in 1839, was the first monument honoring a "cultural hero" in German space. The base of the statue of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar bears the inscription: "To the writing couple, on behalf of the fatherland". The cult of the writers mixed the tradition of religious ceremonies with new forms of sociability, leisure and political meetings.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1905/sienkiewicz/speech/>

¹² Cf. Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason, *National Poets, Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe*. Amsterdam, Brill, 2017.

The national canonization of Dante, revered as the patron saint of Italian unity during the Risorgimento, culminated in the celebration of the 600th anniversary of his birth in 1865, four years after the proclamation of the unified Kingdom. An imposing statue of the writer was erected in Piazza Santa Croce on this occasion. The base of the statue indicates: "To Dante, on behalf of Italia".

In 1880, large gatherings took place for the inauguration of the statue of Pushkin in Moscow, and for the commemoration of Camões in Lisbon, while in Russia and Portugal all political demonstrations were banned. In 1898 the unveiling of Mickiewicz's statue in Warsaw had to be done in silence.

In later periods of political repression, literary monuments were the starting points for mass mobilizations. In Budapest in 1956 it was around the statue of the national poet Petöfi that the crowd protesting against Soviet rule gathered. In Moscow in 1965, the first "dissident" intellectuals gathered around the statue of Pushkin, which remained a gathering place for political protests.

The cult of the national writer also manifested itself in funeral processions which, in many cases, were large-scale political events. Towards the end of the 19th century, with the Polish state being dismembered, the transfer of Alexander Mickiewicz's remains to Krakow Cathedral and the erection of statues of him were among the only possible public manifestations of the Polish nation, and those events were followed with fervor." The spectacular burial of Victor Hugo in Paris in 1885 began with an exhibition of the coffin under the Arc de Triomphe, under the auspices of the republican regime whose triumph it expressed. The next day the funeral procession headed to the Pantheon: this transfer was a mass event (more than one million people attended). The national and foreign press widely publicized these events through articles and illustrations. A reverse version of these writers' cults was the spectacular exclusions staged during the Nazi takeover, which evoke the burning of heretics.

Defining the (true) nation

The end of the 19th century corresponded to the triumph of nationalism: many states, recent or old, took the form of a nation-state. The claims of the nationalities under imperial domination became stronger and stronger. But this triumph also corresponded to an important evolution in the meaning and uses of the term. For a large part of the 19th century, nationalism had been associated with the fight against absolutist powers, for collective and individual

liberties, for modernity and progress. By the end of the 19th century the term "nation" had become a common term. Even those who had fought against nationalism, and in particular the supporters of the old monarchical order, began to refer to the nation. The political confrontations were no longer "for or against the nation". They were opposing different definitions of the nation, its people, its values. This did not mean the end of writers' commitment to the national cause, quite the contrary: they were now mobilizing for one conception of the nation against the others, as illustrated by Dreyfus Affair in France.

Unlike the bourgeois professions, literary activity is not regulated by diplomas and professional organizations (except in Nazi Germany and UdSS). At the beginning of the 20th century, competitive struggles inside the national literary fields were intense and sometimes they led to the claim of a purely national literary space, excluding foreigners. In France, Germany, Hungary, etc., nationalist intellectuals denounced what they called the literary invasion, or, according to a hygienist metaphor, the importation of literary drugs that were dangerous to the national spirit. Here a German and a French example of claims against Norwegian literary production :

“Berlin's literary circles "will soon tie themselves to the drunken skiff of the Norwegians, drag themselves into the heavy fury of the Russians, cling to the manure cart of the French." ¹³

“Contemporary youth, so obviously repulsed by the institutions of the Republic, is no better satisfied by the chimerical romances, allegories and languid dramas that Richard Wagner, Tolstoy and Ibsen have gradually inspired in us, and which threaten to destroy the last vestiges of the national spirit.”¹⁴

Later, dictatorial or totalitarian regimes massively practiced the denationalization of writers and works, with reference to racist or ideological considerations. Numerous national works and writers were excluded from the nation, treated as enemies of the nation. But the writers excluded from the German nation by the Nazis presented themselves as representatives and defenders of the true German nation against barbarism. Similarly, in occupied France, writers, even internationalists and communists, who were denounced by the writers of the

¹³ Peter Rosegger, « Berlin, die Stimme Deutschlands ? », *Heimgarten*, 16, 1892, p. 430-433.

¹⁴ Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, « Manifeste naturiste », *Le Figaro*, 1897, 10 January.

Collaboration as enemies of the nation, presented French literature as an efficient weapon of national defense against the enemy.

What right does the nation have over its writers?

The relationship between literature and nation has been woven in a very close way since the 19th century, but without any legal support. Nations have duties towards their writers, notably through the creation of national libraries, through the cults we have mentioned, through forms of patronage, curricula, etc., but they have no rights of ownership over writers and their works. The legal system concerning intellectual property elaborated in the 19th century recognizes two owners of the work: - first, for a few decades, the writer and his heirs- then, the whole of humanity. The nation is not the legal owner at any time of the national literature nor of the national writers. But this non-legal ownership is sometimes fiercely contested.

A recent example concerns Gogol, a Russian writer whose family came from Ukraine. In 2009, Gogol's bicentenary was celebrated simultaneously in Ukraine and in Russia, with each country claiming the world-famous writer as its own. Recently in his text regarding the Unity of Russia and Ukraine, Vladimir Putin insisted about the common belonging of Gogol and Chevtchenko :

« Taras Shevchenko wrote poetry in the Ukrainian language, and prose mainly in Russian. The books of Nikolay Gogol, a Russian patriot and native of Poltavshchyna, are written in Russian, bristling with Malorussian folk sayings and motifs. How can this heritage be divided between Russia and Ukraine? And why do it?''¹⁵

But writers as citizens belong to the nation. One consequence, at least for male writers, is that they are draftable into the army in time of war. During the First World War, thousands of writers on all fronts were drafted into the armies. Never before had so many writers participated in the fighting. Never had so many literary careers begun at the front or in the hospitals of the rear. Never before had the hardships of war had such an influence on literary themes and styles. The consequences for the political commitments of writers and literary creation in the following decades were decisive.

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", July 12, 2021
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

A plaque in the French Pantheon commemorates the 560 writers who died for France in the First World War. (197 during the Second World War). Between the French Revolution and now, the remains of just 7 writers were transferred to the Pantheon. The most recent writer transferred there, Maurice Genevoix, was a student in 1914. Wounded, he wrote "Carnets de guerre" ("War Diaries"), during his treatment in hospital. The text was published under the title *Ceux de 14 (Those of 14)*. Genevoix was transferred to the Panthéon in 2020. The French President's speech emphasized that "all those of 14", the wholenfighting nation, were symbolically transferred to the Pantheon along with Genevoix's remains.

It should also be emphasized that, in times of war, culture is nationalized in an absolute way: the culture of the enemy is treated as enemy culture... or denied as culture. Cultural works become the targets of military strikes and weapons against the enemy. In his memoirs, Stefan Zweig emphasised the patriotic frenzy of writers in the early days of the First World War, even of those who had previously seemed the least inclined to chauvinism.

"Almost all German writers, Hauptmann and Dehmel in the lead, felt obliged, in the manner of the bards of ancient Germania, to inflame the combatants going to the front with their songs and runes and to encourage them to die well. A rain of poems fell, where glory rhymed with victory, effort with death. The writers solemnly swore that they would never again be in cultural community with a Frenchman, with an Englishman; moreover, they denied from one day to the next that there had ever been an English culture, a French culture. All this was insignificant and worthless in comparison with Germanness, German art and German morals. (...) **Shakespeare was banished from the German stage, Mozart and Wagner from the French and English, German professors explained that Dante was German; according to the French, Beethoven was Belgian;** without a qualm the cultural heritage of the enemy was requisitioned like wheat and ore."¹⁶

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, there have been debates in Western intellectual circles about whether to "cancel" Russian culture....

In fact, just after the First World War, the PEN Club was founded with the aim of maintaining relations between writers despite national conflicts. It was presented by one of its founders as a literary League of nations. The Charter of the P.E.N. adopted at the Brussels Congress in 1927 stipulates ;

¹⁶ Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern, Erinnerungen eines Europäers*, Stockholm, Bermann-Fisher Verlag B, 1944,

“Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.

In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.

Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class, and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.”

Convinced of the power of literature, the political authorities have intensely practiced censorship during Wars. They have also recruited writers for propagandist activities. On September 2, 1914, the War Propaganda Office was created in London. Writers (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton, Thomas Hardy, Sir Henry Newbolt, etc.) were invited to participate in the war action with their pens. The original plan was to write the war story and to publish it as a monthly periodical. To generate support in the United States for the United Kingdom, an “Authors' Declaration” was signed by 53 writers. It was published in the *New York Times* on September 18. In response, an "Appeal to the World of Culture" (“Aufruf an die Kulturwelt”) was published on October 4, signed by 93 German writers and academics.

During the Second World War, in the USA, immediately after Pearl Harbour, the Writers War Board was launched, on the British model of the War Propaganda Office. Thousands of writers (including many women) were recruited to write texts, songs, and comic strips. The goal was to unite the nation at war and to maintain hostility to the Nazi and Japanese enemy.

The literary heritage and the great national writers are often mobilized after their death, long after their death. A contemporary example: the mobilization of Pushkin in the war against Ukraine. As I mentioned earlier, the statue of Pushkin in Moscow has been a rallying point for demonstrations criticizing the government since 1965 (again in 2022 to protest against the start of the war). On the other hand, Pushkin has been mobilized by the regime since the Stalinist era. In 1937, the bicentenary of Pushkin’s birth was celebrated with grandiose manifestations that foreshadowed the new nationalist orientation of “the great fatherland war” against Germany. With the preparation and outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Pushkin was used as an expression of Russian nationalism. Conversely, Pushkin is perceived in Ukraine as an expression of Russian imperialism and his statues have been debunked in dozens of Ukrainian cities under the name “Pushkinopad” (Pushkin'sFall). A statue of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko hit by shrapnel has become one of the symbols of the nation under attack from

Russia. Writers in War, Violence and Literature are still current issues, as illustrated by the case of the writer Zahar Prilepin, a Russian nationalist activist and fighter in the Donbass, who was injured in May 2023 when the car carrying him exploded.