

## War drama as a living reality

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Since 2014, the Russian aggression in Ukraine has prompted filmmakers to master a new genre of war drama to tell the stories of those who serve in the Ukrainian army or the territorial defense, as well as those who contribute to the war effort as volunteers. The article discusses Ukrainian war drama films: *Cyborgs. Heroes Don't Die*, *Call Sign Banderas*, *Mother of Apostles*, *Ilovaysk 2014*, *Donbas Battalion*, *Sniper. The White Raven*. These films integrate war drama with other genres such as detective stories, adventure films, and psychological drama. They also refer to some archetypal themes and conflicts in order to frame the current experience of the war. However, it will be argued that these films do not simply reuse the existing genre models, but complicate them. They refresh war drama by prioritizing the concrete experience of the ongoing war against Russian aggression over the genre conventions. Ukrainian war drama shows not a game of war but the truth of war. It tells the real stories of the bravery of ordinary people who fight against Russian aggression.

**KEYWORDS:** war drama, Ukrainian cinema, Russian aggression, Akhtem Seitablaev, Zaza Buladze, Ivan Tymchenko, Marian Bushan, *Cyborgs. Heroes Don't Die*, *Call Sign Banderas*, *Mother of Apostles*, *Ilovaysk 2014*, *Donbas Battalion*, *Sniper. The White Raven*

2014 was a turning point in the history of Ukraine, and therefore in Ukrainian cinema. At the end of February, violating the international status quo and ignoring the "concerns" of European countries and the USA, Russia annexed Crimea and unleashed a war in Donbas. Such barbarism – a violation of the borders of an independent state – seemed incredible considering the progress of civilization and democratic values, as well as the not-yet-forgotten experience of the Second World War. The aggressor did not officially declare war, but battles took place on the contact line, and soldiers and civilians died. The Russian Federation did not advertise the presence of weapons and Russian troops in Donbas; on the contrary, the president of the enemy country assured that "they were not there." In this regard, let us recall the lines of Lina Kostenko:

And horror, and blood, and death, and despair,  
And the clawing of a predatory horde  
A little gray-haired man  
Caused dark trouble.  
This is a beast of a disgusting breed,  
Loch Ness of cold Neva,  
Where do you look, people?  
Today we are, and tomorrow – you!  
The war was called hybrid.[1]

[1] L. Kostenko, *I zhakh, i krov, i smert', i vidchaj* [*And horror, and blood, and death, and*

*despair*], <https://virshi.com.ua/lina-kostenko-zhah-krov-smert-vidchaj/> (accessed: 18.01.2022).

The appearance of a war drama became natural because the events in Donbas have generated many sharp and tense plots. Ukrainian cinematographers did not stand aside and made maximum efforts to bring at least some of these plots to the big screen. War drama is one of the most expensive genres, as it often requires the involvement or production of military equipment, the destruction of scenery, large groups of costumed extras, and complex computer effects, but these difficulties did not stop the filmmakers.

This study deals with the feature films *Cyborgs. Heroes Never Die* (2017), *Call Sign "Banderas"* (2018), *Ilovaisk 2014. Battalion "Donbas"* (2019), *Mother of the Apostles* (2020), and *Sniper. The White Raven* (2022). The meaning is clearly outlined in the film names. They have a lot in common: being based on current material and chronicling the powerful events of the war that has been going on for eight years, they embody the images of the defenders of Ukraine; using real stories, they show the deep mental gulf between the Ukrainian defenders and the Russian aggressors, not ignoring the residents of Donbas. It is characteristic that, though tending to the epic form, the films are at the same time reconstructions that faithfully recreate the events. The differences between the films mentioned above are that their authors refer to the images of soldiers of different military professions, and in one case, a woman is central to the story.

Cinematographers who turned to war dramas had to learn a new genre of films quickly. Help came from professional soldiers, participants in the battles. Films that are difficult to bring to fruition require full commitment from all its creators, and from the actors, a complete transformation, even military training. The images of soldiers-defenders in the films are cyborgs, among whom were special forces fighters, ordinary volunteers and scouts – both in *Call Sign "Banderas"* and *Mother of the Apostles*, fighters of airborne assault groups – in *Ilovaisk*, snipers – in *Snipers. The White Raven*. All of them are united by features recognizable to the audience: calm confidence in what they are doing, willingness to take risks, an unwavering will to win and courage.

The images of the antagonists are also individualized. Among the most striking are the saboteur Boroda, real call sign – Khodok (Mykola Zmievskyi) in *Call Sign "Banderas"*. He is gifted with artistry – huddling among Ukrainian soldiers, he pretends to be a merry man, a good fellow, and he manages to play out his bloody game long enough though ultimately loses to the Ukrainian scout Saienko. In the film *Ilovaisk 2014*, the commandant of occupied Ilovaisk, Runkov (Serhii Dzialyk), who came from Rostov to Donbas in search of his son, wants to destroy Bishut at any cost, but does not succeed. The commander of the separatists Ork in *Mother of the Apostles* (Stanislav Shchokin), who came from Russia to Donbas, might be described as absolutely crazy and frantic; he behaved as if he were the legal owner, full of hatred for both Ukrainian soldiers and the local population. He paid for it with his life. The embodiment of self-confidence and invincibility is the Russian

sniper Sieryi (Oleh Drach) in the film *Sniper. The White Raven*, who is killed in the finale by the character with the call sign White Raven. In this gallery of predators, the character and mentality of the horde is accurately conveyed. There is another category of characters – these are the residents of Donbas: some of them sympathize and secretly help Ukrainian fighters (like the character of the film *Mother of the Apostles*, an ordinary civilian played by Bohdan Beniuk). Others fight on the side of the occupiers, but under the influence of circumstances, they experience an epiphany and undergo change, like Liokha from the movie *Call Sign "Banderas"*.

In just a few years, filmmakers working in this genre have produced high-quality results – their films have gained recognition from audiences. However, the Ukrainian war drama does not fully conform to generally accepted canons. Firstly, the authors of the films in question do not imitate foreign models, therefore, their films are characterized by originality. Secondly, they do not relate events that are remote in historical time, but deal with the current war, the events of which are known from the reports of the domestic and world media, and this adds emotional tension to the works. And even if the local events of the war are shown, the films operate on a wider scale in terms of ideas. The result of this true reproduction of tragic events and life material is an organic fusion of the documentary basis with the feature element being the reproduction of the pages of the war by artistic means. Thirdly, Ukrainian cinematographers, creating artistic images, emphasize that the war Ukraine is engaged in is just, and strive to reveal the images of its courageous defenders as fully as possible.

Thus, the modern military drama in Ukraine was brought to life by the tragic events unfolding in Donbas and the heroic resistance of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and volunteers. The causes of this war are widely known. During the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich, the Kremlin convinced itself that Ukraine, although *de jure* independent, *de facto* remains a colony of Russia. But the events on Maidan Square Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), which lasted from November 2013 to February 2014 and went down in history as the Revolution of Dignity, showed that the Moscow authorities were wrong, and that the Ukrainian people had chosen the path of democracy and wanted to join the European Union. Russia responded with aggression to this choice, and to Ukrainians' manifestation of will in the form of peaceful protests. Ukraine found itself in a difficult economic situation: an empty treasury, and an almost incapacitated army – initially, it was mainly volunteers who fought in Donbas. Thus, the government had to save the country and form the armed forces. But even under such conditions, cinema did not stop; on the contrary, Ukrainian (as well as foreign) cinematographers on Maidan Square were participants in the events and their chroniclers. As a result, many films appeared, stating, commenting on and analyzing those events. Only a few were made with the support of private TV channels, and the majority were based

on enthusiasm. They were shown at international festivals, and at the same time, they became a message to the future.

The government of Ukraine began allocating funds for cinema in 2016. On March 18, 2015, Volodymyr Hroisman, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, signed a decree banning Russian TV series in Ukraine that glorify Russian weapons, Russian punishers and criminals. The vacated space could be filled with Ukrainian cinema, including TV series. But Ukrainian private TV channels had been cooperating with Russia for a long time and, by inertia, gave screen time on television to non-Ukrainian topics. As the people's deputy of the Verkhovna Rada, Hanna Hopko, rightly wrote, "Ukrainian TV series are the same Russian TV series in which portraits of Putin and two-headed eagles were simply removed. They multiply so fast as if we are still some kind of Russian province, and this is unacceptable." [2] The government's measures to support the Ukrainian film industry resulted primarily in the expansion of film production. A new generation came to Ukrainian cinema, although not all of its representatives were interested in the war and the defense of their native country: with some exceptions, young people pretended that there was no war.

But tragic events required both documentation and creative interpretation. Domestic film dramaturgy (which had long been a weak point in Ukrainian cinematography) began to take shape. If in the last twenty years a detachment of story-providers for television soap operas has formed, then the emergence of screenwriters for movies was stimulated by the events of the war in Crimea and Donbas, which provided many plots for feature films. Natalia Vorozhbyt (*Cyborgs, Bad Roads* – in the latter she is also the director) joined this work, the duet of Serhii Dziuba and Artemii Kirsanov (*Call Sign "Banderas", Forbidden*), and journalist Mykhailo Brynykh (*Ilovaisk 2014. Battalion "Donbas"*) became a screenwriter. The writers Andrii Kokotiukha (*Red*, 2017) and Iren Rozdobudko (*Double Immelmann*, 2021) continued to work for cinema.

And another interesting phenomenon was that with the expansion of film production, many new names appeared among actors, and these actors who starred in war dramas deserve special respect. Some of them, like Oleh Shulha, fought at the front. Ukrainian military personnel also became actors, such as the former scout and now employee of the foundation "Come Back Alive", Andrii Rymaruk (leading roles in the films *Atlantyda* and *Reflection* by Valentyn Vasianovych, known outside of Ukraine), and the warrior and politician Taras Kostanchuk (who played himself in the film *Ilovaisk 2014. Battalion "Donbas"* by Ivan Tymchenko). Volunteers and soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine took an active part in military dramas.

[2] H. Hopko, *Shcho take ukrayins'kyi masovyy kinematohraf? [What should Ukrainian mass cinema be like?]*, "Kino-Teatr" 2016, no. 6(129), p. 2.

The events in Ukraine aroused the interest of foreign filmmakers as well: the American documentary filmmaker Mark Harris, together with the director Oles Sanin and cameraman Yaroslav Pilunskyi, created the film *The Turning Point. The War for Democracy in Ukraine* (2017), where the history of the struggle of Ukrainians for their own state is shown through the eyes of soldiers, doctors, journalists, theater actors and all those who left their usual lives for the sake of the fight for democracy.[3] The theme of the war in the center of Europe was covered by artists of Ukrainian origin from the USA (Damian Kolodii) and Canada (Adriana Luhova). The director and cinematographer Simon Lereng Wilmont from Denmark documented the life of a grandmother and her grandson on the demarcation line in the film *The Distant Barking of Dogs*,[4] and in 2022 he completed the documentary *A House Made of Splinters* about a shelter for children in a dangerous zone. On March 15, 2021, the Swiss blogger Le Grand JD showed the documentary film in French *War in Ukraine*. Its main characters are Ukrainian defenders. The author also recalled the downing of the MH17 passenger plane by Russian weapons, as well as Moscow's use of all means of hybrid warfare against Ukraine: political, economic, and informational.

It is believed that it is impossible to artistically comprehend historically important events from a close temporal distance. Time filters, leaving what is important and essential, and a talented artist relying on real facts summarizes and invents so that the picture becomes expressive and conveys an important historical event to the viewer. But as time has become dynamic, events are developing rapidly, begging to be shown on the screen, it was impossible to put off their on-screen embodiment for some time. The first feature films about the Russian-Ukrainian war became the events in the cultural space of Ukraine. They were directed by the filmmakers Akhtem Seitablaiev and Zaza Buadze, who have been working in Ukraine for a long time. Their films gained recognition: *Khaitarma* (2013) by Seitablaiev about the deportation of Crimean Tatars, where he played the main role – the legendary pilot of the Second World War Amet-Khan Sultan, and *Red* (2017) by Buadze, about the soldiers of The Ukrainian Insurgent Army, who raised an armed uprising in the Gulag, where in the final scene the exhausted prisoners defeat their tormentors in a real battle.

The war drama *Cyborgs. Heroes Never Die* by Akhtem Seitablaiev became the first convincing evidence of the success of Ukrainian cinema after the Revolution of Dignity. Filming began in February 2017, and on December 7 of the same year, on the Day of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the film was released. It became a sensation – the flow

[3] Film “*Perelomnyj moment: Wijna za demokratiju w Ukrajinii*” zmahatymet’sia za “Oskar” [The film “*Turning Point: The War for Democracy in Ukraine*” will compete for an Oscar], Vchasno UA, 20.11.2018,

<https://vchasnoua.com/donbass/58537-film-perelomny-moment-viina-za-demokratiiu-v-ukraini-zmahatymetsia-za-oskar> (accessed: 18.01.2022).

[4] Ibidem.

of spectators who wanted to see it on the big screen did not stop for a month.[5]

The Crimean Tatar actor and director Akhtem Seitablaiev, who has an acting and directing education, organically entered the space of Ukrainian culture. Before filming *Cyborgs*, he worked on one of the TV channels on a series of programs titled *Brave Hearts*. He invited to the studio fighters who had fought in Donbas, including defenders of Donetsk airport, who were respected and admired in Ukraine. The shows had high ratings, and the director decided to make a movie about them. Natalia Vorozhbyt, who is known for her modernized staging of Ukrainian literature, prepared the script based on the stories of the participants of the battles.

The fighting for the airport began in September 2014 and lasted until January 22, 2015, becoming one of the fiercest in the war in eastern Ukraine. The battles for control over Donetsk international airport broke out between Ukrainian troops, including fighters of volunteer formations, on the one hand, and the forces of pro-Russian armed groups and the occupation army, on the other hand. The stronghold of the Ukrainian forces was the village of Pisky – provisions and ammunition were supplied to the defenders of the airport and soldiers were rotated there. Fire support artillery was deployed in Pisky. Pro-Russian forces attacked the airport from the adjacent Kyiv district of Donetsk, from the territory of the monastery in the south and from the village of Spartak in the east.

*Cyborgs* also joined the film, providing material for the script, advising the director and actors, in particular, Andriy Sharaskin, a theater director, originally from Ternopil region, a prototype of a cyborg with the call sign Serpen, whose role was played by one of the leading actors, his friend from student days, Viacheslav Dovzhenko. The actor explained: “My character is a collective image, but he has a prototype – Andriusha Sharaskin (call sign Bohema). I talked to him a lot. He, like my character, told military comrades about the history of Ukraine, had conversations with them.”[6] The film was also consulted by Kyrylo Nedria (Dotsent), Yevhen Zhukov (Marshal) and Yevhen Mezhevikin (Adam).

High-class specialists worked on the film – the producer Ivanna Diadiura, cameraman Yurii Korol, artist Shevket Seidametov, who faithfully reproduced one-fifth of the airport territory. Their proficiency was manifested primarily in relating the truth of the events. All members of the film crew had a great desire to show this phenomenon of resistance against overwhelming enemy forces. Undoubtedly, the human appeal of the characters is primarily down to the actors: Viacheslav Dovzhenko

[5] During the first weekend, the film grossed over UAH 8 million. This is a record figure for the first weekend for a Ukrainian film. As of January 30, 2018, after 8 weeks of release, the film's box office had grossed UAH 22.3 million, which was an absolute

record for a film produced entirely in Ukraine at the time.

[6] V. Dovzhenko, *Lyudy khochut' dyvytysya "Kiborhiv"* [People want to watch "Cyborgs"], "Kino-Teatr" 2018, no. 2(136), p. 7.

(Serpen), Andrii Isaienko (Subota), Roman Yasinovskiy (Hid), Makar Tykhomyrov (Mazhor), Viktor Zhdanov (Did), Oleksandr Piskunov (Mars), Konstantyn Temliak (Psykh). As you can see, the main focus in the picture is on seven cyborgs, and it is associated with the famous film *Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa, whose characters in the distant 16<sup>th</sup> century also entered into battle with the overwhelming forces of attackers.

Actors and civilians had to become convincing in conveying the images of the military. They had to master the flawless handling of weapons (and trained a lot to do this), convey the inner state, true behavior in an extreme situation. Being organic in the image was important, because they were watched by real-life prototypes of their characters, ready to help on the film set. The characters are people with extraordinary abilities. Without their prompt reactions and ingenuity, it is impossible to survive in extreme conditions. And most importantly, despite the disputes and discussions between them, they united, became one unit, a strike force. A collective portrait of the defenders of the airport appeared on the screen, and each of them is a complex and interesting person in its own way.

War drama is a genre that, in addition to semantic clarity for the sake of understanding who is the attacker and who is the defender in war, requires the severity of events and their constant development. Because of that, in films of this genre, events often overshadow people. In *Cyborgs*, on the contrary, each of the characters is an individuality, everyone, even the enemy who was captured by the cyborgs, had the opportunity to express himself. In the tension of military operations, the individual remains in the foreground. There are no open battles in the film because the nature of the war is different here, it is undeclared and hybrid. Ukrainian soldiers repel attacks, they are constantly ready for direct confrontation. Enemy snipers are hiding in the ruins of the airport, they are almost impossible to detect.

The cyborgs spend most of their time in the mutilated premises of the airport, occasionally venturing out at great risk to their lives. It is also dangerous in the airport itself, but the walls, even pierced by shells, provide some kind of protection. A fighter with the call sign Mazhor risks his life. He leaves the airport during the night shift, violating the commander's order, and goes in search of a gun. His sortie is successful, for in addition to weapons, he also manages to capture the enemy. The commander does not ignore the young man's willfulness and orders Mazhor to return home (besides, the young man is a talented musician and the commander wants to save him). But instead of carrying out the order, Mazhor accuses Serpen and his generation of being unable to keep the independence of Ukraine, develop and make Ukraine successful... For the first time in Ukrainian cinema the authors touch a painful nerve. But Mazhor, apparently, does not know that Ukraine was not made successful by corrupt politicians and thieves who became oligarchs. This brilliantly performed "duel" between Serpen and Mazhor is memorable.

Firstly, the image of the young man shows the tendency of Ukrainians towards anarchism and the unwillingness to obey orders, which is the cause of many troubles for the country itself. Secondly, the episode shows the difference between the army of a democratic country and the army of a totalitarian country, where unconstitutional conversations were not allowed in principle and where Major would have been quickly sent “where he should be”. But, on the other hand, in the conditions of democracy there are people of heightened consciousness, and they were the ones who defended the airport, their country, went to fight voluntarily, because in the time of danger, volunteers began to defend the country.

The film did not imitate other people’s models. The creative task of the film crew was to make no mistakes in recreating the images of real people. The actor Viktor Zhdanov had valuable impressions from the creative process: “We were all of the same mind, in the truth of this film, in the director’s position, in our view of this war. The civil position is the same. Therefore, there was no shouting or scandals on the film set – there was active work.”[7] Shooting *Cyborgs* marked a successful start to a career in cinema for the actors.

Akhtem Seitablaiev and his associates found the exact ratio of the terrible and the majestic. During the short period of protecting Donetsk Airport, strict everyday life is shown: replenishment with new fighters, a tour of the destroyed territory of the airport, daily life, discussions, readiness for battles and the battle itself. There is an episode in the film when the cyborgs were warned that the Russians would use their most powerful artillery, which would finally destroy the building and they would die, but at the commander’s suggestion to leave the airport there were none who wanted to, everyone stayed. Fortunately, the predictions did not come true.

It has already been mentioned about the strong connection to reality as a characteristic feature of this war drama. This can also be seen in the episode when, after successfully repelling an enemy attack, an officer from the headquarters comes to the defenders of the airport and scolds them for “violating the peace agreements”, that is, the courage and persistence of cyborgs were not always appreciated by the higher command. This also shows the conceptual mismatch between the imaginary and the real: the concept of “anti-terrorist operation” (ATO) and the concept of “war”. By the way, many soldiers mistook Oleh Drach in the role of an officer for the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Viktor Muzhenko – both due to the external similarity and due to the skillfully played role.

Serpen dies from a sniper’s bullet in the finale. The spectator has managed to become close to this character, so there is not only empathy, but also an internal protest against this loss.

[7] V. Zhdanov, *Meni vypalo shchastia vyslovyty svoji dumky* [I was lucky enough to express my thoughts], “Kino-Teatr” 2018, no. 2(136), p. 8.



On the occasion of the release of the film, the group “Cyborgs” and the fund “Come Back Alive” organized the initiative #ЯНебайдужий! (#YaNebaiduzhyi [I am not different]). Five hryvnias from each ticket purchased for the film are transferred to help the families of those killed in the battles for the Donetsk airport. The film was highly appreciated by audiences – it became the Ukrainian record holder of domestic film distribution during the period of independent Ukraine. Its four-episode version was broadcast on ICTV on February 20, 2019. Viewers are still interested in the film even five years after its release: one Ukrainian student expressed his belief that future generations will watch it:

The film *Cyborgs* has a symbolic meaning for me because it raises topics that make citizens more aware. I consider the war in Donbas a national tragedy because many of our people died, and they are not even mentioned. I thank the director for this film because it is really important. Over the years, it will acquire its relevance, and I am sure it will appear in history textbooks.[8]

The film was acquired by foreign distributors. On March 14, 2018, it was released in the USA, Canada and a number of European countries. International distribution started with the premiere in Washington: the film was shown in the US Congress as a part of the discussion “Russian hybrid war against Ukraine. A global response to a global threat”.

“When we were presenting *Cyborgs*, said Akhtem Seitablaiev, there was a period when we visited about 15 or 20 countries. The film was shown, for example, at the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg, the NATO headquarters in Brussels, the US Congress, the European Court of Human Rights, etc. 99% of all the presentations took place before an important meeting of an international institution. I remember each of our trips resulted in decisions being made in favor of Ukraine the following day. Of course, I’m not saying that people, having only watched *Cyborgs*, discussed the movie in the next room and voted for us. Of course, I am still a healthy person. But it also had an impact.”[9]

Therefore, the film was also an ambassador of goodwill because true art can adequately represent the country on the international stage.

After that, Seitablaiev continued to work in this genre (the mini-series *Volunteer*, the film *Myrnyi 21*). He considers such films to be his civic duty:

Probably, this is such a stage in my life. I will definitely make a comedy someday. But now [...] if I have the tools to pick away at the subject, to constantly hammer in the fact that we must have a strong army, we must learn to trust ourselves, see the situation more broadly, I must do it.[10]

[8] B. Liberats'kyy, *Film fihuruvatyme v pidruchnykakh istoriyi* [The film will appear in history textbooks], “Kino-Teatr” 2022, no. 5(163), p. 22.

[9] A. Seitablaiev, “I try to remind about Crimea in each of my films”. The interview was conducted by A. Malysenko, LB, 23.07.2021, <https://lb.ua/world> (accessed: 28.01.2022).

[10] K. Nekrechaja, R. Halilov, “Ja nie liubliu vojennyje filmy, no postojanno ih snimaju”. Akhtem Seitablaiev – o voyne, kino i neveroyatnoy dramaturgii jyzni [“I don’t like war movies, but I make them all the time.” Akhtem Seitablaiev – about war, movies and the incredible drama of life], Krym: realii, 22.08.2022, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/ahtem-seitablaiev-ki>

In the summer of 2014, at the beginning of the Russian–Ukrainian war, Ukrainian troops successfully liberated our territories from pro-Russian militants. In order to liberate another settlement, they came into the small city of Ilovaïsk, strategic for the liberation operation, and took control of part of the city. But from August 9, a significant number of regular troops of the Russian Federation began to enter the territory of Ukraine<sup>[11]</sup> and on August 24, the troops who were in and around Ilovaïsk found themselves surrounded by the enemy. As a result of the negotiations with the Russian enemy, the terms of leaving Ilovaïsk through the “humanitarian corridor” were agreed upon. But when the Ukrainian military were breaking out of the encirclement on the morning of August 28, they were shelled by “Grads”. No one was held accountable for this crime in Russia. The position of the highest command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine at that time was also questionable... The battles in Ilovaïsk and this tragic breakout from the encirclement became one of the turning points of the war in Donbas: the Armed Forces of Ukraine lost the initiative and switched from attack to defense. This also had negative political consequences: the enemy encouraged the Ukrainian leadership to conclude the Minsk agreements within the framework of the tripartite Ukraine–Russia OSCE contact group with the involvement of representatives of the Russian militants.

These heroic and tragic events are described in the books *Ilovaïsk* by Yevhen Polozhii (2015), *Ilovaïsk Diary* by Roman Zinenko (2017), *War that Wasn't. Chronicle of Ilovaïsk Tragedy* by Roman Zinenko (2019), research on the battles for Ilovaïsk by Yaroslav Tynchenko in the magazine “Week UA”. On the fifth anniversary of the Ilovaïsk tragedy, on August 29, 2019, the film *Ilovaïsk 2014. Donbas Battalion* was released. The author of the screenplay, writer and journalist Mykhailo Brynykh, emphasized that this is in no way a propaganda film, but undoubtedly a patriotic one. On the one hand, he wanted no one to have any doubts what we are fighting for and against whom, and on the other hand, he did not want to slip into theatrics, and again, into propaganda.

Eighty percent of the film is a reconstruction of real events. Its creators accomplished a very significant amount of work in just one year, while movies sometimes take years to shoot. The film was not supported by the State Cinema of Ukraine; it is independent of the state, filmed with funds raised by volunteers.

For the script, Mykhailo Brynykh spent two years collecting memories of these events, asking about the fallen soldiers – 59 soldiers of the volunteer battalion “Donbas” died in Ilovaïsk. This battalion became the main character of the film. In the picture, the space is limited by the battle, which ended in defeat and heavy losses: Ukrainian soldiers

no-filmy-ukraina-voyna-intervyu/31999636.html  
(accessed: 22.08.2022).

[11] On August 13, 2015, a representative of the Central Research Institute of the Armed Forces of Ukraine stated that more than 4,000 Russian military personnel took part in the battle for Ilovaïsk.

were shot, and their equipment was destroyed. Since then, the word “Ilovaisk”, like “Azovstal” today, echoes with pain in the consciousness of every Ukrainian, not to mention the families of the victims. Who is to blame for the fact that the events unfolded in this way is a question raised in the film in passing (an episode when an officer from the headquarters, ignoring the dangerous situation, orders the battalion commanders to hold Ilovaisk without reinforcements).

Each character in the film is based on a real person. Oleh Drach played Skif (Oleksandr Romanenko), Ukrainian-born Canadian Istan Rozumnyi played Franko (Marko Poslavskiy), Yevhen Lamakh played Samoliot (Vadym Antonov), Oleksandr Mavritys played Shults (Serhii Shkarivskiy), Serhii Solopai played Usach (Yevhenii Telnov). And Yevhenii Nikitchenko, with the call sign Quentin, was played by Ruslan Sokilnyk. The actors were trained in a special training camp, and studied the art of reincarnation and the truth of life. Military equipment for the film was provided by the “Azov” regiment.

“This is a war movie, so we, the actors, were filmed with real volunteers, people who fought,” said Istan Rozumnyi, who played Mark Poslavskiy, an American from New York who came to Ukraine. “We had training – this done was in order to get used to the role better. It was organized by Ivan (director Ivan Tymchenko – L.B.), and it was very useful. It is interesting to work with him on the film set, because he gives the actors freedom, the opportunity to improvise. A director who chooses a war movie as his first work is very ambitious. [...] The pseudonym of my character is Franko. He was a colonel, one of the four commanders of the “Donbas” battalion and, unfortunately, he died. [...] The guys who fought with him treated him with great respect. Kind, cheerful, with an excellent sense of humor.”[12]

“They said about Shults that he had no fear at all. He was a brave, life-loving and ironic person,” said actor Oleksandr Mavritys about his character Serhii Shkarivskiy.[13]

The film can be conventionally divided into two parts: the first deals with the battles for Ilovaisk and the shooting of Ukrainian soldiers when they were breaking out of the encirclement; the second is the story of Bishut and Tarantino. The viewer is kept in constant suspense and it is difficult to predict the end.

When, after the reconstruction of the fighting, the authors move on to the story of Bishut and the ordinary soldier Tarantino, the film takes on something of an adventure character. Bishut was wounded in the head in the battle for Ilovaisk and, together with Quentin, who was wounded in the leg, fell behind their soldiers. Both, looking for salvation, ran into an apartment, the door of which was open. Its resident,

[12] I. Rozumnyy, *Hraty tsoho khloptsya bulo vidpovidalno y pochesno* [It was responsible and honorable to play this guy], “Kino-Teatr” 2019, no. 6(146), pp. 4–5.

[13] *Aktor z Uzhhoroda Oleksandr Mavritys podilyvsya vrazhennyamy pro rol' u fil'mi “Ilovays'k 2014”*

[O. Mavritys, an actor from Uzhhorod, shares his impressions of his role in the film “Ilovaisk 2014”], Uzhgorod, 2.08.2019, <https://uzhgorod.net.ua/news/140628> (accessed: 15.01.2022).

90-year-old Petrivna, sheltered them. At any moment, someone could have come across them and handed them over to the “Kadyrovites” or local terrorists. The elderly landlady and her young neighbor Svitlana (Anastasia Renard) took care of the soldiers. It is clear that such a risky situation could not last long, and the soldiers had to break through to the Ukrainian soldiers. Bishut found a way out by accident: flipping through the binders of old newspapers, he came across an acquaintance, who helped them with fictitious documents. Bishut and Tarantino broke out of the occupied city. But after learning about them, the city commandant Valerii Runtsov (Serhii Dzialyk) caught up with them. And only with the unexpected help of the teacher, as well as endurance and courage, were both soldiers saved.

Peaceful residents of occupied Ilovaisk also appear in the film. Svitlana, whose blind father refused to leave his home despite the war, worked as a secretary in the commandant’s office. She helped Ukrainian soldiers and bought food. Another character is a teacher of Russian literature, who was ashamed that all those whom he had taught became marauders and bandits in one moment, ultimately, in a critical moment, helped to save Bishut. There are also stories of militants, a commander of Kadyrov mercenaries, who was looking for a living there, a typical local “vatnik” who thought about “how khokhly ruined the Soviet Union”, a clueless Russian drug addict who came to Donbas from Rostov-on-Don in order not to be annoyed by parents.

Ivan Tymchenko combines the acuteness of the events with documentary, even going so far as to have a real military man appear in front of the film camera, playing himself. Taras Kostanchuk (Bishut), a participant in the events, produced the film, aiming to immortalize his brothers. In the finale, a photo is shown and the names of the battalion’s fighters who died in the battles for Ilovaisk or died soon after are named. The task of the picture’s creators was not easy - for the first time to show a tragedy on the screen – not a victory, but a defeat, and also to depict the courage of the soldiers. The young but already experienced cameraman Oleksandr Zemlianyi also helped the debutant director Ivan Tymchenko.

The film tells us about the heroic deeds and self-sacrifice of our soldiers, evokes emotions and an admiration for the measure of truth. In reviews, critics noted its tension and clearly placed semantic accents.

This movie is fully developed in the style of a military action movie. Every single second, one feels the intrigue and unpredictability of the development of the action. Our blood, pulsating tension and not sham national resistance are definitely enough here. The filmmakers successfully managed to combine drama with unstoppable action: explosions, shootings, car chases on Donbas roads and bloody realistic battles.[14]

[14] K. Petrenko, *Fylm “Pozyvnoy «Banderas»”: horryachyy detektyv o voyne na Vostoke, kotoromu verysh* [“Call Sign Banderas”: a hot detective story about the war in the East that you can believe], 24 Kanal,

16.10.2018, [https://24tv.ua/ru/film\\_pozyvnoj\\_banderas\\_gorjachij\\_detektiv\\_o\\_vojne\\_na\\_vostoke\\_kotoromu\\_verish\\_n1048356](https://24tv.ua/ru/film_pozyvnoj_banderas_gorjachij_detektiv_o_vojne_na_vostoke_kotoromu_verish_n1048356) (accessed: 7.01.2022).

For cinematography, which for a long time almost did not function, it is quite an achievement and even a miracle how quickly and successfully Ukrainian film directors mastered war drama, and how the cinematographers Yurii Korol and Oleksandr Zemlyanyi professionally filmed battles with military equipment and many participants. And if Akhtem Seitablaiev already had the experience of working with a lot of extras in *Khaitarma*, debutant Ivan Tymchenko had to master this difficult task for the first time.

Zaza Buadze, an experienced director, started to shoot war drama as well. Having taken up the profession of director while abroad, he managed to shoot several films in his native Georgia, and since 2008 he has been working in Ukraine. In an interview with Military Television of Ukraine on January 3, 2019, Buadze, the director of the film *Call Sign "Banderas"*, explained why he was interested in the war in Donbas: for him, this war did not start in 2014, but 27 years ago in Georgia and he had his own attitude to this war. *Call Sign "Banderas"* is exactly the film he wanted to shoot.

The basis of Serhii Dziuba and Artemii Kirsanov's screenplay is the diary of a national guard Serhii Bashkov, call sign "Indian", from the 93<sup>rd</sup> brigade, and the stories of ATO soldiers.

The beginning of the film is impressive: the local militant Liokha, under the command of a Russian officer, shoots at the houses of civilians with a grenade launcher, as well as a minibus in which his compatriots are traveling, including, as it turns out later, his aunt. There are several plot lines in the film, but the main plot is about the search for an enemy saboteur, Khodok, who was holed up among ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) fighters.

The main character of the film is counter-intelligence captain Anton Saienko. His nickname is the name of the Spanish actor Antonio Banderas, although for Ukrainians this surname evokes other associations related to the person who fought for Ukrainian independence and became the symbol of its independence. Anton is going to Donbas to carry out tasks for the General Staff. Together with three scouts, he arrives at the brigade, where, according to the information received at the headquarters, there is an enemy saboteur among the Ukrainian military. They need to find him and neutralize him. Credit should be given to the actor performing the role of Anton, an actor from Dnipro's "We believe!" theater Oleh Shulha. He is convincing in the role of a smart, skillful and shrewd scout. The character with the call sign "Banderas" is recognizable and true. He is also convincing because Oleh Shulha previously starred in the film *Red* by Zaza Buadze, and since 2014 had been fighting at the front. Much later, he revealed the acting secrets of filming:

Hand-to-hand fighting in *Banderas*... It was terrible! I was always involved in sports, in the theater – in stage fighting, stage movement. I am well prepared physically. But the movie fighting became something new

for me. Especially when my opponent is 20 cm taller and 20 kilograms heavier than me.

And the final scene. According to the scenario, Liokha stepped on an anti-personnel mine, and it should have exploded. And my character was to de-mine it with a knife. But have you seen such mines at our front? They were not used. We have anti-personnel MONKs, which are placed on a stretcher, or an electro detonator, or controlled. I told Zaza that it couldn't have been the way it was written in the script. So we sat, thought a lot, the pyrotechnicians suggested something - how the separatists would put something so that Liokha would stand on the mine, and I would defuse it. And I suggested: let it be an anti-tank mine that explodes from 150 kilograms. He won't know what he stepped on, but I will. And so the final scene was born. This option is more dramatic in terms of dramaturgy, because Liokha says goodbye to life, and in a few seconds, he exhales with relief. We seem to see two different people. If in this way we avoided any nonsense and improved the film, then and we thank God for this![15]

In *Call Sign*, commands to local militants are given by Russian military personnel in well-delivered voices. The executor questions the expediency of shooting the minibus, and he hears in response: "They are disguised, Banderovites!". The Russian military, after every shelling of the civilian population, shifts the blame to the Ukrainian soldiers, and Russian television keeps talking about it. Liokha is injured, and another storyline unfolds. He is being treated by a Ukrainian military doctor. He is Saienko's childhood friend and once both were in love with the same girl. But Saienko left his home, unable to stand the rudeness of his stepfather. He started a normal life – got a good profession, status. And his friend was degrading. He says to Saienko: "If you had stayed here, you would also have been a separatist." Because the residents of Donbas were forced to live in Russian culture and watch the Russian "ZombieTube".

The search for the saboteur Khodok is unfolding according to the laws of detective films – it is an equation with many unknowns; the protagonist follows the path of trial and error until he finally discovers the truth, and the criminal appears in all his obviousness. Before neutralizing him, the protagonist must overcome him in a difficult fight, because the enemy, although wounded, is alive and dangerous. The director heightens the tension, as it should be in detective stories.

The film, unfortunately, did not have proper advertising, and thus no significant success at the box office, but it resonated with critics. The majority agreed that *Call Sign* keeps the viewer in suspense and raises important issues:

It shows the frontline hell that we do not see, thanks to such *Banderas*. It shows how Ukrainian soldiers see the war, as well as local people who were

[15] K. Stulen, *Aktor-ATOVETS' Oleh Shul'ha "Banderas": Khochu zdobuty "Oskara", pryty z nym na vybory i byty po holovah* [O. Shulha, actor and ATO veteran, "Banderas": I want to win an Oscar, come to

the election with it and beat over the heads: "Don't vote for actors!"], *Novynarnia*, 12.11.2020, <https://novynarnia.com/2020/11/12/oleh-shulga/> (accessed: 2.01.2022).

bamboozled by “ZombieTube”, and separatist traitors. And the main thing: it shows why it turned out that way and how it can be in the future [...] We already know a lot about the brutality and stupidity of local recruits in the “militia” and the meanness of the separatists. But do we know of cases when the fanatics of the pseudo-republic realized their mistake and tried to atone for their guilt by overcoming self-loathing?! Is it real? And can there be a war without it?[16]

The directors were assisted by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: fighters of the 57<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Brigade, cadets of the Odessa Military Academy, and veterans of the ATO took part in the filming. *Banderas* was honored at the I Filmmaker International Film Festival in Girona (Spain).

In 2020, the film *Mother of the Apostles* by Zaza Buadze, written by Ratkha Makaienkova and Zaza Buadze, who had already become a member of the European Film Academy by that time, was released. It was filmed by cameraman Oleksandr Zemlianyi, with music composed by Roman Hryhoriv and Illia Rozumeiko. Thanks to them and Natalia Polovynka, who sang in the film, music became one of the characters. Natalia Polovynka, Bohdan Beniuk, Oleksandr Pozharskyi, Serhii Derevianko, Stanislav Shchokin are in the main roles. The studio is Zolote Runo, and the producer Dmytro Ovechkin.

The genre affiliation of *Mother of the Apostles* to war drama is obvious: the film is made on the confrontation of the parties, shown clearly and in detail, and the final battle scene is a classic example of this genre. In the previous film, Zaza Buadze showed himself to be a master of screen battles, and this time, the battle between the Russian aggressors and Ukrainian fighters is staged dynamically, reliably and with a high degree of tension. But at the center of the story is not a soldier, not a commander, not an ordinary soldier, but a woman; moreover, she has a peaceful profession belonging to the spiritual sphere. Sofia Kulyk is a folklorist and performer of rare, little-known songs and spiritual chants. Her son is a military pilot. While carrying out the task of delivering humanitarian cargo, the plane he was piloting is shot down on occupied territory. The mother's search for her pilot son on the territory of Donbas which is not controlled by Ukraine, full of hope that he is alive, becomes the main plot line. But the picture is not only about Sofia Petrivna: this woman personifies those mothers who saved our soldiers and who lost their sons in the war.

The director raised the theme of the mother to an emotional and artistic height. Her search and rescue of Ukrainian soldiers forms the core of the drama – it is clearly structured, tense and sharp. The basis is again a real story, when in 2014, a Ukrainian transport plane which was supplying food to the fighters was shot down in Donbas. The guys who were there had to eject and survive. In the film, Sofia Petrivna, having seen this message on TV, goes to the east to look for her pilot

[16] K. Petrenko, op. cit.

son. She finds the young men, one of them was in the hospital under guard. And with the help of a man she meets on the way to Donbas, Sofiia manages to save him. Indeed, she is helped by the people she was brought together with by fate. A Ukrainian scout, who was among the separatists, helps her as well. She witnesses the massacre of civilians by the Russian military Orc.

The image of the mother becomes the center of this dramatic film. The actress does not try to follow the dynamics of the action, but rather leads the dramatic arc, transforming her character from an individual story into an archetype. It is no coincidence that her profession and vocation is folklore, and she relies on ancient spiritual chants as roots that nourish and guide her. [...] The performance of Natalia Polovynka from Lviv, who is originally from Vinnytsia region and has devoted a significant part of her life to researching and interpreting ancient Ukrainian chants, is a good reason to go to the movies.[17]

This critic Kateryna Slipchenko reminds us that the authors, thanks to the precisely chosen performer of the main role, went beyond the canons of the military drama and managed to enrich it.

As the director, Zaza Buadze, said:

I started working on the film unexpectedly, when there was such an overabundance of script material that we could no longer deal with. The authors tried to include so many parallel lines in it that it was already unclear who the film was about. Together, we rejected seven or nine options, but the script was still endless. Then I turned to the producers and my colleague Ratkha Makeienkova: "Give me three days to rewrite everything at my own discretion. If it doesn't work, let it be, but it's worth a try". I assumed that we didn't have a plot that could be explained in one sentence. Why was this important? God created the world as an exciting story. And despite any deviations, cinema stubbornly returns to a simple, well-told story, relatively speaking, to Homer and Aristotle. The artist gave mankind the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey", the logician proved that a work of fiction should have a beginning, middle and end. That is why, while welcoming the most daring experiments in cinema, I believe that we in Ukraine today must speak about our own things, and in a language familiar to the audience. We have plenty of problems and collisions that bring suffering to people, and all of them can become material for cinematography of the highest level, giving emotions of considerable tension.

The most striking line we had was the story of a mother – Sofiia Kulyk, who goes to the occupied, hostile territory to find her son from a plane shot down by mercenaries. And what is this, if not the situation of Orpheus descending into hell? So when I freed the plot from extraneous themes, everything fell into place. After all, the myth not only reveals the eerie meaning of today's events, it even sets the mandatory types on the hero's path – a guide, a mentor, an anti-hero.[18]

[17] K. Slipchenko, "The Mother of Apostles": between drama and action movie, Zaxid, 3.12.2020, [https://zaxid.net/statti\\_tags0974/](https://zaxid.net/statti_tags0974/) (accessed: 18.01.2022).

[18] Z. Buadze, *Bulo davnye bazhannya znyaty film pro zhinku* [There was a long-standing desire to make a movie about a woman], "Kino-Teatr" 2021, no. 2(154), p. 26.



Subtext is highly valued in a work of art. In *Mother of the Apostles*, it is read as the presence of God's providence, which helps Sofiia Petrivna to save the crew. She is helped by the fact that there are still people in Donbas who still show signs of faith. On the contrary, the mind of the Russian mercenary Orc is clouded by anesthesia of power, and he has nothing left but the thirst to kill – the actor Stanislav Shchokin conveys this very accurately. The difference between the desire to save and the desire to destroy people was very strong in the film. The critic Oleksandr Sakva emphasized it thus:

In *Mother of the Apostles*, the spiritual song to which Sofiia Kulyk refers has nothing to do with the songs sung by residents of the occupied territories. We know it a priori, and we know it from experience. Our songs and theirs are different! And this watershed is for an immeasurably indefinite time! Because until the Russians, who rule that land, eradicate the imperial code of invaders and enslavers from their mentality, there can be no question of any human unity: here the limit of desires is peaceful coexistence.[19]

Zaza Buadze replied:

The horror is that the mental difference of people on both sides of the demarcation line really divides Ukraine irreparably. The occupied territory is now a poisoned land. This is not a reason for arrogance for the residents of the “mainland” country, but this situation should give rise to a desire to act immediately.[20]

The film-making group of professionals worked on the film harmoniously, which gave a significant result and wide recognition.

“In addition to director Zaza Buadze – Natalia Polovynka spoke at a meeting with the audience in Vinnytsia – I worked with cinematographer Oleksandr Zemlianyi. They went through a very powerful film school and with this film pushed me to the world stage, which should be a perspective for both actors and Ukrainian cinema.”[21]

In the space of two years, the film won more than 60 awards at international film festivals in many countries of the world, which is an absolute record for Ukrainian cinema. The lead actress aptly said about the importance of these awards: “I am very happy about the victories of the film because every prize of our film is a step towards victory in this war. The war is on all fronts and the invisible fronts are even more decisive than the visible ones. A war with weapons is simply a manifested reality.”[22]

The situation in Ukraine requires a cinematic hero who would inspire and be worth emulating. The movie *Mother of Apostles* responded

[19] Ibidem.

[20] Ibidem.

[21] R. Tyshchenko-Lamanskyi, “*Stalosya shchos' bil'she, nizh kino*”. *Natalya Polovynka pro ziomky fil'mu „Maty Apostoliv”* [“*Something more than a movie happened*”. *Natalia Polovynka about the filming of*

“*The Mother of Apostles*”], Your city, no date, [https://tvoemisto.tv/exclusive/stalosya\\_shchos\\_bil'she\\_nizh\\_kino\\_natalya\\_polovynka\\_pro\\_ziomky\\_fil'mu\\_maty\\_apostoliv\\_125416.html](https://tvoemisto.tv/exclusive/stalosya_shchos_bil'she_nizh_kino_natalya_polovynka_pro_ziomky_fil'mu_maty_apostoliv_125416.html) (accessed: 20.10.2022).

[22] Ibidem.

to this request. The heroine is a woman, and her fearlessness and the way she is not afraid to talk to the locals prove it.

For all the clarity of the story, the film allows each viewer to find what they think is most important. The drama demanded an apotheosis in the ending, but it did not become pathetic, because the pain of the mother who finds his grave instead of her son is too strong. That's why the character of Sofiia was emphasized – she managed to save three young men. The image was based on the purification of everyday life, which was cautious but steady.

On August 24, 2022, on the Independence Day of Ukraine, under martial law, Marian Bushan's film *Sniper. The White Raven* was released. It is a reflection on the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014, which has now become a bloody wound all over Ukraine.

The beginning of the film is domestic in its nature – we see an ordinary and, at the same time, unusual young couple, who refused the benefits of civilization. The protagonist is a paradoxical one: at the beginning, he is a peace-loving math teacher, an ecologist who lives near Horlivka in Donbas and teaches at a school. A capable teacher, he loves his profession, but not all is well: among the students there is someone who expresses an aggressive attitude towards his Ukrainian language and his beliefs. Mykola (Pavlo Aldoshyn) loves his wife (Maryna Koshkina), who is expecting a child, they live in a “hole” that he built from industrial waste and managed to establish a life.

The enemy breaks into this well-established peaceful life, kills his wife and burns down his home. After a smooth flow, an abrupt and tragic drama begins, and followed by the war story of the protagonist Mykola Voronenko. Mykola joins the Ukrainian army and, after persistent training, becomes a skilled sniper, where his mathematical talent and ability to quickly calculate the distance to the target to be neutralized comes in handy. The character's evolution is determined by the events of the war.

Once again, as in previous films, the director (he is also the co-writer of the screenplay) uses real events as a basis, and the prototype of his character, a mathematician and ecologist, a graduate of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Mykola Voronin, is the other co-writer. This image was masterfully embodied by the actor Pavlo Aldoshyn, who is currently fighting at the front.

*Sniper. The White Raven* had a limited release in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the USA before its screening in Ukraine. Recognized international publications praised the film.

“The Los Angeles Times” emphasized the relevance and significance of the film. “Like many other movies trailing a lone gunslinger, “*Sniper. The White Raven*” builds to a tense face-off, which for our hero comes to represent a small measure of justice. The story's beginning in such a tranquil place makes its ultimate devotion to vengeance somewhat difficult to comprehend – though, one might argue, so is an imperialist war.”

“The New York Times” noted the director’s mastery in combining genres: “Bushan employs different styles throughout the film, revealing a knack for dynamic action that his more low-key first half-hour doesn’t suggest. He delivers the goods for anyone looking for an intense war movie – but he doesn’t let the shooting start until everyone understands the stakes.[23]

When the film crew finished shooting *The Raven* in 2020, they could not have imagined that the footage shot in winter would turn out to be prophetic, that February 24, 2022 would change the life of every Ukrainian, dividing it into “before” and “after.” The film reminds us that the war knocked on peaceful Ukrainian homes eight years ago, and all this time Ukrainian soldiers have been bravely defending their homeland, just like the film’s protagonist, sniper Mykola Voronenko.

There are wars of aggression waged by countries whose rulers want to seize other people’s lands under false pretenses, destroy the population and their material possessions. And there are just wars, when people defend their homeland without sparing their lives. There is such a thing as the strength of spirit, against which there are no weapons and against which evil and hatred are powerless. Ukraine has been a battlefield for centuries, and in the early twentieth century it was occupied by the Russian Bolsheviks. The Russian empire, which collapsed for the second time in 1991, proved resilient and resumed its military aggression, first in the Caucasus and since 2014 in Ukraine. These actions of the invader have been tempering the will and courage of Ukrainian patriots for eight years, including the filmmakers, who recorded historical events and continue to do so in documentaries and feature films.

## Summary

Ukrainian filmmakers had to master a new genre, war drama, and involve other genres such as detective stories and even adventure films in their war stories. Some of them use archetypes in their storytelling, and in such films you can read eternal themes and conflicts. We must pay tribute to the directing and cinematography skills, and the artists’ indifference to the stories they have chosen. The filmmakers did not repeat existing models, because Ukrainian war drama is not a game of war, but the truth of war. They were aware of national heroism when the armed forces, the territorial defense forces, and volunteers stood up to defend Ukraine for those for whom the slogans “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!” have a sacred meaning. That is why the films in question have rejuvenated the genre, bringing into it the living spirit of current events that Ukraine has been experiencing since 2014.

*Translation: Olga Grabar*

[23] Cited by I. Marichka, “Snayper. Bilyy voron” – tse of revenge], Lvivska Poshta, 24.08.2022, <https://www.istoriya pomsty> [“Sniper. The White Raven” is a story [lvivpost.net/kultura/n/48719](https://www.lvivpost.net/kultura/n/48719) (accessed: 20.08.2022).

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