

## ***Our Daily War* as a Window to the World: Shaping International Perception of Ukraine**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents research on Andrey Kurkov's sequel to the diary series "Our Daily War" as a unique literary document that records not only the chronicle of war events in Ukraine but also the author's deeply personal experiences and observations of life in the country during the war. This article analyses how the author's view, through the prism of everyday situations and reflections, reveals the multifaceted nature of Ukrainian culture and its defining role in shaping international perceptions of Ukraine.*

*The study shows that "Our Daily War" goes beyond the traditional military narrative, focusing on the resilience of Ukrainian identity, manifested in the preservation and respect for traditions and a persistent desire for an ordinary life despite constant threats. Analysing Kurkov's diary entries, the article reveals how these cultural aspects become a powerful tool for providing the European community with a completely new perception of the country, reflecting the social and political changes.*

*It should also be noted that "Our Daily War" is regarded as an important means of communicating with the world. It has been observed that Kurkov's diary transmits to the international community both the facts of the war and the rich culture of the Ukrainian people, their values and aspirations. This helps dismantle simplistic, stereotypical ideas about Ukraine, fostering a deeper, more objective understanding of it as a distinctive nation with its own history and culture.*

**Keywords:** *chronicles, international perception, culture, memory.*

### **Introduction**

Andrey Kurkov is widely recognised as an outstanding Ukrainian novelist, often acknowledged as "one of Ukraine's greatest novelists" by publications such as the New York Times. Kurkov has firsthand experience of the conflict that began in 2022, having lived as an internally displaced person and refugee before returning to his home city. This personal immersion in the unfolding crisis lends his writing an undeniable authenticity and immediacy. Beyond his fiction, the writer has become an essential voice for Ukraine on the global stage, publishing in newspapers and magazines worldwide since the start of the full-scale invasion. His former role as president of PEN Ukraine further strengthens his position as a leading cultural and intellectual ambassador for his homeland. His latest work, *Our Daily War* (2024), continues the diary series begun with

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*Diary of an Invasion* and stands as one of the most significant literary documents of wartime in Ukraine. It records daily life from August 2022 to April 2024, depicting a society's endurance amid existential threat. Through short, reflective entries, Kurkov captures moments of fear, humour, solidarity, and quiet perseverance, offering a comprehensive and multifaceted view of everyday life in Ukraine amid the conflict.

### **The war diary as a literary and historical genre**

Although known as one of Ukraine's leading fiction writers, A. Kurkov turned to the diary form, adopting it as a means of witnessing and documenting the lived experience of war. This shift from fiction to non-fiction emphasises the profound impact of the invasion, presenting a reality that goes beyond fictional narratives. War diaries form a highly significant literary and historical genre, offering unique personal insight into the struggles and emotions of individuals involved in conflicts. These accounts show both individual experiences and contribute to broader collective narratives, acting as fundamental reflections of identity and vital sources of cultural memory. Diaries record historical events while also providing access to personal perspectives. It is common for people to begin diary writing when faced with "something extraordinary," marking a clear transition from a previously stable social situation to a new, unprecedented reality (Pukhonska 2020: 211).

Wartime diaries are a form of documentary literature in which individuals record their personal experiences, perceptions, and reflections during periods of armed conflict (Kulinska 2021: 25).

The diary's value for analysis arises from a profound synergy between its defining characteristics and core principles. The diary, with its intimate, real-time perspective, offers a unique micro-level perspective into the genesis and negotiation of collective images. Formal literary genres tend to frame identity retrospectively, through selection and construction, while the diary conveys it with immediacy and spontaneity, granting access to the evolving process of self-definition (Kulinska 2021: 26).

The genre is characterised by several key features. Firstly, it offers a personal perspective, providing a firsthand view of the conflict from the diarist's unique point. Secondly, these diaries powerfully convey the emotional and psychological impact of war on individuals, documenting their fears, hopes, and coping mechanisms in the face of challenges. Thirdly, while deeply personal, war diaries also contribute significantly to the historical context, detailing daily life, prevailing conditions, and specific incidents during wartime, thereby enriching the broader historical record. A crucial characteristic is the act of witnessing. The author acts as a witness whose individual point of view goes beyond the personal to formulate the story of the social and historical groups to which he belongs. Furthermore, writing a diary

often involves identity exploration, serving as a self-referential experience. Finally, the very concept of chronological record enhances diary writing, structuring the narrative and facilitating an understanding of experience over time (Pukhonska 2020: 212).

The diarist's personal subjectivity serves as a medium through which a collective identity is not merely passively recorded but actively, and often subconsciously, processed and articulated. In recording their private reality and continually reconstituting the self, the diarist simultaneously participates in a dialogical exchange with the wider social and cultural narratives that shape and surround them.

Because diaries capture experiences close to the moment of their occurrence, they provide an unmediated record of thought, emotion, and perception. This immediacy reduces retrospective bias, making diaries not only convincing literary texts but also valuable empirical data for understanding human behaviour and cultural attitudes (Pukhonska 2020: 219).

Among the various subgenres of diary writing, wartime diaries are particularly significant for the research. Written under conditions of existential threat, disruption, and heightened awareness of national belonging, these diaries often crystallise images of both the diarist's own nation and the perceived enemy or ally. Their immediacy and temporal proximity to the events of war mean that they capture attitudes and perceptions without the distance or revision typical of memoirs and historical accounts (Kulinska 2021: 31). In wartime diaries, the diarist's reflections frequently merge the personal with the collective. Individual experiences – bombings, displacements, encounters with soldiers, or food shortages – become symbols of a nation's suffering or resilience. Thus, the diary serves as a space where private life intersects with collective identity, producing an image of the country as seen from within. These representations are rarely neutral: they frequently emphasise themes of national resilience and moral authority, thereby contributing to the symbolic construction of the nation in literature (Kulinska 2021: 31).

At the same time, wartime diaries are filled with depictions of the enemy. These images, ranging from dehumanisation to reluctant acknowledgement of shared humanity, reveal the deep tensions and stereotypes that war intensifies. They also construct images of allies or neutral parties, often idealising them as moral or cultural counterpoints. In this way, wartime diaries provide a range of national images that reflect both the diarist's subjectivity and the wider ideological environment in which they write (Kulinska 2021: 32).

In the contemporary context, diaries emerging from conflicts such as the war in Ukraine continue this tradition. Personal accounts of survival, displacement, and resistance do not merely narrate events; they actively shape

how Ukraine is imagined by its citizens and the international community. These texts foster a renewed sense of national identity, while simultaneously offering the world a narrative of Ukraine as a nation of resilience, suffering, and democratic aspiration in the face of aggression (Pukhonska 2020: 220).

Thus, wartime diaries encode both the intimate voice of the individual and the collective image of the nation, mediating between personal experience and the symbolic construction of national identity on the global stage.

### **Central themes and narratives in the wartime diary**

Andrey Kurkov's *Our Daily War* exemplifies the inherent characteristics of the war diary tradition. His work provides an invaluable insight into the history, politics and culture of Ukraine.

*Our Daily War* is a powerful and deeply personal sequel to the author's initial *Diary of an Invasion*. Published in English on 18 July 2024 by Open Borders Press, this volume continues his chronicle of life during the war. The analysis aims to discover how this non-fiction account influences international perceptions of Ukraine after the war began.

This diary provides a vivid and comprehensive chronicle of Ukrainian life and thought during the ongoing conflict, spanning 1 August 2022 to 22 April 2024. The book sets itself apart by offering a human perspective on wartime events, moving beyond conventional military narratives to deeply explore the daily realities, thoughts, and emotional responses of ordinary Ukrainians.

Central to *Our Daily War* is the exploration of several core themes, which collectively reflect the resilience, identity, and moral fortitude of the Ukrainian people during the ongoing conflict. One of the most prominent themes is resistance and solidarity. A. Kurkov emphasises the determination of ordinary citizens to maintain their routines despite the pervasive threats caused by war.

For example, he writes:

Refusing to hide in bomb shelters or to put their lives on hold until the end of the war, Ukraine's farmers continue preparing their fields and allotments for the sowing season. Of course, those who were mobilised into the army can only dream of returning to their former life. They may come back on short leave – barely enough time to see family and friends. Those with light or moderate injuries can spend a little more time at home after treatment and may even be able to arrange a temporary return to their pre-war activities (Kurkov 2024: 286).

This excerpt demonstrates how everyday life acts as a form of cultural and moral resistance. By emphasising everyday routines such as farming, the author suggests that survival is both physical and psychological as well as

social. These routines strengthen collective solidarity and show how cultural practices maintain identity even in extreme conditions (Belimova 2024: 17).

Kurkov addresses the imperative of Ukrainian identity and cultural preservation, another significant theme, and the human cost of war, which he portrays with both immediacy and empathy. He observes:

Ukraine is a country of traumatised people. The scope of the trauma can vary greatly. Many have lost not only their homes but also loved ones and relatives. Many have witnessed death up close and narrowly escaped death themselves. Many Ukrainians living far from the front lines have heard the explosions of rockets and drones and seen the consequences of air strikes... (Kurkov 2024: 192)

This depiction underscores the pervasive psychological and social effects of the conflict. Kurkov's focus on personal suffering, displacement, and the interruption of daily life, such as children's education, emphasises that the consequences of war extend far beyond the battlefield. By documenting these experiences, Kurkov provides an invaluable insight into the multifaceted dimensions of civilian trauma, contributing to the historical record while fostering empathy among international readers (Belimova 2024: 18).

Moreover, the author reflects on the extraordinary emotional and moral strength of ordinary Ukrainians, which constitutes the following significant theme of extraordinary resilience and adaptation:

My hopes and reality do not coincide. The reality is much more complicated and dramatic. It forces Ukrainians to dig deep for additional energy and faith, to remain strong and not to break down. For some it has proved too much. But Ukraine is holding on. We were taught from childhood that good always triumphs over evil. (Kurkov 2024: 301).

This quote highlights individuals' ability to adapt to extreme circumstances while upholding ethical and cultural values. The writer presents resilience not as abstract heroism but as a lived experience, reflected in the everyday actions and coping strategies of people. He also highlights the continuation of normal life, with its challenges and routines amidst chaos, demonstrating how humour and creativity help maintain social cohesion.

Despite tragic news daily, Ukrainians have not lost their sense of humour. Jokes are probably the cheapest way to maintain optimism. The National Bank's instruction to keep exchange rates in a state of semi-secrecy has spawned dozens, if not hundreds, of anecdotes, jokes, and cartoons (Kurkov 2024: 13).

Humour here acts as a tool for psychological survival, helping people to navigate fear and uncertainty while maintaining community bonds. His narrative shows that keeping everyday life, including cultural rituals and social interactions, is a vital part of collective resilience.

Finally, the author's narrative style is characterised by its insider's perspective, which blends personal reflection with social critique:

It is difficult for me to remember life in pre-war Ukraine. It is not that I have forgotten, not entirely. It is just that it now seems like a fairy tale, like something I heard about as a child when I believed in magic... (Kurkov 2024: 141)

Through such reflections, he documents real experience and positions individual memory within broader cultural and historical contexts. He critically examines internal challenges, including governmental corruption and harsh mobilisation policies, alongside the widespread human suffering caused by the conflict. Despite these difficulties, a persistent sense of hope and defiance penetrates his writing:

Despite this, despite the struggle to maintain any semblance of normal life, despite the anguish of losses and the anxiety about a future that is impossible to imagine, Ukrainians are trying to prove to the world that they are O.K., to prove to the world that they can survive... (Kurkov 2024: 133).

Furthermore, the emphasis on "how an ordinary life became extraordinary" and the detailed descriptions of commonplace yet substantial adaptations – such as children learning in bomb shelters or the continuation of Christmas celebrations amidst conflict – highlight the compelling power of the ordinary in extraordinary times:

Many Ukrainian children could not go to school on September 1 this year, the day traditionally celebrated as Knowledge Day. They study online because their schools have been destroyed by Russian rockets, or because their schools are not equipped with bomb shelters. Those schools that have not been damaged and do have bomb shelters live a special wartime life. The shelters are prepared for school lessons, and some even have high-speed internet. Children must be prepared to go to the bomb shelter at any moment, and nobody knows how long an air raid will last. (Kurkov 2024: 49)

By focusing on the daily lives of citizens, the book humanises the conflict, making it relatable and emotionally accessible to international readers. This approach shifts the perception from abstract geopolitical events to the personal impact of the war on individuals, thereby deepening empathy and engagement. This emphasis on universal human experiences of survival, hope,

and humanity proves more effective in shaping global understanding than analyses that focus solely on strategic or military aspects.

Reflecting on the purpose of writing during wartime, A. Kurkov considers literature a moral and communicative means that transcends national and temporal boundaries. His reflections move beyond the documentation of daily events to consider the broader significance of artistic testimony in moments of collective crisis (Belimova 2024: 23). This conceptualisation of the writer's role is most explicitly expressed in his observation:

If journalists tell the news to the people of their country, writers and poets tell the whole world and future generations. Somebody still needs to write (Kurkov 2024: 144)

This statement defines the writer's unique moral and communicative responsibility in times of war. He asserts the enduring and transnational significance of the writer's contribution to historical record and cultural memory.

Journalists primarily engage in the reader's cognitive understanding of events. Writers, however, activate the readers' emotional and moral awareness. By using literary techniques – such as Kurkov's humour, contrast, and flashbacks to document the Ukrainian war – literature creates a narrative link, allowing the whole world to feel and internalise the national tragedy. The emotional depth and ambiguity of literary language enable a more profound moral witnessing, which is vital for sustained international solidarity and remembrance.

It also seems necessary to demonstrate the explicit defense of Ukrainian multiculturalism, focusing on the following statement:

Ukraine was and remains a multi-ethnic state with a dozen active national minorities, each with its own culture and literature, often written in its own language – Crimean Tatar, Hungarian, Russian, Gagauz among them. I see all these languages and cultures as part of my Ukrainianness. Tolerance in inter-ethnic relations is a Ukrainian tradition, and the harmony that flows from such tolerance should again flourish in my country, once we have peace (Kurkov 2024: 161).

This excerpt expresses a vision of Ukraine as a multicultural nation, deeply rooted in traditions of coexistence and mutual respect. His assertion that Ukraine “was and remains a multi-ethnic state” highlights the inclusive and composite nature of Ukrainian identity, which encompasses a multitude of national minorities, including Crimean Tatars, Hungarians, Russians, Romanians, and Gagauz, among others.

By positioning multilingualism and multiculturalism as integral components of Ukrainian identity, the writer advances an inclusive and democratic conception of nationhood. His concept of tolerance in interethnic relations not only evokes a historical model of coexistence but also points to a future-oriented vision of social harmony that he suggests to be restored after peace has been achieved (Belimova 2024: 25).

From a broader analytical perspective, this passage performs an important cultural and diplomatic function. It demonstrates to international readers that Ukraine's struggle for sovereignty is simultaneously a struggle to preserve a diverse and tolerant society. Kurkov demonstrates an image of a pluralistic and humanistic nation whose values resonate with global democratic ideals. Thus, the passage serves not merely as a statement of cultural identity but as an act of cultural representation and international communication, reinforcing the country's place within the wider European and global cultural space.

All the above-mentioned quotes illustrate the function of Kurkov's diary as both a historical record and a cultural representation, portraying Ukraine as a resilient and ethically grounded nation to an international audience. By integrating individual experiences with broader social and cultural observations, he constructs a narrative that operates simultaneously at personal, collective, and transnational levels.

### Critical reception and international response

In addition to the diaries' key topics, this book has received widespread critical acclaim from prominent media outlets, with reviewers consistently highlighting its vivid, moving, and insightful portrayal of life during the Russian invasion. Critics have praised the book for its ability to convey the profound human experience of the conflict. These are the leading media publications and key focus from their reviews on the book.

Publication	Reviewer	Quote	Key Focus
<i>The Times</i>	Marc Bennetts	<i>"A vivid, moving and sometimes funny account of the reality of life during Russia's invasion."</i>	vivid, moving, nuanced reality, humour
<i>The Times</i>	Helen Davies	<i>"Immediate and important... an insider's account of how an ordinary life became extraordinary. It is also about survival, hope and humanity."</i>	immediate, important, insider's view, human spirit



Cultural Intertexts  
Year XII Volume 15 (2025)

<b>New York Times</b>	Giles Harvey	<i>"Ukraine's greatest novelist is fighting for his country."</i>	author as national defender
<b>Guardian</b>	Blake Morrison	<i>"The author's on-the-ground account is packed with surprising details about the human effects of the Russian assault. His voice is genial but also impassioned... Ukraine, he says, "will either be free, independent and European, or it will not exist at all". That's why the war has to be fought, with no concession of territory. And he remains quietly hopeful that it will be won."</i>	impassioned, existential fight, hope
<b>Spectator</b>	Sam Leith	<i>"From the grim incredulity at Russians massing on the border to the displacement of millions of people, this is an insider's account of how an ordinary life became extraordinary. It is also about survival, hope and humanity"</i>	survival, the enduring nature of hope, and the claim of humanity

The consistent positive critical reception, with descriptors such as "uplifting and utterly defiant" and "immediate and important", combined with the "Best European Book" award (Transfuge Prize in France), demonstrates that the book is not merely seen as a journalistic account but as a work of notable literary worth. When a book about a conflict gains such high literary recognition, it elevates the narrative beyond short-term news reportage. It transforms the human story of the war into literature, thereby shaping international perception at a deeper, more enduring cultural level rather than through fleeting daily news broadcasts.

Western media, particularly Marc Bennet from *The Times*, have characterised Andrey Kurkov's work as a compelling and affectively powerful narrative that combines detailed realism with moments of humour to depict life during the invasion. The term "*vivid*" highlights Kurkov's detailed, immersive depiction of everyday life under conflict, reflecting the physical and psychological landscapes of Ukrainian society. By emphasising the work as moving, the critique recognises the emotional resonance of the diary, particularly in portraying individual suffering, resilience and ethical dilemmas faced by

ordinary citizens. Notably, the acknowledgement of humour illustrates Kurkov's ability to capture the persistence of everyday life even amidst extreme adversity. Such a combination of vividness, emotional depth, and subtle humour positions *Our Daily War* as a distinctive form of war literature that transcends conventional military reportage, offering international readers empathetic engagement and nuanced insight into the lived realities of Ukrainians. Reviewer Marc Bennetts thus reflects the book's dual function as a historical document and as a source for shaping global perception of Ukraine, emphasising human agency, cultural resilience, and the ethical dimensions of civilian experience during wartime (Muhammad 2025: 22).

Helen Davies's recognition of Andrey Kurkov's diary as a significant work during the ongoing conflict that offers an insider perspective on the transformation of everyday life highlights the diary's unique capacity to convey the experience of civilians during wartime from a first-person perspective, exploring themes of survival, resilience, and the enduring human spirit. The description of the work as *immediate* reflects a recording of events that preserves the urgency and authenticity of everyday life under conflict. By highlighting how *ordinary life became extraordinary*, H. Davies points to the transformative effects of war on routine, behaviour, social practices, and personal attitude, illustrating the subtle heroism inherent in adaptation. The references to survival, hope, and humanity situate the diary within a broader ethical and humanistic framework, emphasising the enduring psychological, moral, and cultural capacities of Ukrainians despite pervasive violence and disruption (Peskova 110).

Giles Harvey of the New York Times recognises A. Kurkov as one of Ukraine's greatest novelists, who actively participates in the country's struggle, integrating his literary influence with his national commitment. This remark highlights the interconnectedness of personal, cultural, and national identity in the author's work, showing that his contributions go beyond literary creation to active participation in Ukraine's social and political life. Moreover, the creative output of A. Kurkov is inseparable from civic responsibility and political engagement, demonstrating that this diary serves as a source of cultural preservation and international communication.

The perspective offered by Sam Leith resonates with the preceding critical observation, further emphasising the text's transformation of individual experience into a reflection of collective upheaval. He highlights the diary's capacity to document both large-scale geopolitical events and their intimate, human consequences, demonstrating the interplay between public crisis and private experience. By framing the work as an insider's account, Leith underscores Kurkov's unique position as both witness and participant, offering readers detailed insights into Ukrainian realities. The references to survival, hope, and humanity place the diary within a humanistic and ethical

perspective, illustrating the resilience and emotional endurance of ordinary citizens. Furthermore, Leith's appraisal is consistent with earlier evaluations by other Western commentators, collectively reinforcing the perception of *the diary* as not merely a chronicle of events but also a means for shaping international understanding of Ukraine. These similar views demonstrate that Kurkov's narrative provides global audiences with an empathetic, multidimensional perspective on the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of the ongoing conflict.

### **The role of the diary in shaping global perception of Ukraine**

Kurkov's narrative style, characterised by its blend of "bitingly satirical, tragic, humorous and heartfelt" elements, makes the grim realities of war accessible and emotionally resonant. The book's consistent focus on survival, hope and humanity fosters profound empathy and connection with the Ukrainian people. The author effectively generates international support for Ukraine's sovereignty and self-determination (Belimova 2024: 23).

The consistent critical description of the book as "moving", "heartfelt", and "uplifting" clearly indicates a substantial emotional impact on its readers. While policy decisions are often rooted in strategic and economic considerations, public opinion and empathy play a crucial role in shaping political will for international intervention or sustained support. *Our Daily War*, by evoking a deep emotional resonance with the Ukrainian experience, can subtly but effectively influence public opinion in Western nations. This, in turn, can create a more favourable environment for continued political support for Ukraine, positioning the book as a form of soft power that indirectly shapes international policy.

Furthermore, the narrative details the efforts to preserve cultural life even during wartime. This portrayal of the war not simply as a territorial dispute but as an existential fight for cultural identity resonates deeply with international audiences who value cultural diversity and self-determination. By emphasising this vital cultural aspect of the conflict, the author shapes global perception, transforming the struggle for Ukraine into a universal fight against cultural eradication. This wider perspective can attract backing from various stakeholders, including cultural institutions, human rights organisations, and individuals worldwide, thereby broadening the book's influence beyond traditional political spheres and bolstering Ukraine's image as a defender of core European values (Peskova 2023: 117).

### **Conclusions**

Thus, it is worth noting that *Our Daily War* stands as a profound testimony to the extraordinary resilience and defiance of the Ukrainian people. This convincing work is significant not only as a vital historical document,

recording history as it happens, but also as a tremendous literary achievement.

The book serves as a “window to the world” and continues to promote global awareness and engagement. It offers unmatched insight into the complex realities of life in Ukraine during the ongoing conflict. Kurkov’s distinctive voice, combined with the spirit of the diary genre, effectively shapes international perception by fostering deep empathy, countering widespread misinformation, and defending Ukraine’s cultural and political sovereignty. Through its subtle depiction of both hardship and hope, the diary urges readers to connect with the human side of the conflict, turning abstract geopolitical events into relatable personal struggles. The book’s widespread critical praise and prestigious international awards highlight its success in engaging and influencing global audiences, securing its position as a key text for understanding contemporary Ukraine. In conclusion, *Our Daily War* acts as a powerful call for continued critical awareness and sustained support for Ukraine’s fight for sovereignty, freedom, and national resilience.

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