

Yara Arts Group and the Ukrainian Museum present:

# ZHADAN & FRIENDS 2021

## PROSE:

April 2021  
[www.yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.yaraartsgroup.net)

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## ZHADAN & FRIENDS 2021: PROSE

Serhiy Zhadan reads from *his novel The Orphanage* in Ukrainian  
and Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler reads the English translation  
he did with Reilly Costigan-Humes

Introduction and moderation by Maria Genkin

three video interludes with photographs by Eugeniy Maloletka  
and music by Julian Kytasty, video created by Waldemart Klyuzko

entrance and exit music by Julian Kytasty

virtual event directed by Virlana Tkacz  
graphic design: Waldemart Klyuzko,  
tech support: Chris Ignacio

premiere: April 20, 2021

**SERHIY ZHADAN** was born in the Luhansk Region of Ukraine and educated in Kharkiv where he lives today. He is the author of twelve books of poetry. His prose works include *Voroshilovgrad*, *Mesopotamia* and *The Orphanage*. He is the front man for the band Zhadan and the Dogs, and has collaborated with Yara Arts Group since 2002. Yale University Press published his selected poems as *What We Live For/What We Die For* translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps in 2019 and this year it published the translation of his novel *The Orphanage* by Reilly Costigan-Humes and Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler.

**REILLY COSTIGAN-HUMES & ISAAC STACKHOUSE WHEELER** are a team of literary translators who work with Russian and Ukrainian, known for their renderings of novels by contemporary authors including Serhiy Zhadan, Dmitry Lipskerov, and Andriy Lyubka. Their translations have appeared in numerous journals, including Little Star, Trafika Europe, and the Tupelo Quarterly. Wheeler is also a published poet.

### **TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST PASSAGE ZHADAN READS:**

Everyone listens. And they hear the wind going from room to room, somewhere above them. And drafts sweeping in one smashed window and out another. They hear drops of water trickling in a broken pipe and the wind dragging old newspapers across the steps. Most important, they're standing transfixed and listening. Somewhere between the third and fourth floors, on the landing, someone's cautiously blowing on their fingers, rubbing their hands together, putting on fingerless gloves, and quietly, very quietly—so nobody, nobody at all, can hear—picking up something metal. They hear him standing up cautiously, very cautiously, crouching, looking outside, nimbly stepping over shards of broken glass, surveying the space with a trained eye, looking all around, sniffing all around, and sensing someone's presence nearby, an uninvited presence.

“Hurry,” Pasha whispers, gasping with fear. “No talking. Follow me.”

They skirt the building, one after another, and run over to the first trees, moving from trunk to trunk. From off to the side, from the rotten grass, a potent stench hits them—something poisonous even. “Don't look, don't look,” Pasha repeats to himself. He keeps running. He can hear the women's labored breathing behind him. They run over to a playground with a burned swing set and find themselves out in the open. Pasha looks around—the apartment block looms in the distance like a whale that's beached itself out of sheer despair. Black windows that look like they're stained with coal, no movement, no voices. This makes things even scarier.

### **TRANSLATION OF THE SECOND PASSAGE ZHADAN READS:**

They go across the grounds to the street, walk crouched over along a row of linden trees and get to the tram circle, run in little spurts out to the main road, trying not to stop when they're out in the open, and reach the square. They stand under some spruces and hide. On the other side of the square is the Palace of Culture. Black, burned out. A shockwave broke all the windows. It looks like a television with a missing kinescope. There are clusters of apartment buildings behind it. They can slip through the neighborhood and get to the main avenue. Just have to run across the square first. Pasha looks all around. Coast is clear. The

square's empty and quiet. Running across it shouldn't take longer than a minute. It's still scary, though. Nobody can see you, but you can't see anyone either. The moon hangs right above the Palace of Culture, seemingly prompting them. C'mon, don't waste any more time, run straight at my dead light.

“Let's go,” Pasha whispers, still not releasing the kid's hand, and they charge forward. And as soon as they move away from the merciful spruces, the ones they were hiding behind, they hear this sound coming from somewhere behind the square, from off to the side, from the road—the irreversible clatter of treads on asphalt. It isn't that close—a block away—but Pasha identifies a T-64. There's no mistaking it. “Is it following me or something?” Pasha thinks in a panic, and desperately runs forward, dragging the kid along with him. Fifty yards. The tank is very close, behind the building closest to the square. Another fifty. It's going to pop out any second now. Pasha can already feel it. Another fifty and another. It's already here, it's already barreled around the corner. Another few yards and it'll be rolling right at them. Pasha speeds up, the kid's starting to whimper. Another fifty. His boots are heavy and hot, the kind of boots that are only good for drowning in. The moon draws things closer, outlines them clearly, adding a yellowish tint and otherworldly shadows.

The rumble of the T-64 is already behind them. “Don't look back,” Pasha yells to himself. “Just don't look back, don't look back.” Several more steps, and they fly around the corner, fall onto the asphalt, onto crushed bricks, onto the empty plastic of bottles, onto dog shit and ripped playbills, tumbling and skinning their palms on sharp stones. Pasha immediately shields the kid with his body, as if that will help, as if to make sure they don't spot him. Actually, they don't spot him. The T-64 rolls toward the tram circle, toward the place they just came from, without even stopping. “Just missed each other,” Pasha thinks. “Got lucky.” He stands up, lifts the kid, who rubs his aching elbow. His jacket is ripped at his shoulder and his left sneaker is coming apart. His tears have dried, though. Just like that.

### **TRANSLATION OF THE THIRD PASSAGE ZHADAN READS:**

The ringing dissolves, time flows out, the air thins. There's no fixing anything, there's no saving anyone. The main road stretches out, just a series of snowy fields. There's so much white all around. It's as if all the other colors have disappeared and only white remains. It stretches as far as the eye can see, never-ending white, deep and unmoving, all the way out to the horizon. White fields and the black thawed streak of the road that he's following as he tries to escape, the road that ought to save him. He's running, shielding his eyes from the blinding, white mist all around, running, dragging all his fatigue, all his drenched torment. Just don't stop, don't stop no matter what. You'll make it, you will, you'll break free, you'll slip through. You'll pull it off, you will. Just a little more, a little bit more. Footsteps. The asphalt echoes hollowly.

Snowy fields approach, like the sea at high tide. The white, white surface of life. The white, white space where no one can help. And then he spots some movement. The white canvas sways ever so slightly; his retinas respond to a nearly imperceptible quivering. Black dots—one, two, three, four, five—emerge distinctly on the horizon, expand, move toward him, and in all this movement, he suddenly senses some sort of danger, something irreparable, something that will usher in the end of this, something that he has to escape—as fast as possible, as far as possible. And he's running, on the brink of exhaustion, down the black channel of the road. He runs and catches the cadenced, contentious movement of black dots on the white canvas, sees them expanding, throbbing, charging toward him, seemingly reacting to his body heat.

“Don't look,” he says to himself. “Don't look, don't, just run, run as fast as you can, until you drop, until you're out of time, run and don't look,” he orders himself. And he looks. And he clearly makes out dark dogs on the white backdrop: their heavy chests sinking into the icy expanse, their paws churning scraps of snow, their throats wailing as the warm smell of their victim reaches them more and more sharply. Closer and closer, more furiously, more consumed with the hunt, realizing that their victim won't be able to escape, that he isn't going anywhere, that he's up ahead, a few strong spurts away. Almost there, one more second, and they can pounce, sink their teeth into his neck, but he's trying to escape, trying to trick fate. He's already picking up that wet dog smell, hearing the snowy crust crunch under heavy paws, deafened by their hoarse barking that shreds the surrounding silence.

One, two, three, four, five—he jerks forward, runs, his eyes trying to latch on to anything that could save him or simply delay his death. But the space is empty, rarified, and there's just the white light that's burning his eyes, and there's so much of this light—nothing else, nothing at all, just light, that's it, nothing more. And all he can do is run—don't stop, don't turn around—until he drops, until he's out of time. How much time does he have left? “How much?” he asks himself and begins counting:

one

two

three

four

five

six

seven

eight

nine

ten

There's more and more light; it floods everything all around. There's just so much of it; it fills up everything. It's as if life consists solely of light, as if, in this light, there's no place for death.

#### **THE COMPANY for the VIRTUAL EVENT:**

**ISAAC STACKHOUSE WHEELER** is a poet and literary translator from New Hampshire, best known for his work on English renderings of Serhiy Zhadan's novels with co-translator Reilly Costigan-Humes, published by Deep Vellum and Yale University Press and positively reviewed by publications including the Los Angeles Review of Books, the New Yorker, and the Times Literary Supplement. His work has also appeared in numerous journals.

**MARIA GENKIN** was born and raised in Lviv where she attended Lvivska Polytechnica. In the summer of 1994, Maria attended HURI (Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute) where she took a Ukrainian Literature course with George Grabowicz and a theater workshop with Virlana Tkacz and Yara Arts. Maria is a member of the board of Razom for Ukraine. She is an avid reader, and co-founded the Razom Book Club, a community of engaged readers of Ukrainian literature. She has moderated events for PEN America and collaborated with Zhadan on his charity foundation.

**JULIAN KYTASTY** is a bandurist, singer, and composer whose work moves freely between the deep tradition of Ukrainian epic song and contemporary free improvisation. He has been creating music for Yara events for over twenty years. His work on Yara's *1917-2017 Tychyna, Zhadan, and the Dogs* earned him a NY Innovative Theater Award for best original score.

**EVGENIY MALOLETKA** is a Ukrainian freelance photojournalist based in Kyiv, originally from the city of Berdyansk, in eastern Ukraine. Maloletka was deeply involved in the coverage of the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014 and then started covering the conflicts in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. His work has been published in: TIME, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Der Spiegel, Newsweek, The Independent, El Pais, The Guardian and The Telegraph. He works in eastern Ukraine on assignment for Associated Press. He has worked with Yara Arts Group since 2016.

**WALDEMART KLYUZKO** is an artist from Kyiv who has collaborated with Yara Arts Group since 2010, most recently creating the set for *Opera GAZ*. He is a visual artist who has had exhibits at La MaMa Galleria, the Ukrainian Institute of America the Ukrainian Museum in New York and the Bezpala Gallery in Toronto.

**VIRLANA TKACZ** heads the Yara Arts Group and has directed thirty original shows at La MaMa Theatre in New York, as well as in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Bishkek, Ulaanbaatar, and Ulan Ude. She received an NEA Poetry Translation Fellowship for her translations with Wanda Phipps of Serhiy Zhadan's poetry.

**CHRIS IGNACIO** (tech support) works at La MaMa Experimental Theatre. He was in Yara's *Dream Bridge, Winter Songs on Mars* and *1917/2017: Tychyna, Zhadan, and the Dogs* at La MaMa.

**THE UKRAINIAN MUSEUM** was founded in 1976 by the Ukrainian National Women's League of America as a showcase for Ukrainian culture. The Museum has amassed extensive collections of folk art, fine art, and archival material. It mounts several exhibitions annually; publishes accompanying bilingual catalogues; organizes courses, workshops, and other educational programs; and hosts a variety of public events. In April 2005 the Museum moved into a new, state-of-the-art facility in New York's East Village, funded entirely by the Ukrainian American community.

**YARA ARTS GROUP** was established in 1990 and is a resident company at La MaMa, the acclaimed experimental theater in New York. Yara has created thirty-seven theatre pieces based on extensive research in Eastern Europe, Siberia and Asia, in Yara's signature style of multilingual dialogue and songs supported by evocative visuals and documentation. Yara has worked with Serhiy Zhadan since 2002. **Yara Arts Group 306 East 11th St #3B, New York, NY 10003** [yara@prodigy.net](mailto:yara@prodigy.net) [www.yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.yaraartsgroup.net)

Yara's Spring Poetry Events were made possible by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts and the Self Reliance Foundation. Since 2015 they have been hosted by the Ukrainian Museum of New York. Media partner: Razom for Ukraine.

