

The UCSD Department of Literature mourns the death of Victoria Yulivna Amelina (January 1, 1986-July 1, 2023). A member of PEN International, a finalist for the European Union Prize for Literature, and the winner of Joseph Conrad Literary Award, Amelina wrote about home, the boundlessness of that home, and passages leading to its haunted interior. Her two published full-length novels are *The Fall Syndrome: About Homo Compatients* (2014) and *Dom's Dream Kingdom* (2017), as well as a children's book, *Somebody, or Water Heart*.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Amelina joined the human rights organization Truth Hounds as a field researcher, investigating and documenting Russian war crimes in the Kherson, Kharkiv, and the Dnipro regions. "I look like I should be taking pictures of books, art, and my little son. But I document Russia's war crimes and listen to the sound of shelling, not poems," she Tweeted in 2022.

Her politics were never estranged from her writing. Her first debut novel *Fall Syndrome* dealt with the events of Maidan Revolution of Dignity and Russian invasion into Eastern Ukraine in 2014, incising a historical amnesia brought forth by the attempted, and often successful, Russification of post-Soviet states. "Though the Soviet Union collapsed decades ago, the Sovieticus syndrome hasn't been entirely eradicated. Yesterday's 'Soviet Man' has morphed into today's 'Amnesiac Man'. *Homo Sovieticus* has mutated into *Homo Oblivious*," she writes in an essay published in [\*Arrowsmith Press\*](#).

Remembrance and amnesia coalesce. Her work is a layered strata of place on a page. In an excerpt from *Dom's Dream Kingdom* (if translated literally from the Ukrainian, Дім Для Дома is titled House for House, or Home for House. In this case the protagonistic dog is named "Dom," or "House") translated by Grace Mahoney and published in [\*Alchemy\*](#) last year, Dom smells out traces of the past in Amelina's hometown of Lviv: "Here in the park are not only battles and night robberies—there are all the goodbyes and kisses, all the first steps of children—Marusia's in particular. And next to the university, that once was the Parliament of Galicia—a crown land of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there's an entire fountain of happiness."

Like a landmark imprints place, Amelina's prose is marked by precision – unlike a landmark, her precision is indelible. Its exacting narrative is concrete like a monument could be. It stands, constructed out of untold truths, sidelined stories, marking a place in time, a place in many times. In [describing a monument](#) erected in Lviv to commemorate the bygone Golden Rose Synagogue she pinpoints, "The monument transformed the space, but it can never displace the history it marks. The stories of the dead and the monuments commemorating them aren't meant to end a conversation, but rather to launch one." Amelina's prose demands truth, fulfilling its own challenge by fully acknowledging what is unknown, yet foregrounding specificity.

Amelina was aware of the complexities of home: its joys, horrors, and nicks. Its constitution lies in memory; a memory of truth. "As a writer, I tend to think of home as the narrative shared by its inhabitants...Silence creates cracks so deep that it is hardly possible to feel at home," she reflected in an essay in [\*The Guardian\*](#) (originally published in HOME/LAND/S: AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM) where her relationship to the past is supported and opened up by notions of a wider acknowledged home beyond an origin point. In this piece she references Milan Kundera's essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe," in which he quotes a telegram sent by the director of the Hungarian News Agency as Soviet forces invaded Budapest in November 1956, "We are going to die for Hungary and Europe." Histories within histories tethered together in events and writers themselves.

Amelina's dedication to preserving memory is inherently political. In "Cancel Culture vs. Execution Culture," which should be essential reading regarding the discourse around whether the world should boycott Russian culture, she notes that one of the very reasons the world is more aware of Russian cultural production than Ukrainian cultural production in the first place is the strategic, deliberate execution of a generation of Ukrainian writers, artists, and intellectuals by the Stalinist regime in the 1930s. "Now there is a real threat that Russians will successfully execute another generation of Ukrainian culture," she writes, "this time by missiles and bombs. For me, it would mean the majority of my friends get killed. For an average westerner, it would only mean never seeing their paintings, never hearing them read their poems, or never reading the novels that they have yet to write." True to her word, as part of her work with Truth Hounds, Amelina unearthed and published the 36-page occupation diary of author Volodymyr Vakulenko, who buried the diary after Russian soldiers invaded his village and was killed by the occupiers soon after. Amelina took great care to send photos of every page to the Kharkiv Literary Museum as soon as possible in order to ensure the text's survival. "Volodymyr's message was saved, even if the next day I [stepped] on some anti-infantry mine," she wrote in the foreword. "As long as a writer is read, he's alive."

Her concerns about a new "executed renaissance" of Ukrainian writers and artists proved horribly prophetic. On June 27, just five days after presenting Vakulenko's diary at Kyiv's Book Arsenal Festival, Amelina was eating with a group of Colombian writers in the Ria Lounge pizzeria in Kramatorsk, when a Russian rocket hit the restaurant. She died four days later of wounds sustained during the attack. She was 37 years old.

At the time of her death, Amelina was working on a project titled *War and Justice Diary: Looking at Women Looking at War*—an English language non-fiction book about the lives of Ukrainian women during the war, which she was meant to work on in Paris this coming fall, thanks to a scholarship from Columbia. Although there are current plans to get this particular project to publication, when we mourn Amelina we also mourn the countless works she had yet to write, the countless memories she had yet to resurrect.

Victoria Amelina was keenly aware that occupation and imperialism are mechanisms of erasure, and that, as a writer, her duty was to safeguard a sense of truth against that encroachment. As Russia's war continues its assault on Ukrainian people, cities, and histories, this tremendous loss further responsabilizes us to her project of foregrounding Ukrainian voices and narratives, and to the editorial due diligence of preserving cultural memory whenever it is being systematically exterminated. As Amelina writes in "Homo Oblivious," "Whenever the official line insists we look away, we should make it a point to take out our binoculars and our microscopes."

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