

# Ukrainian Poetry in Translation

## Special Feature—Part II



**Part II of our Special Feature dedicated to Ukrainian poetry in translation** includes the poetry of Pavlo Tychyna and Kateryna Babkina translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps, Mykola Vorobiov translated by Maria G. Rewakowicz, Serhi Zhadan translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin, Lyudmyla Khersonska translated by Grace Mahoney, Olga Livshin, and Nina Kossman, Boris Khersonsky translated by Martha M. F. Kelly, Olga Livshin, and Nina Kossman, Oleg Kadanov and Halyna Kruk translated by RB Lemberg, Iryna Starovoyt translated by Grace Mahoney, and Dmitry Blizniuk translated by Nina Kossman.

Our gratitude goes to the editors at [Lost Horse Press](#) for their unwavering support and to all the editors of journals, collections, and presses where some of these poems previously appeared. Many thanks to all the poets and translators who spread the word and sent us poems in just a few days, and to our newly appointed Translations Editor, Dana Serea, who edited this special feature.

**We'd also like to request your support** for these tremendous poets and their translators. Many of them are still stuck in Ukraine, dealing with unthinkable difficulties—so please consider donating to the organizations below.

[Red Cross](#)

[Help Ukraine Win](#)

In addition, our Romanian-American editors recommend donating to [Immigration Research Forum](#) and [Blue Heron Foundation](#), two organizations with volunteers on the border with Romanian and Moldova, helping Ukrainian refugees.

**We will return to our regular #TranslationMonth edition in September, when we're celebrating our 10 year anniversary.** Until then, please keep sharing Ukrainian voices and stand united against the horrors of this war. Thank you all for being part of this project. **#StandWithUkraine**

—The Editors

# Ukrainian Poetry in Translation

## Special Feature—Part II

### Pavlo Tychyna

*translated from the Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps*

Published in *In a Different Light: A Bilingual Anthology of Ukrainian Literature Translated into English by Virlana Tkacz as Performed by Yara Arts Group*, edited by Olha Luchuk. Lviv: Sribne Slovo, 2008.

### WAR

I lay down to sleep.  
Three angels stand at my head.  
The first angel—sees all.  
The second angel—hears all.  
The third angel—knows all.

My dream—my son.

He seems to face the enemy alone.  
They surround him, strike at his chest!  
(The first angel covers his own eyes.)

The field is flat, flat and green.  
The wind carries a tune: “Farewell, mother dear.”  
(The second angel approaches me with a cross.)

The wind cries: “Don't grieve, if he falls for his land,  
He will not die.”  
(The third angel comforts my heart.)

My dream—my son.

II  
On the right—the sun.  
On the left—the moon.  
Ahead—the stars.

I give you my blessing, son, strike back at the enemy.  
And he replies: “Mother dear!  
There is no enemy  
And there never was one.  
The only enemy  
Exists in our own hearts.  
Give me your blessing, mother, I seek a root,  
An herb to cure the insanity of men.”  
I raise my hands to the cross  
But there's nothing there.  
Silence, except the crow - caw! caw!

On the right—the sun.  
On the left—the moon.  
Ahead—the stars.



## Kateryna Babkina

Translated from the Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps

### GIVE ME A BROTHER

“Give me a brother, who can protect me,  
Who can be there every time I need him,”  
the woman begs. But the earth is silent. In the garden  
the golden shoots grow lush, but each fruit hangs down  
ominously on its long stem, like a stone.

“Give me shelter from peering, lascivious eyes,  
so no strange, unwanted hand ever reaches me.  
Hide me in the radiance and reflection of your blue depths,”  
the woman says. But the river quietly flows by.  
No, the river can’t hide her while she’s still alive.

The woman looks at the sky and says, “Upend it all.  
Now fall follows summer, before winter comes.  
There’s a time for roses and a time for bitter wormwood,  
a place for every beast, and every weed and grass,  
only I have no place of my own.” And the sky answers,  
“Make it yourself. You’re on your own now.”



**Katerina Babkina** is Ukrainian poet, prose writer and playwright, who was born in Ivano-Frankivsk and lived in Kyiv. Today she is a refugee in Poland. Her books of poetry include *Saint Elmo’s Fire* (2002), *Mustard* (2011), *Painkillers and Sleeping Pills* (2014), *Charmed for Love* (2017) and *Does Not Hurt* (2017). In 2021, her novel *My Grandfather Danced the Best* won the prestigious Angelus Award.

**Pavlo Tychyna (1891-1967)** was the most important Ukrainian poet of the 20th century. He lived in Kyiv most of his life. His first collection *Clarinets of the Sun* (1918) brought him instant recognition as the major Ukrainian poet of his time. His work in the 1920s confirmed this position. In 1927 Tychyna was harshly criticized by the Communist Party. After several years of silence he became an official ode writer of Socialist Realism and censored his own early work.

**Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps** have received the Agni Poetry Translation Prize, the National Theatre Translation Fund Award, and thirteen translation grants from the New York State Council on the Arts. *What We Live For / What We Die For: Selected Poems by Serhiy Zhadan*, with translations by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps, was published by Yale University Press in 2019. Their translations have also appeared in many literary journals and anthologies, and are integral to the theatre pieces created by Yara Arts Group.

**Virlana Tkacz** heads the Yara Arts Group and has directed almost forty original shows at La MaMa Theatre in New York, as well as in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Bishkek, Ulaanbaatar, and Ulan Ude. She has received an NEA Poetry Translation Fellowship for her translations with Wanda Phipps. [www.yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.yaraartsgroup.net)

**Wanda Phipps** is the author of the books *Mind Honey*, *Field of Wanting: Poems of Desire*, and *Wake-Up Calls: 66 Morning Poems*. She received a New York Foundation for the Arts Poetry Fellowship. Her poems have appeared in over one-hundred literary magazines and numerous anthologies.

## Mykola Vorobiov

*Translated from the Ukrainian by Maria G. Rewakowicz*

Selected Poems from the book *Mountain and Flower*, published by Lost Horse Press, 2020.

\*\*\*

are we to see light  
if darkness disappears?

a messenger testifies  
but he alone is not a testimony...

\*\*\*

what time is it?  
even in the cemetery  
this question is asked constantly...

\*\*\*

leaves are falling  
and I – as if a handless guest –  
yearn to touch something...

\*\*\*

since life has no end  
and no beginning  
each of our intentions  
has no end or beginning

\*\*\*

it gets dark so quickly...  
night falls  
to the tap of shoes...

\*\*\*

someone punctured a maple leaf  
with a needle –  
and now its red name  
drips off...

\*\*\*

the reflection of something unknown  
fades away late autumn  
when you – leafless –  
stand next to  
a candle  
of the last leaf

\*\*\*

no matter how many times you write the word death on sand



you won't be able to write it...  
its contour merges with the primeval sea  
and there's no sound as if you're far away  
somewhere far in the sea of sand –  
dunes fall –  
dunes rise...

Born in central Ukraine in 1941, **Mykola Vorobiov** is a well-known poet, painter, and one of the founding members of the *Kyiv School of Poetry* nonconformist literary group. He made his poetry debut in 1962, but after his expulsion from the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in 1968 for being “ideologically unreliable,” he was no longer permitted to publish. His first poetry collection *Remind Me for the Road* came out only in 1985, after eighteen years of silence. Since then, more than ten volumes of poetry have appeared, including two books in English translation, *Wild Dog Rose Moon* (1992) and *Mountain and Flower* (2020). A recipient of the prestigious 2005 Shevchenko National Prize in Literature, Vorobiov lives in Kyiv, Ukraine.

**Maria G. Rewakowicz** is a poet, translator, and literary scholar. She holds a Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of Toronto and has taught Ukrainian literature at a number of universities, most recently at Rutgers University—New Brunswick, NJ. She has authored four collections of poetry in Ukrainian and two monographs of literary criticism in English. Her translations from Polish and Ukrainian have appeared in *Agni*, *Cyphers*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Modern Haiku*, and *Toronto Slavic Annual*. Born in Poland to Ukrainian parents, Rewakowicz lives in New York City.

## Serhiy Zhadan

*Translated from the Ukrainian by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin*

A friend of mine volunteered.  
He came back six months later.  
Who knows where he was.  
He won't say what he's afraid of.  
But he's afraid of something.  
Sometimes it seems  
he's afraid of everything.  
He left a normal person.  
But he talked too much.  
About everything in this world.  
About everything he came across.  
And he came back  
completely changed, as if  
someone took his old tongue  
and didn't leave him a new one.  
So he sits in his bed every day  
and listens to the demons in his head.  
The first demon is ferocious,  
he pours out white heat, demands  
punishment for all the living.  
The second demon is submissive,  
talks about forgiveness,  
speaks quietly,  
touches the heart with hands  
covered in black soil.  
But the worst is the third demon.  
He agrees with the other two.  
He agrees, doesn't object.  
As soon as he speaks  
the headaches begin.



We've been talking about war for three years.  
Learned to talk about our past in light of the war.  
Learned to make plans around the war.  
We have words to show our anger.  
We have words to express our sorrow.  
We have words to signify our contempt.  
We have words for curses, prayers,  
we have all the necessary words  
to describe ourselves in a time of war.  
It's very important for us to talk about ourselves in a time of war.  
We can't help talking about ourselves in a time of war.  
We think it's unacceptable to be silent about ourselves.  
Every morning we talk about war.  
Stand before the mirror and talk about war.  
Talk with the one we see in front of us.  
Smart words.  
Smart and convincing.  
Smart questions,  
smart answers.  
Every morning we remind each other of the number of people killed.  
In the afternoon we enjoy a flash of sunshine outside our window.  
Fresh grass that tries to penetrate the dead stones.  
But by evening once again we remind each other  
of the number of people killed.  
It's very important for us to remind everyone of the number of people killed.  
It's very important we be the ones who remind everyone  
of the number of people killed.  
It's very important that they learn  
the number of people killed from us.

This is the family they have now.  
These are the conversations they have.  
They agreed not to argue  
in order to at least get through September  
under the shelling.  
So  
they don't talk about politics  
not to argue,  
they don't talk about church  
not to argue,  
and they don't talk about god  
not to argue.  
They don't talk about their relatives  
who left.  
They don't talk about their friends  
who stayed.  
They don't talk about the guy from the next building  
who's fighting.  
They recall their neighbor.  
The neighbor you can talk about.  
The neighbor died.  
You feel sorry for the neighbor.  
Although god has also died.  
But for some reason you don't feel sorry.  
You don't feel sorry at all.

He's been away for two years,  
she hesitated.  
Change the lock?  
Or not?  
Will he come back?  
Or not?  
In the end, she didn't change the lock.  
Probably, she unconsciously expected  
him to come back.  
He would return and she would tell him everything.  
About her take on him,  
about her take on all of this—  
she would definitely tell him.  
And about her terminated pregnancy.  
Which he knew nothing about these past two years.  
And when he came back  
(without keys, actually, he lost them somewhere),  
she wouldn't say anything.  
And neither would he.  
In general, they decided to talk less.  
Especially about politics.  
Talking about politics in our situation  
is the same as talking about death in a TB ward—  
someone there definitely won't like it.  
And here no matter what you say—everything is politics.  
Bread on the table—politics.  
The school around the corner—politics.  
The early spring that fills the sky with sweet smoke—  
also politics.  
Politics in gestures, politics in breathing,  
politics in vocal cords  
that need rest.  
They got into a fight on the third day,  
a fight over the shower.  
In the morning, he collects his stuff again.  
She watches the sky like milk  
that is about to simmer.  
It's too late for us to learn joy and consolation.  
It's too late to fix the floodgates when so much water has  
passed through.  
Life is like a house where a person is found hanging.  
It's too late to choose the right words.  
It's too late to install a new lock.

Sun, terrace, lots of green.  
A guy and a girl,  
most likely they're students, sit at a table,  
waiting, it seems, for their order.  
Nearby, on the table, notebooks,  
folders with documents,  
they must have just stopped by between classes.  
After lunch they'll continue running errands.  
So grown-up, so serious.  
What else?  
It looks like they rent an apartment,  
don't like to cook,  
eat where they are.  
Don't want to waste time cooking.  
Don't want to waste time on little things.  
You should treat life like clothing  
that you try on before buying.  
You've got to learn not to waste time  
on little things.  
Someday she'll definitely have her own house.  
Someday he'll definitely find a good job.  
You'll need to learn everything,  
you'll need to learn to choose  
the right words to talk about  
love and humanity.  
Dust, flowers, lots of green.  
The spring of last year.  
This is the only photo where we're together, she says,  
here I'm angry at him,  
you see, I'm even looking in the other direction,  
I'm not talking to him.  
Then the war started.  
He went.  
And that's it.

A woman walks down the street.  
She stops in front of a store.  
She hesitates.  
She needs to buy bread.  
Buy it now or wait until tomorrow? she wonders.  
She reaches for her phone.  
Talks with her mother.  
Speaks sharply, doesn't listen,  
raises her voice.  
She yells as she stands  
in front of a shop window.  
As if she's yelling at her own reflection.  
She cuts off the conversation, not listening,  
and walks down the street cursing  
her invisible, and so even more  
hateful,  
mother.  
She cries at some offense from her  
and because she can't forgive her.  
She forgets about the bread.  
She forgets about everything in the world.  
In the morning the first  
shelling starts.

**Serhiy Zhadan** is one of Eastern Europe's leading literary figures and widely recognized as the voice of post-Soviet Ukraine. His work has been translated into a dozen languages. He has received the 2015 Angelus Central European Literary Award (Poland), the 2014 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature (Switzerland), the 2009 Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski Literary Award (Ukraine), the 2006 Hubert Burda Prize for young Eastern European poets (Austria), and the BBC Ukrainian Book of the Year award in 2006, 2010, and 2014. Zhadan lives in Kharkiv.

**John Hennessy** is the author of two collections of poems, *Bridge and Tunnel* and *Coney Island Pilgrims*. He is the co-translator, with Ostap Kin, of *A New Orthography*, selected poems by Serhiy Zhadan, finalist for the PEN America Award for Poetry in Translation and co-winner of the Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry, and the anthology *Babyn Yar: Ukrainian Poets Respond*, part of the new Harvard Library of Ukrainian Literature (HUP). He is the poetry editor of *The Common* and teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

**Ostap Kin** is the editor, and co-translator with John Hennessy, of *Babyn Yar: Ukrainian Poets Respond* (forthcoming from Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute), the editor of *New York Elegies*, and the co-translator, with John Hennessy, of Serhiy Zhadan's *A New Orthography*, finalist for the PEN America Award for Poetry in Translation and co-winner of the Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry. He co-translated, with Vitaly Chernetsky, Yuri Andrukhovych's *Songs for a Dead Rooster*.

## Lyudmyla Khersonska

**Lyudmyla Khersonska** is a war refugee from Odesa, Ukraine. She's the author of two books, *Vse svoi*, named one of the ten best poetry books of 2011, and *Tyl'naia-litsevaia* (2015). She has won the Voloshin competition, among other awards. Evenings devoted to her poetry have been held in Moscow, Kiev, Lviv, Munich, and New York; her poems have been translated into Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and German. In English, her poems appear in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poem*, *Poetry International*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *Words Without Borders*, where she was recognized as one of "33 International Women Writers Who Are Bold for Change."



### VOTE FOR OUR COUNTRY BECOMING A WAGON

From the forthcoming volume *The Country Where Everyone's Name is Fear* poems of Boris and Lyudmyla Khersonsky edited by Katie Farris and Ilya Kaminsky (Lost Horse Press, 2022).

We vote. Vote for our country. For our country becoming a wagon in the railroad transport of history. Our engine, an old flatiron. Our one-armed bandit, an article of war. Little tanks, little tanks creep. Into someone else's court, dance. Our dancing the ice: an Olympic torch in each kitchen. In each face: a stolen seaport. Tanks aim at that port. On to the next. In short, we are moving on to another port inside another. Tanks are hooting beliefs into someone else's grief.

*Translated by Grace Mahoney*

**Grace Mahoney** is the translator of *A Field of Foundlings* poems of Iryna Starovoyt (Lost Horse Press). She is the Series Editor of the Lost Horse Press Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry Series.

\* \* \*

Did you know that if you hide under a blanket and pull it over your head,  
then, for sure, World War II won't happen? Instead,  
lie there don't breathe, don't let your feet stick out,  
or, if you do, stick one out bit by bit.  
Or try this helpful trick to stop a war:  
first, carefully stick out one foot, then the other, now touch the floor,  
lay back down, turn to one side, facing the wall,  
turn your back to the war:  
now that it's behind your back, it can thrash and shred,  
you just close your eyes, pull the blanket over your head, stock up on bread,  
and when you just can't deal with caring for peace anymore,  
tear off some chunks, and when the night comes, eat what you've stored.

*Translated by Olga Livshin and Andrew Janco*

**Olga Livshin** was raised in Odessa and Moscow, and came to San Diego as a Jewish refugee with her parents. Her poetry and translations appear in *Ploughshares*, *the Kenyon Review Online*, and *Modern Poetry in Translation*, among other journals, as well as anthologies including *Words for War: New Poetry from Ukraine*. She is the author of *A Life Replaced: Poems with Translations from Anna Akhmatova and Vladimir Gandelman*.

**Andrew Janco** has co-translated a number of Russian and Ukrainian poets with Olga Livshin. Their translations appear in *Words for War: New Poetry from Ukraine* and numerous journals. He holds a PhD in history, and works as a digital scholarship programmer at the University of Pennsylvania, where co-directs an NEH-funded institute designed to build linguistic diversity in the digital humanities.

\* \* \*

when war comes – don't keep quiet, scream,  
scream *bastards*, scream *beasts*, *executioners*,  
don't pretend that nothing is going on,  
don't be afraid to disturb anyone;  
when there's war, it's no sin to wake them all up.  
scream to the whole country, scream to all other countries,  
open windows wide, don't keep it in, don't keep quiet,  
don't eat the damn thing in secret, don't choke on it.  
any human ones left here? Respond!  
if the human is gone, then mankind is done for.  
It seemed there were plenty of them to last a while, now there aren't enough,  
he hides his head in his shoulders, he hides his eyes in his head,  
he doesn't mind, he's practically saying yea.  
so try to push him every which way,  
don't let him be silent, make him scream too,  
let him not pretend that nothing is going on.  
even if he's the last man, bring him back,  
turn him to face reality, to face the war,  
explain to him it's not outside the window, it's not out there,  
it's right here, next to his home and work,  
next to his mute self, his silent self squeezing out words with difficulty,  
teach him to speak, to scream in syllables.  
only don't be silent. you can't be silent about the war.

\* \* \*

she says it's a carnival in venice, it's spring,  
while here a leader is peeling open his eyelids swollen with sleep,  
while here, a louse is readying itself to drink some blood,  
she says it's carnival time, your partner is masked,  
and here we have masked fighters, slits instead of their eyes,  
she says, over there the masks are different, fancy masks,  
and here a new death is added to the anniversary of a death,  
to call a war a provocation – this takes some smarts,  
she says venice, she repeats carnival,  
everyone who didn't fight has been to Venice,  
such a colorful feast, such noise, such clamor,  
war is not terrible for those who have not fought.

First published in *EastWest Literary Forum*

*Translated by Nina Kossman*

**Nina Kossman** is a novelist, short story writer, poet, painter, and playwright. Among her published works are three books of poems, two volumes of translations of Marina Tsvetaeva's poems, two books of short stories, an anthology she put together and edited for Oxford University Press, and a novel. Her work has been translated into Greek, Japanese, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Persian, Danish, and Dutch. She lives in New York.

## **Boris Khersonsky**

*Translated by Nina Kossman*

**Boris Khersonsky (b.1950)** is a poet, translator, professor of clinical psychology. Boris Khersonsky was born in Chernivtsi in 1950. He has published over nineteen collections of poetry and essays in Russian, and most recently, in Ukrainian. He is widely regarded as one of Ukraine's most prominent Russian-language poets.

**SEPTEMBER 1, 1939**

*I*

the second world war begins with a masquerade  
germans in polish uniforms raid the borders of the  
reich  
the doors of war open more easily than the doors of hell  
like a crane over a well a road barrier a striped lath

lies preach violence harm propaganda  
it's impossible to enter the same war more definitely than a river  
food of the god of war is labor camp gruel  
he allows no more than a spoonful per person

comrade perun shakes hands with genosse votan  
they congratulate children on the start of the school year  
an expanding beam from a projector reaches a screen



sunny weather is better for a bombing

the voice of the radio announcer sounds tense  
mothers now say your joyful goodbyes to your sons  
a beginning of a war is more fun than its middle  
but the enemy shall be defeated and victory shall be ours

*1 September 2016*

## 2

Ever wonder what the weather was like  
on September first, nineteen thirty-nine?  
Especially in Poland, on the German border?  
A weather report for that day is surely filed away somewhere.

Sowing of winter cereals in the fields is done.  
SS men hurriedly put on Polish uniforms.  
A big war begins with a small masquerade.  
At the start, the theater of operations is just a stage.

The audience is waiting. The audience is half asleep.  
Germany enters center stage. The USSR is watchful.  
The audience freezes with admiration and horror.

An incombustible angel of vengeance flies amidst fighter  
planes.

The Audience is waiting. The audience is waiting half asleep.  
Germany enters center stage. The USSR is watchful.  
The audience freezes with admiration and horror.

An incombustible angel of vengeance flies amidst fighter  
planes.

*1 September 2014*

## 3

The beginning of a school and liturgical year,  
the beginning of autumn, the beginning of the second world war.  
We enter the river of times without knowing how to ford.  
A solemn yellow leaf circles over the withered grass.

A firstborn of temporary death, he reigns, falling,  
in every line of a poem devoted to autumn days,  
on the earth, which is fiery in its own way and in its own way fireproof,  
where death, grace, and, alas, the law are all mixed,

in which, on occasion, trenches are dug as well as dugouts,  
in which roots are intertwined, forming a strong web,  
which is trampled on by animals to make curvy, narrow trails,  
we too should walk it, yet what a pity we won't have the time.

*1 September 2013*

## 4

And here is the first lesson of the war,  
with its solemn first bell,  
when two reptiles divide the Polish  
pie with their crooked bayonet.

They chew it so greedily  
their eyes crawl out of their orbits.  
In the meantime, a soldier is frightened,  
he wants to be neither killed nor hurt.

He can want all he wants. Welcome to Hell.  
Only the lords of war have their say here.  
Lord, Lord! Have mercy on  
those who walk under you.

*1 September 2012*

### Notes

\*September 1, 1939 - On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland.

The German-Soviet Pact, signed in August 1939, stated that Poland was to be partitioned between Germany and the USSR,

\* Perun - Slavic god of thunder

\*\*Genosse - comrade

\*\*\*Votan - Odin, the chief god of Norse mythology

First published in *South Florida Poetry Journal*

*Translated by Nina Kossman*

**Nina Kossman** is a novelist, short story writer, poet, painter, and playwright. Among her published works are three books of poems, two volumes of translations of Marina Tsvetaeva's poems, two books of short stories, an anthology she put together and edited for Oxford University Press, and a novel. Her work has been translated into Greek, Japanese, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Persian, Danish, and Dutch. She lives in New York.

## Untitled

*Translated by Olga Livshin and Andrew Janco*

My brother brought war to our crippled home.  
War, a little girl, hair tied in bow – *she can barely walk on her own,*  
my brother says, *she can stay with you, we'll go out, we'll hit the road,*  
*she's so little, she can't keep up, can't roam around alone!*

My brother left, but war stayed, and she really is small.  
She tried to help around the house, she swept the floor and all,  
but she is sort of weird, she pokes around in the corner,  
takes junk out of grandma's oak chests in no particular order.

At night she's restless – and we have no peace.  
She keeps silent – we've had no days worse than these.  
The windows are broken. It is too cold to stir.  
And my brother still hasn't come back for her...

**Olga Livshin** was raised in Odessa and Moscow, and came to San Diego as a Jewish refugee with her parents. Her poetry and translations appear in *Ploughshares*, *the Kenyon Review Online*, and *Modern Poetry in Translation*, among other journals, as well as anthologies including *Words for War: New Poetry from Ukraine*. She is the author of *A Life Replaced: Poems with Translations from Anna Akhmatova and Vladimir Gandel'sman*.

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## Missa in tempore belli

*Translated by Martha M. F. Kelly*

### 1. Kyrie

Lord, have mercy on us,  
if You are for us, who can be against us?  
Christ, have mercy on us,  
especially if our hours are numbered.  
Lord, have mercy on us,  
especially in days of war  
Kyrie eleison.  
Christe eleison  
Kyrie eleison

### 2. Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo  
et in terra pax  
hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Glory to God in the highest—wondrous are Your works!  
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth—more war.  
Glory to God in the highest—be not troubled, soldier, nightingales!  
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth—bodies flail,  
arms flung wide. People's will is evil.  
Thus it has been and always will.  
We praise you, soldier, slender of neck, sharp of throat.  
We bless you, soldier, who on bayonet raise up the foe,  
We lift on high your long dying groan.  
God is cruel at times, but still better than earthly thrones.  
We bless you, mister General,  
we glorify you, mister President,  
you who have robbed us blind,  
did the Lord trample down death with death for your kind?  
“Yes, sir!” says the General, hand to visor.  
He's taken an oath to submit to his own dear tsar.  
But his own dear tsar has flown up on a branch and cries, “Cocka-doodle-doo!”  
He has a comb of gold, and a log in each eye, too.  
Be glorified in the highest, God, behold not what's going on down here.  
The bullet's a fool, the bayonet a good boy, one hit—and no more boy to fear.  
With the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.  
Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.  
Amen.

### 3. Credo

I believe that God is God alone,  
He is Lord of his own.  
He is the peace created by Him,  
He is the light by whom the world is illumined,  
And when battle flags billow, He is their Wind.  
Out of black concrete holes the rockets fly.  
The unseen world attacks the world in sight.  
I believe that in Christ this God was made flesh,  
and was crucified on the cross in sculpture and on canvas,  
outside of time and yet within time, outside of space and yet on a hill,  
between two thieves, a kind of earth-to-earth.  
But if life is a sea, Christ stands at the helm  
and steers the ship of the universe.  
A ship with hundreds of thousands of cannons on board.  
I doubt it can dock in the heavenly port.  
Christ said, “I bring not peace, but the sword,  
and with it, the chance to lie dead in the earth,  
but when the reveille plays on the archangel's trump,  
the graves will open right up.  
And the skeletons will arise and before our eyes  
they'll grow muscle and then a cover of skin,  
and they'll tread the battlefield in delirium  
always, forever and ever, for weather of weathers,  
for trenches of trenches, for tranches of tranches,  
where once they lay side by side, feeding the lice.  
And the lice grew as big as typhoidal cows on the *kollhoz*,  
and the tanks rumbled as good as armored tractors down the rows.”

#### 4. Sanctus

Holy, holy, holy, the Lord, God of might!  
In other words—God of the heavenly hosts, or of the heavenly lights!

You went out with us to war, you seized the foe by the throat!  
You filled earth and heaven with Your glory like a jug with wine.  
You let the earth turn upside down.  
Hosannah in the highest! We'll see you around in the next world.

#### 5. Benedictus

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord in a glorious  
and frightening time, a time of troubles, a time of war,  
blessed are those who walk row by row, each one shall be a hero,  
salvos three and into the ground they go.  
And once again—Hosannah in the highest! Hosannah on high!  
The further into battle, the fewer heroes left behind.

#### 6. Agnus

Lamb of God, who has freed all people from deadly snares,  
Lamb of God, who has borne the immeasurable weight of our sins,  
Lamb of God, who has counted and pardoned every fall,  
Lamb of God, have mercy on us all.  
Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Light from true Light,  
Lamb of God, Savior of constellations, planets and stars in the sky,  
Lamb of God, who crown your iconostasis,  
Lamb of God, have mercy on us.  
Lamb of God, little lamb lain on the altar,  
a time of war has come. Cinders rise from the earth.  
Grant us peace, we are sated with eternal fire.  
They say, "We're starting a war again."  
Dona nobis pacem. Amen.

**Martha M. F. Kelly** is an associate professor of Russian Studies in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Missouri. She is the author of *Unorthodox Beauty: Russian Modernism and Its New Religious Aesthetics* (Northwestern University Press, 2016) and co-editor, with Sibelan Forrester, of *Russian Silver Age Poetry: Texts and Contexts* (Academic Studies Press, 2015). Her translations and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Two Lines*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Michigan Quarterly*, *Poetry Daily*, and *Lit Hub*. She is currently working on a new monograph, "How to Be a Russian Icon: The Post-Soviet Public Life of Poet Olga Sedakova," and is translating a volume of Ольга Седакова's poems.

## Oleg Kadanov

Translated by R.B. Lemberg

I'm a battery that keeps going  
even with a negative charge  
barbed wire of scream in my throat  
everyone listens  
but no one can hear  
how the low, anxious sound  
pulsates in the sky  
it's the voice of god  
god unneeded by anyone  
for ten whole days  
it's been raining red stone  
it's time to read  
the manual of reincarnation:  
in case of emergency,  
a) break the glass of calm  
b) erase the protective layer of fear  
look, here it is  
the molecular formula of love  
use it, then pass on to the children



First published in *Chytomo*

**Oleg Kadanov** was born on November 16, 1977 in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. He published a book of poems titled *not me, but that one* which was recognized as the best poetry collection by the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee of Ukraine and was on the shortlist of most beautiful books of the Kyiv Book Arsenal in 2018. As an actor, he starred in the film *The Wild Fields* based on the novel by Serhiy Zhadan. He was the composer of the play *A Dream of a Better Land* (Poznań, Poland) and for the film *The Kharkiv Holocaust* which won the Best Documentary award at the Kyiv International Film Festival. Together with Serhiy Zhadan and Yevhen Turchynov, he created the Mannerheim Line project. He is the leader of the Kerouac's Mantra music project. He was also the art director of the Kharkiv club Cult and the curator of the music part at the Parade Fest festival of contemporary art (Kharkiv, Ukraine).

**R.B. Lemberg** is a poet, fantasist, and professor living in Lawrence, Kansas. R.B.'s LGBTQIA-themed fantasy books were shortlisted for the Nebula, Locus, World Fantasy, Crawford, and other awards. R.B.'s poetry memoir *Everything Thaws* about climate change and Soviet Jews is forthcoming in June 2022 from Ben Yehuda Press. R.B. was born in L'viv, Ukraine. Follow them on Twitter at @rb\_lemborg.

## Halyna Kruk

Translated by R.B. Lemberg

You stand with your little “No war” sign like it’s your atonement  
for what can’t be reversed now: the war can’t be stopped,  
like bright blood from a torn artery --  
it gushes forcefully, draining energy and life,  
bursts into our cities as armed soldiers,  
scatters its sabotage groups in the inner courtyards,  
like deadly mercury balls that can’t be gathered up,  
can’t be turned back, only tracked and neutralized  
by those civilians -- managers, clerks, IT workers, students,  
whose life didn’t prepare them for street battles, but the war teaches  
rapidly, in field conditions, on this painfully familiar ground  
territorial defenses first took men with combat experience,  
then, even those whose combat experience was *Dune* and *Fallout*  
and a short masterclass in explosive cocktails from a friendly  
bartender. In the nearest nightclub,  
children are sleeping, children are crying, children are born  
into this world temporarily unfit for life  
in the courtyard by the playground, the anti-tank hedgehogs  
and deadly “drinks” are being poured – now a family business  
for the whole kin, who learned, at last, the joy of togetherness  
and of coordinated collective labor – war shortens the distance  
between one person and the next, between birth and death,  
between what we didn’t want for ourselves  
and what we were capable of doing  
- mom, pick up the phone, - begs the woman  
in the basement of a high-rise, for the second hour already,  
stubbornly, numbly, never ceasing to believe in miracles  
but her mom is beyond reach, in that little town  
where walls melted down like cheap Legos  
from mass strikes, where already last night, the network towers  
stopped working, where the world  
was torn into before and after the war  
along the uneven fold of your little “no war” sign  
which you’ll toss into the nearest trash can  
walking home from the protests, you, Russian poet

War kills with the hands of the indifferent  
and even with the hands of passive sympathizers

**Halyna Kruk** (Lviv, Ukraine, 1974) is writer, translator, and literary critic. She holds a PhD in Ukrainian Literature and is currently researching in Ukrainian medieval literature. She is the author of five poetry books: *Journeys in Search of a Home*, *Footprints on Sand* (both 1997), *The Face beyond the Photograph* (2005), *Co(an)existence* (2013), *An Adult Woman* (2017) and collection of short stories *Anyone but me* (2021). Kruk has been published widely in literary journals and has won two Ukrainian literary awards. Her poems and short stories were translated into more than 20 languages.

**R.B. Lemberg** is a poet, fantasist, and professor living in Lawrence, Kansas. R.B.’s LGBTQIA-themed fantasy books were shortlisted for the Nebula, Locus, World Fantasy, Crawford, and other awards. R.B.’s poetry memoir *Everything Thaws* about climate change and Soviet Jews is forthcoming in June 2022 from Ben Yehuda Press. R.B. was born in Lviv, Ukraine. Follow them on Twitter at @rb\_lemborg.



# Iryna Starovoyt

Translated by Grace Mahoney

From *A Field of Foundlings* (Lost Horse Press, 2017)

\*\*\*

Diplomat-boys with ostrich inclinations,  
you are clueless  
that someone could be born in a gas chamber  
and instead of dying,  
grows like *Kotyhoroshko*\*  
to pump and kick  
the soccer-globe of the world.

Clueless, that one can love  
from East to West. That one can learn  
the difference between right and wrong  
through the little casualties of everyday life,  
accepting condolences from you  
and the humanitarian aid of words.

Clueless, that in a single generation  
one can transform from something gaseous  
into fiery water and shale.  
We—the people—are the energy source.

Diplomat-boys from countries  
where the sun sets,  
now you're all just one  
diplomat-toy.

*Search for the cure to human madness.*  
Look at us and don't look away.  
Archive the screenshots  
of how our boys—  
domestic as houseplants—  
suddenly grow to war  
and become cacti, agave,  
and then—tequila.

How our children turn grey,  
how our cities burn like coal,  
how the dead fall from the sky,  
how the living burrow in the earth.

*(The first angel covers his face).*

How terrifying-  
ly comfortable it is  
to you on the other side  
of the screen.



\*A Ukrainian fairytale hero born from a pea seed (whose name means “roll the pea seed”). In a short amount of time, he grows into a large, strong man who battles and defeats a dragon to save his own siblings. Even as the youngest, he is the most successful and strongest of his family, despite his humble origins. Although he has no blood relations, he remains a close and loving son and brother. The whole pathos of *Kotyhoroshko* is that “there are no dead ends.”

\*\*\*

Your sisters will no longer weep.  
They will not bite chapped lips,  
or aim a throaty song at you,  
sent to the heart under your dress—  
when you were still wearing dresses.  
They will curse at you over walkie-talkies  
and then like your posts on FB.  
They won't clean their armpits  
with damp washcloths for three days.  
They won't lay curtains in the trenches for comfort,  
to keep clean from the mud.  
They'll strain their necks and shudder with exhaustion,  
watching the other side of the line through the sniper scope.  
They've grown accustomed to your monthly bleeding,  
to the smell and the process.  
Let it flow, like in all mammals,  
pulsing in the temples and on the wrist,  
it presses from inside,  
starting with the nose.  
Let's learn to love the living,  
to apply a tourniquet.  
to wash the dead.  
As if from a split pod, misfortune spills from you.  
Days roll out, not black  
nights, not white.  
*Not you, your hand. Not that one, the other . . .*  
Here there could be a different ending,  
but there won't be.

**Iryna Starovoyt** is a poet, essayist, and Associate Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies at Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine.

**Grace Mahoney** is the translator of *A Field of Foundlings* poems of Iryna Starovoyt. She is the Series Editor of the Lost Horse Press Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry Series.

## Dmitry Blizniuk

*Translated by Nina Kossman*

### SCAFANDER AND A BABY

when you die, call me.  
If it's March and hungry tits.\*  
If there's a connection, call me right away,  
so I shudder under the ceiling  
like a woolly ball of lightning,  
with an unshaven cheek.  
when you're dead, relax, as I taught you.  
Parachute upwards, to the lambs, to the clouds.  
Don't be afraid: in the overturned yellow wolf's eyes  
the past is a silken dome, look, don't let it be taken away  
memory  
to the senile and the homeless  
of paradise  
for souvenirs and linen.  
And don't look back.  
Let go of this world, the orb -  
this creepy, slow nightmare.  
of the kite,  
that bit you.

\*

I am  
canning our images,  
sweet ugly things, like peaches,  
in the flasks/phototrans/embryos of the soul.  
A sparkling, Bengali voice.  
The hard laugh. The fox tattoo  
on the collarbone.  
Glints of immortality in the words.  
There,  
in the frontal lobes of the sky, where you will not die.  
When you die,  
unlace the corset of your ribs,  
unclench your spine,  
become a lilac flower of super fresh,  
flexible and whipping.  
Breathe us out.  
Finally, dive into my memory.  
from the coat-hanging tower, where your coat is left, -  
a cashmere she-wolf  
tangoing with my coat,  
boiling neurons.  
Don't be afraid to get burned when you leave.

\*

Hint. Pinch the nipple  
of my consciousness,  
so that I can rearrange my coordinates,drag



anti-aircraft guns, sunrises, pianos  
so that sleepy ghosts in the morning  
swallow the salty oatmeal  
of the first snowfall - through you,  
through  
transparent  
stomach  
of a window.

\*

When you die, don't worry about the credits.  
I'll pay for it  
don't worry about Casper the cat, I'll keep him  
I promise to feed him and love him  
I promise to outlive him, too  
or eternity in me is like a hump,  
the granite curse of rocks and mountains.  
This is the art of not-dying,  
for I am a demigod.  
and I will carry it in my heart.  
to remember that you are alive.  
The lilac Niagara flickers  
of evening unearthly sadness,  
A Hiroshima of meaning and meaninglessness.  
what a pity for the towns of our day,  
the happy japs of our days...

\*

when you're gone, I'll shudder like a laptop.  
and look out the window  
the skyscrapers crumbling -  
the glare, the pixels, the mottled quadrupole  
of a computer program...  
destroying the machine code.

\*Tit: a small bird, related to titmouse and chickadee.

**Dmitry Blizniuk** is a poet from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Pinch*, *Salamander*, *Willow Springs*, *Grub Street*, *Spillway*, and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of *The Red Forest* (Fowlpox Press, 2018). Despite the war, he did not leave his home in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

**Nina Kossman** is a novelist, short story writer, poet, painter, and playwright. Among her published works are three books of poems, two volumes of translations of Marina Tsvetaeva's poems, two books of short stories, an anthology she put together and edited for Oxford University Press, and a novel. Her work has been translated into Greek, Japanese, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Persian, Danish, and Dutch. She lives in New York.