

Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861)

Testament (1847)

When I am dead, bury me
In my beloved Ukraine,
My tomb upon a grave mound high
Amid the spreading plain,
So that the fields, the boundless steppes,
The Dnieper's plunging shore
My eyes could see, my ears could hear
The mighty river roar.
When from Ukraine the Dnieper bears
Into the deep blue sea
The blood of foes ... then will I leave
These hills and fertile fields—
I'll leave them all and fly away
To the abode of God,
And then I'll pray But until that day
I know nothing of God.
Oh bury me, then rise ye up
And break your heavy chains
And water with the tyrants' blood
The freedom you have gained.
And in the great new family,
The family of the free,
With softly spoken, kindly word
Remember also me.

Volodymyr Svidzinsky (1885- 1941)

The Lustre of Surfaces (1933-1934)

The lustre of surfaces dies into the shadow
And antique silence sleeps,
Like water decanted into a bowl.
Only my hands live,
Strange and separate,
Their movements
Compel me to meditate,
Like the whisper of a leaf.

I go to the window,
A broken post stands by the verandah,
Mould grows in the guttering
Where snowflakes gather in winter,
Where birds alight in the morning.
I press my forehead against the glass
And gaze for a while.

I don't love the advent of night
It seems guilty, a dark linen,
The blurred green edges of vegetation.
A huge pool of silence accumulates.
Where have the birds gone?

The lustrous surface of things dies,
The curtains hang motionless
As if carved in stone.
In my defined circle of silence
I become more insensitive, and sad,
As a forgotten, Chinese lantern caught
On a branch in some old orchard.

Mykhailo Drai-Khmara (1889-1939)

Swans (1928)

On the tranquil lake where willows dream
Long tamed by both summer and Autumn
They splashdown, flutter and swim
Their necks bend like heavily laden vines.
When frosts come resonant as glass
And waves whisper immersed in a white trance
These swimmers shatter the frozen space
Fearless, although winter threatens.
Oh cluster of five unconquered singers
Through snow and storm your song victorious
Breaks the apathetic faithless ice.
Be strong; from slavery and nothingness
Be guided by the constellated Lyre
To worlds of light, oceans of foaming life.

Ilya Kaminsky (1977-)

I Ask That I Do Not Die

—but if I do
I want an open coffin
I am an American poet and therefore open
for business

Owls peck the windows of the 21st century
as if looking for
the board members
of Exxon Mobil
who who who who who

Listen
my beloved nothings
your seriousness
will kill you!

But before you die
my doctors
have prescribed happiness

God is a warm brick
or a claw
or the silence that survives
empires

An old woman
in the rain with a pot of mushroom soup
is one of God's
disguises. Her dog
lifts its leg
 another one of God's shenanigans
and pushes its nose
into morning's ribcage

I point my hand

God *this* and God *that* and
when God has nothing
I still have my hairy hand for a pillow

Put me in an open box
so when God reaches inside my holes
I can still see
how a taxi makes a city more a city
slippers on my feet, and only half
covered by a sheet,
in a yellow taxi
so as not to seem laid out in state
but in transit

We Lived Happily During the War (2013)

And when they bombed other people's houses, we
protested
but not enough, we opposed them but not

enough. I was
in my bed, around my bed America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.

I took a chair outside and watched the sun.

In the sixth month
of a disastrous reign in the house of money

in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money,
our great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war.

BORYS HUMENYUK (1967-)

When You Clean Your Weapon (2017)

When you clean your weapon
When time and again, you clean your weapon
When you rub strong-smelling oils into your weapon
And shield it from the rain with your own body
When you swaddle it like a baby
Even though you've never swaddled a baby before —
You're only nineteen, no baby, no wife —
The weapon becomes your only kin
You and the weapon are one.

When you dig trench after trench
When you dig this precious this hateful earth by handfuls
Every other handful reaches your soul
You grind this earth between your teeth
You don't, you never will have another
You climb into the earth like into your mother's womb
You are warm and snug
You've never felt this close to anyone before
You and earth are one.

When you shoot
Even when it's at night and you don't see the enemy's face
Even when night hides the enemy from you and you from the enemy
And embraces each of you as her own
You smell like gunpowder
Your hands, face, hair, clothing, shoes —
No matter how much you wash them — smell of gunpowder
They smell of war
You smell of war
You and war are one.

Serhiy Zhadan (1974-)

Everything will change

Everything will change. Even this perpetual warmth
will change. The fog's settled steadiness will shift.
The wet orthography of the grass will lose its inherently
clean line along with its stem's expressive calligraphy.
The measure of things, which you accept so easily, will change,
the voice, which grew thicker in the dark, will get hoarse,
October, which you know by its broken light
and oversaturated space, will change too.
It will go like this: a bird's lightness and rage
people, who forestall the evening chill by singing,
will start to remember winter like a forgotten language,
they'll read it, re-read it, recognize it.
And everything will change for you, too, you
won't escape this warning, this fear
of the blackbird in the morning circling the sharp,
warm trees, beating its wings against the blind gleam.
Lands that freeze to the core.
Sunny days for the brave and the luckless.
Your breath will change, in the end, when you recite
a memorized list of apologies, dogmas, and faults.
Dryness will change, and the wetness from the lowlands
will change, the field's winter cold will change,
the stubborn October grasses and women's inflections
will change. Like in fall, like in fall.

Iryna Shuvalova (b. 1986)

(Poems *circa.* 2020)

February

we planned to get through February
like any other month—
only shorter

to cross it like crossing a little stream
day by day
stone to stone

to stand, having made it across,
on the green shore of spring

but instead, the river roars and grabs us by the legs
this red slippery foaming
February-fury

knee-deep in darkness
we hasten to build rafts

our rolled-up pants
grow heavy
filling up with water

or maybe with triumph
or maybe with death

Earrings

getting ready to leave for work
I suddenly catch myself wondering
if I ought to wear
simpler earrings

if today
someone dies there
what will I do

a tearful
angry
helpless
fool

in these cheerful things
in these colorful things

Your own

at first glance every bombed house in the photo
looks like your own

every child sleeping in the kyiv metro
has the face
of your daughter

the news doesn't happen to us
happens to us

the woman in the photo
desperate palm covering
her twisted weeping mouth

I don't know this woman
I know this woman

Boris Khersonsky (1950-)

Missa in tempore belli. (2014)

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 fly, 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 kolhoz,

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.