

Kateryna Pylypchuk

The War that Changed Us

Ukrainian Novellas, Poems, and Essays from 2022

With a foreword by Victor Yushchenko

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Contents

Foreword by <i>Victor Yushchenko</i>	7
38 minutes.....	11
The day before it.....	14
Carpe diem.....	16
Multi-sensuality.....	21
The way back home.....	25
The Black Hole.....	27
Baby.....	30
The Heroes.....	34
Ivan Kupala Night.....	36
... Maaam... ..	41
Holodomor.....	45
The wreath.....	50
Galloping across Europe.....	56
The scouts.....	63
Carthage must be destroyed.....	69
The Ukrainian Warriors of Light.....	72
The puzzle.....	75
The window.....	80

Sophia.....	83
The hryvnia	91
Forgetting	98
Motanka	101
Lightning never strikes the same place twice.....	104
Letter from the other end of the Earth.....	109
Today they've shot us with missiles	112
Island of Happiness.....	114
Guardian Angels.....	123
Solomiya and Francesco	126
If people could understand	136
Smile of the Gods.....	140
She who knows the place of war	146
Anhelinka	154
Jobs	157
Taiwan Soul.....	160
Thank you very much.....	165
Making Love with Words.....	168
A Second Chance	171
Clock of the war.....	175

Foreword

For many in the Western world, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and then massive escalation in 2022 was unexpected. For Ukraine, it was just the latest in a centuries-long struggle against imperialist Russia's unending desire to colonize Ukraine and destroy Ukrainian identity, language, culture, and history. But, in another surprise for the world, the Ukrainian army succeeded in not only defending Ukraine from all-out invasion, but also freeing territories that had been seized by Russia, and liberating people who had become hostages of Russia's occupying forces. But the war tragically continues, with ever more Russian conscripts and mercenaries attacking every day, with frequent barrages of missile and drone strikes. We now see Ukraine's armed forces defending the longest frontline since the Second World War—3,300 km of land border, and almost as long a sea border.

The war continues, and it cannot but affect each of us. It changes us. Despite Russia's efforts to destroy Ukraine's identity, the Ukrainian nation is becoming ever more consolidated, united, and determined to survive and flourish. We have never been so close to national unity as today. Every day our political and civil society leaders, journalists and cultural figures speak out, and the world is actually listening. Together, we are conveying a single message—Ukrainians are fighting not only for ourselves but for each of you—for your freedom and independence, for democracy, justice, and a rules-based world order.

Kateryna Pylypchuk's collection of short stories and essays about ordinary Ukrainians—*The War That Changed Us*—is an attempt to reach out, to tell real, living stories of once ordinary, now heroic Ukrainian people facing extraordinary hardship. Kateryna is following a long and important tradition of Ukrainian writers and poets who also tried to break through barriers to tell of Ukraine's

struggle against Russian colonial oppression, of individual Ukrainians who have sacrificed to preserve their families and communities, their history, culture, and nation.

Our poet laureate and kobzar, Taras Shevchenko, wrote 170 years ago: "My beloved country is innocent, for which the Lord punishes you... He punishes you severely... For Bohdan and for the mad Peter." His argument even then was that Russia and the betrayal of its promises were the roots of Ukraine's many misfortunes.

Seven decades later, another patriot, the President of the Ukrainian People's Republic 1918–21, Simon Petliura, advised Ukrainians to stay "away from Moscow." He contended that "the biggest obstacle to the recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty is the hypnosis of the name of Russia. This hypnosis must be dispelled... The matter of the division of Russia must be raised as a matter of peace for the whole world, as a matter of European balance..."

During Ukraine's struggle for its independence in the 1930s and 40s, Ukrainian freedom fighter Stepan Bandera said: "If another form of Russian imperialism replaces Bolshevism tomorrow, it will also, first of all, turn to with all its might against the independence of Ukraine and its enslavement. The Russian people will continue to carry that imperialism, will do everything to keep Ukraine enslaved..."

Then Vyacheslav Chornovil, a dissident of the 1960s to 1980s and one of the leaders of the Ukrainian popular movement Rukh, a great Ukrainian humanist, wrote: "Over Ukraine hangs the two-headed shadow of Russian imperialism, which is just waiting for the final collapse of our society to launch its predatory claws into the living body of our people. May God grant us to love Ukraine more than anything today – so that we don't have to love it bitterly after losing it..." "The time has come for a great choice: either unity and victory and the path to light, or defeat, shame and again a long road to freedom..."

The moral of this long historical Ukrainian saga is simple: if we, Ukrainians, cultivate a deep national consciousness in ourselves, which becomes the meaning of our identity and conscience, then we will truly speak with one voice, and be united and whole as a people and nation. This is the greatest and indeed the only guarantee of our eternal independence from our imperialist neighbor.

For us it is obvious that Russia has already lost its war against us, but, to be honest, it should be said that Ukraine has not yet won. We still have a long way to go. But, we are confident of our eventual victory, because we know the deep commitment of our army and our society cannot and will not be overcome. When ordinary Ukrainians give up everything to fight for their freedom and dignity, victory is the only option.

As you read our living history in the pages of this book, you will discover more about the traits of the Ukrainian people, their heroism and their hospitality, their exaltation of freedom and their creativity, their love for tradition and customs, and their dreams of a brighter future. We welcome you to these pages, and we welcome you to Ukraine.

Viktor Yushchenko



Kateryna Pylypchuk and Viktor Yushchenko holding the first Ukrainian edition of *The War That Changed Us*, published in Kharkiv and printed in Kyiv, during blackouts and missile attacks.

November 18, 2022
Museum "Code of the nation"
Kyiv oblast, Ukraine