





I DREAM OF THE ABSINTHIUM FIELD  
*Landscapes, Myth and Longing*

Kateryna Rudenko  
Iryna Zamuruieva  
D.Z.



*Warsaw 2024*

With the struggle for Ukrainian victory ragging, it's terrifyingly easy for distance and time to lull us into a deadly torpor. To stagnate. To sift through the flashing red breaking news headlines with a painful indifference. The pain is being deferred to someone else, further east. I'm safe. I have electricity. My sky is closed. I check apps every few minutes because of a vain addiction, not necessity.

After the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ziemniaki i had the opportunity to support Kateryna Rudenko by commissioning her to conduct research and write a text. We met several times to discuss the research subject and our interests in folklore, belief and myth. Kateryna then decided to tell the story of her Ukrainian language teacher and her harrowing escape from Chernihiv, using Ukrainian folk songs to illustrate the journey. This sadly well-trodden path has led countless Ukrainians away from russian imperialism and aggression over the centuries. In this publication at least, as Kateryna writes, the folk songs light her former teacher's way along the paths of Farewell, the Road and Yearning, with a song in the heart.

For this re-edition, we commissioned a new introduction by Kateryna and two new texts by Iryna Zamuruieva and D.Z. This time the publication further blends the folkloric, folding and kneading it into the stories you're about to read. When reading the first edition, I was struck by the relationship between the Ukrainian landscape, her peoples and trauma.

In Iryna's text, we travel in a fever dream through plants and into the soil as it eats away at the bodies of an ancient horseman and his steed. The landscape that Kateryna's protagonist navigates becomes populated with eerie imagery, the real blends with the unreal, the unmade and the not-yet-formed. From there, we enter the unearthly through the diary of an anonymous citizen journalist investigating a deep rumbling that's being heard and felt in the occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Who or what is behind it is yet to be seen.

The earth we take for granted harbours secrets, songs and knowledge. So how do we relate to a scarred landscape in the face of war, shelling, torture, rape and murder? Where do non-humans come into this? How can we comprehend ecocide in the face of genocide? Are they two sides of the same coin? While the book doesn't attempt to answer these questions, it instead seeks to dream with seeds and plants and nudge and whisper to the spectres lurking in our shadows, making allies of them of all.

Josh Plough

# I DREAM OF THE ABSINTHIUM FIELD

A Journey of the Ukrainian refugee:  
*from Farewell to Yearning*  
*with a Song in the Heart*

Kateryna Rudenko and Anon

## PRELUDE

In times of major crises, some of the borders humans draw to explain the world become transparent while other ones—thicker. As the previous reality is torn apart (or bombed out), we notice how people reconsider the confines of their existence. One of the borders questioned on these pages is the dividing line between humans and nature. Can animals, plants, and even whole ecosystems sympathise with us? The other borders this story touches on are between homelands and foreign lands, small and big homelands, ancient and present-day.

This story was a sorrowful child of a great tragedy—an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War in February of 2022. The experience of the Ukrainian displaced person is a lens through which we can see the aforementioned borders clearly. My guest is a woman, folk singer and a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature who fled to Poland when the full-scale invasion began. When she told me her story, she worked as a teaching assistant at a Polish school, helping Ukrainian kids adapt to their foreign environment. Several months after our conversation, she went back to Ukraine to continue teaching. She is a mother of two adult sons and a genuine patriot with a deep love of Ukrainian folk songs.

I divided her experience into three parts that assemble themselves into a linear pathway. An itinerary of the displaced person consists of the Farewell, the Road itself, and then the Yearning. As the war destroys people's lives, it has an inevitable and gruesome impact on the environment too. Can we argue that people and nature are united in their suffering while experiencing these three stages?

I chose Ukrainian verbal folklore for at least three reasons. It has a profound meaning in the formation

of Ukrainian national culture. It is an organism that constantly adapts to society's needs and it emphasises relations between humans and nature and employs the recurrent motive of pain of leaving ones homeland.

In a way, the living being of Ukrainian folklore is an intermediary between humans and nature. In folk songs, an individual expresses their sorrow using tropes that include symbolic images of the animate and inanimate nature. The narrator's soul is intimately linked to the spiritual essence of nature to the point when it is hard to define whether they are being equated to nature or nature itself is humanised. From the blood ties between people and animals to the transformation of a man or a woman into an animal or a tree, we see how folklore erases the dividing line between humans and nature.

Along with the function of the intermediary, we must acknowledge the power of folklore to unite people across borders. The waves of emigration throughout Ukrainian history due to wars, genocidal policies, and economic hardships led to the establishment of vast communities abroad. Being forced to leave your home is at the core of Ukrainian folklore, along with the notion of love towards the (mother)land you leave and might never see again.

Ancient folklore songs about nature being able to feel the pain of people in times of bloody misery found their re-incarnation in the reflections of the Ukrainian displaced person in 2022. The path of the woman whose story you will soon read was a linear development of the events, knee-deep in the brutal daily routine. But I lit her way with the passages from folk songs. They tell of feelings which are as old as humankind itself. They serve as a bridge between old and new, far and close, and between dreaming and wakefulness. They become a precious link between people who love each other but are separated because of war.

The woman telling this story remained anonymous for the sake of her and her family's safety.

#### DANGER: ACTIVELY ERODING CLIFF

It's been two years since I was told this story and I am sitting at the ocean shore thousands of kilometres away from home. Sometimes, a foreign land makes an offer that's difficult to turn down.

I am leaning on an eroding cliff. If you are really silent, you can hear the tiniest pieces of sandstone falling. These cliffs are 200 million years old. My two year presence in the Bay of Fundy isn't even a blink of the eye compared to their age—it's more like a thought or something beyond the concept of time at all, like a dream.

They say dreams are much shorter than our brains perceive. We think we lived a whole life in our sleep, but it was actually just a few minutes. When you're back to back with something that old, you can't help but think these cliffs are just dreaming of you in their afternoon lull. You are as passing as a thought and as lovely as a dream. You are real because you are dreamt of.

Two years ago, I was told a folk singer's story. Several years ago, our paths diverged in Ukraine and then came together again in Poland because of the war. I recorded her story, transcribed it and translated it from Ukrainian to English. I also read hundreds of songs in Ukrainian, picked a few, and translated them too. The original piece I wrote was not nearly as personal as it should have been. Why was I hiding? Another character in this story was the One Who Translated and Shared the Story. Now, things should be clearer.

I have had some training in translation throughout my degree, but I never thought it would become my full-time occupation. I don't mean that I'm employed as a translator. These years, I have wandered from place to place, meeting new people, and wherever I go I would do my best to loyally translate songs of my Ukrainian land to people who have never seen it and probably never would. It is always hard.

J. Edward Chamberlin called untranslatability an ancient value. He referred to the Greek philosopher Plato who said if we change the forms of a story and song, we change fundamentals in the moral and political constitution of a society. In other words, is my Ukrainian story as meaningful in English as it is bound to be in my mother tongue? How can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

#### THE SONG WILL BE BETWEEN US

There is a song widely known in Ukraine. It was written by Volodymyr Ivasyuk, a Ukrainian songwriter, composer, and poet, in 1971, and it's called "The Song Will Be Between Us".

*Не ховай очей блакитний промінь,  
Заспівай мені в останній раз.  
Пісню ту візьму собі на спомин,  
Пісня буде поміж нас!  
Бо твій голос, бо твій голос—щедра повінь,  
Я мов колос, зелен-колос нею повен.  
Жовтий лист стаде і виросте зелений,  
А ти в пісні будеш завжди біля мене.*

*Do not hide the blue beam of your eyes,  
Sing to me for the last time.  
I'll take that song to remember.*

*The song will be between us!  
For your voice, for your voice is a great flood,  
I'm like ears of grain, green ears full of it.  
The yellow leaf will fall, and a green one will grow,  
And you will always be beside me in the song.*

This is, for sure, a love song. However, if Ivasyuk had been a displaced person, this song could have easily become a homesickness elegy. It is not bizarre. Ukrainian verbal folklore often refers to homeland as a beloved one. The song between a person and their homeland overseas is language, culture, and identity—remembering who you are and where you come from, translating and sharing your stories.

I couldn't find a version of this song in English, so I attempted to do it myself. I quickly encountered a difficulty. I count on your patience, as I am not a professional translator of lyric poetry.

I showed my partner a picture of колос and asked what she would call it.

"Wheat?" she seemed unsure.

"But what if it is not wheat?" I asked.

"Rye or barley, for example?"

My partner has never been a professional translator, either. It takes an additional minute to think of a word you wouldn't often use.

I looked it up online and several dictionaries defined "an ear" as a grain-bearing part of a stem.

"How could you not have a separate word for this?" I got somewhat emotional and explained that the word "колос", which is apparently "an ear of grain" here—four words, for God's sake!—is important in Ukrainian culture. It is everywhere in folk songs and as a visual element in



embroidery. It is a sacred symbol of life and abundance. How could they not have a word for that?

Like many people who have ever lost their home, I travelled a long way and brought the dreams about my land with me. I have to explain them to those who have never seen such vast fields of wheat, rye and barley. I explain the concepts, the importance of which I used to take for granted. Every word requires a page of footnotes. It makes me look for the root of why I cherish things. It makes me test my loyalty and my knowledge.

A wanderer becomes a translator, and it feels like a lot of unforeseen responsibility. My land is so far away, and two years in, I am having difficulty talking in my language. Yet, it is something that another person would not notice, but it feels like my tongue is becoming heavy when I pronounce sounds. Sometimes, a thought scares me that this is everything I have left from the immensity of being native—scattered knowledge about my culture in the language I am forgetting. The stories I value so much, translated poorly, but with feeling.

I am a wanderer, a translator, and a storyteller. My land exists now only in my memory, which will inevitably weaken. To not forget my own story, I share the dream of my land with the people, and they imagine what it is like: the fields of buckwheat blossoming and a morning carpet of fog on the grassy hills. My land, in the way it is ingrained in my mind, for a minute becomes palpable for me and my audience. It is real because it is dreamt of.

GRIEF IS NOT THE SUN BUT DRIES YOU WELL

My academic supervisor in Canada is proud of her Ukrainian origin. Her family arrived to the prairies a

couple of generations ago. During our first conversation—via Zoom and several months prior to the full-scale invasion—I told her she must be delighted to have such a meaningful Ukrainian last name, “Zurba”.

It turned out nobody told her what it meant. The story was lost in the hastiness of time. It was accidentally forgotten on a shelf of an empty house somewhere in the Old Country after the bags were packed in a hurry in preparation for a brighter future.

Журба, or zhurba, is one of the core concepts in Ukrainian culture. The dictionary defines it either as unhappiness or circumstances that caused it. According to folk wisdom, журба is grief that dries you like the sun would. It is a heavy longing that overtakes your soul as powerfully and unapologetically as a river flows. People say it feels like an embrace, as if in a way, it brings comfort.

Red means love, and black means журба—this is a saying we have in Ukraine. Love goes hand in hand with sorrow, so nothing explains one of them better than the other. When asked for an example of журба, I had to think for a couple of minutes (testing my loyalty and knowledge...) and then I offered to imagine your loved one is gone and that you don't know whether they'll come back. You indulge in a memory of what you are afraid you have already lost. It embraces you instead of your lover. You love, but you grieve.

Another example, I said, is when you lose your land, whether it was annexed, occupied, or bombed out, or when you receive an offer that is difficult to decline. You indulge in a memory of what you are afraid you lost forever. To love is to grieve.

Needless to say, my supervisor appreciated what I told her about her last name. It was important for her to

reconnect with her Ukrainian roots. Later, I learnt that one of the topics she has been researching for a while is eco-grief, the sense of loss from environmental destruction or climate change. The pieces of a story came together as intended.

As I said, I wander, I translate, and I share stories—unprofessionally, but in the way I can. J. Edward Chamberlin refers to the responsibility to worry about your homeland, no matter how far you are, as being not so much before oneself but ancestors and generations to come. The stories I share are more often sad than not. This is a story of a folk singer who came a long way from afar and misses the landscapes of her home. It is a song about the ears of grain. I agree with Chamberlin that sad stories are a ceremony in a way they commemorate our ancestors or our temporary or permanent loss of home. My stories are not just a translated lesson about a faraway land, it is a type of grief that embraces and heals my ancestors and generations to come—and me. I might be as passing as a thought or a dream, but the stories I tell of my land make the fields of buckwheat as tangible as the 200 million-year-old cliffs behind my back. The fact it is translated or explained does not matter much as long as it is a ceremony that comes from the genuine heart, and this is my pledge as a storyteller.

I am not alone in my ceremonies. My heartfelt thanks go to a folk singer who shared her story with me. It changed me. I am also grateful to my supervisor, Dr Melanie Zurba from the School for Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie, for helping me shape my voice. My partner, Courtney Bell, is my lantern. Lastly, as I move forward to the uncertain future, I constantly glance back—to Ukraine, to the soil where my ancestors rest.

## FAREWELL

The realisation that I would soon have to leave my homeland came gradually as the war was spreading to every corner of our lives. On the one hand, it came to us unexpectedly but on the other, it had been hanging in the air for many weeks. We felt it.

The war came to us at five in the morning. The younger son woke me up and said, ‘Mum, it has started.’ That word ‘started’ struck me. His eyes glistened with tears, and I did not know what to tell him. He said to gather all the necessary things because it was dangerous now to remain on the fourteenth floor. I put something in my suitcase. The first thing I took was my cat in a carrier. Then I stood at the door looking around my apartment. Fixed the rug. I didn’t know where I was going. I took the jacket that I wear for work, a warm sweater, and almost nothing more. I didn’t know I would be hiding in the basement for so long.

*Oh, the knotgrass grows, the knotgrass grows,  
Spreads down the road,  
Farewell, my dear family,  
Because I am already on the road.  
Oh, the knotgrass grows, the knotgrass grows,  
It has spread to the knoll,  
Farewell, my dear family,  
I will not be with you soon.  
Emigrant folk song ‘Oh, the knotgrass grows.’*

*[Г]ой росте спориш, гой росте спориш,  
Стелиться дорогою,  
Бувай здорова, родинко моя,  
Бо я вже на дорозі.  
Ой росте спориш, ой росте спориш,*

*Простерся та й на груди,  
Бувай здорова, родинко моя,  
Не зараз я у те буду.  
'Ой росте спориш'*

The eldest son took me to his wife's parents. He thought that there would be no war a few kilometres from the city, but it turned out that we went out to meet it. One day, he went to the railway bridge. The territorial defence was gathering there. They were carrying sandbags, and he saw something in the sky... Everyone thought it was a crow, but it turned out it was a drone. And this drone probably took a photo of the gathering because soon a 'Grad' struck this place. People survived thanks to the railway embankment but for the first time, I saw the fear of death in my son's eyes. Since then, this pain has not left me. It still haunts me.

*Oh, the black cloud came,  
Oh, the dark blue.  
The poor widow gave birth  
To a nice son.  
She gave birth to him  
In the dark night.  
She gave him a pale face  
And black eyes.  
—Grow, the dry oak,  
A frost will be tomorrow.  
Get prepared, the widow's son,  
They will take you to the soldiers tomorrow.  
—I am not afraid of the frost,  
I will grow soon.  
I am not afraid of being taken to the soldiers,  
I will now get prepared.  
Soldier folk song 'Oh, the black cloud came'  
(An oak tree is a symbol of a strong young man.)*

*Ой надійшла чорна хмара,  
Гей, надійшла синя.  
Породила бідна вдова  
Хорошого сина.  
Породила ж вона його  
Темнької ночі.  
Дала йому біле личко  
Ще й чорнії очі.  
—Розвивайся, сухий дубе,  
Завтра мороз буде.  
Ізбирайся, вдовин сину,  
Взавтра прийом буде.  
—Я морозу не боюся,  
Зараз розів'юся.  
Я прийому не боюся,  
Сей час ізберуся.  
'Ой надійшла чорна хмара'*

The bombing started that same night. The bombs fell, and everything around exploded. They flew directly over our heads as the city was attacked from two flanks at once, and battles were fought on both sides of the village. We had to go to the cellar. It was a damp room that was not at all suitable for staying in. We spent eight days in it. We slept sitting, and we ate apples. From time to time we could quickly go out of the cellar when there was no shelling and cook something—for the first four days there was still gas and water. Though, shortly after that it was gone.

We understood that we needed to help the city because there was already fighting on the outskirts of Chernihiv. We began to prepare Molotov cocktails. Thanks to this activity, I felt elated because I felt involved in our victory. However, this continued until the bridge between the village and the city was blown up. Then, we could no longer help. The feeling of helplessness, of non-involvement in what was happening in my city, tormented me, and I felt like a traitor. I was in pain, and I asked my

eldest son to take me back to Chernihiv, but the neighbouring villages had been already occupied. There was no way to the city. The neighbouring village had been bombed, and the fire started.

On the third of March, I felt feverish. I got sick. I had a feeling that something was going to happen, and it had not been leaving me from the morning. I asked, 'Take me to the city, please take me to the city.' I wanted to go home. I imagined that I would go with everyone to the basement of my own house, and I would be there with all the people.

*A black cloud in the meadow,  
It is hard for me to be here.  
—Come out, cloud, from the meadow,  
Take me home.*

Emigrant folk song "Oh, so hard to live in a foreign land."

*Чорна хмара в полонині,  
Тяжко мені у чужині.  
—Вийди, хмарко, з полонини,  
Винеси ня із чужини.  
'Ой в чужині тяжко жити'*

Then my phone died and I couldn't contact anyone. At about five o'clock in the evening I came out of the cellar, turned on the phone, and saw a flurry of missed calls and text messages. Immediately, there was a call from my former student. She called and straight away asked, 'Are you alive? How are you?' I was surprised and asked her in reply, 'And you, are you all right? Where are you?' She then asked, 'So you do not know anything, do you?' I replied, 'What do I need to know?' She said, 'But your house was bombed.'

My house was bombed at 12:15, and I only found out about it in the evening. It turned out that both of my sons knew

about it, but they were afraid to upset me because they knew I had bought this apartment for myself. I had been collecting money for it for many years, almost twenty years. It was very dear to me because it had been so hard for me to get it. On Facebook, the pictures of my house were everywhere. A shell hit the window that is next to my place. My apartment is simply gone, a black hole is there instead. I do not have a place to live any more.

On March 3rd, when my house was destroyed, the neighbouring one was also bombed. People did not think that something would happen because there was not even an air raid alarm. Three air bombs were dropped. That day, a car brought bread near that house, and people were standing in a queue. Almost everyone died there, and that house, which was not as strong as mine, collapsed almost completely. Forty-seven people died that day... Forty-seven.

One woman said, 'I still live in the basement, and I envy those who have a home. When I see someone walking under the windows, I feel like an orphan.' This is what the woman from that house said.

*You stay quiet, the grassland, you stay quiet,  
And you, the green grove,  
Do not make my heart ache,  
That I am in a foreign place.  
One sheep would bleat,  
And everyone would respond,  
The orphan would weep,  
Only the mountains would tremble.*

Emigrant folk song 'You stay quiet, the grassland, you stay quiet.'

*Та й не шуми, луже, дуже,  
Та зелений гаю,  
Не завдавай серцю жалю,  
Що я в чужім краю.  
Овечка як заблєє,*

*Другі відозвуться,  
А сирота як заплаче,  
Лиш гори здрігнуться.*  
'Та й не шуми, луже, луже'

I cried, cried for a long time. The next day, I had my birthday. This is probably how Putin congratulated me on this day. He knew who a true patriot in the city was and who loved Ukraine the most. That day, my youngest son arrived. I asked him for one present for my birthday, to take me to the city. I didn't know where I was going, I just went to my acquaintances. I was invited to their basement. It was not so wet; it was spacious but very cold because the temperature outside was far below zero. There were more people.

We spent the night in that basement. We laid wooden boards on the concrete floor. We laid everything we could, some blankets and old coats. Acquaintances, strangers—we laid down together on these boards, put the children between us, hugged each other so as not to freeze at night. Though we hugged not only to be warm as they also bombed at night. Airstrikes became more frequent. They were so strong that the whole house trembled. It was painful to look at the children because they were becoming silent then and were hugging their mothers. We tried to talk to them at this time to distract them, but the fear in their eyes was so strong that it's impossible to forget. It was very painful. Moreover, there were no adult sons of mine near me. I understood that they were busy, but my soul was constantly longing for them.

*If I was a cuckoo,  
If I was a grey one,  
I would fly to Ukraine,  
And would find my son.  
I would fly to Ukraine,  
And I would say, 'Cuckoo!'*

Soldier folk song 'Quiet water, quiet water'  
(A cuckoo is a symbol of motherhood and nostalgia.)

*Коли б була зозуленька,  
Та коли б була сива,  
Полетіла на Вкраїну,  
Чи не знайшла б сина.  
Полетіла й на Вкраїну,  
Та й сказала: "Ку-ку!"*  
'Тиха вода, тиха водаг'

I was sick and spent twenty days in the basement. There was no more water and electricity. The whole system of water and gas supply in the city was completely bombed out. The shops did not work. I had no medicine. My youngest son called me and asked me to leave the city. I did not want to because my children stayed there. I did not want to, but one day he came to me. He said, 'Mum, it will be easier for me if you are safe because there is no medicine for you and the danger is growing each day, more and more.'

*The duck is floating down the Dunay River,  
Give me, God, what I am thinking about.  
I am thinking about travel,  
Such a pity I have to leave.*

Emigrant folk song 'The duck is floating down the Dunay River'

*Плине качур по Дунаю,  
Дай ми, Боже, що гадаю.  
Я гадаю вандрувати,  
Жаль ми роду покидати.*  
'Плине качур по Дунаю'

The bomb hit the house next to the one where I was in. Apartments were on fire there, and my good acquaintance, thanks to whom I was in this basement, began to worry more and more about her son, who is in the seventh

grade. She said, 'If it were not for him, I would not be going anywhere, but I have to.' She started asking us to arrange a trip. My youngest son took care of it. He gave us his car, and we found a driver. We took a big risk because many of those who tried to leave were killed. We knew that students from other schools who were travelling with their parents were shot dead. Whole families were killed. Some were missing. However, the risk of dying on the road or while staying in the city was roughly the same for us.

### THE ROAD

So, one morning, we left. The road from Chernihiv to Kyiv usually takes an hour and a half. We drove to Kyiv for six hours by detours. My son was following us, he was taking his wife and her sisters out of the city as well. We did not know it yet, but the car that had been driving right after my son's one was shot at, and people died there. But we managed to leave. While we were driving, we remained silent, and I prayed. I prayed the way I could. All the way to Kyiv.

We stopped on the outskirts of Kyiv as we had to refuel the car. There were a lot of people, and suddenly a Russian plane flew over our heads. It flew very low, and all the people were extremely frightened. Someone fell to the ground in fright. Someone began to hide under the car. The fright was insane. But then the plane came back, and we saw it being shot at. This plane was shot down in front of us. We got back on the road.

It was only when we arrived in Cherkasy that we felt relatively safe. Then we came to the Ternopil region, where my good friend lived with her family. In the two weeks while I was with them, I recovered from my illness. I observed how this part of Ukraine, which did not yet know

what war was, was concerned about it. People prepared humanitarian aid and sent it to the areas where the fighting took place. However, what struck me most was how they prayed in their church. It was a village church, and three times a day the whole village came there. They carried the Ukrainian flag and honoured every villager who was serving at the front.

They surrounded me with such love that it made me uncomfortable. I used to work all my life, and here I was under such care that I could not afford to enjoy the affection of these people for too long. I had to work. I wanted to help my city financially because my children, my students, and my colleagues stayed there. I called my colleague, who was in Transcarpathia at the time. She had the same sense of inaction as I had, and we decided that we had to work somewhere, we had to do something by ourselves and not depend on anyone. We must help, not receive help because, thank God, we survived but our loved ones remained in danger.

While I was in the Ternopil region, I started to receive the news about the danger that loomed over my city. My children were without water, without food, in complete isolation.

*Oh, the eagles have screamed  
Over the blue sea.  
The fine fellows have burst into tears,  
While staying in captivity.*  
Soldier folk song 'Oh, the eagles have screamed'  
(An eagle is a symbol of a young man.)

*Ой крикнули орли  
По синьому морю.  
Заплакали хлопці-молодці,  
Сидячи в неволі.  
'Ой крикнули орли'*

My colleague and I met in Ternopil. We decided to go to Poland. It was not an easy decision for us. Why Poland? Probably because this is a country that is mentally close to us. This is a language that is close to Ukrainian. And most importantly, we felt from the Poles this message of love and support, which we did not feel from any other nation. We went to Poland, first and foremost hoping to find a job here. When we got on the bus in Ternopil and started heading towards the border, the feeling was... Heavy. It was difficult to go because we were leaving the country in great danger.

*Oh, rustle, the grassland, rustle,  
Oh, the green oak grove.  
Oh, rustle above me,  
As I will be walking through you.  
Soldier song 'Oh, rustle, the grassland, rustle.'*

*Ой зашуми, луже, дуже,  
Ой діброво зелена.  
Ой зашуми понад мене,  
Як я піду через тебе.  
'Ой зашуми, луже, дуже'*

When we approached the border, we stayed there for a long time as there were a lot of buses with people. We stood there for ten hours. It was very cold. Not so much because of the temperature, but due to the feeling of fear for Ukraine, for our homeland, people, and relatives. When we got to the Polish side already, we met many volunteers. They gave us blankets and tea and tried to warm us with their attention and their food. They even gave us those blankets to take on the bus because we were cold. We felt this concern, and it was comforting. It calmed me down to some extent.

In Poland, we were reading the news about Ukraine all the time. We were making phone calls, we were weeping, and we went through this isolation with them. Then the gradual liberation of Ukrainian territories and our city began. Severe fighting took place, many people were killed. We saw a video of the dead soldiers being returned to the villages that had already been liberated from the occupiers.

*Oh, the white birch rustled  
On the hill and in the valley.  
Oh, the young boys burst into tears,  
While going to be taken to the soldiers.*

*—Oh you, pigeons, oh you, grey ones,  
Please take wing.  
Oh you, soldiers, oh you, young ones,  
Please come home.  
—Oh, we would be happy to take wing,  
But the fog is coming.*

*Soldier folk song 'Oh, the white birch rustled'  
(A birch is a symbol of womanhood, a pigeon—of love, and fog  
—of danger.)*

*Ой зашуміла березонька біла  
Та горою і долиною.  
Ой заплакали все молоді хлопці,  
Та й ідучи до прийому.*

*—Ой ви, голуби, ой ви, сивесенькі,  
Та підлетіте вгору.  
Ой ви, рекрути, ой ви, молоденькі,  
Та верніться додому.  
—Ой раді б же ми вгору підлітати,  
Та туман налягає.*

*'Ой зашуміла березонька біла'*

My colleague found out that her nephew, her sister's son, had been killed. It was hard for her to go through this, she was far away from him and could not even bury him. All this time she thought he was alive. He was allegedly killed on March 5th, but since the area was occupied and fighting was taking place, his body could not be found and wasn't until early April. He was buried only on the seventh of April. He couldn't be buried for more than a month... People from the village took him out of the car, buried the body near the road and put a stick as a sign that someone is buried there. When the territory was liberated, the father was looking for his son. The territory was completely destroyed. One man said he buried one of the dead near the road, although there were many bodies. The father dug up this grave with his own hands. Imagine how it was for a father to get his son's body out of the soil and recognise him. This is how he was then buried on April 7th.

*The wind is blowing, the grass is rustling,  
And in that grass, and in that grass,  
And in that grass, the Cossack lies.  
Above him his horse is sad,  
It is on the knees, on the knees,  
It fell to its knees on the ground.*

Soldier folk song 'A black cloud in the meadow'  
(A wind is a symbol of destiny and sorrow, a horse—of loyalty.)

*Вітер віє, трава шумить,  
А в тій траві, а в тій траві,  
А в тій траві козак лежить.  
Над ним коник зажурився,  
По коліна, по коліна,  
По коліна в землю вбився.  
'Чорна хмара в полонині'*

He was not buried in the cemetery, as were not all the other people who died during the occupation because

even the cemetery was mined by Russians. They bombed the graves where Ukrainian soldiers were buried and where Ukrainian flags stood. They bombed the cemetery; they even bombed the church near the cemetery! People have begun to bury the dead in a large forest park, which is located in the centre of the city, and is called 'Yalivshchyna'. The place, which was previously a favourite recreation place of the city's residents, has become a cemetery. During this occupation, more than seven hundred civilians were buried there. I do not know yet, maybe one of them is an acquaintance of mine. I do not know... My colleague's nephew was buried there. These are very difficult memories, difficult experiences. And even distance does not calm you down.

Now I work at a Polish school. Although I did not work in primary school before, now I help small Ukrainian children adapt to their studies here. It comforts me. It returns me to what I have been doing all my life. For a while, I forget about the situation in which I have found myself.

However, I see children's eyes. Even children from Ukraine are different. Those children who came from the regions where there are fewer war hostilities are joyful, they befriend other children easily, and I see how quickly they learn the language. They do not need my help. They just want to be hugged. But I also meet children who have endured a lot. I was especially impressed by a boy who left Bucha. I was sitting next to him, and we had to translate a maths problem. He said to me, 'Do you want me to make you a crane? I learned to do it in the basement.' 'Which basement?' And he says, 'When we were hiding from the bombs, I sat in the basement for so long that although I could not make a crane at first, I learnt.' I asked how long he had been there and he said, 'I don't know how long. Very long. There was no light. In the beginning, there was a flashlight, then a candle. But I learnt.' I saw this sincerity and his little victory. When I asked him how he managed



to get out, he said in an adult way, 'We were given a "green corridor", but not everyone came out. My friend stayed there.' He still does not know whether his girlfriend is alive or not. This boy cannot laugh like all other children. He cannot run like everyone else; he speaks very seriously at such a young age. He is in the first grade.

*Oh, I will go, I will go  
To the oak grove,  
There I will find  
A forest nut.*

*I will roll it  
Over the mountain to the valley,  
Maybe it will get  
To my Galicia.*

*It will not roll,  
Because the mountains are high.  
It will not get there,  
Because the seas are deep.  
Cuckoo is cuckooing,  
Cuckooing, cuckooing,  
And my heart  
Is cracking from the pain.*

*—Tell me the truth,  
Grey cuckoo,  
Where are you cuckooing me to be  
Next summer?*

*—Anywhere where you want me to,  
I will cuckoo you,  
All over the world  
I know all the roads.  
Emigrant folk song 'Oh, I will go, I will go'*

*Ой піду я, піду  
У лісок дубовий,  
Там я собі знайду  
Орішок лісовий.*

*Покочу я єго  
З гори на долину,  
Можє, ся покоти  
В мою Галичину.*

*Він ся не покоти,  
Бо гори високі.  
Він ся не закоти,  
Бо моря глибокі.  
Кукає зозуля,  
Кукає, кукає,  
А моє серденько  
Зо жалю пукає.*

*—Скажи мені правду,  
Сива зозуленько,  
Де ти ми закуєш  
На друге літенько?*

*—Де мене лиш хочеш,  
Я ти закуваю,  
Я по цілім світі  
Всі дороги знаю.  
'Ой піду я, піду'*

Poland is tidy. Intelligent. Friendly. Comfortable. These are probably the words I can use to reward Poland. However, during the first days upon arrival, we were overwhelmed by silence. It was difficult for me to hear the sound of the plane because I always expected that there would be an explosion after. But there were no explosions. In Poland, it is peaceful and quiet, children are smiling. People go to work; children go to school. At first,

I perceived it somehow... Feelings were incomprehensible. The calmer the situation, the more nostalgia begins to overwhelm you because you want such peace at home, in your hometown. I do not want to stay abroad because I love my homeland and my small, ancient, clean, and cosy city. I dream of coming back, although I know I have nowhere to return, I no longer have a home.

*I would fly to my country, but I do not have wings.  
I would swim by the sea, but I cannot swim,  
I would be glad to send letters to my family at least.*

Emigrant folk song 'I walk around Canada and I think'

*Злетів би-м до краю, та крилий не маю.  
Пустив би-м сі в море, та не вмію плисти,  
Рад би-м відсилати хоць до родини листи.  
'По Канаді ходжу та й думку думаю'*

I do not know where I will live, but I will return to my city anyway. I often dream that I go back home, to my apartment. Everything is as it was—elegant and cosy. Though, when I open the drawers and the closet door, I cannot find my things. Then I realise that something is wrong with my life.

*Rustle, the wind, rustle, wild one,  
Over the woods, over the mountains,  
Carry my sad thought  
To the Lemko courtyards.  
There you will rest, my thought,  
In the green spruce,  
You will get rid of sorrow  
In this evil hour.  
The old pine will tell you there  
And all the trees,  
How joyful my heart was back then  
In the happy times.  
This is what an old oak will tell you,*

*One and another,  
How I lived there with my darling  
Without any sorrow.  
And in the garden, a nightingale  
Was chirping its songs,  
Accompanied my young years  
With its singing.  
Oh, my dear homeland,  
I cannot see you,  
It is so hard here and miserable,  
At least I cry sometimes.  
Emigrant folk song 'Rustle, the wind, rustle, wild one'*

*Шуми, вітре, шуми, буйний,  
На ліси, на гори,  
Мою сумтну думку неси  
На лемківські двори.  
Там спочинеш, моя думко,  
В зеленій ялині,  
Журбу збудеш, потішишися  
У лихій годині.  
Там ти скаже стара сосна  
І вся деревина,  
Як там грало серце моє  
У світлу годину.  
Там ти скаже і дуб старий,  
І єден і другий,  
Як я жила там з миленьким  
Без журби, без туги.  
А в садочку соловейко  
Щебетав пісеньки,  
Розвивав ми пісеньками  
Літа молоденькі.  
Ой милая сторононько,  
Я тебе не бачу,  
Так мі тяжко тут і сумтно,  
Хоч коли заплачу.  
'Шуми, вітре, шуми, буйний'*

Often, when I go to bed, I imagine myself with a suitcase in the middle of the city and thinking about where I will go. Where will we live with my son? I do not know. But I try to drive these thoughts away from me because first of all, I want our victory. When there is a victory and this terrible regime that has come upon us is overcome, then we will solve these issues. For me, victory is in first place now, and so are my sons.

*You, black-winged crow,  
You fly high,  
How much do you see my son  
During the war?  
—I see him there near the Dunay,  
He writes you letters,  
Through the tears  
He is breathing heavily.*

Soldier folk song 'The sycamore stands over the water'  
(A crow is a symbol of suffering, and sycamore—of a young man.)

*Ти, вороне чорнокрилий,  
Високо літаєш,  
Чи багато ти мого сина  
На війні видаєш?  
—Там видаю при Дунаю,  
Дрібне листя пише,  
Дрібонькими слізоньками  
Все тяженько дише.  
'Стоїть явір над водою'*

I grew up among forests and rivers, and here in Warsaw, I miss nature so much... Groves, trees, and rivers are my homeland. Here, I sometimes stay for a while, admiring the wild grass that sprouted here and there without being planted.

*Farewell,  
Pine forests,  
Where you, my pale legs,  
Were walking.*

Emigrant folk song 'Farewell, pine forests'

*Бувайте здорові,  
Соснові пороги,  
Де ви походжали,  
Мої білі ноги.*

'Бувайте здорові, соснові пороги'

Sometimes, I dream of wandering through the fields where absinthium grows. It's a symbol of my destiny because it is bitter. The smell of it—is also my homeland.

*(Absinthium is a symbol of sadness, a bitter destiny.)*

AGROS, EROS AND THANATOS  
ДЛЯ ТИХ ДВОХ

Iryna Zamuruieva

Awaking up to a dream of a war-torn ecology is as much real as it is opaque, I think it went something like this:

A yellow petal falls out of a window, onto a street. It goes boom! And everything is changed—an annunciation scene whose message I can't comprehend. I make myself herbal tea, hoping that infusing my body with more vegetal matter will help the intra-species understanding.

A yellow petal falls through the window, landing on my desk as I write about pain. I never know how to say this, not even with Elaine Scarry's help. A dream of raw meat turned asbestos dust turned greasy stains on the shattered glass is the best I can do. The oil is leaking out of every hole, filling every hole. Do you happen to have a lighter? Spalakh! I can now see the rainbow spills all over the muddy potholes we are sloshing through, knee-deep in mire, making our way to the top of the kurgan.

From the top, I could see us, rolling downhill, laughing, betting our best bet on not hitting the landmine on the way down. "How dare you be laughing, appalling, this war, a serious topic, you must be sad"—they frown, but who are they to say this? Our militarised bodies, some of them mobilised, others immobilised and exhausted, are coping by all means available. Some of them gave themselves, bravely and willingly, to defend the rest of us, less brave and less willing. We are all beaming with life until we aren't, including those two rolling down the kurgan, including the deminers risking their limbs and paws at best, and lives at worst. What would it take to de-militarise our bodies now?

At the bottom of the kurgan there are two plants: adonis vernalis and rapeseed, an impossible duo of unlikely lovers. This landscape reproduces culture, lumping together the original agrós, a field, a plot of land with the modern one, the cultivated soil to birth a synthetic cannibalis-

tic monster: it feeds on the feed it feeds. The topsoil of the kurgan is layered over the layers of those gone and decomposing. Soon, the earthworms would crawl their way here and slowly but methodically turn the dead into humus-rich chernozem, the cycle of life and death, gone through the earthworm's intestinal tract.

Imagine this: the spirits buried in the kurgan returned to earth and find themselves in the breakfast cereal supermarket aisle. A buried horseman from Trypillia wonders, "What's this about?" Cereals did domesticate them after all, he sighs, but something isn't right about this intimacy. His Neolithic horse follows, rising through the fungal mycelia networks and ending up in a freezer. Having galloped between the Seret and Bug rivers, they are now in the company of Norwegian salmon that are also, technically, buried here, centuries apart and in a somewhat less dignified way. A dog barks outside, imitating an air raid siren with an eerie accuracy. Smoke is rising but the call will remain unanswered.

The rapeseed doesn't know it yet, but it will dream of *adonis vernalis* dreaming of tarpans running freely across the heat of the Naddnipyrianskyi steppe. The hot-yellow will flow up its stem, radiating heat, a dazzling sensation of a place dreamt and lost. The story curves to accommodate more mud mixed with language, but I can't tell them apart anymore. Maybe if we smear each other's bodies with it and if it doesn't come off, we will know it was language all along—*nasha mova*, tenacious, deep in our pores. Or, if it washes off with the first acidic rain, we will know it was mud—*nasha hryazyuka*, with our words piercing its lumps, cutting our skin. By the time we realise it, it might not really matter, the toxicity spilling out might swallow them, us, both.

Going further down, your hands slide under the surface to find more of a murky matter—glowing with ionised

atoms. Soon they will enter a nuclear reactor, leaky and golden, soon you will feel their heat on your cheeks and under your chest, your heart beating a few beats faster, sweat dripping on the floor. Zhovti Vody, Yellow Waters, uranium ore mining town in Dnipro region, standing on the Zhovta Rika, Yellow River, its walls proclaiming: "collective dreaming is more intimate than sex". It's getting hot here, can someone open the window?

Deeper than the bottom of this kurgan runs another substance—dark and unctuous, miles under the surface, one that will be pumped and burnt, causing trouble, proliferating its sister-in-grease rapeseed above ground. The oil-black and the oil-yellow leaking into each other, not mixing well, filling up the dimples above your collarbone. Crude oil lends itself well to anonymity—someone dies and the question who is responsible remains ringing in the air, someone's hands covered in grease. Someone brings out bread and salt, but who are they welcoming?

The dream has no plot, just like the toxicity that shows up on my tongue and in the rapeseed roots. But if you look closely, it has a shape and it has a language: elusive, slippery, shimmery or greasy, depending how you look at it. Don't let a satellite view fool you, she is a trickster. She will let you believe the world is graspable all at once—sleek and shiny black box of codes and numbers, running on cryptocurrency, someone else's energy cooling the motherboards, someone's house devoured by a sandstorm. I think I saw you dancing with her, or were you mourning?

Ascending and descending this kurgan in an ever-repeating loop, is akin to a ritual, attempting to prevent the catastrophe that is already happening from becoming more of itself—a war that keeps on murdering, an atmosphere that keeps on heating, a heart that keeps on breaking. We meet and dance on the fallen gorse prickles, so hard,

that the soles of our feet bleed. Yet we can't dance this tragedy out of our bodies, out of this landscape, with every move we only fuel what is already on fire. We need to move differently, but we dance blindfolded, tracing each other's arms and branches not knowing where they lead. Towards more or less heat, the only axis we truly understand. It is hard to contain things, especially fire, when your arms are holding the weight of the world, oh so flammable.

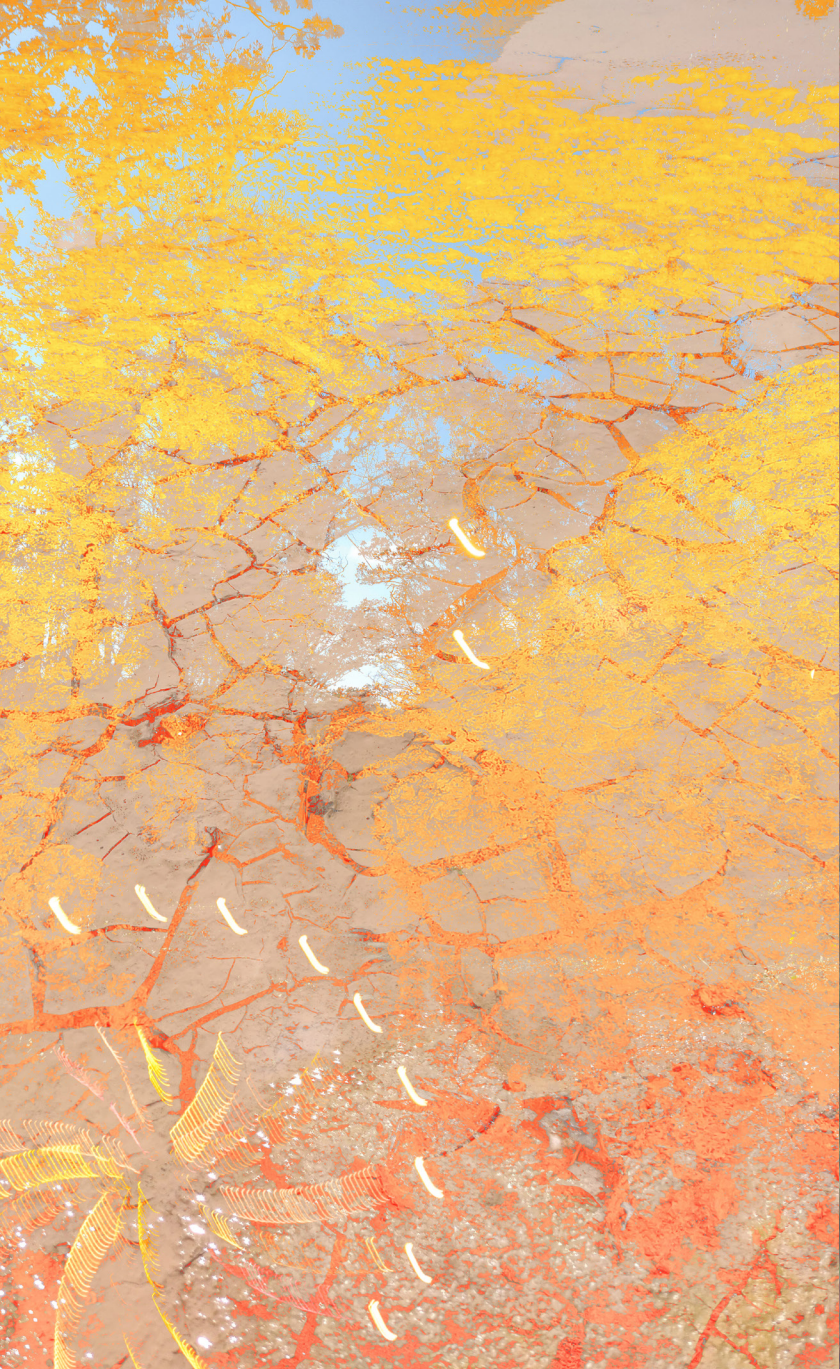
Maybe, for a change, we could try being very, very still. We don't have to look each other in the eyes, just as long as we look in the same direction once in a while. That way we might see, there's kin to be unmade, there're ties to be cut. That way we may learn that the apple tree blossoms most feverishly the year before its death, that the petals it drops are next year's tears, that ecocide falls apart as soon as you try to hold someone accountable. None of it being a reason to give up the fight. The ever-soaring heat and ever-crumbling desire. There is only touch and truth to make and hold on to in the dream and outside the dream, if such a place exists.













*25/05/2024* KHARKIV  
SHUBIN'S LABYRINTH

D.Z.

Something odd has been happening in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk lately. Aside from the tortures in the basements, forced conscriptions and military builders 'reconstructing' what they have erased. Yes, something odd has been happening in occupied Donetschyna lately, aside from the uprooting of forests, people and spirits, the scarring of land and the scorching of fields.

As you read this, in occupied 'Donbas', the heart of the empire, the heart of the union, the heart of the world, something is being constructed on top of our bones. Yet no one can really say what. The miners, they know it, the residents hear it, the settlers, they fear it, for it's kept them sleepless for months.

It began with reports of a rumbling. A never ending drone-like soundscape oozing out of the mines, from the cracks in the Earth left by missiles, from beneath the very ground upon which the occupation builds new homes. The residents were used to it, having lived in a state of continuous wartime for ten years, there's little that could surprise them. Yet this soundscape was different from the mundane world. These were not the familiar mortars, ballistics, gunshots and noises of construction or the never ending tank and heavy machinery columns eroding the earth.

The months which followed the initial reports were filled with silence, the eeriest of responses to a phenomenon of this magnitude. Weeks on end with no news on the matter, did the rumbling cease? Did it dissolve back into the worldly? Did the illegitimate authorities of the occupying forces wish to cover it up?

I later found out, after digging and digging for any possible information, that the silence was nothing but a veil. Three distinct hypotheses regarding the rumbling formed among the inhabitants of the region, the locals,

and the settlers. The three were mostly spread by storytelling in each community.

The most popular belief among the inhabitants is one which initially spread in the circles of those who follow the teachings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. It's said that the source for this was a vision that came to a monk from the Svyatohirsk Lavra, an extremely problematic yet important site for the Orthodox Christians in the region.

The second scenario was put forth by the community of Ukrainian environmentalists, who staunchly opposed the hypothesis put forth by the church, viewing it as an extension of institutional propaganda. While theirs is the most rational response to the phenomenon, it has not yet been agreed upon by international environmental bodies.

The third, being both the most marginal and speculative of the tales, traces back to the miners in Donetsk. While most miners in Donetschna have been forcefully sent to the frontlines to fight for the Russian colonial war machine, the hundred or so people who remain in the last mines have united in their belief on what, or rather who stands behind these noises.

To get to the truth of it, I travelled to Kharkiv to meet a member of each community, and hear a first-hand account of each story that arose since the initial reports were published.

#### THE VISION OF A MONK FROM SVYATOHIRSK

I met H. in the Shevchenko City Garden, an oak filled park in Kharkiv near the church where they relocated after the Russian occupation of Svyatohirsk in June of

2022. We started off on a melancholic note, reminiscing of both of our experiences with the church and faith in childhood. Having been brought up as a religious person myself, albeit as a Roman Catholic, I had plenty of stories to share with them.

We strolled through the park, surrounded by the greenery of a city facing the imminent threat of missiles and occupation. H. told me it's a feeling they know all too well, having lived in Svyatohirsk since 2014, they were accustomed to the eeriness induced by the calmness of a wanted city. I asked them if they were thinking of fleeing West as the periphery of Kharkiv was engulfed in flames, to which H shook their head and proceeded:

'The reason why I went into service in the Svyatohirsk Lavra was to be there for the people that needed me most, and I wouldn't have fled if it wasn't for my mother's condition. For the longest time, I felt like a traitor to my church, my people, my brothers and sisters for leaving them at their time of need. I will not do so again. I know that God has led me here for the purpose of guiding his servants at this turbulent time for the city, and I will stay no matter what.'

By here H. meant The Church of the Holy Myrrh-Bearing Women, whose golden domes and baby blue facade hadn't left my gaze since I'd arrived in the garden. A Church is made powerful by way of many things, and The Church of the Holy Myrrh-Bearing Women had them all. It was imposing, its grandeur and size made you feel tiny and helpless yet its beauty and the soundscape emanating from within struck you with awe.

As we sat down on a bench just by the entrance, I finally managed to lead the conversation to the topic at hand, the vision of a monk from Svyatohirsk that could explain the sounds radiating from the deep. H. had not expe-

rienced the phenomenon first hand, being away from Donetschyna since 2022, the closest he came to it was by way of the stories told by the monks who visited him in Kharkiv. Father S., a figure revered within the orthodox church for his spiritual feats delivered the story to H. during his latest visit.

'I've never seen Father this shaken', H. began. 'His usual steady gaze was pacing from one side of the room to another. It felt as if he were anxiously expecting something or someone to show up. As if there were other eyes and ears present in the room with us. I offered him some tea, it's a tradition of ours, to catch up every once in a while over some freshly brewed black tea and talk our hearts out. A makeshift confessional booth if you will.

At that point in time I had heard rumours of these rumblings and visions, but I dismissed them for chatter and nothing more, such stories came up every once in a while when I was at the Lavra. When the going gets tough people look for extraordinary explanations, yet I sensed that this was different the moment I looked into the Father's eyes.

I did not wish to press the matter initially, but I decided to intervene after sitting in silence with the shadow of a man I once knew. As I was about to break the silence, the Father mumbled "There will be wars and rumours of more wars to come. There will be great calamities. There will be earthquakes and famines. The Orthodox Christians will be scapegoated. Men will betray each other and false prophets will thrive. The signs will appear in the heavens and the Antichrist, the master of illusions and mirages will appear and claim to free all men. There will be wars and rumours of more wars to come. There will be great calamities. There will be earthquakes and famines. The Orthodox Christians will be scapegoated. Men will betray each other and false prophets will thrive. The signs will appear in the heavens and the Antichrist, the

master of illusions and mirages will appear and claim to free all men." He kept on repeating these lines to himself over and over again as if he were in prayer. As if I wasn't in the room with him.

'I know these lines, we all do', H. continued, 'they speak of the end of times as prophesied by God through John in Revelations. The Father, known for his spiritual strength and wisdom, was shaking in front of my eyes in fear of the end. What could have caused a man of his stature to be so broken? It seemed like these noises, whatever they were, haunted the man.

After another brief silence the Father spoke again, this time with more clarity yet shaken nonetheless'. "One of the new monks who joined us after the occupation of the Lavra, would wake up screaming in the night for days on end. What he saw were not mere nightmares, they were visions, prophetic visions of the end. He saw a goat, whether it was covered in coal dust or simply black he couldn't say, which was striking the earth from beneath with its horns. Its eyes were bloodshot and the tears streaming out of them were filled with pus. The horns were crystal clear, smashing the soil in a desperate attempt to break out of the underground. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* The Moon was the Sun and the Sun was the Moon and the stars were scorching the Earth with such voraciousness as if God himself, in his anger, were throwing them down on us from above. The land was burning but the goat never stopped making the ground shudder with its horns from beneath. Every day since it began he has seen this goat."

This was the last of the Father's words that evening, he retired straight after retelling the story and went back to Svyatohirsk the next morning. Please excuse me, but this is as much as I know.'

At this point H. had to go back into the church to prepare for the evening service, I thanked him for making time for me and he took his leave. I was glued to the bench, taken aback by what I heard, piecing the story together in my head for hours. But the sudden air raid alert snapped me out of it. I rushed down to the nearby Universytet metro stop, surrounded by the interwoven sounds of the air raids and the church bells which signalled that the service had begun.

#### THE RATIONAL RESPONSE

The next morning I woke up in my hostel room having had little sleep. Dreams of all sorts of bloodied and pus filled horned creatures woke me up in a cold sweat every few hours. At one point I think I counted 33 goat-like beings simultaneously striking the Earth from beneath in a nightmarish choreography.

Having picked up my phone straight after I opened my eyes to look at the missile activity, I noticed that I'm running late for my meeting with P. I grabbed my notebook, put on a skirt and a hoodie and jumped out of the room.

P. is part of a team of seismologists tasked with modernising the destroyed seismic network in Ukraine. Apart from the hellish task at hand, in their free time, they enjoy going on research trips to pre-frontline areas with the goal of archiving the scale of seismic activity induced by the russian war on our land.

Securing this interview was almost impossible as P. and the team were about to head over to Donetchyna with their newly acquired RS3D seismographs to investigate and get to the bottom of the reports.

I arrived ten minutes late to a twenty minute interview, and was thanking God that the crew hadn't left yet. Our meeting spot was in the square right in front of the Kharkiv-Pasazhyrsky railway station, an enormous building built in the architectural style named after the 20th century's most celebrated tyrant. P. and the team were in the process of loading the equipment into their minivan. I joined them in the task while doing my best to write down as much of the monologue coming my way as possible, 'Seismic activity in Ukraine is not a new phenomenon', they tell me, 'seismicity has been concentrated particularly in the western, southwestern and southern areas, where the Carpathian and the Crimean-Black Sea seismic regions are located. Donetchyna historically has not seen the same levels of activity, the highest magnitude of an earthquake recorded being 3.5 back in the beginning of the 20th century near Kupyansk. With that being said, let's get to the topic at hand, the news of the mysterious "rumbling" that is spreading like wildfire.

No matter what that corrupt russian proxy of a church wants people to believe, there is a simple explanation behind the phenomenon. This rumbling is nothing more than a continuous man-made earthquake of a minimal magnitude and with our trip to the region we will be proving just that. The only mystery is its duration.

You see, it's common knowledge within our circles that for years there have been kopankas (illegal mini open pit mines) operating in Donetsk and Luhansk. Prior to the occupation of the region by russia, the effort of illegal open pit mining was spearheaded by the criminal organisations there. Since 2014 however, the situation worsened with the coming of occupation and the war on Ukraine. Most of the officially registered mines have been flooded as a result of the mass-bombardment of Doneschyna by russia, prompting a large-scale infrastructural collapse

of the mining industry. It was reported that this will have catastrophic effects on the ecology of the region, ranging from land subsidence and the formation of sinkholes to man-made earthquakes. The problem is no one was expecting this future to arrive so soon. Add to the equation the fact that russia has closed most of the non-flooded operational mines since 2022, and the hypothetical acceleration of illegal mining, as the local economy and the russian war effort depends heavily on extracted resources, the picture gets clearer.

Again, the remaining problem in all of this is the continuity of these earthquakes, this ‘rumbling’. It just seems odd, the reports do not make any sense. If it is as they say, that it’s a never ending murmur coming out of the Earth, then these open pit mines have to be working non-stop across the whole of Donetchyna. Which is impossible as most of the able-bodied men who worked them were forcefully conscripted into the russian war effort. So unless they have made all of the remaining children in the region work these kopankas, I don’t see how these reports could be true.

Oh and this might have to be off the record, as I’m not a fan of spreading conspiracy theories, but I’ve read some threads online which make a case that the rumbling is orchestrated by russia by way of repeated underground explosions. They say it’s done to unsettle the local population. Yet aside from it being objectively unrealistic, the reported radius of these minimal earthquakes covers the part of the region where the majority of the population are settlers, so, again, it doesn’t make much sense.

Anyhow, all things considered, if the scale of this ‘rumbling’ is as reported then I can see why the church’s narrative of the coming of the apocalypse is so easily eaten up by the locals. After all, I think my brain would be fried if I’d be forced to listen to the russian state

propaganda channels. Take what they say with a grain of salt. But maybe not engaging with them is your best bet at staying sane.’

And just like that P shook my hand, jumped into the van, and drove off with the team to confirm their hypothesis.

#### THE MINER’S TALE

To put it bluntly, nothing but the immediate fear for my own life occupied my mind last night, the nightmares had no opportunity to infiltrate my psyche. Explosions followed by yet more explosions, and on and on it went through the night.

Kharkiv has not seen a break since the beginning of this year, in the last few weeks alone, taking into account the occupation of the towns on its periphery I reckon a billion pounds or so were spent on its destruction. Every night we prayed that it’s not our time to go, and in the morning we awoke to images of carnage.

To be clear, it’s not dying that I am fearful of. It’s not finding solace once I do that scares me. Our bodies are scorched by the missiles at night, and in the morning devoured by the hungry eyes of millions of spectators worldwide who long to voyage digitally into the sites of ruination. May I remind you all that your gluttony plays a part in our slaughter.

This was the last day of my trip to the wanted city, the day I would finally piece the puzzle together, or so I hoped. I was to meet S at a construction site where they have found a job since fleeing from the occupation. I spotted them hiding in the shade of the crane overlooking the ruins of a school. They greeted me with a handshake and



an offer of a smoke, which I couldn't refuse this morning even though I quit a year ago.

Since young adulthood, S worked the mines with their father in Vuhledar, they told me that being the youngest worker in a mine wasn't as bad as it may seem. For as long as they could remember, they wanted to be a miner just like their father and grandfather were before them. An endangered tradition of many tough working class families in the region. They told me that Vuhledar literally translates to a *gift of coal*, yet I thought to myself that perhaps the immense coal basin of Donetschyna was not as much a blessing but a curse.

Donbas, the heart of the empire, the heart of the union, provided the resources necessary for the two to survive. The name itself suggests the extractivist gaze on the region from russia, Donbas—Donetsk basin. The coal basin that powered the previous iterations of the russian empire, and that the one in the making desires to power its current war effort and future conquests to the West. This time however, not by way of coal extraction directly, but through the ideological resourcification that comes with the occupation of the region.

S has worked the coal mines in Vuhledar since they turned 16, had a brief stint at salt mining in Soledar at 20, but then returned to the city which raised them and continued to work the same mine as their dad. At this point, many of the mines were flooded, they told me that it was as dangerous as never before. With the coming of the full-scale invasion and closure of the remaining mines in Donetschyna, they were forced to work the kopankas in hopes of getting enough money to bail their father out of jail, who was forcefully detained for evading military service.

Not wanting to fight his own people, S's father hid for as long as he could, yet a month after his detainment

he was tortured and died of tuberculosis in a makeshift prison in Luhansk. S believes that the russians put him in a cell filled with men with an active stage of the disease, a practice well documented in occupied territories. This was the final straw for S, and to evade torture and possible death they managed to get back to war-torn Vuhledar and escape with the Ukrainian forces during the battle for the city.

Having lit up the third cigarette in a span of five minutes, they asked me if I knew of the stories that miners tell of the rumbling, while evading my question on their miraculous escape to Ukrainian controlled territories. I did not, so they proceeded to tell me of Shubin.

'The story has many beginnings, many folk wonder which one's true. Some say it all began with a young miner in the first operational mine of Donetsk, who was the lone survivor from his group after a methane induced explosion. Blamed for the deaths of his kin, they say that he blew himself up with the mine and has since wandered underground in anger. Others have it, that an owner of a mine, who was skilled in predicting explosions went down a mine and never came back. The ones who doubt, say that it stems from the gas burners who'd burn out the gas so that explosions wouldn't happen. They wore these furs to protect them yet many of them died, they say their spirits are trapped inside the mines where they have perished.

Whoever he is, we know him to be true. He has wandered the mines for centuries, led us out of their darkest corners countless times and sheltered us from premature deaths. That was until they arrived.

Bit by bit they flooded his mines, pushing him to the periphery of his underground kingdom. Then, they came again, this time bringing even more calamity and

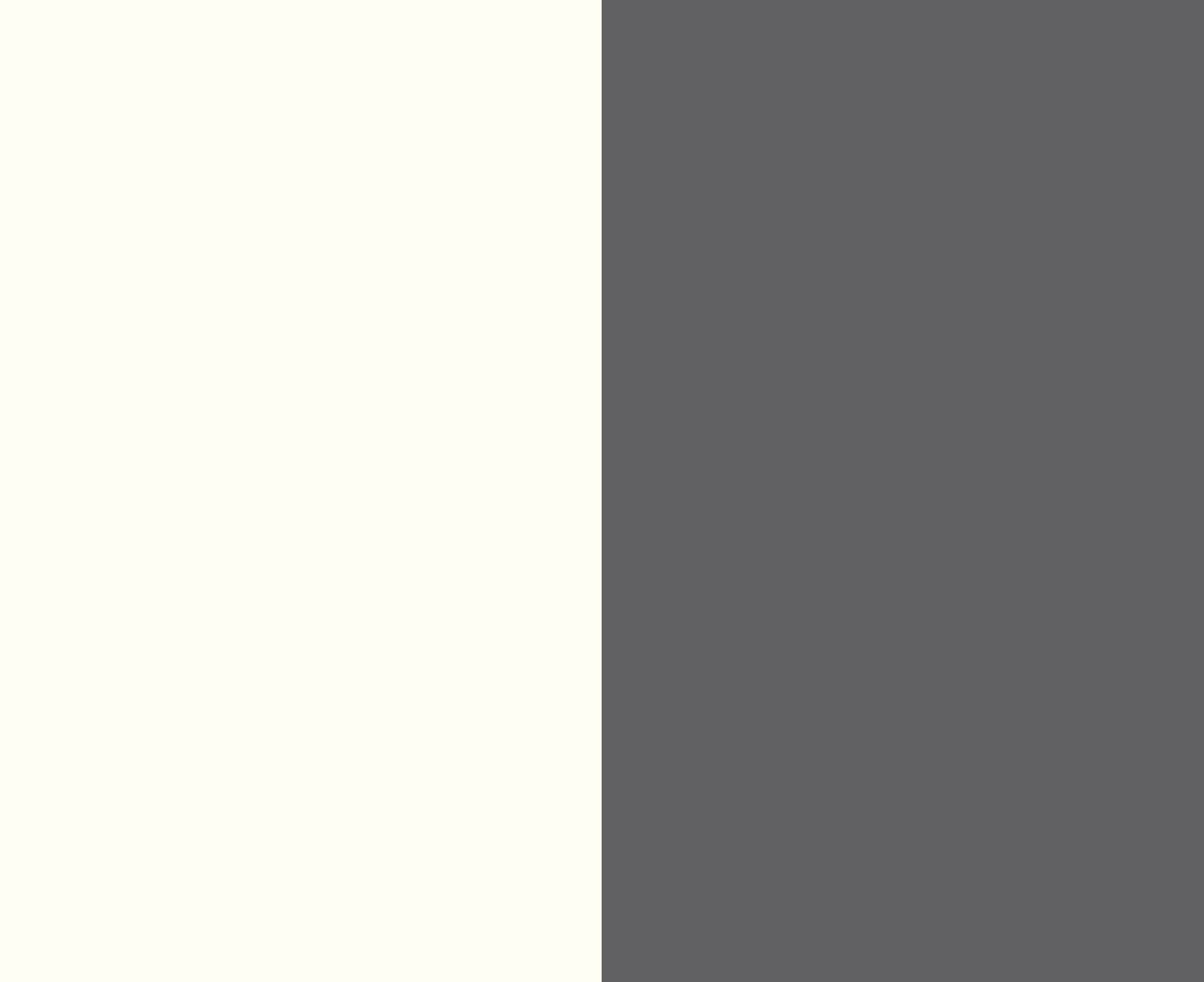
destruction with them. They sent most of his kin, the miners, to their deaths and imprisoned the rest, leaving him to wander the mines alone. In his solitude he grew angry and started a process that cannot be stopped.

In the depths of the underground, under the abandoned and flooded mines of Donbas, where the scorching iron core of our Earth is at its deadliest, a new kingdom arises. It is built for all of his kin who have been murdered by the invaders. A kingdom of and for the dead. A place for them to be together again after a forced separation. This kingdom is being built with the very bones of the occupiers and settlers.

It is said, that alongside the White Queen, she who reigned over the mines further East, they entrap all the spirits of the dead in Donetschyna. The spirits of the settlers and invaders are sent to wander in a never-ending labyrinth of darkness. Given only a pickaxe, they're left to pick at the Earth in a futile attempt to get out.

The miners are sent to the newfound kingdom, where in hopes of rebuilding their homes underground they work side by side with their kin, and with him, our protector.

This is the rumbling. It is the birth of a home and a fruitless attempt to escape one's demise. I know that my father is there, rejoicing to be back with the people he cherished. I wish I could join them too when it's my time to go, and revel in the cacophony of Shubin's revenge on the settlers.'



## COLOPHON

*I Dream of the Absinthium Fields  
Landscapes, Myth and Longing*

### WRITERS

Kateryna Rudenko  
Iryna Zamuruieva  
D.Z.:Dalia Zhdanovskyy

### EDITOR

Josh Plough

### CO-PUBLISHED BY

Fundacja Ziemiaki i  
[www.ziemniakii.eu](http://www.ziemniakii.eu)  
& Ksi Prostir  
[www.ksiprostir.org](http://www.ksiprostir.org)

### DESIGN AND PRINTING

Wydawnictwo Stopka

### PAPER

Ecco Book,  
Diverso Natural Offset

### RISO COLOURS

Blue, Fluo Pink, Yellow

### TYPEFACE

Source Serif, Scala Sans

### BINDING

Perfect Binding

Originally published as *I Dream of the Absinthium Fields: A Journey of the Ukrainian refugee: from Farewell to Yearning with a Song in the Heart* in 2021 with the help of The Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology.

Republished in 2024 within the framework of the project Under the Lying Stone, Water Does Not Flow, which has been funded by the IZOLYAT-SIA foundation, Trans Europe Halles, and Malý Berlín, and co-financed by the ZMINA: Rebuilding program, created with the support of the European Union under a dedicated call for proposals to support Ukrainian displaced people and the Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors.



Співфінансується  
Європейським Союзом

### SPECIAL THANKS TO:

IWM The Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna



