

A Fictional War

(Which the West Can't Win)

Lesia Daria

Lesia Daria is a writer, journalist, campaigner, and volunteer. She is a communications adviser at the Ukrainian Institute London, and in Surrey where she is active in her local community, she is helping Ukrainian refugees to settle into life in the UK. Previously Lesia worked as a journalist in Washington DC, Kyiv, London, and New York, and lived in Paris, Minsk, and Istanbul. She holds a BA from the University of Virginia and an MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

In Lesia's three-in-one poem A Fictional War, two voices speak in separated monologues but are also integrated and juxtaposed. The poem confronts the battle of narratives (lived, reported experience versus Russian lies) that rage alongside and form a critical part of the war and brutal violence in Ukraine.

Small boy in Bucha:

I had a toy rabbit

Mama said don't look

They shoot for no reason

It's only a short walk

In the car, we'll be safe

Mama ran but tripped

By a broken door a Russian soldier

In the shelling I stopped short, hid

My hands covered my ears

But you can't stop your eyes from seeing

Still, I heard her screams

And the shots that made her stop

Then they came looking for me

This is only a special operation

A project of denazification

Ukraine must be stripped

In order to be subdued

Fascists must be eradicated

We will infiltrate and exhaust them

This is our sphere of influence

We will purge their ranks

We can immobilise you

We will tie your hands

And so we have our way

It is you who encroached on us

Crimes a figment of your imagination

As we obliterate a nation, we do not target civilians

In the rubble, I played dead	
My rabbit was buried	Yet you cancel our great Russian culture
They don't bury anybody, not ours or theirs	We have ballet, we have Pushkin!
Darkness so long, I finally went to find mama	We have bullets, we have Putin!
Behind the door she lay, arms out, not quite right	We have nuclear options too
	Yet you seize our yachts and villas

What is this rule of law?

I could not see her face, I could not	
I hid in the woods until Ukrainians came	We decry your cynical lies
They gave me water and black bread	We are always ready to negotiate
And a blue and yellow blanket	For our long term security, which is paramount
Now I am here	For our total domination, we will choose
And I so miss my mama	There is no truth, only fake news
	As ever we win, with our great Russian fiction

Who do you think has the last word?

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