



Author	ANDRIY BONDARENKO
Play	PEACE AND TRANQUILITY
Original name / translated	Мир і спокій
Translator	JOHN FARNDON
Language of translation	English
Copyright of original text belongs to	<a href="mailto:bondarenko.andrij@gmail.com">bondarenko.andrij@gmail.com</a>
Copyright of translation belongs to	<a href="mailto:jfarndon@dircon.co.uk">jfarndon@dircon.co.uk</a>

All I want now is to go back to my unsettled, troubled, modest, confusing, peaceful previous life.

But now on the 13th day of the war, I realize that disaster, famine, mass deaths, and catastrophe were an integral part of my previous peaceful life. So why do I call it 'peaceful'? From habit. It was never either peaceful or calm.

I was lucky to be born in 1978, during the most peaceful and tranquil period of my country's existence. For my first 12 years, I lived in relative prosperity, peace and tranquility. Or it seemed so to me then. I lived quietly, went to kindergarten, then to school, ate bagels, drank kefir, received chocolates at holidays, signed greeting cards to relatives, studied primers and political pamphlets, and read Charles Dickens and Jules Verne.

I was often afraid that the Americans would drop an atomic bomb on us. Sometimes I would wake up in a cold sweat after hearing the sound of a plane at night. But that passed. It was only later, when I read my mother's diary after her death, that I realized that the peace and tranquility existed only in my childhood mind. For my mother, it was a life full of sorrow, stress and daily survival.

But there was someone in our family who, like me, enjoyed peace and tranquility then. That was my grandmother, who had lived all her life in the village. She had survived the Holodomor, the Nazis,

Soviet collective farm slavery – and from 1978 to 1990 she was finally able to grow potatoes in peace.

So I grew up with a sense of peace and tranquility. I saw it as an inalienable right. I was a child of the 80s of the 20th century.

Now I understand how naive this feeling was. A mistake from being born in a short period of peace and tranquility. In the area where I was born, no one ever gave anyone the right to peace and quiet. And we, the Ukrainian children of the 1980s, had no privileges or rights. None. Who gave them to us? No one.

My mother was born in the remote village of Polissya in the north of Ukraine – where Russian tanks are now breaking into Kyiv from Belarus. All her ancestors lived there since ancient times. From time immemorial, a curse hung over our family. No one had a normal home of their own in which to live and earn a living. My great-grandmother, Kateryna, spent her life saving money against the despotic will of her abusive husband. She eventually built her own home, but that drunken abusive husband set it on fire and burned it down. So she packed up all her belongings and her children, and went to live with relatives.

My grandmother was born in a small cottage along with several dozen other people. When she was 16, the Holodomor began. She and her siblings survived because their mother Kateryna had a secret can of moonshine. She gave each of her children a spoonful of moonshine every day. And so their bellies did not swell from eating wild grass and bark like their neighbours' children. And so they survived.

When she turned 18, my grandma ran away from home and settled near a stone quarry to give herself some freedom. There she fell in love with a train driver who drove the trains transporting the quarried stones to the east. Moscow was built from this stone. Baba felt a certain peace and tranquility and even love. But then came the war with the Nazis and her train driver was drafted into the army. So Baba went back to the cramped cottage. And she married an old soldier who had caught yellow fever in the 1930s while serving in Abkhazia. He was kind and frail, and because of his disability he was not called to the war. But when the Nazi's came, they herded the women and all the others still in the village into an old wooden church. They then set the church on fire. Miraculously, Baba escaped through a crack in the wall, but the rest of the villagers were burned alive. After the war, she worked at a flax factory. But it was not enough to keep the house going. So every evening, she came home after dark, carrying a bag of defective flax she'd salvaged from the factory. Until midnight, she'd spin the flax on an old wooden spinning wheel, then fall asleep sitting upright. And at five in the morning, the foreman knocked on the window – and off she'd go to the factory again.

After 1978, grandma was able to get a little more sleep. The foremen no longer went from house to house. Once a week, she could eat a can of condensed milk or a bar of chocolate. It was a time of peace and quiet.

My mother. When she was 16 years old, she left the village and got a job in construction in Kazakhstan. She believed in communism and wanted to be useful to the Soviet people. It was in Kazakhstan she first heard about the Soviet camps. She heard the horrific story of the Kangaroo

Uprising - how the prisoners in one of the camps revolted and how they were brutally murdered. People told this story to each other in whispers, looking around fearful of being heard. My mother stopped believing in communism. She continued to believe only in classical music, poetry and the human soul. Fate took her to Lviv, where she worked as a metrological engineer, raising and feeding three children entirely herself, because she had divorced her husband. He, by the way, continued to live in the same apartment, because there was no money to rent another. Almost every day I was woken by their arguments - since they were forced to use the same kitchen. Still, we lived in two rooms, not a single communal one, like some of my friends, so in general I felt peaceful and calm and read Dickens on the warm tiles. It's just my nature - I'm an optimist. And my sister is not - very much. Later, she went crazy because she believed she had the right to a normal life, but she did not and it was not. In the end, she could bear no more and went to live in a fictional world.

In the 1990s, there was very little money for food and clothing. Since then, I have been in the habit of buying most of my clothes in second-hand shops. Shops like these, which appeared at this time, allowed me to buy the clothes I liked instead of my brother's old Soviet jacket. I saved bottles to find the money to buy clothes in these Seconds. At least vodka was cheap then. We students drank it on an empty stomach, smoking cheap cigarettes, and ever since I have had a stomach ulcer. It was normal in the faculty of philosophy where I studied to drink vodka on an empty stomach.

But in our new state of Ukraine, for some reason we all thought we now have the right and privilege to peace and tranquility. And dignity. So we went to political rallies and protests. First, 'Ukraine without Kuchma<sup>1</sup>', then the first Maidan. All we needed was peace, tranquility and dignity. We just wanted that right.

Then the second Maidan. Hundreds of peaceful protesters shot dead in the streets of Kyiv. But it only gave us a week. Peace and tranquility after the victory of the second Maidan lasted literally just a week. For that one week I lived in the belief that we were finally worthy of the right to peace and tranquility. Then the Russians landed in Crimea.

For eight years, we listened daily to the news of dead Ukrainian soldiers. Sometimes more, sometimes less. But we believed, we believed – I believed – that it was all a terrible mistake. That we really do have the right to peace and tranquility and dignity. That in the end it will all end at last.

But after eight years it did end. The Great War came. Burnt, bombed, destroyed houses. The horrific deaths of thousands of civilians. So far thousands...

Well, on the one hand, it's a curse. I know sooner or later my house will burn down like my great-grandmother Kateryna's house, burned down in the 1910s. It has not burned down yet, but these days, I have said goodbye to it dozens of times and goodbye to everything that is dear to me – everything that I will not be able to take with me when Russian tanks come to Lviv. It's like seeing it burned dozens of times.

On the other hand, who actually gives anyone any rights? Where does the privilege of having peace and tranquility come from? I do not know. If Ukraine survives, maybe I will have an answer to this question. Right now - I do not know. I stand now in some darkness, next to my sister and brother, next to friends, next to my deceased mother, grandmother, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-

---

<sup>1</sup> Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine from 1994 to 2005, whose rule was engulfed in corruption scandals

grandmother, next to all Ukrainians who died in this and other wars and during periods of peace and tranquility.

They don't know, and I don't know. We just stare at the black darkness in front of us. The light of the house where we were born, consumed by flames which do not illuminate the darkness in any way. How can we finally dispel this darkness? Can we?

What to write next, I just don't know.

Here is my list of books about the war. I give it to you:

*The Iliad*

*The Song of the Nibelung*

*The House at the Edge of the Night*

*The Good Soldier Schweik*

*The Tale of Igor's campaign*

*War and Peace*

*Quiet flows the Don*

*All quiet on the western front*

*The song of Roland*

*The little prince*

*And the stars are quiet here.*

*The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*

*The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*

*Vasily Torkin*

*The Fate of a Man*