

★ The Ukraine

Artem Chapeye

Zenia Tompkins, Translator

Seven Stories Press (Jan 16, 2024)

Softcover \$18.95 (240pp)

978-1-64421-295-0

Going beyond headlines of war and strife, Artem Chapeye's *The Ukraine* parts the veil to offer an earthy, humane look at the people and places of Ukraine. Chapeye is a Ukrainian native and traveling journalist, and his compendium of short stories and "creative nonfiction" dates from 2010-2018, documenting local struggles (and in some cases, eerily presaging the future).

The Ukraine's fiction entries focus on the quotidian: an old village woman venturing to Kyiv to sell potatoes while dodging nosy police officers; a former hoodlum dealing with the stresses of being a father; a downtrodden courier obsessed with acquiring the latest smartphone. For these characters, today is hard enough. These stories capture people's travails with rough affection and humor.

But the true meat of Chapeye's powerful collection is its numerous creative nonfiction segments, chronicling his travels across Ukraine. His visits to regions already wracked by clashes between government forces; Russia-friendly separatists and corrupt local authorities provide sobering context for the current war with Russia. There are vibrant details, too, as of repairmen forced to use a rusty Russian motorcycle chain to replace the chain on a damaged Japanese motorcycle, and of a car battery that's used to power a single light bulb for warmth in the dead of winter.

Chapeye's interviews and unlikely friendships with political pundits, brash truck drivers, hardscrabble country folk, and committed militants give a human face to Ukraine's woes. Each subject is handed ample opportunity to voice their disappointments and fears about what Ukraine is and where it's going. The result is an expansive, absorbing portrait of an imperfect land that's worth cherishing for its complexity and contradictions.

The Ukraine is a deft, humane, and empathetic text that contemplates a nation's ever-shifting fortunes.

HO LIN (January / February 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.