

Between the lines

1. If you were born in the Soviet Union, then you've often heard the phrase "between the lines" and you know what it means...
2. its meaning is hidden between the lines.
3. Though Latvia's flag – they say – is one of the oldest flags in the world – a white stripe between two carmine red lines,
4. for long, drawn-out years, my country existed only between the lines of ideological history books
5. I was born in the Soviet Union. I'm as ancient as a collapsed state's political system and an unwanted monument¹.
6. In principle, I'm so ancient that I could start collapsing too.
7. They say – Latvians are a nation of poets – and poets created their Aesopic language between the lines
8. Poets are paid by the line – everything else, everything written between the lines, well that's on them – on their bill and conscience
9. I thought my generation didn't have to deal with censorship, but since February 24th we've realised the scale of the propaganda gushing from that horn of plenty without shame and bringing repressions with it.
10. Sometimes between the lines means beating around the bush
11. Sometimes between the lines means sweeping it under the rug.
12. And now we're just going to pretend this shit isn't just sitting there?
13. There were some carpets in my childhood home – mostly on the walls.
14. May 12th, the 78th day of the war, I finally got my dad on the phone, we talked warmly, I told him about his grandson, my son, we'd brought him a Sherlock Holmes hat from London just like the one Livanov has. And then he told me that when it comes to the war, his thoughts part ways with mine, and the old television was turned off for some reason.
15. The rest of it, well, it's just between the lines.
16. This trauma is worse than when he and mom divorced when I was just six or seven.
17. I know you just shot me a crooked glance between the lines. Whenever I hear Russian now, I can't help but do the same. Sometimes I grit my teeth. Sometimes I try to hold myself steady.
18. And so I shoot myself a crooked glance between the lines too.
19. Sometimes I pretend I don't understand this language. Even though it's my dad's language and I understand it perfectly, even with my dad always trying to speak to me in Latvian. Only now as his Alzheimer's advances is he forgetting Latvian words.

¹ The Monument at Victory Park in Rīga – following Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24th, questions were raised concerning the place and role of this monument in Latvian society. After the illegal May 9th commemorations and events praising Soviet rule, the Saeima (the Latvian parliament) passed a law authorising the dismantling of the monument in the near future.

20. Sovereignty. Independence. Truth. Lies...
21. And are you waiting for somebody to come and free you? I asked him. My dad.
22. OK, but we're here to talk about literature. So, let's talk about literature – all those books about generation gaps suddenly were written about me.
23. The subtext?
24. Text that's lower than the grass, but just keeps on growing
25. Why can't you just write in lines?
26. Lines at the bank, lines at the filtration camps, lines at the border, lines at the undertaker, lines at the florist who creates funeral bouquets, lines at the national guard enrolment offices, lines at the registry office, lines for social welfare payments, lines at confession, lines at the soup kitchen, lines at the Pearly Gates...
27. In line for new deliveries of second-hand goods
28. In line for sausage and in line for cheese
29. "no additives, no artificial fragrances, colours, low sugar, low salt" – but what's hidden there between the lines?!
30. In line for two bottles of Moskovskaya² vodka (which they renamed just like the Moscow Garden³?) before the store closes
31. Between the lines there is a different state of consciousness.
32. Between the lines there are different laws.
33. But there are other lines too. The lines between which my tiredness hides
34. My anger
35. My self-pity. Moaning. Well, why isn't it going my way? Like I was in the wrong movie, with the wrong people, in the wrong time, in the wrong job, writing the wrong books between the wrong lines.
36. My despair
37. My offence
38. What's not on my face also hides between the lines. Smiles that line up in droves, but know how to hide the true condition of my spirit
39. and sometimes those are really marginal lines or lines in very fine print
40. maybe those lines aren't even written yet.
41. The space between the lines can be like an abyss, the hidden part of an iceberg, a field of light, camouflage, a bomb shelter, a mine field, Pandora's Box, and a closed, protected sky or maybe even an island. A lonely island.
42. Some people are like rhythmic, euphonious lines and their inner world – a cluster of profound purpose and meaning. But not me.
43. What do we do with the sort of experience that has no place in written lines?
44. The gaps between lines are linear black holes
45. (In Morse code, the letter "d" – like the word "dad" – starts with a black line.)
46. which swallow up the powerless lines
47. which swallowed up not just my first period, my first time, but also my small breasts

² Moskovskaya Vodka is manufactured by the Latvian alcoholic beverage producer "Latvijas Balzāms". Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, "Moskovskaya Vodka" has been renamed "Mosko Vodka" and all of its profits are being donated to support Ukraine.

³ Since the beginning of the war, the Rīga City Council has decided to change the name of the Moscow Garden to its original name – Latgale Park.

48. long nose and narrow hips, long, hairy arms, grey hair, and the veins on my legs,
weak nerves, postpartum stretch marks and hypertonia
49. anaemia, tuberculosis and cervical cancer
50. and me too almost, together with all the lines I've written
51. Do lines also sag with age?
52. How do lines die?
53. A last breath trained between the lines
54. A last breath Mi-8 helicoptered between the lines
55. A last cruiser ("Moskva"?)
56. And the last lifeboat (full of holes too)
57. Bury me behind the lines
58. What message is hidden between the last lines?
59. The very last ones.
60. But why should we worry about the problems of others?!
61. The reason shows up (somewhere between the lines)
62. We're all one – and in that, there is much said between the lines
63. The reason expands
64. And takes over every line, even those which had no reason.
65. It's much cooler between the lines anyway!
66. The truth – and especially secrets – love it between the lines, and aren't they actually
one and the same?
67. What's between the lines fractures our illusions
68. Sometimes lightning strikes between the lines
69. Sometimes the water runs out between the lines
70. But sometimes – paper
71. and ink
72. and also ammunition
73. And what if there's total silence between the lines?
74. And harmony
75. Our best side (which shows up too rarely)
76. There might be something said between shitty lines too
77. but then what's said between the lines is crap too
78. And what if there's nothing between the lines?
79. Then that would mean that I'm nothing too, because too often I've felt like I also exist
only between the lines.
80. Maybe I really am nothing, a Buddhist dream – about Nothing
81. The stuff between the lines – is it real?
82. *But those are just your thoughts, it's not reality!*
83. Materialism doesn't acknowledge that there's something between the lines
84. There's a dream between the lines
85. but between a dream and wakefulness are lines
86. And no one will ever read between these lines
87. And if no one will ever read these lines, can we assume what's said between the lines
was ever actually said between the lines?

88. Sometimes I feel like I just want to go and scream between all those lines, but I know that actually I don't, because later I always feel worse not better. I can scream into a pillow too or the carpet on the wall, or underwater.
89. If I wrote something underwater – on a submarine, then that wouldn't be between the lines, but between the earth and the bottom (of the sea, of course).
90. All that's left between the lines is that juicy cursing that I'd like more, but do less
91. The Devil
92. In the details and in deep
93. Shit
94. This shit will tear us apart
95. Or will it be love that'll tear us apart after all?
96. Or unexploded shells and mines?
97. Lines like these will tear us apart
98. War has torn open every line and shown what's long been hidden between them – like under a carpet where the dirt we had tolerated so long was swept
99. Well, sometimes, I just choose to live like I didn't know that I know.
100. By the way, a question about tolerance
101. Some lines should be torn apart
102. It's an art to say it between the lines
103. Take a shot (every phrase involving "shooting" makes one shake right now)
104. Every line like that is shaking right now
105. Any line like that resonates in my heart right now
106. Everything I keep to myself is written between the lines.
107. When everything around us is suffocating, there's oxygen right between the lines.
108. Starp rindām ir miers. There is peace between the lines.