

The background of the cover is a monochromatic, pinkish-red photograph. On the left side, a large, gnarled tree with long, drooping branches (likely a weeping willow) dominates the frame. In the lower right portion of the image, a person is sitting on a wooden bench, facing away from the camera towards a hazy, open landscape. The overall mood is contemplative and melancholic.

*dis*UNITY

Selected novels by Anatoly Kudryavitsky

Glagoslav

*dis*UNITY

Selected novels
by Anatoly Kudryavitsky

Glagoslav Publications

*dis*UNITY

Selected novels by Anatoly Kudryavitsky

© 2013, Anatoly Kudryavitsky

English translation © 2013, Carol Ermakova
Shadowplay on a Sunless Day

English translation © 2013, Siobhán McNamara
A Parade of Mirrors and Reflections

© 2013, Glagoslav Publications, United Kingdom

Glagoslav Publications Ltd
88-90 Hatton Garden
EC1N 8PN London
United Kingdom

www.glagoslav.com

ISBN: 978-1-78267-106-0

This book is in copyright. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

CONTENTS

SHADOWPLAY ON A SUNLESS DAY

Part one	6
Part two	72
Part three	114

A PARADE OF MIRRORS AND REFLECTIONS

Part one	191
Part two	231
Part three	253

SHADOWPLAY ON A SUNLESS DAY

Translated from the Russian by Carol Ermakova

Caelum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt.
They change their skies but not their souls,
those who soar across the sea.

Horace, Epistles, Book I, epistle XI

PART ONE

I.

Anything written is obvious.

First to the writer, and then to the readers.

What is obvious now is the transparent birch trees and the fresh green gold of the foliage melting in the warm May wind. This process gives rise to a philosopher's stone: the Sun, that fiery mass, or rather, that amalgamation of gases which punctually and even persistently illuminates our many and varied paths.

The morning path leads to milk and bread. Ah, those wonderful non-French French baguettes! And the grocery van, cutely parked there, with its piggy snout and its despondent elephant's trunk of doleful little steps trailing down to the ground. This is the gathering point for all the paths which run between Projected Prospect and the newly-felled forest cutting. Incidentally, the cutting has had its own name for more than a week now: Academician Afonsky Street. But there is no street as such yet, only three clearings in the middle of the forest which encircles Moscow. Did this acclaimed academician once live somewhere in these woods? He had a cottage here, at least, for it was on the veranda of that cottage that the prominent artist Nesterov sketched his satire of the academician dancing naked around a table littered with manuscript pages scattering down like autumn leaves. That portrait caused such a furore... It depicts the academician sticking his tongue out and pressing his palms to his ears, which are drawn in the form of huge elephant ears.

The picture is known as Eureka (oil on canvas, 180×120cm, private collection in Baltimore, USA).

How good it is to walk unburdened! It's good to walk burdened with bread and milk, too, though not quite so good. But at least breakfast is underway now, with lilac in bud just under the wide open windows, and the roar of a waterfall as the rubbish cascades down the chute. How do they collect the rubbish from here? How can any vehicle drive up to this clearing? After all, there's no tarmac... Well, they get here somehow.

But for now there are only the stray passersby, sleepy morning bushes and chirpy morning birds. Morning — morning in the forest! Clad in two little yellow bonnets, coltsfoot smiles out from behind a mouldy stump. Someone's shadow is glimpsed behind the y-shaped aspen. A dog's? Well, certainly not a wolf's!

No, not a wolf's. But it wasn't human, either, though it rustled and slunk away like a human. Grey fur, moulting, with pricked ears flattened slightly as it ran. It was probably just some animal or other; maybe it lives here. The only memory it left was the swaying branches and a chill in the spine, as if a gust of wind had whistled by. Or maybe it was nothing more than an apparition. Only its transparency is remembered, and a few opaque details — horn-rimmed glasses and a tie against a background of grey wool. It was a red tie, with little black squares.

2.

“The things you run into in a former soviet forest!” Arefiev was saying to the accompaniment of milk flowing into his stomach and an avalanche of bread.

A shrivelled, silver-haired old lady with marble grey eyes was nodding her head as she meticulously chewed her mortadella. She had just dug all the eyes of fat out of it with a long knife and her nods were for the mortadella, too; every morsel of

food — or chymus, to give this substance its proper name — which landed in her stomach provoked a rumbling “y-yes!” as her body approved the arrival of nutrition. The fat eyes were saved for dessert.

“Maybe it was a monkey?” Arefiev suggested.

The old woman was nodding. She had just consumed a fatty sponge cake and was pondering whether she should complete the repast with some smoked fish. After all, sweet and savoury go so well together!

The repast over, it is time for him to go. He leaves, and the house is now hers. She walks through to the other room, the room with the curtained windows where her eyes rest in the darkness, her ears in the silence and her lungs in the dust. She quietly settles herself in the corner, occupying the junction of three planes, and then sets to work. It is as though a transparent thread, fine and youthful, comes spinning out from the very centre of her small, convex, saffron tummy, right from her belly button, recently relieved. How it would gleam in the sunshine, how it would waft in the wind! But here it is motionless. A spider’s web?

3.

*Reality augments itself with us and becomes “surreality”,
for we humans are surreal beings.*

People are taught to supplement themselves to reality in school, during grammar classes. This exercise can go by many names, such as “complete the gaps”:

“We read about the persecution of scholars in the Middle Ages but then opened the biography of academician Lysenko and...”*

“This stream is narrow but deep and although there are no fish in it, there is something of scientific value and so we carefully...”

* T. D. Lysenko, Soviet pseudo-scientist favoured by Stalin, and blamed for the deaths of many Soviet geneticists.

“Without losing his head, the hunter fired a shot at the bear and ... but then, unaware of the danger, he walked calmly along the edge of the forest.”

“Masha went into the manufactured goods shop where ... but at home she gazed for a long time at the cover of “Burda World of Fashion” magazine.”

“This year at school we memorised 120 poems by Pushkin, Lermontov and Nekrasov and we found them all really...”

“Larissa went up to the map of the Soviet Union and ... but then remembered something funny and laughed.”

“Ilyusha took a folio of Pushkin’s poems from the shelf and ... but then, with his seat raised, he began watching cartoons.”

“Soviet writers portray typical scenes of nature and everyday life thereby invoking in us...”

In the latter case the children take their pencils and scrawl: “a sense of deep aversion”. They show this to each other, giggle, then rub it out, but they are wrong. In fact they should have written “familiarity with the grotesque” or better still “a sense of the surreal nature of existence”.

4.

He walked more slowly on his way home from work. The Sun marked the entrance to the forest with squares and triangles for him. But the forest was melting into the blurred moist haze and slipping away. With each step he took, the forest retreated a step. This went on for some time. Then the forest took a deep breath with its bird-filled canopy and let him in. He followed the fine thread of the path, but then suddenly became aware of someone else walking next to him, following the same fine thread. He shuddered and stopped. The stranger raised his straw hat.

“Excuse me, are you looking for the entrance?” he asked, and his pronunciation seemed somehow overly correct. Curious, foreign, yet oddly correct.

ANATOLY KUDRYAVITSKY

“The entrance?” Arefiev queried, and raised his hand to his mouth in an involuntary, inexplicable gesture.

“*Entrée. Eingang.*” The stranger’s reply was utterly incomprehensible.

A butterfly carried the sun’s light to the stranger’s face. Arefiev shuddered: his face was covered with grey fur, right up to the eyes.

With a deft flick of his wrist the stranger caught the butterfly and it froze on his wrinkled brown palm as though paralysed.

“I didn’t even knock her powder off,” the stranger congratulated himself. “I’m agile, aren’t I? Really agile, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes, you are,” Arefiev admitted. “Can I look at the butterfly?”

“How do you like the pattern?” the stranger asked, pointing at the butterfly with his claw-like nail.

Arefiev took a look. The design on the little cherry-coloured wings was unusual: the eyes were not along the edge of the wing but in the middle, forming a spiral.

“The pattern’s not right,” Arefiev remarked.

The stranger looked at him curiously:

“Doesn’t it remind you of anything?”

“It’s like a snail,” Arefiev shrugged.

“Exactly. A snail,” the stranger said sternly. “The acceleration of gravity at the exit is 10G.”

“That has something to do with physics, hasn’t it?” Arefiev put in uncertainly. He worked in a research institute, and, as everyone knows, a scientist’s knowledge only covers one branch of science – the one he is paid for.

The Sun measured out mellow sunset honeycombs on the branches. The gusty wind was strangely cold.

“From applied astronomy, actually,” the stranger said. “So you don’t know anything about the entrance or the exit, right?”

“It depends what we’re talking about.”

“About the abstract, my dear, about the downright abstract. As for concrete reality, you will see it on the television this

evening. By the way, a question for you: can there be such a thing as an entrance into nowhere and an exit from there?"

Smacking sounds came from somewhere in the distance, as though the bog were readying itself to swallow the Sun. Arefiev remembered he was hungry.

"Well, I'll be on my way then, I think," he said, and without saying goodbye, he wandered off along one branch of the forked path.

"Hey! You aren't allowed down there!" the stranger cried out, and dashed after him.

Arefiev ran, too. For a moment they ran neck and neck, but Arefiev couldn't keep it up. By the time he ran out into the glade, the stranger had already reached the little hill on the far side of the forest.

"The hole is closed," Arefiev heard a mechanical, sexless voice say, and the figure on the hillock vanished. All that remained was a mass of crimson sun, shrivelled spring grass and a heathery wind. Arefiev couldn't spot anyone in the glade, nor anywhere in the vicinity; it was as if the earth had swallowed the stranger. The serene sky shone blue as though it hadn't seen anything.

5.

The blue sky received its blueness as a gift, primordially, and never asked itself why it is blue.

But the blue water collects its blueness gradually, stocking it up from the transparent air, the dark fish and the golden sunshine.

The blue of the sky and the blue of the water are both convincing, just as any success is convincing; but as for dirty puddles, life has more than enough of those so there is no need to splash them over the pages.

Blue sky and blue water — these form an inter-mirror dimension where time sometimes runs forward, sometimes backward, although actually time never runs anywhere; it

ANATOLY KUDRYAVITSKY

simply abides freely in weightlessness. Humankind cannot stay between two looking glasses; from time to time we are overwhelmed by cheerless thoughts which chase wrinkles over our countenance and clouds over the forgetful sky. A human is a swimmer under the icy, cloudy skies. That is his element and he is able to screw his eyes up and blot out any light, even the Sun's regal shine. After all, it is more relaxing to swim with your eyes wide shut, especially if you are swimming towards the halls of eternal rest.

"What did he look like?" Arefiev asked himself when he was almost home. "Like anyone else. A Turkish leather jacket, a white shirt, a tie. No, not a red tie, that was the first one. That was a different person. But was this one a person at all? Was it human? And what about the first one? It didn't look like a human, not a bit... But then, who does?"

The block of flats opened up like a book and let him in. A silvery mesh of threads shone through the wall's smooth page. The little old woman was sitting in the bull's eye, gnawing something with her apparently toothless mouth.

"Let there be light!" said Arefiev, and switched on the television.

The mesh of threads turned blue. The old woman purred contentedly.

"Honecker was no longer..." The television was showing the chronicles of the early nineties. "The citizens of the GDR were able to travel to..."

Out poked the predatory grin of a German diesel locomotive.

"That's who's got a really beastly muzzle," Arefiev thought: "Things". He shook some tea leaves into a cup and was about to slosh some boiling water over them when the picture suddenly flickered and something utterly and even improbably familiar appeared on the screen.

Hey, that's our institute! He put the kettle down. What are they showing that for?

When he found out why, the cup fell from his hands and a dry brown tea stain appeared on the carpet. The same stains and puddles were spread over the floor of the institute, except that those were dark red, not brown. The institute had been stormed by armed men who had shot dead two guards and the director, wounded his secretary and then mercilessly clubbed nearly a dozen others who got in their way. On the television the wounded were being led out of the building, then the bodies were carried out, covered in sheets, some white, some blood-spattered.

White as snow, Arefiev sat in his armchair glued to the screen. The old woman worked her jaws, unruffled.

“At three o’clock today, in the institute...” the television was saying.

Arefiev remembered that he had left early that day, at a quarter to three. Fifteen minutes had separated him from...

6.

Bullets were singing in thin air... People were only just starting to get used to contract killings in Russia. It was later that bankers, bandits, politicians and passerby, the ones who had seen something and the ones who hadn’t, were culled on a daily basis, and it is still going on; there’s no end to it. And there’s no point in asking why, because there’s always a weapon and a target; as many targets as you can think of. Not to mention that it’s a well-paid job, and one doesn’t even have to perfect his shooting skills, as he can always take a few pot-shots — just to be sure.

Those killed were buried with much weeping and wailing. And the weeping and wailing rose up under the clouds and then throughout all the years to come it would swoop down onto our good old Earth more often than you could imagine. Listen — it is still there, biding its time!

Then it occurred to him: the man from the forest knew! “As for concrete reality, you will see it on the television this

evening...” When was that said? At three o’clock? Slightly later? Yes, that’s right. How could he have known? Or had he played an active part in those events? Arefiev felt uneasy. He realised that something hidden, something terrible was going on, and that some unknown entity had given him a particular role in it all.

As always, he soothed himself with music. The cherished chest with its gleaming golden ribs opened up and produced Schubert’s quartets. Arefiev donned gigantic headphones, which were more akin to some antiquated apparatus for deadening noise than to headphones, and immersed himself in “Death and the Maiden.” An odd name, he pondered, thinking about his own life. He’d had enough death in his life, but as for maidens... And he began to remember all the girls for whom he’d felt anything, even a little, starting from when he was sixteen. He didn’t have a good word for any of them now. Not one of them had appreciated him. They had all been so self-absorbed. And apart from certain fluctuating emotions, he was mainly self-absorbed, too. Life is a feast of egoism, he thought. The chest with its LPs exuded unsung peace, and Schubert was intimating some other life which flowed with beauty and harmony.

7.

*Sounds are formed by colours. This secret is known only
to the most skilful sound painters. Black is stillness,
and white is the whole orchestra. A day sometimes reveals
itself as a green andante played by a violin,
and sometimes as a brown solo of a flute.*

That harmony was infiltrated by something persistent and not entirely harmonious; Schubert had clearly written nothing of the kind.

Arefiev half raised his headphones. The telephone's raucous ring came pouring in. He grabbed the receiver.

The hush of offices seeped into the room, offices with unpleasant portraits and clocks with golden pendulums, and with never-ending cellars burrowing into the innards of the earth.

Can we keep someone out of our lives if he, or they, really want to burrow into them? Alas, we cannot.

"You don't like the portraits on our walls, do you?" enquired a pleasant, gravelly, inanimate voice. "Let's say the choice were yours. Who would you suggest?"

"Malyuta Skuratov," Arefiev blurted out with not a moment's hesitation.

"I suppose you think that's awfully ironic, but in fact he could easily hang here. Well, who would you put forward as a positive role model? In your opinion, whose portraits should hang in government offices?"

Whose indeed? Arefiev pondered. Peter the Great? Suvorov and Kutuzov? You couldn't put writers here — imagine for a moment that Solzhenitsyn were watching from the walls and you could read in his stern eyes exactly what he thought about this establishment...

"Aha, keeping quiet, are we?" the voice laughed gloatingly. "Well then, come on over and we can discuss it."

"Is it compulsory?" Arefiev said after a pause.

"No, quite voluntary," said the receiver soothingly. "We are part of history after all, and as Lincoln said: "we cannot escape history"."

"You are quoting Lincoln?" Arefiev was taken aback.

"We like to study our enemies," said the voice. "And our

* Ivan the Terrible's henchman.

** Two great Russian generals of the Napoleon era.

friends, too. Believe me, we know a lot about you. So come on over — let's say, tomorrow, at around ten-ish. No-one's working in your institute now anyhow. They are all listening to music. This kind of music..."

And music came down the telephone. It was the Allegretto from Beethoven's seventh symphony, which some think of as funeral music. There are some who think any music except the hit parade is funeral music, thought Arefiev as he listened to the music over the phone and wondered whether it was Toscanini conducting or Furtwängler. At around bar sixty-four a click was heard and the line went dead.

8.

The following morning Arefiev walked straight out of his house and into the sunshine. Screwing up his eyes against the dazzle, he headed into the forest and opened his eyes, only to discover that he wasn't in the forest at all. In fact, he had no idea where he was. He found himself in the midst of a painted landscape: the grass was coloured in with felt-tip pen, the crooked apple trees were festooned with unrealistically bright fruit, and a painted green sun hung in the sky. Arefiev could have sworn he had not gone more than 50 paces from his house.

A little white track stood out in the middle of the drawing and Arefiev set out along it. It led to a white cottage with a thatched roof. The roof was coloured in orange for some reason. Arefiev had just begun to wonder whether there was a door when one materialised, complete with a doorknocker in the form of a lion's face. Arefiev grasped the knocker. The bronze lion yawned and said: "Aha, so an entrance has come to light."

Arefiev froze on the spot and stood there for a long time because the picture, too, froze on the paper — Someone-Who-Wanted-To-Look was approaching. But Arefiev didn't see who it was as he suddenly felt very weak and sat down, right in front

of the door. He put his head on his knees and fell asleep. The last thing he saw was a real dog chasing a rabbit as it scurried across the picture-perfect lawn. The dog apprehended the rabbit and was frog-marching it into the kennel.

“Well?”

“He’s asleep, Comrade Captain.”

“Where?”

“In the cell. He’s leaning against the wall, asleep. Maybe he’s dreaming.”

“Maybe he is, but he’s not telling us.”

“We didn’t ask.”

“We asked all right. With instruments.”

“Of course, it is possible he doesn’t know anything.”

“Anything’s possible, but it’s not clear how he could be in the thick of it all and not notice anything.”

“He probably doesn’t want to notice.”

“Mmm...”

*It was not, as you might expect, people who were talking,
but uniforms.*

What was inside those uniforms is quite another matter. But it doesn’t matter anyway, of course, since whoever was idling in those uniforms was nothing more than a uniform-filler.

9.

Arefiev dreamt that he got married and that his wife was a corpulent, inwardly noisy woman in a gaudy, variegated dress who wanted to make a famous professor out of him and who forced him to meet various evergreen people which meant he had no time for himself when he could listen to his records. To cap it all, when they argued, she made her point by producing a little red pass with a golden coat of arms from some secret place and showing it to him. Of course, everyone knows that a pass

ANATOLY KUDRYAVITSKY

like that from the police or the secret service is the pride and joy of every Russian soul, Arefiev thought. Actually, it would be nice to wake up, even in the cellars of the Lubyanka.* And with that second thought he did indeed wake up. But not where he had feared, nor in the picture garden; he woke up in his own bachelor's bed at home. For some reason the clock said it was already evening.

He should at least have lunch. He had bought in some sausages, but there was nothing to go with them. He liked to eat off multicoloured plates since his food looked really rather wretched on a white plate. Scientific researchers aren't well paid, he thought as he gnawed a tomato, especially since the inflation of the early nineties when they'd added so many zeroes to each note and money just slipped through your fingers. He wondered what the figure on his next wage packet would be and whether it wouldn't just remain exactly that — a figure on paper. And I have Mother to feed, too. Just as well she doesn't need much.

Just then a suspicious sound came from the corner, followed by a wild squeal. A mouse had got caught in the spider's web and Arefiev would not have liked to be in its place.

He had supper before going to bed. He served up silence. Under his knife the silence fell away into pieces of china sound, sliced air, and a rustle beyond the window. The leaves were evidently begging to be included in the salad, but the window pane kept them out. Offended, they formed a green conspiracy and spread themselves out as a mosaic on the glass to prevent Day from getting in the next morning. Their fingers were slipping over the cold, greenish surface, their flat bodies bristled with cold, but they didn't just curl up and give in. What was it they had drawn on the glass? That life is a punishment, and we don't even know for what?

* The KGB headquarters and affiliated secret prison on Lubyanka Square in Moscow.

IO.

The Institute of Useful Mutations where Arefiev worked was established in the mid seventies. This is how it came about: Early one morning, the phone rang in the apartment of academician Churbasov, who had the pleasure of being personal physician to Leonid Illyich Brezhnev. It was so early that the academician was still somewhere in the cherished depths of sleep. But the telephone didn't let up.

"Yeah..." The enormous academician, waking in a cold sweat, finally raised the receiver to his small, myopic little head: he was vaguely reminiscent of a diplodocus which had somehow acquired glasses.

"We have to create him, my dear fellow," came the obscure rumble.

"Create who, Leonid Illyich?"

"You know, the young builder of Communism."

Having over-eaten the night before, Brezhnev had woken up at five in the morning and couldn't get off to sleep again. Vexed, he fumbled through some papers on his bedside table and picked up the first one which came to hand. By sheer chance it turned out to be the

"Code of the Young Builder of Communism."

Brezhnev yanked the light switch and a lamp in the shape of a five-pointed star came on. It was pink, oddly enough. At first he read half-heartedly, but soon became absorbed.

"But how can we create him, Leonid Illyich?" said the academician, somewhat at a loss.

"Well, Michurin created a new kind of apple, didn't he? So we'll hatch a new kind of person."

"But it's not that simple, Leonid Illyich. A person isn't an apple or a pear. We'll need genetics."

"Well then, gather some geneticists. Genetics isn't banned here now."

ANATOLY KUDRYAVITSKY

“Ah, but where are our geneticists...” sighed Churbasov. “We can’t bring them back.”

“Then collect some new ones,” his conversant breezed cheerily. “Make use of foreign experience.”

The academician heaved another sigh.

“Oh and by the way,” Brezhnev went on, “Keep all of this... well, you know... under wraps. Otherwise the West will try, too...”

“Understood, Leonid Illyich,” replied the academician, trying to imagine how the West, in a mad dash to compete with Moscow, would create an exemplary builder of Communism.

That same day Churbasov summoned two people. The first was an old survivor, the geneticist Wolfson. He was head scientist at the dilapidated and utterly unimportant zootechnical laboratory.

When the academician brought him up to date, wiry little Wolfson gave a sly snigger and the orioles of wrinkles which hid his deep-set green eyes began sparkling like miniature tanned suns.

“That’s what’s known as eugenics, my dear fellow, the betterment of human nature. There’s a whiff of Hitler there — he was interested in it, too, you know.”

Churbasov was as big as a mountain. He drew himself up slightly and threw the old man one of his displeased looks, the kind that the members of the nation’s medical establishment were so afraid of. But he realised at once that he wouldn’t get through to this old devil that way. Nothing would make him crack — you wouldn’t be scared of anything after what he’d been through. But just as he was thinking this, Churbasov had a bright idea:

“My dear Lupus Wolfovich, you are a man of science,” he said, bowing his diplodocusian neck and looking into those stubborn, owlsh eye sockets. “I have explained the task. How you complete it is entirely up to you. You will be granted total freedom of research. Oh and by the way, you will merely be head of science. We’ll appoint someone else as director.”

This had occurred to Churbasov just a moment ago and he immediately congratulated himself on his wise decision.

“Aha, I see, a young party member with more suitable national identity,” grinned Wolfson. “By the way, I am not Lupus Wolfovich but Menahem Yegudovich... OK, let’s say we’ve agreed about the director. Just as long as he doesn’t get his hands on the fundamental research — people like that would put everything on sale.”

“I’ll sort that out with him,” the academician agreed, thinking to himself that some people have the bad habit of dotting every letter just to make sure they dot their i’s.

II.

Our homeland is eternal sleep, and we expect it to bestow attention and even consolation upon us. But no matter whether we are awake or asleep, all we see around us are icy rocks. Multitudes of icy rocks.

Arefiev was celebrating his trousers’ birthday. He deliberately kept forgetting his own birthday so as not to count his each passing year. He didn’t really have any friends, and the cobwebby old lady was not up for celebrations; she counted any catch as a cause for celebration. Arefiev had only one pair of trousers and he had bought them exactly one year ago, by chance, cheaply and brand new. A brand new pair of grey Italian cords was definitely worth celebrating!

His trousers were proudly hanging on the corner of the wardrobe door, with the legs bent at the knee giving the impression they had struck up some casual pose. Arefiev was sitting in nothing but his undies drinking cherry liqueur and, like all good folk who can control themselves and train their brains, he was not getting in the least tipsy. Such an unscientific term, “brains”, Arefiev thought remembering his university studies. The memory of bygone days prompted him to take

a look at himself in the mirror hanging on the inside of the wardrobe door. The door creaked huffily and showed him a pale, flabby old youth of around forty. Nothing had changed yet his age was somehow reflected. He gave a sour grimace and his reflection grimaced, too, as it floated away into the wardrobe, for the door was closing, quietly but firmly. Well, at least I still look human, thought Arefiev. Rattled, he didn't notice that the Sun had covered itself with a cloud for a moment, stuck out its tongue and pulled a monkey face at him. His trousers slipped quietly to the floor and lay in a little heap like a high-spirited school leaver deflated once the steam had gone out of him. Hurrying to the WC, looking somewhere inside himself instead of where he was going, the proud owner of the Italian cords stepped right on the birthday trousers' crotch.

12.

It was the former chief secretary of the municipal Komsomol, Sikofantov, who became director of the Institute of Useful Mutations, with the personal, slobbery-kissed blessing of Leonid Illyich himself. Sikofantov had the lowest forehead in the history of humankind as a biological species. His hair grew in thickets just above his eyebrows and it was hard to guess where he kept his brains. He had a large, protruding goitre and evil tongues wagged: maybe that's where...? The secretary-cum-director was prone to sweating, so before greeting anyone he would give his large Komsomol hand a pre-emptive wipe. The poor man had bulging eyes and bulged with gas, too.

He immediately set aside part of the building and rented it out to a jewellers shop, and a bureau de change was quartered in the far corner.

"I'll pay your wages with the money from their rent," Sikofantov informed his employees when he got back from holidaying in the Canary Islands. "The Director of the Institute of Microbiology doesn't pay any wages because he doesn't let

out the property, you see. Although he did buy himself an Alpha-Romeo in Milan, at the same place where I got mine at the beginning of the year...”

At this point a certain hushed silence fell over his employees, for no-one had encouraged him to blab yet he had spilled the beans. But there was this bottle of mineral water standing on the table in front of him, and the label said “Vera”. At last a knowledgeable person had shown up: “vera” is the Italian for “true”. But it is not the same as the true faith which makes the Russian nation so strong.

Two employees reacted to this revelation with more outrage than was appropriate, and it was explained to them, very quickly and in no uncertain terms, that they could not do anything to the director but that the director could in fact do quite a lot to them. After fuming for a while, they quietly got their own back by inventing a fond nickname for Sikofantov: his full name was German Romanovich Sikofantov, so they called him Romeovich.

13.

Later it became apparent why the late Sikofantov had feared nothing when he disclosed his Alpha-Romeo in front of everyone. When he had left his employment as the Komsomol Chief, Romeovich began working very closely, but very secretly, with a certain organisation, which in fact was more of a society than an organisation. It was called “Central,” not in the sense of basketball, but because it had a hand in the division of any spoils. Someone even dubbed this group “kremlinski” on the basis that nothing is more central than the Kremlin. The Kremlin itself took offence at such impudent claims: the journalist who used this epithet in his criminal report was even arrested, albeit not for long, just long enough for him to get his kidneys pulverised by the police. Everyone joked afterwards that he was punished “for divulging state secrets.”

It seems that when they confirmed Sikofantov's appointment, those up there in the highest echelons (if, of course, they are the highest, which is relative) didn't know what kind of person they were putting at the helm. It only came to light later when there was no longer any director and a great deal fewer employees.

"Who will be the next director?" the survivors were discussing the matter in muted tones when Arefiev finally showed up at work. He went into his small lab almost at once and, closing the door which gleamed with medically white paint, he shut himself off from everyone. A plaque hung on his door: "Severe Research Scientist Arefiev". Actually, he was the senior scientist but when one of the lab assistants had jokingly changed the name plate, he had decided to leave it as it was. Arefiev was first and foremost a fatalist who didn't like to change anything. And anyhow, "severity", well, it rather impressed him. Before that he had been housed in the former X-ray office where there was a glowing crimson warning: "Don't go in — mortal danger."

As for the door of the director's office, a burnished brass plaque soon appeared on it. It proclaimed the office was occupied by a certain

"A.F. Kannabich".

14.

However there was no Kannabich. In fact, nobody ever set eyes on such a person. The director's office was not locked. Anyone could go in, but an emptiness dwelt in its polished opulence, an emptiness which seemed to breathe and tremble like a frightened bird, blinking its eyelids. Nobody hung around in there for long because you soon had an uneasy feeling of being watched. The staff left memos and reports on the desk and left promptly, aware of someone's eyes following them. The next day they would come back to collect their papers and find them duly authorised, or at least checked through, as was evident from

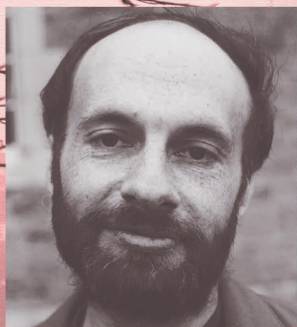
notes in the margins. Notes which were not even in Russian but in some bizarre cuneiform.

One young lab assistant decided to spend a night in the office. He was due to be called up for the army in the autumn so he didn't give a damn about anything anyway. But he wasn't there in the morning. In fact, he wasn't anywhere in the whole institute, though the night watchmen swore no-one had got past them. He couldn't have gone anywhere else, either, as the institute was surrounded by a three metre high concrete wall topped with barbed wire. The only trace of him left in the office was a square-toed black boot made by the Moscow factory "Quickmarch"; the cuneiform in the margins of the documents on the desk looked particularly ominous that morning.

*An emptiness settled over the whole country, too.
It had big names, won elections and was discussed
in the papers, but it was still emptiness.*

It broadened its reach, took over the courts and hospitals, inadvertently stole into the Kremlin, and danced a victory dance on all TV channels. And the people were sighing: What has become of our glorious hockey players? There are no decent teachers or doctors any more, nothing to read, nothing to watch, nothing to listen to... Ah, but IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS...

And so things got just as bad as they had been in the good old days, only in a different way; everything was tarnished by the white stains of emptiness and the red stains of blood spilt in vain. Why in vain? Because no matter where or when blood is spilt, it is always in vain, in vain and once more in vain. And there is no historical precedence, and no-one ever learns anything from it. For Earth's population is growing and the number of people who are always and in all ways right grows with it. Three, four, ten billion people who are always right... Funny? Frightening, but funny, too, of course.



Anatoly Kudryavitsky

Born in Moscow in 1954, Anatoly Kudryavitsky is the grandson of an Irishman who was imprisoned in Stalin's GULAG. Educated at the Moscow Medical Academy, he holds a PhD in Biomedical Science. In Russia, he worked as a researcher, as a magazine editor, and as a literary translator. Blacklisted in the Soviet Union until 1988, he first got published openly in 1989.

Since then, he has authored two novels, as well as a few novellas and short stories, seven collections of poetry in Russian and three collections of his English-language poems, and an anthology of Irish haiku poetry.



The two novels included in this book are works of Russian magic realism. In the first novel, *Shadowplay on a Sunless Day*, Anatoly Kudryavitsky writes about life in modern-day Moscow and about an emigrant's life in Germany. The chapters of this multi-layered novel form a narrative mosaic of episodes set in both real and surreal worlds. The novel deals with problems of self-identification, national identity and the crises of the generation of "new Europeans".

In the second novel, *A Parade of Mirrors and Reflection*, the writer turns his attention to human cloning, an issue very much at the centre of current scientific debate. In this novel, he looks at the philosophical aspects of creating artificial personalities who lack emotions and experience of everyday human life through a story about secret cloning experiments being carried out in an underground laboratory on the outskirts of Moscow.

"A poet who voices the unspoken." – JOSEPH BRODSKY

Glagoslav Publications

ISBN 978-1-78267-106-0

London

ISBN 978-1-78267-106-0



9 781782 671060