

INTERVIEW WITH INGA KUZNETSOVA
ABOUT HER NOVEL: INSIDE OUT

MOSKOVSKI KOMSOMOLETS

19.9.20

<https://www.mk.ru/culture/2020/09/19/rossiyskaya-pisatel'nica-napisala-roman-ot-lica-koronavirusa.html?fbclid=IwAR0y5R1dwo5ByjOAUzI-zoPMQtmoeTPxGKZMyD62k38eybgu78cU7u08xoQ>

- ... I remember that a collection of lullabies in childhood had the same effect as the beginning of your novel: pettiness and grace suddenly turned into horror stories in the spirit of a non-conformist Hoffmann - with "wolves", "claws" and other infernals of Russian folklore. With you everything is a little softer, and the beginning also sounds like that of the spiritualized Khlebnikov, and afterwards - like a cold shower: this microbe speaks like Pelewin's beetle! "Vague hills have unfolded below us. Invisible creatures screamed over us. Someone lurking in the rustle in the twilight looked with one crazy eye. The owner began to decline. "Your new novel - on the subject of the day?

- No microbe (microbes and viruses have different biological states). Yes, the hero and narrator of my novel is half a creature who does not have the fullness of an independent life, and he suspects it. This is the hero of the day who got all the news feeds and our heads. It is not named by its direct name given by virologists in my novel, and readers of the next generation will see not only every virus in the novel, but also every alien that will invade man. But today we know exactly who I meant.

Writing a novel for the coronavirus that leaves people to die is an incredibly difficult ethical and technically almost impossible task, and yet it seemed like an outbreak to me. I couldn't help it. With all due respect, Pelevin has nothing to do with it. In addition, there is universal fear. In conditions where the whole world is afraid of a tiny object and regards it as the main enemy of humanity, I thought it would be fair to give it a word. I've made the coronavirus a topic that thinks and feels. Such an optic enables us to understand a lot about people, and in particular about the radical discrepancy between our ideas of ourselves and our real inner being, our inside out. My novel is mostly about people.

Life is not at all like a child's lullaby, and its tragic edge is almost not mitigated by the beauty that is still possible in our world as a quality of sight. For me, the sharpness arises not only in the "skin" of society, but also in nature "behind" a person. That means I'm by no means the author of a pastoral.

- A story from the point of view of animals already existed in literature. Just think of Tolstoy's "Kholstomer" and "Fox Micki's Diary" by Sasha Cherny. Insects at Kafka and Chukovsky also spoke. You have a ventriloquist virus that, like the yak fighter in Vyssotsky's song, imagining himself as the host of a living being and the main character not only of the novel but also of world history. Are you afraid of it or do you admire it?

- Neither the one nor the other. It's interesting to me. I create my honest (paradox!) and fantastic myth about him. Neither in reality nor in the novel, the coronavirus can see itself as master - on the contrary, it is looking for a master / host and is passed on along a chain. The hero of "The Inside Out" falls in love with almost every owner, including a bat, a cat, and finally the giants - we (we can assume that "in real life", in a sense, the purpose of viruses is to contact us). But it is impossible to love someone without trying to understand him, and in order to understand the gigs (giants, humans) my hero has to go through human cells-space-chambers in which it can only move by eating them away. After all, someone overpowering - the Lord of All Worlds - created viruses with their own peculiarities of movement. It turns out that the emotional virus

has no other way of loving us than consuming us from within. And until a person dies because of my hero in "Inside Out", the virus doesn't realize how dangerous it is for us. This is his drama. So what? It also has the right to its own drama. The virus' love for people is fundamentally insatiable and tragic for everyone.

Isn't this sometimes the inside out of love in the purely human world, in the contact between human and human? Of course I'm driving this idea to the limit, but the vector is important. Beauty cannot save the world, but it can at least soften it. And love won't save us. It sharpens everything.

- Isn't your anthroposophy an echo of the same Russian classics that are about the eternal "little man"? And isn't there some sort of modern Khlysty here - supposedly right in exaggerating the role of our next smaller brothers, who due to general political correctness are gradually taking over the wide world? How do you see this problem in your novel?

- "Khlysts", "little man" - these are retro headings that are clearly not enough to cover today's world. Everything is much sharper and touches everyone whether they feel small or not. Today there is a need for a more generous ethic that takes all into account. This is the challenge that time presents to writers and philosophers. Yes, like everyone, I am afraid of the suffering and death of loved ones. As a humanist, I don't want any suffering of people (not even of serial killers). But as a writer, I have no right to be afraid of ideas. The writer's fear is very boring. When faced with a strong idea, I go all the way because it contains some kind of promise for the future or a warning for the future. And it seems to me that today it is worth taking a step back or a step forward to consider: Why on earth do we measure everything by the standard of human self-preservation, which in practice is becoming an ever smaller pragmatism? Why should everything around us only exist as useful / harmful to us? We're not the only inhabitants of planet earth, are we? Here I could send a greeting to Greta Tumberg: I do not share your views, Greta, but I understand your concern. With a loving look I want to warm up my soul not only towards people, but also towards other beings / half-beings. And even towards things.

- I remember even prison bars and platforms talking in your previous novel "Intervals" ...

- I actually developed the practice there of speaking from the perspective of non-humans: In INTERVALS I give the word to pigeons, trees, moss, blood platelets, tanks, etc. Such optics and exercises not only require trained imagination, but also gigantic empathy. And now, with Flaubert, I could exclaim: "I am the coronavirus!" The willingness to empathize is a key trait that we all need. It is absolutely necessary to my reader. Yes, I call him to get out of the isolation of fears and see everything from a completely different perspective. And I hope this is less horror than a sigh of relief. Today humanism cannot be limited to the love of man. It expands to love all living beings. And even everything, whether it is considered alive or dead.

- In the fast rhythm of the novel there are often "lyrical" pauses that show the author not as "anthropologist" and "virologist", but as "poet", as you are called in literature. "We have fallen into a kind of pause and are now surrounded by bondage" - isn't the level of such a statement very high and its message relevant? Does "poetic" experience help you write prose? You seem to have written this novel almost in one breath, like a poem? Or how did it happen?

- My genre is the philosophical novel with fantastic elements. You could say that with my prose I grow as a surreal branch of magical realism. Nobody bothers me to describe the hard scenes in the novel of ideas in a naturalistic (and at the same time strange) way. For me - the poet - it may be directly related to my ear for language. But there are no insurmountable boundaries between poetry and prose, as the heroes of INTERVAL have proven. On the downside of INSIDE OUT, the novel was written quickly - in four months in several tries. The basic idea still makes me

excited. It took a lot of courage to turn it into a text fabric. This is all new and it nowhere has the smell of postmodernism. It was exciting to weave this jungle and, like with a machete, to immediately break through the sensory-biological fabric of the text. It was dizzying to travel in bodies.

- According to the conspiracy, poachers are selling bats to a scientist, and one of them contains "the same" virus that has since conquered the whole world. Then cat and mouse, daughters and mothers, laboratory errors and a real thriller with a sex offender. But basically your novel actually offers a truly revolutionary reading, full of conceptual ideas, new visions and radical solutions. But please explain whether the infamous "fifth element" is once again destined to save the world, or, without spoiling, suggest another option to revive all that exists?

- Many thanks! But to see at least some conclusions, it is worth reading the novel - I cannot put it more succinctly here. I can say one thing: it is impossible to revive what is already gone. It is necessary to build a new harmony, a new philosophy on a new basis, taking into account our disappointments with the global destruction in the world and in human cells.

- Here are the good old hosts who feed the parasites in their bodies, goldfinches and mice beep, but suddenly evil giants appear, much cooler than the bats - from romantic youngsters to murderous monsters - and now life in the Immeasurable is not at all the same as before ... So this model, which in your opinion is reminiscent of both Bulgakov's house and THE TWELVE by Blok, can only be saved by a revolutionary virus that can turn brains on the past where there are Owls, wasps, foxes? Well, and then remember a world held together by the spittle of love ...

- The "human" heroes of the novel are very different people with their own paths of fate, and between them there are fundamental arcs of love or love demands: mother - son, "Romeo" - "Juliet", adult son - old father, monogamous partner - polygamous partner, provocative victim - murderer. All the hosts of the virus in my novel, like us, deserve love and understanding, despite their deadly acts or inaction. The dance of hosts is a kind of conditional model of humanity, and I do not claim to be exhaustive, but I do believe I am structurally correct. In the novel, it doesn't seem to me that there is any destructive criticism of people. There is a scope to understand their problems. I hope so, anyway. There is no pastoral idealization of primitiveness, the call "back to nature". Although the flying host from the bat team is beautiful.

No, no, I don't think our world has finally turned bad. It's the old world and not a kefir that just turned sour. Rather, it was probably always both "kefir" and "efir" (ether). A new hero just showed up in it. And it has now received its first outlines.