nova·nevėdoma



Adaptations of Lurid Dreams

nova-nevedoma.com/adaptations-of-lurid-dreams/



Chaos, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, 1906 A few months after Russia invaded Ukraine, independent Russian journalism website Important Stories published an article about dreams people were having about Putin [1]. The dreams, expectedly, were weird as fuck, ranging from surreal scenarios like Putin as a cake to more politically charged dreams involving confrontations or Putin's death, with these dreams often reflecting people's anxieties, desires, and political views in the current socio-political climate.

Darya Serenko, an activist who, along with the Feminist Anti-War Resistance, was collecting and analysing those dreams, described the reasoning behind the project:

> *"I would divide all dreams into two categories: dreams about experiencing horror and dreams about the impossible. In the first category, exaggerated anxiety, absurdity, and horror from the ongoing reality are reproduced. In the second, people feel political will and participation, political agency that they don't have in reality. In dreams of the second category, people dream of Putin's assassination, retribution, personal communications with the president: people humiliate him, tell him everything they think, or participate in his trial. These are dreams in which the isolated, all-powerful Putin from the bunker turns into who he really is - an aging man who has driven himself and the entire country into a corner. I don't know how those who will read our dreams years later as anthropological material will react to them. But I see that these dreams are sometimes a more accurate description of the era than all political and sociological measurements of public opinion.* I don't recall having Putin dreams myself, or any similar dreams for that matter, and I rarely remember what I see at night, but I'm a daydreamer and a writer, moreover a writer who loves employing surreal and dreamlike sequences in his work [2], whether they are symbolic or absurd. I always have visions, imaginary situations and scenarios inspired by the real events that can suddenly morph into a story, and sometimes I

> cannot help but to write them down. This is how it works, anyhow, a blessing and a curse, an internal urge to turn everything into a story.

Thus, after the war started, the events witnessed in the news or heard from the people affected by them, as well as consequences of those events, invaded my visions and have been fermenting there since. Even when it wasn't one, it felt like a dream, sometimes surreal and absurd, sometimes horrid and often unbelievable, one that's hard to make sense of, one that haunts you everywhere even if you're not there physically. Thence my visions and my writing became darker, more emotionally or politically charged, direct reflections of the zeitgeist or its image in the funhouse mirror of the subconscious. A few years [3] later, they became a book, "Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel".

For a while, especially closer to publishing, I had an internal struggle whether I should name my book "Deleted Scenes..." or "Adaptations of Lurid Dreams". Both fit well for the contents and perhaps I will choose some interpreted version of the latter for Russian edition if I ever translate it, for the former sounds too clumsy in my native language. I don't see this as an issue; some novels and films change their titles considerably when translated (though, not always for the best). Despite "Deleted Scenes..." is now an official title, I used "Adaptations..." in the book description, so both of them stay with the story.

A "lurid dream" is a recurring motif in the book, especially in the first part of it, a central novella. Whenever the protagonist sees a dream or a

nightmare or recalls one, the description of it almost always starts with "A lurid dream there was..." or mentions "a lurid dream".

The book starts this way, too:

> *Every snowflake that settles on the frozen city carries the weight of silent dissent. Buried under the drifts, we gather our strength, stretch out our hands and soar. It is but a lurid dream, we know, for that is the only time when we can fly. Our wings draped in snow, we, a lonely androgynous angel, sweep over the age-bleached streets, peering into the windows of grey houses where corpses try to tune into Channel One. The screens show nothing but static that taunts them and, lost and distressed, the corpses smash their black boxes, bend the aerials, twist the knobs, yet nothing happens, nothing — the static does not disappear and they give up. They approach the window, and the first thing they see is an angel with wings blinding white. Oh, they envy us, they envy our graceful flight, frown, and grind their teeth, while we, angelically apathetic, dismiss their existence. Eyes closed, we whirl round the towering buildings as the corpses boil oil on their foil-covered rusty kitchen hobs, and the moment we pass by their windows, all together they douse us with the bubbling liquid. The oil sizzles and splashes, our white wings disintegrate, the skin on our face peels away to expose the bare flesh beneath, we scream and* At that point, this dream end abruptly, just like dreams often do when you wake up, without a logical resolution. The phrase appears

> in the book eleven times and the word “dream” alone more than thirty times, not even mentioning that there’s a story titled with it there. The book is full of dreams and many of the stories, vignettes and random scenes can be considered dreams, too. They can flash out of nowhere and flash back in an instant scarring the narrative or leaving no trace.

I noticed that the book was one big dreamlike sequence only during editing and decided to emphasise it further.

> *“Not sure we want to tell any of these stories. Not sure we want to tell any story at all. It’s better to tell something absurd, create a literary cage, the content of which cannot exist under any possible conditions anywhere and nowhere. Some stories must not see reality, for they may emerge into it, merge with it and make it far worse than it already is.”*

— from the protagonist’s inner monologue. This artistic decision, however, was not intentional but intuitive, subconscious, if you will. It emerged naturally during writing and was a trope that seemed appropriate and comfortable to use to tell the story I wanted to tell. The events in the book never happened to me, but they either happened or could happen to someone in life, surely could’ve been someone’s dream, and certainly were my daydreams.

Dreams, even nightmares, provide a safe space where they are caged

isolated and cannot escape as long as we know they are dreams or as soon as we realise that. I wanted to create an experience and talk about the real events but do it in an environment I had full control over, and the dreams are a perfect device for that. I can pump up the grotesque, I can turn metaphorical demons and pigs into literal demons and pigs, I can warp the reality in a hyperbolic way, I can transform a real nightmare into a surreal nightmare that, despite being terrifyingly close to reality, still remains fantasy. Thus dreams, even the most lurid, become controlled environments where subjects can be dissected, studied, and understood. From that safe distance, I could look at the reality, share and discuss it with others and with you.

Perhaps it's just one of the ways of digesting the present, chanelling your experiences, emotions and worries, giving them some form to finally stop thinking them. As Darya Serenko described it in her interview:

> *In my childhood, we had a belief in our family - a nightmare should be told aloud so that it doesn't come true, so that you don't remain alone with it in sticky horror. This way, you can distance yourself from it and laugh at everything that happens with our reality - at the state, the government, and the security forces.* This, for me, encapsulates the gist of it; the nightmare must be told aloud, for ofttimes it's the only thing you can do to fight it.

- Worth to mention, not everyone knows that the pronunciation is "poo-tin" not "pew-tin" with the first syllable stressed. The same guy also has his shit carried in a suitcase by his bodyguard. Draw your own conclusions. Sometimes you don't need dreams to feel the

absurdity.
- “Nevédoma”, for that matter, can losely refer to subconscious, too.
- Terrifying to realise that “a few years” can be applied to the war’s description now.

nova·nevédoma

A literary locus and samizdat press
for original fictions and translations.

nova-nevedoma.com



scan to subscribe

Find us on Substack

blog.nova-nevedoma.com