nova·nevědoma

nevédomosti №4

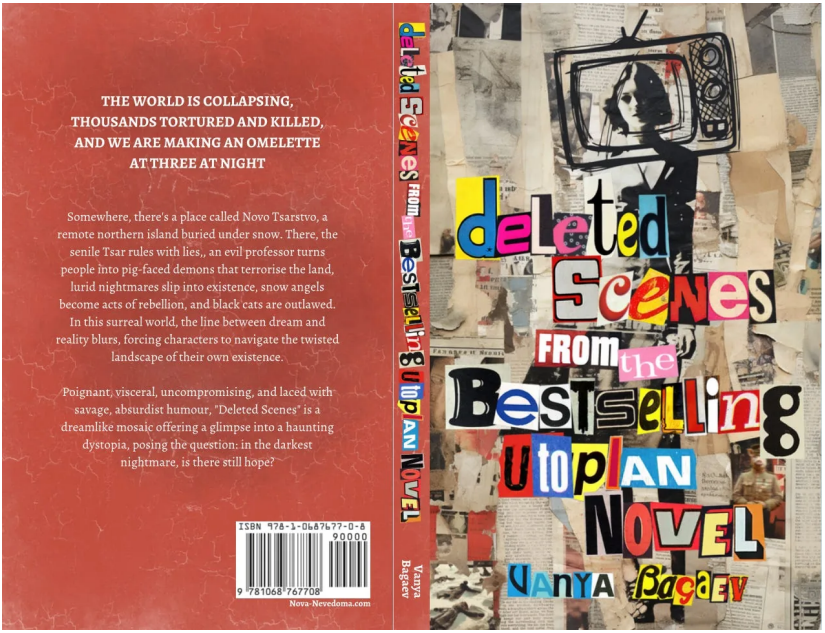
nova-nevedoma.com/the-strange-afterlife-of-books-nevedomosti/

nevédomosti is a regularly irregular and irregularly regular blog about the publication's updates and other matters of interest and curiosity.

§1 My opus "Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel" has been regaining some momentum lately. A few wonderful, surreal, magical things happened that made me to update my expectation of what the actual half-life and afterlife of a newly published book is and invigorated the fading attempts to spread the word about the book—there's really not much needed to be done to make a writer happy, mayhap slightly more than to imagine Sisyphus happy, but not marginally so.

I don't have much experience in samizdating a book and I don't have a particular time range in mind but a few months back the sales and whatever buzz that was left all stalled and I started forgetting the book existed. I do exaggerate here, of course, but there's plenty of truth to it. I operate in a way that when a thing is done, it's done, and it's hard to force myself to do anything related to it, such as to write a post like this or even sporadically talk to people about it in a casual conversation, especially in a situation while I'm working on another [magnum] opus[1]

that occupies most of my free time, attention, and writerly passion, among dozens of other things I want to do. But yes, to my surprise, “Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel” still exists (wow, actually) and, to even more pleasant surprise, has been doing really well (wowest wow).



Thanks to my dear friends, I managed to get the book displayed for sale on a few events of the Russian opposition in London, to which, despite being in English, the book naturally, given its topicality, has a great relevance. The proceedings from that go to the organisation; I practically donate the books for the good cause.

A few new readers found my book via that route. After one of the

aforementioned events, a protest in front of the Russian Embassy against the increasingly tightening Russian homophobic laws, "Deleted Scenes..." was displayed again together with other merchandise for fundraising, that time with my presence. I'm still probably extremely naive and oblivious of the fact that what I write can be interesting to someone beyond a polite acknowledgement and moreover resonate with them, so when I get positive feedback of such kind, it always feels surreal and, in a way, unbelievable, yet of course making me happy deep inside, but that time the interest and the feedback was face to face[2] as I managed to meet a few readers in real life (even one reader from Substack; most radiant beams of appreciation, !) and sign some copies of the book.

At the same time, be it related or not, I've seen more people on here expressing interest in my work on Substack. published a long wonderful heartwarming review of "Deleted Scenes..." in which she offers a lot of thoughtful and positive commentary:

> When I ordered *Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel* online, I was expecting a book. What I received was a transformative experience. To be deeply moved by a work of art is a gift, and to experience this as the real circumstances reflected by the work persist is somewhat rare. Readers who enjoy poetics, humor, and experimental forms will revel in this timely piece of fiction by up-and-coming author Vanya Bagaev. ... At times like this, creative work offers comfort. Art can soothe

> what is too painful to comprehend by transmuting suffering into aesthetic beauty, cathartic humor, and transportive storytelling. It can also unmask reality and help the audience understand and be understood. *Deleted Scenes* accomplishes both, and does so with a strong sense of artistic freedom that resonates with the story's powerful themes of resilience. ... Vanya Bagaev's *Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel* is not only a gift to the oppressed but to the observer. It is a forceful call to turn toward what matters and a brave stand against apathy and despair. It is also an aesthetic piece of art that can be admired for its beauty, which provides generous conventional framework to support the rich poetics, text art, and experimental narrative play which stimulate the imagination and invite the reader to revel in all that is possible. There's a lot more in Annie's generous and insightful review, including a pinch of criticism, so I do recommend to read it fully, whether you've read the book or plan to. I'm grateful, honoured, and deeply moved, thank you, Annie!

You can read the full review and check out her other work on her Substack:

Deleted Scenes From The Bestselling — Read on SubstackI'm dazed and thankful for all this happening and all the time people are willing to dedicate to my work and spreading the word about it and thankful for all your support. It is often, as I said before, the only reminder that I've

created something important, not only for me but someone else, for you, and it's you precisely who makes the book alive after its published and roams free in the literary wildscapes. Thank you.

A lot of people have recently expressed the interest in the book, including those whose geographical location or financial situation doesn't allow them to grab a copy freely. If you're in a similar predicament, don't hesitate to reach out to me, either email me at vanya [at] nova-nevedoma [dot] com or send a direct message on Substack, and we'll solve that:

If you wish to have a signed copy of the book or want a copy for writing a review, whether digital or physical, just reach out and we'll solve that, too.

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§2 "You can't leave it be," I said to myself. If you've already written the book, help her get on her feet. We are, they say, responsible for those we have tamed. I'm not talking about ruthless self-promotion, which I'm always uncomfortable with, and even if I wasn't, I wouldn't have a skill or enough time to do it. Everything here happens by intuition, achance[3]. My tendency to shelf a thing that's done hasn't proven to be effective when it comes to samizdar which at some point even made me think the whole undertaking isn't for me. I just want to write, you know, but I also want to do it my own way, free from constraints, which doesn't make it easier. That's the thing about writing and publishing fiction, at least about "the type" I've chosen to write—I have to care about it even after the last full stop, even after its published, even

when I'm working on another [magnum] opus. Semantic network of "care" here includes, progressively: look after, attend to, cherish, worship. Hence, the new perspective—thinking of the book as a life-long project rather than a done-and-move-on project. I still believe it's worth your time and attention, it's my first serious work[4], it's the work I'm still proud of and don't cringe when reading a random passage from it like it often happens with older works. With "Deleted Scenes..." I reckon I've reached my own sufficient level of non-cringeness, even though I often think I could've done it better now, sometimes even much better, sometimes even completely differently, yet I don't feel I did it *wrong* way.

My role as "a writer" has ceased to matter for the book, for I'm not writing it anymore, not editing, not changing anything; it's become a solid piece of text that changes and mutates only when a reader opens it and allows it in, the readership that also includes me now. I do believe my writer's role for "Deleted Scenes" is over but there're plenty of other roles I have to fulfil, mayhap as its main, but not only, custodian, keeper, steward. It's a different role compared to both "a writer" and "an author" and requires me to adopt different thinking. I really want the book to succeed as much as possible given what it is not just as someone who wrote it—that person doesn't exist anymore—but someone who loves the results and reckons it important and worthy. So I've decided to put a bit more effort into "talking about the book" as that custodian of it.

Any text is a different text every time it's read by a different person.

With “Deleted Scenes”, I can only talk about the premise, the original intention, the goal of writing it retrospectively, from the present position, but it wouldn’t be fair to the person who started writing it. Why did that person do that? I’ve no idea why. It felt good? Was fun? Relieving? The original feelings, ideas, emotions were sublimated at the time unto the text and now are rationalised beyond recollection. The reader always know better what the book is about and why it’s important. I’ve noticed that many times while receiving feedback on the book regardless of the form. Thus I want to dedicate a few more posts[5], whether it’s an essay, a bit of literary cricitism, a tour across [potential] influences, or something else, on the topics and other literature around the book, what and positions it in the literary tradition, and ultimately, regardless why it was written, why it’s still an important book for me, now as a reader, too.

Notes

1. For the curious: “Tulubaikaporia” is alive and well. I’ve finished the first round of editing. Now two more rounds are left: sound editing and grammar | spelling | formatting editing. I don’t know the proper names for the two. Sound would involve listening to the whole thing, either vocalised in my head fully, or read aloud by myself or read aloud by a computer, which have gotten pretty advanced and helpful on that front lately. This would take me a few months to complete. Meanwhile, two artists are working on the visual aspects of the book: the cover and the illustrations. When it’s all done, I’ll open pre-orders and send ARCs, with the aim to officially launch the book closer to the end of this year, once I get enough reviews pre-launch. I’ve heard that’s what “professionals” are doing and decided why not to try that, too. The book is 450 pages long (big font), 50 of which are footnotes and commentary to translation. The book is written by Vanechka (me) and translated by Vanya

Bagaev (don't know him). Most of it is written in Russian, not just as rough drafts, so the commentary to translation felt crucial, even though complementary and hopefully not disrupting to the experience of the book, for they'll be provided as endnotes. I'll come back to this with more information later this year.

2. I participated in a few indie bookfairs last year, but the feeling there was completely different. Won't elaborate. Or will, just a little: it was stressfully fun, sobering, inspiring, and, depending on the bookfair in question, had weird "peddler of some random texts" vibe, which wasn't even remotely present in the occasion mentioned here.
3. There's Russian "avos'" and now there's English "achance". In both cases, it's an attitude that finds comfort in unpredictability and absurdity of the endevour.
4. Serious meaning "for adults" or "those who're bothered with life" or "literary" or something else I know not what. Just "serious". "Serious piece of work," they say, "solid, formidable." A lot of it in the book is, of course, grotesque, surreal, absurd and far away from serious, seemingly so, because absurd is always only a façade. My first book wasn't "serious" in a sense I'm implying. It was funny, engaging, interesting, satirical, poignant, entertaining, and serious in other senses. It's a good work I'm also proud of and a great milestone for me as a writer and an author but it's not the type of work that I think about now and then. I do sometimes think of certain aspects or episodes of it, but it doesn't make me want to share it with the world as much as "Deleted Scenes", which is a sad thing to say, yes, but there's nothing I can do about that feeling. Mayhap, I'm just a different person now.
5. There're actually "complementary materials to "Deleted Scenes…"" shared in the first issue of nevédomosti, a range of personal and literary essays that explore themes ofaround the book: "Adaptations of Lurid Dreams", where I explore the use of dreamlike and surreal sequences in the "Deleted Scenes" as a means of processing and understanding the anxieties and political realities of the time, particularly in the context of the oppressions in Russian and the war in Ukraine. "Why I Don't Go to Russia", where I analyse the potential legal consequences I would face if my book were (miraculously or recklessly) published in Russia, highlighting the repressive laws that stifle dissent and the risks associated with speaking out against the regime. "Dragons in the Dungeons of Mind", where I analyse the play "The Dragon" by Evgeny Schwartz as an allegory for the enduring nature of authoritarian systems, even after the figurehead of that system has been removed, and how

psychological structures of oppression persist in the minds of the populace, making them complicit in the perpetuation of tyranny. "How to Be 'Good'", where I examine the ways in which individuals justify that exact complicity in evil systems, drawing on historical and literary examples such as Nazi Germany and C.P. Taylor's play "Good". It's about how passivity, conformism, and the desire to maintain one's worldview can lead to the acceptance of atrocities and Evil in general. "Truth Crawling Back to Her Well", where I use Jean-Léon Gérôme's paintings of Truth and discuss the changing nature of truth in a world of technology and information. The essay speaks on the challenges of discerning fact from fiction and the erosion of trust in authorities and objective reality. "On Success in Futile Endeavours", where I "present" my personal framework for navigating a world of seemingly insurmountable challenges and the paradox of action in the face of futility. You'll read about potential benefits of "microdosing hopium" among other sublime concepts that help to maintain a sense of agency and hope in the face of sheer absurdity (which is the world, "beyond satire" it is). "The Art, The Tragedy, The Art of Tragedy, The Tragedy of Art", a piece where the lyrical I deals with an internal struggle with the act of writing amidst tragedy and societal upheaval. The essay questions the role of Art and the artist in times of crisis, meaning and purpose in writing, desire to comment on the state of the world and the overwhelming nature of the present reality and the paradoxical nature of creating art in the face of suffering. I want to organise them into a separate section here on Substack and on my website for the ease of navigation for the curious. From time to time, I grow weary of writing essays, especially personal essays, but I've accumulated enough thoughts and topics to plunge into that bog again.

Read next part

nevédomosti №5

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for original fictions and translations.

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