

Alexander Zinoviev

THE MADHOUSE

Translated by Michael Kirkwood

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Zheltyi dom (literally: 'the yellow house') was first published in 1980 in two volumes and totalled some seven hundred and seventy pages of rather small type. A full translation would have run to over eight hundred pages. Gollancz agreed to publish an abridged version in English translation and the author agreed to collaborate in the very complicated pruning process which an abridgment entailed. Inevitably there was a need for compromise. The length of this version is probably somewhat greater than Gollancz would ideally have liked and somewhat shorter than Professor Zinoviev would have preferred. There was also a need for compromise on the criteria according to which the abridgment would be carried out. The author very kindly sent me an abridged version of the original and I have tried to take account of his wishes as far as possible. I could not accede to his wishes totally for the reason given above concerning the overall length of the translation. The original work contains over eight hundred separate texts, each with its own title. The English version contains probably about four hundred. I have tried to be guided by my perception of what the Western reader would most appreciate and I have chosen the passages accordingly. However, this was not the only criterion. I wanted to maintain the structure of the original in so far as that was possible and have thus abridged each of the four parts by an approximately equal amount. I have tried to include as wide a range as possible of text-types, while omitting some of the more serious sociological and philosophico-historical strands, and I have included all texts which are important for the rather slender plot development. I will not deny that I have also included passages which appeal to me on a purely subjective level. Given the nature of the exercise, the version offered in this translation is only one of infinitely many possible versions, but I have a great affection for this work, in particular for JRF, and I have tried to prune with care. The extent to which I have been successful is not for me to judge. I take full responsibility for the text, however, and on the occasions where I have had to choose between an exact 'surface-to-surface' rendering and fidelity to the canons of English style, I have consistently chosen the latter. In this connection I am happy to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to my wife Melanie who kindly (and rigorously) revised the complete typescript of this translation. It has benefited considerably as a result.

M.K.

FOREWORD

How many books have been written about outstanding people! But what about nonentities? Not one book has been written about a nonentity! Why write a book about nonentities, you ask? What could contemporary or future readers learn from such a book? A naive question: it's worth writing such a book so that contemporary and future readers can see that it is stupid, silly, senseless to be a nonentity, and that there is nothing to be learned from the description of a nonentity.

Having decided to write such a book, I was then faced with the problem of whom to choose in the category of nonentity. Naturally I first thought of cleaners, janitors, watchmen, shop-assistants, militiamen, soldiers, dockers and other representatives of the human race who have no intention of becoming even slightly significant individuals, never mind outstanding, famous personalities. But on mature reflection I rejected them all, for I always found that there was something significant which could be said about them. And in the end I came to the conclusion that the most insignificant of nonentities is that creature known as a junior research fellow without a higher degree and academic title, or JRF for short.

Why a JRF? I'll explain. First of all, take the title itself and think about it. Now take the title academician. Now compare the salary and perks of an academician and a junior research fellow. Do you see the difference? Now consider the creative, intellectual aspect. Even the most average JRF is superior from this point of view to any dozen academicians still capable of using their loaf. But do we often come across the title of JRF among the recipients of national or international awards or in encyclopedias or in the pages of popular journals disseminating information about outstanding scientific discoveries?! That is the whole point. JRF is someone who is intellectually capable of making an outstanding contribution to culture and of writing his name for ever on the pages of human history but who has no chance of doing so. He is someone with a lot of vanity and a pittance of a salary. He is someone who is ready to do very much to obtain very little but who knows from the very beginning that only if one is totally ungifted (which he is not) and makes no effort at all (of which he is not capable) can one obtain very much. And therefore he is someone for whom insignificance as such becomes not only a hated profession but also a welcome vocation.

The book consists of four parts. The first part contains the philosophical propaedeutics written by JRF, composed at the most difficult period in his life when he was excluded from the list of candidates earmarked by the

Party bureau for inclusion in the list of candidates for associate membership of the Party, but when he still, as befits a future communist, retained a vestigial hope of being included in a future list.

The second part of the book is devoted to a defence of impure reason. It follows, therefore, that it is purely scientific. Why, you will ask, defend impure reason? The fact is that a well-known philosopher who worked in Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg) did such a thorough job of criticising pure reason that defending it after that became simply indecent. So if you want to defend some kind of reason, there's nothing for it but to defend impure reason. Thus reasoned our JRF, thereby earning the encouragement of the head of the Department of Disclosure of the Foul Essence of Anti-Communism and a sojourn, subsidised by the district committee, in a rest home in the Moscow region.

The third part of the book is devoted to a defence of practical unreason. You will have already guessed why: practical reason was criticised once and for all by that same philosopher. This defence was composed by a Senior Technical Assistant (STA) during a harvesting trip to the country with JRF long before the latter composed his Propaedeutics. It is not by chance that I chose an STA but in order to underline JRF's insignificance: if even some middle-aged, useless, miserable STA can permit himself to look down on JRF, it is impossible to conceive of the degree of contempt felt for him by people from higher walks of life, cleaners, cloakroom attendants, shop-assistants and militiamen on the beat. By juxtaposing the young JRF with the old STA I wanted to indicate that being the former is not only unpleasant but also dangerous.

The fourth part of the book describes how JRF, having arrived in a rest home outside Moscow, experienced union with mother nature and acquired a spiritual peace of which he had absolutely no need. Consequently this part is also concerned with a purely scientific question, namely man's relationship with nature, and with the eternal problem of what will happen when Eternal Peace comes and people begin to live like they do in a rest home outside Moscow, i.e. under full communism. And what fool doesn't want to live under communism?!

Thinking about this last sentence, I was suddenly struck by the deviousness of the Russian language. From a logical point of view that sentence is equivalent in meaning to the sentence 'All fools want to live under communism'. But don't laugh too soon. Logically it does not follow that if you are not a fool, then you don't want to live under communism. Nor does it follow that if you want to live under communism then you are definitely a fool. Only one thing follows: if a person is a fool then he wants to live under communism. And according to the law of contraposition in logic, it follows that if a person does not want to live under communism then he is not a fool. And that means something! And notice: the conclusion was arrived at exclusively according to the rules of logic.

PART ONE

Propaedeutics

A SHORT REVIEW OF DIALECTICS

According to the leading cretin of our Institute, Dr of Philosophical Pseudo-science Barabanov (and he makes this pronouncement at least ten times a day), the division of things into two is the crotch of dialectics. The wits in our Institute (the talented and philosophically literate junior staff) have a good laugh about that. In the first place, they say with a wink to each other, the classical writers on matters dialectical gave birth to this 'truism' long before Barabanov. And in the second place those classical writers were not so illiterate: they used the word 'crux' and not 'crotch'. But I like 'crotch' better. It has pleasant connotations. Moreover I am magnanimous. / know that Barabanov was 'parachuted' into our Institute from some party post on high which he had held after finishing the Higher Party School and that he has attained the pinnacles of philosophical ratiocination absolutely unaided. That, however, is not the point. The real point is that Barabanov and co. are absolutely right. Take our Department, for example. Wherever you look you see some sign of dualism. Take Senior Research Fellow Subbotin. He's the most intelligent blockhead in the Institute. (I'll explain the difference between a blockhead and a cretin later on.) He's also a Doctor of Philosophical Pseudo-science. He's half Russian and half Jewish. Moreover, his more intelligent half is Jewish, while everything in him which is stupid, servile and mean belongs to the Russian part of him, and that part itself is half Tartar and half Mongol. Yet another Doctor of Philosophical Pseudo-science (the majority in our Department are Doctors), Departmental Paranoiac Smir-nyashchev is also a bit of a split personality, but in a different sense -he's halfwitted, but he's also half-chancer. His right-hand man Vadim Nikolaevich Sazonov is split in many ways at once. He's half-scholar and half-informer. As an informer he's half-volunteer and half-conscript. As a scholar he's half-hack and half-plagiarist. And everyone else's personality is split as well, one way or another.

Including mine. I cannot do anything without engaging in a hard-fought polemical battle with myself. It's bloody exhausting. That's why I try *not* to do anything. But a decision not to do anything often requires its own justification as well, so that I still have to engage in these internal polemics. I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't. For example:

'It's about time I had a woman,' I say to myself.

'Good idea,' I agree, not without a certain innuendo.

'Well, who would it be best with today? One of the "regulars", or one from the "waiting-list" or should I try the street?'

'Regulars' are women with whom I've been 'associating' regularly for

some months. The 'waiting-list' consists of those with whom I've not yet 'associated' but for whom the ground, as it were, has been prepared and who are ready either to come to my place or to admit me to theirs (!) 'Trying the street', of course, is self-explanatory. Actually, this term does require comment, because it takes a fair amount of experience and a grounding in some quite rigorous theory to tempt your Russian whore, no matter how unlovely and clapped out she might be. Even after five years a friend of mine had still not learned how to take a woman in the street, although he must have collected about two hundred slaps in the face.

'Not the street! The weather's lousy. And anyway, it's risky. The most obvious effect of increasing cultural ties with the West has been the spread of venereal disease.'

'You don't call negroes and Arabs the "West", do you?' 'Listen, even the Chinese are Western, as far as we are concerned.' 'In that case, choose someone from the "waiting-list".' 'It's not quite as simple as that. First you have to "sweet-talk" them into it, you need to lay out for drink, and "zakuski". You have to go and meet them. And take them home again. Maybe you even have to pay for a taxi. And they don't surrender first time. They play hard to get. *They* of course, are not like all the others! And they put on airs, sometimes. And they know absolutely nothing about making love. You have to teach them everything from square one. And you're no great shakes as a teacher yourself.'

'OK. One of the "regulars", then? Where's my "book-for-bedtime"? Who'll I choose?'

'You surely haven't forgotten that one of your "regulars" tore it up? At first she threatened to take it to the local Party authorities and she tried to blackmail you into marrying her.'

'What a bitch! OK, then, let's think of something better.' 'I wouldn't hurry, if I were you. I'm fed up with the "regulars". It's time to replace them. Especially since those on the waiting-list are beginning to wander. They can't be expected to wait for ever!! Right now the "regulars" are probably at home with their husbands or pouring their souls out to other "friends" like yourself. And if any of them *is* free at the moment, she'll only drag her hysterical problems along with her. You'd be better to have a go at the woman next door.'

'Listen, it was *you* who told me not to have any affairs with people in the same building.'

'If you don't fancy your neighbour, have a go at writing. You've got enough paper! You nicked a whole box from the Institute, allegedly for "departmental business". You're certainly not short of worldly wisdom. You've got more time and energy than you know what to do with. Ability, do I hear you ask? Show me one contemporary writer of any real, genuine ability. Nowadays anyone who is not actually illiterate can

be a writer, if he wants to. And if he's illiterate, so much the better. Take, for example, the General Secretary himself. You couldn't imagine anyone more inarticulate and even he's become an outstanding writer.*

'It's easy to say "Have a go at writing". You have to have a starting point. And to know how to start, you need to know how you're going to carry on and what the ending's going to be.'

'The continuation of something never has anything to do with how it began. Do you remember what our revolution was concocted out of? And how do you think it's progressing now? And if you knew how it would end, you would discover another philosophical truth: the end is never the culmination of the process of continuation. So start with what you've got. Or, as the great Ilich taught us, start with something as simple as possible, something obvious to the masses, something which has been repeated countless millions of times. For instance, "Horses eat oats".'

*E'en though you've 'explicated' all
That was, is and will be, The
picture will be incomplete, Unless
the message it promotes Is clear for
everyone to see: What horses eat are
oats.*

'If horses and oats were a mass phenomenon, repeated millions of times, we'd have bread and meat coming out of our ears and we wouldn't have to be buying it from Bandaranaike. Anyway, that would be a banal beginning.'

'It's only those wonderfully wise members of the liberal intelligentsia that are scared of banalities,' I object indignantly, 'that's why they only talk nonsense. But those who are really wise speak only in banalities. And that's why they occasionally come up with something worthy of note.'

T give up! In which case I'll start in accordance with philosophical tradition with propaedeutics.'

PROPAEDEUTICS

When people ask me as a professional philosopher what 'propaedeutics' means, I reply somewhat arrogantly that it's the same thing as 'prolegomena'. When they get an answer like that, their jaws drop and they are

* A reference to the award of the Lenin Prize for Literature to L. I. Brezhnev for his memoirs, the literary merit of which is questionable - as, indeed, is the authorship. (Translator's note)

suddenly far too aware of their glaring ignorance to dare to ask what 'prolegomena' means. And they're not alone. I'm ready to bet that twenty-four thousand nine hundred and ninety qualified philosophers out of twenty-five thousand couldn't answer a question like that and the remaining ten would only be waffling. Ask them yourself. And watch their faces. When I was a first year student and still believed in the gospel according to St Marx, I asked a professor who had been rabbiting on about the primacy of matter and, naturally, the secondary nature of consciousness, what the difference was between gnosiology and epistemology and how they differed from the theory of cognition and whether clarity in these matters was more likely to be achieved by an approach associated with transcendentalism or transcendentalism. By the look on his face you'd think I'd asked him what 'prolegomena' meant.

I suspect that Engels's face had exactly the same expression when Marx told him the heart-rending news that the future belonged, lock, stock and barrel, to the proletariat. The proletariat alone, excluding the poorest peasantry. The poorest peasantry was a later discovery of Lenin's, since the West no longer *had* any 'poorest peasantry'. I can just picture it. Engels is sitting in a leather armchair, one leg crossed over the other, wearing striped trousers and smoking a cigar. Marx, dishevelled, is pacing up and down the study with all three (or is it four) volumes of *Das Kapital* under his arm. For some reason Marx calls Engels 'General'. Clearly the practice of promoting Party workers to the rank of 'General' and 'Marshal' dates from that time. Engels calls Marx 'the Moor'. What's 'Moor'? An Arab? If that's the case, Engels's little joke is a trifle sour in the light of the conflict in the Middle East. 'We have to join ranks with the Proletariat,' Marx shouts, 'for the future belongs to *it*!' These words have such an effect on Engels that he sticks the lighted end of his cigar in his mouth by mistake. When he sees his face, Marx lowers his voice a little. 'You don't need to get rid of your factory yet,' he says, 'there's no hurry. And, God willing, maybe it won't be necessary.'

But this is not the point. This section on propaedeutics is included for the sole purpose of allowing me to make clear my own attitude to communism from the very beginning. Clarity right from the word 'go' is my motto. I can't stand authors who beat about the bush for page after page and never reveal to the very end the stance to which their implacable logic has brought them. Perhaps that's a natural development for some writers, but not for me. And I certainly won't regard it as a sign of some higher-order intellectual evolution. I remember once leafing through a collection of articles on communism published by our Institute. 'In the period of the advanced stage in the building of communism', I read on a page chosen at random, 'the Soviet Union will exceed the level of industrial production of the most developed country in the world - the USA. At the same time the Soviet Union will exceed the level of

productivity in the USA . . .' Oh, you idiots, I exclaimed and threw the book under the bed. And that was that. No more evolution. And no spiritual drama. Why would there be? On account of crap like that? Rubbish! Don't believe anyone who tells you that he went through a great spiritual crisis when he discovered that marxism was not the pinnacle of wisdom and nobility of thought but the nadir of dull-wittedness, superficiality and dishonesty. If anyone does experience a crisis, he's lying if he says it's because he's lost his faith in marxism. He's lost his faith in something else and is disguising it as an ideological crisis. I repeat, and I insist upon it: it is impossible to lose one's faith in marxism for the simple reason that it's impossible to believe in it in the first place. It is a phenomenon which does not belong in the realm of faith, but in that of quasi-faith or pseudo-faith.

My attitude to communism has always been complex, indeed, even contradictory. On the one hand, I respect it since I live not far from Dzerzhinsky Square, or more succinctly, the Lubyanka.* I was born and grew up literally in the shadow of the main building of the vilest institution in the Soviet Union. And I see it almost every day. And every day, for one reason or another, I have to walk past the bronze statue of Iron Felix who has taken root in the middle of the square. On the other hand, I despise communism, for I work in the most undistinguished, untalented institution in the Soviet Union - the Institute of Ideology of the Academy of Sciences. Listen carefully: the Institute of Ideology (!) of the Academy of Sciences (!!). Get it? I'll explain. It's as if the prestigious Academy of Medical Sciences had as one of its affiliates an Institute of Witchcraft.

I am ready to do battle with communism because it will soon be utterly nauseating and revolting. I am also ready to defend it, for I am afraid that if it didn't exist the vanguard of those in the struggle for progress would dream up something a lot worse. Communism is bad enough, but without it things would be a lot worse - that's the problem. The dialectics of social development are such that once communism has arrived, anything that comes after it or replaces it will be worse. The discovery of this fatal circumstance has been the greatest tragedy imaginable for thinking people of my generation. The point is not that we don't believe in communism but that we do not believe either that it can be avoided, or that something better can be invented. And if you really want to know, it's for that very reason, and not because of a preoccupation with matters sartorial, that we wear dirty jeans and unspeakable beards.

*Fate's cruelties I never feared, Her
tricks have not taken their toll.*

* F. E. Dzerzhinsky was head of the Bolshevik terror organisation known as the Cheka, forerunner of the KGB, and the Lubyanka is the KGB headquarters. (*Translator's note*)

*/ simply grow this stragglng beard
To cover my naked soul.*

Don't imagine that I wrote these lines. Poetry I regard generally as the most primitive form of self-consciousness. I've a friend who composes verses for me. He composes them for me because he can't get published -even in the West. And if even the West doesn't want to publish the poetry of a seditious Soviet poet, then it can't be worth publishing. I told him this to his face. He replied that he doesn't write poetry, nor compose it. It comes belching forth from his soul. Moreover, it's not because it's bad that it doesn't get published in the West - worse things than that get published. It's simply that publishing Russian stuff over there is in the hands of Soviet emigres who have taken with them all their Soviet manners and customs. A Soviet person can never ever cleanse himself of his inherent Sovietism. The story goes that a certain Soviet emigre tried to join some religious institution or other but another emigrant (his good friend) denounced him secretly as being politically unreliable, since he had been expelled from the CPSU. And he wasn't admitted for that reason. In our part of the world we had an even funnier case. A philosopher wanted to work part-time at the Ecclesiastical Academy, but he was refused admission because he was a member of the CPSU. He then became a dissident. Naturally he was expelled from the Party. He was dismissed from his post. He tried again to get into that Ecclesiastical Academy. Again he was unsuccessful. This time, admittedly, it was for a different reason. This time it was because he had been *expelled* from the CPSU.

THE EPIGRAPH

A philosophical disquisition of the type I am about to undertake requires an epigraph, and I have chosen as such a few lines from a piss-taking ditty of my friend the poet:

*A future bleak ahead I see,
(This cheerless truth I cannot duck)
Despite official optimism.
Our kids will change their repartee;
They'll say, instead of 'Go to f—!'
'Piss off to communism!'*

What piss-taking verse does with respect to communism is that it takes everything it (communism) regards as sacrosanct and pisses all over it. It

doesn't refute; it doesn't criticise; it doesn't negate or denounce - it takes the piss.

Some people regard such verse as evidence of anti-communism, but they are quite wrong. It does not put the reader or the writer in a position vis-a-vis communism which could be designated by the scientific term 'anti-'. It expresses neither rapture nor disappointment. It states honestly, frankly and unambiguously the following: 'As far as your communism is concerned, I piss all over it'. The most you could accuse it of is covering in a light spray of piss communist ideas and manifestations. And notice the subtle use of language! What we're talking about is not cold indifference, but warm-hearted concern. And in good old Russian tradition such concern can be directed not only against what is harmful but also what is near and dear to you.

This reminds me of the situation in which a colleague in our Institute found himself. (He's nicknamed 'The Teacher' because in the course of a long life he has not managed to produce a single text-book nor obtain permission to expound his teaching publicly.) The Teacher was trying to set up a short course in the Faculty of Philosophy on a very fashionable aspect of contemporary logic. He was invited to a meeting of the Party committee to discuss the matter. Present at the meeting were the Secretary of the Party committee, the Dean and many other important people. The Dean said that he had no complaints. There was, however, this rumour that the Teacher under-rated dialectical logic. It was to be hoped that there was some misunderstanding. 'Of course!' said the Teacher, 'it's a foul calumny!' The faces of those present lit up, as if to say: 'Well, that's all right - he's one of us after all!' 'As a matter of fact,' continued the Teacher, 'I deeply despise it.'

That is precisely my attitude to communism. However, unlike the Teacher, if I were asked to choose the society in which I should prefer to live, I'd still choose our own dear, and at the same time deeply despised, communist society. Surprised? 'What's the catch?' I hear you ask? The point is that really the sole purpose of building communism is to provide an intelligent and thinking person with enough material and excuse to indulge in suffering because of the loathsomeness of human existence. And apart from anything else, I still haven't given up all hope. As my friend the Poet said:

*History at times is rather droll, One day, a
church - the next, a hole. But something
worse than that can be: One day the
Mausoleum - the next a WC.*

This verse could also have served as an epigraph, but the Poet thinks that the word 'Mausoleum' is rude. 'Do you think the word "f" is less rude?' I asked. 'As you well know, tens of millions of people go to

the Mausoleum.' 'And there are hundreds of millions of people going to f , ' said the Poet. There was no answer to that.

ON BLOCKHEADS AND CRETINS

I promised to explain the difference between a blockhead and a cretin, but I find that the matter is not so simple. We all operate perfectly well in practice with terms like 'fool', 'blockhead', 'cretin', 'degenerate'. Even our clerks and cloakroom-attendants know that Barabanov is a cretin and not a blockhead and that Subbotin is a blockhead but not a cretin. We only have to glance at a member of the academic staff to know right away whether he is a fool, blockhead, cretin or degenerate. But it is beyond even the Teacher's power to produce strict, scientific definitions of these terms. When I raised the problem during a break between classes on the stair-landing he admitted it himself: 'I know only that all these terms apply to people with higher education, that cretins enter the academic world from posts within the Party, that blockheads are not suitable even for posts in the trade-union organisation and that fools are usually from the ranks of the informers. A special theory of measurement will be required if these categories are to be more strictly delineated. If you take up this problem and solve it, your name will go down for ever in the pages of science history.'

A tempting prospect, of course. But it would probably take a lot of work and a long time, and that's not for me. As far as the difference between a blockhead and a cretin is concerned, I can give you a short example and you'll see right away what I mean. When Barabanov begins to discuss the crotch of dialectics, you involuntarily think to yourself: God, what a cretin! But when Subbotin adopts the pose of a philosophically literate, refined intellectual and begins to expose Barabanov for his incomprehension and distortion of both the letter and the spirit of the dialectic, you can't help asking yourself: Where do they get such blockheads from? And even if you're not a Party member you know immediately that Barabanov will inevitably be elected onto the Party committee, but that Subbotin won't make it further than departmental trade-union organiser, because the former is a cretin, and that's very good, whereas the latter is merely a blockhead, which is also good, but not very.

I belong to the category of 'fool' since I have still not managed to defend my thesis. Academician Petin belongs to the category of 'degenerate'. To be a degenerate it's not enough to be merely a cretin. You have to be an outstanding cretin and to have been at least once a member of the Central Committee, a deputy and a prize-winner.

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The Madhouse doesn't mean what you think it does. What you're thinking of sounds much more poetic: Kanatchikova Dacha, Matrosskaya Tyshina, Belye Stolby.* Listen to the sound: Be-ly-e Stol-by! If I were a foreigner, the sound alone would make me want to go there instead of Zagorsk, Suzdal, Samarkand and the Lenin Hills. But I'm not a foreigner, and I never shall be. It's strange, isn't it: as far as we are concerned, everyone who lives abroad is a foreigner to us, but somehow we're not foreigners to them. Even Mongolians and Chinese don't want to count us as foreigners. Even Bulgarians count as foreigners for us, but in their eyes we don't. We're just Soviet people. I had only just formulated this thought when my Alter Ego said that I'd still make it to Belye Stolby, even though I'm not a foreigner but a run-of-the-mill Soviet citizen. But you've made another mistake if you think that I have a split personality. Actually, I have a third Ego, and a fourth, and a fifth ... as many, in fact, as you like. I once tried to count them but I couldn't keep track of them. One of my Egos laughed about this and observed that I've got as many Egos as I've had hot women. Unfortunately, added another Ego, there wasn't a decent one among them. Where are they, these divine creatures, for the sake of whom, and because of whom, men ... ?! *{Translator's note}*

But let's get back to the subject. My Second Ego has told me more than once that I am capable enough but that I have one (if only it were one!) fatal defect: I cannot think anything through to its logical conclusion, i.e. cannot perfect an article to the point where it is worth an honorarium. Not like Lenin. Incidentally, said my Seventeenth Ego, have you noticed something interesting in that connection? In Stalin's time there were a lot of nutcases who thought they were Lenin but not one who thought he was Stalin. Any bald chancer who was short enough could grow a little pointed beard and travel on the trams without a ticket and get in free to the children's matinees at the cinema. We had one of them in our backyard. First of all he said he was a close friend of Lenin's, then his assistant, then his personal emissary and finally, when he was totally bald and so drunk that he couldn't get his tongue round a single sound in the whole alphabet, Lenin himself. He amused the whole street. And, you know, these 'Lenins' were almost never rounded up. They would only be picked up when they started shouting that officials shouldn't get paid more than workers. Our Lenin was only picked up after he drove into the yard on the running board of an armoured car. I'm not joking or making anything

* These are the names of psychiatric hospitals. *(Translator's note)*

up. It's an actual fact. God knows where he got an armoured car from. The word was that he'd sweet-talked a driver-mechanic from the barracks with a pint of vodka . . . The barracks used to be over there where these houses are. Anyway, the hypothesis concerning the car was partly confirmed. After that incident the unit was transferred somewhere and the barracks was allocated to that same institution which had taken in our Tlich'. As a matter of fact, the neighbours were glad. Tlich' had got on everyone's nerves with his drunken orgies and his threats of organising a new revolution, and the soldiers had annoyed people as well by marching down the road at daybreak bawling raucously:

*Through the Urals our hero Chapaev would roam
And falcon-like lead his men into the fight.*

Anyway, there were plenty of 'Lenins', but only one Stalin. Maybe there was only one, said my Third Ego, but . . . Sh-h! I cried. Shut up!

The Madhouse, if you want to know, is the building which houses the humanity institutes of the Academy of Sciences. It is situated almost in the centre of Moscow next to a round pee-filled swimming pool, where formerly stood the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. And it's called the Madhouse, not because it has just as many nutcases as Belye Stolby but because it is painted the same colour - yellow.* And it was painted that colour from the start. It was yellow before the Revolution when it was the premises of some commercial joint-stock company. They say that ten years ago the building was painted dark blue. It stayed dark blue for two days. Then it became light blue. Then green. On Monday when the staff came to work it was the same old yellow building and they merely thought that blue is the colour of yellow paint while it is drying. They also say that just before the Revolution Lenin (the real one, not the nutcase, although the real one was also supposed to be a bit nutty) signed a decree concerning the foundation of a Soviet Academy of Sciences. There's a bit of foresight for you! They say he signed it while he was still in his hut.^f That hut is now a branch of the Historical Museum. What kind of hut was it, for goodness sake?! You need five rooms just to house the administration! They say our present director, Academician Petin (formerly Isaac Moiseevitch) personally brought the document concerning the Academy of Sciences to Lenin for signature. And the day after the Revolution revolutionary sailors were already walking around Moscow commandeering private dwellings and property belonging to merchants, the nobility, staff clubs and political clubs to house the institutes of the Academy of Sciences. All the other institutes were housed in dark blue, or green, or red buildings, but for some reason the humanities got the yellow one. As

* 'Yellow house' in Russian is slang for 'psychiatric hospital'. {Translator's note} ^f While in hiding outside Petrograd. (Translator's note)

soon as the Baltic sailor Zheleznyak (they say it was he himself) saw the yellow building beside the former Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, he prodded it with his Mauser and roared; Here! And then he went on more confidently and calmly: First floor'll be the effing editorial office of the journal 'Questions of philosophy'; the second floor'll be the effing institute of history; the third floor'll be the effing institute of economics. The fourth floor became the home of the institute of ideology, and that was that. My friend the Poet, who had only been a couple of hours in the Madhouse, and then only because he was waiting with me for my paycheck, produced the following verse:

*There is in Moscow, in the centre, an edifice of yellow hue.
It looks like all the others, but it's not,
For deep within it every day a team of experts meets anew,
To mass-produce a flood of epoch-making thought.
They come in of a morning, a steady stream of folk,
To push their pens and manufacture all their bull.
They sit about and 'labour' - it really is a joke.
To fiddle Ph.Ds and so forth, is the rule.
To speechify, to chatter, give their mouths some exercise,
To tear a strip off junior staff or rabbit on
About how wonderful they are, or higher up the ladder rise,
Is why they gather in the morning ere the dawn.
To illuminate the paths along which science has to go,
Impose important party duties on the arts,
Or generalise from life's experience and its great successes show,
Or how to others nous and wisdom it imparts,
To empty over all opponents a metaphorical pail of slops,
To nail revisionism dead with all its might,
To bury Earth beneath quotations until it on its axis stops,
Is why the team of 'experts' works till dead of night.*

WE

'We' is you, me and him. On the other hand, 'we' is not you, not me and not him, either. And certainly not Mahomet, Christ or Napoleon. More your Ivanov, Petrov and Sidorov. 'We' are those united by a common impulse, motivated by a feeling of justified pride. 'We' is the primary category of our ideology. When we say 'we', we mean that if you so much as raise a squeak we'll break your neck, crush you into powder, turn you into prison-camp dust. 'We' is the iron tread of history. 'We' is the invincible will of the Party. In short:

*We are making true our dream:
Nonentities will reign supreme.*

Not separately, but all together. In other words:

*We walk in close-knit ranks And
happiness awaits us ahead. **

Physically I imagine 'We' as follows. 'We' is a colossal mass of particles, each particle being capable of movement but deriving all of its energy from surrounding particles, having none of its own. The paradox is insoluble: not one particle contains within itself any energy at all yet each derives its energy from the others. Solve this paradox and perhaps in time you'll fathom the secret of 'We'. Our leading cretin Barabanov says that there's no paradox, but merely a dialectical contradiction, which is resolved by the formula:

We feel each other's elbow.

. . . What if the truth comes out of the mouth of cretins?!

HE

He is my great secret. I often meet Him, chat with Him, argue with Him. I tell Him all about my affairs and I listen to his observations and advice. I don't even have to speak for He guesses everything Himself. I meet Him at the most unexpected times and in the most unexpected places. For example, I'll be walking past the main building of the vilest institution in the Soviet Union and suddenly He'll be there.

'He was a pretty tough old nut, that Iron Felix,' I'll be thinking to myself, looking at the bronze statue of Dzerzhinsky in the middle of the square.

'That's only an illusion,' He'll say. 'You have to distinguish between genuine human will and the will of an animal. Genuine will is not associated with coercion, whereas apparent strength of will is based on coercion and is an embodiment of it. I was once kept in a cell for a month without sleep until I signed whatever testimony it was which They required. I didn't hold out, of course, and I neither remember nor understand how I came to sign. They gave my interrogator a medal, however, because he had manifested will. And I was condemned for my pusillanimity. Believe me, all of Them, that Iron Moron (excuse the vulgarity) especially, were absolute nonentities. The vagaries of history

* Two lines from a Stalinist marching song. (*Translator's note*)

brought Them to the top and They began to throw Their weight about. And They compensated for Their insignificance by indulging in dreadful manifestations of pseudo-will. If you only knew how I'd sometimes like to kick Them in the teeth!

'Maybe you're right,' I'll reply, 'but Their names are an excrescence on this earth and in history. And that . . .'

'That doesn't mean a thing,' He'll say. 'That's also a sign of Their superficiality. Pay no attention to Them. Ignore Them. You punish Them not by censuring Them, but by ignoring Them. The highest praise for a bandit is to be cursed for his brutality. Don't think about Them and They'll shrink to the size They really were. Do you know what the driving force was for my interrogator? He practised his brutality on me in the name of History, whereas I . . .'

'I try not to think of Them,' I reply, 'but They keep coming into my head. I have the feeling that They're with me all the time and that there's no escaping Them.'

'I understand. They tormented me as well. Anyway, all I'm good for is giving advice. And what's brought you here to the Lubyanka?'

'I live very near here. I grew up in the shade of this building. I could see it from my classroom window. I used to walk past it on my way to the university. I could have gone another way, but I got used to this route. Anyway, it's shorter. And safer, strange as it may seem.'

THEY

'They' is a rather wide-ranging term and like a lot of Russian swearwords can express many different things, depending on the context. Generally speaking, 'They' means everyone who has a hold over you, whether as regards life as a whole or in any particular situation. 'They' is a power beyond your control which stands in opposition to yourself and is capable of playing every dirty trick in the book. Moreover, it is one hundred per cent socially conditioned. It is a peculiar personification of anonymous social forces which exert pressure on you at every step of your miserable path through life. This is a striking phenomenon. Think about it - the personification of the anonymous! Even if 'They' are actual identifiable individuals, They only acquire 'They'-ness once their identities have been dissolved and They have been reinvested in a cloak of anonymity. We abstract from people's behaviour something which does not depend on their individuality and at the same time we do the opposite by personifying this force as some powerful creature called 'They'.

'How do you explain it?' I ask. 'I've been around for quite a while now and yet I've never seen any of "Them" who was anything but insignificant.'

"They"re all nonentities. Stupid, inarticulate, mendacious, slippery. What on earth is the source of Their power?"

'The source of Their power is Their insignificance,' says He. 'If They were in any positive sense remarkable as individuals, in Their company you'd feel that you, too, had an individual personality and you would feel more important. But that's precisely what They don't want. They need to reduce you to the level of an insignificant insect. And Their most powerful weapon is Their own crawling, insect-like insignificance. That's Their natural form of self-defence, Their means of self-preservation. Believe it or not, the hardest thing for me to bear There was the realisation that the people who were bullying me were not worthy of respect - they were nonentities. They weren't even enemies - they were vermin. And my observations suggest that They end up on the same level as the victims they produce.'

'Don't frighten me,' I say. 'Nowadays they're all graduates. They read books. Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Chekhov . . .'

'That doesn't matter,' He says, 'the interrogator who beat me could spout reams of poetry off by heart, had good English and German, was a friend of Mayakovsky . . .'

Don't think that 'We' means us in actual fact. A daft idea like that is better thrown away. The gentle 'We' you hear when bigshots do their act Is uttered by those bastards known as 'They'.

IDIOTOLOGY

The guardians of Soviet ideology are the philosophers. These are highly interesting creatures from a scientific point of view although as yet they have not been the object of scientific study. This is rather strange. Cancer agents have received so much attention and yet they are less dangerous than philosophers, the agents of idiocy. The miserable state of our scientific knowledge in this area is witnessed by the fact that we do not even know as yet to which species of flora or fauna philosophers belong. Are they reptiles, insects, ruminants or raptors? Even the criteria for their classification are unknown. Do we start from the very stupid and move to the unimaginably stupid, or from the very rotten and move to those who are so rotten that even the very rotten appear as knights in shining armour? The Teacher, with whom I sometimes discuss problems of idiotology (the name I give to the scientific study of Soviet philosophers), thinks that idiotology is the only branch of science where the

dialectical method feels at home. That's where everything flows, everything changes, everything is transformed into its opposite! One and the same philosopher can be a worm and a viper. Take for instance Academician Fedkin. It was he who conceived the cult of Stalin, together with Kanareikin and Petin. Because of him more than a hundred of his colleagues and collaborators were put away. By rights he should have gone on trial. But he saved his skin, and even rose higher. How come? For the simple reason that he is intellectually an amoeba, is as adaptable as a flea and has the appetite of a jackal. Academician Kanareikin is vile enough to be considered a viper but in his ability to twitter on marxist subjects he belongs to the category of song-bird. And that's nothing compared to the bitch Tvarzhinskaya. They say that she's a relative of Dzerzhinsky. By temperament she belongs to an especially spiteful breed of Moscow watchdog, but her brainpower is that of a chicken.

'In short,' said the Teacher, 'these vermin are not worth talking about. If it were up to me, I'd put them all in a cage with a sign saying "Danger! These animals are capable of anything!"'

For a while I was surprised at the serious attitude which the West adopted towards our philosophy. But now I understand. In the first place they've got their own verminous idiots too. Secondly, the people who write on such topics try to 'raise' the intellectual level of the material in order to appear more intelligent themselves. And thirdly, they get caught up in a historical confusion. The point is that people who study Soviet philosophy usually deal with the 'best' texts in which our philosophers paraphrase what Western philosophers have said and vaunt their 'temerity'. The other texts they consider are the early ones when marxist philosophy was only just coming out of its bourgeois shell and still retained some of its features.

But real Soviet philosophy should be considered in terms of its average product and in conjunction with the fact that millions of people are required to study it. From this point of view Soviet philosophy begins from the moment when marxism was shorn of its verbosity, coinciding with the appearance of a work attributed to Stalin entitled *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* which generated a tremendous amount of commentary. After Stalin's death, it looked for a while as if the process might reverse itself but in fact Soviet philosophers had absolutely nothing new to add to what had been said during the Stalinist period. It's not marxism, nor leninism which forms the essence of Soviet philosophy but Stalinism, for Stalinism is the mouse to which the mountain of marxism and leninism gave birth. Our Institute . . . But it's better said in the words of one of our critically minded colleagues who wishes to remain anonymous:

*If you want to see a twit,
Or an idiot, clot, or jerk,*

*Dummy, clown, or quarter-wit,
Ignoramus, ass, or berk, Come and
see our Institute. We've the most,
there's no dispute.*

SHE

A comparatively young man in my position will usually have at any one time about a dozen creatures to each of whom is applicable the concept 'She'. The individuals within the group change over time. At the same time each member of that group associates with other, analogous groups of creatures who come under the heading of 'He'. Many scientists and philosophers tend to see this as the emergence of some new form of marital relations - a peculiar form of group-marriage, while others regard it as a particular form of promiscuity. I think that they are mistaken. Marriage has nothing to do with it. It is a particular form of *social* intercourse. Note the emphasis. It is the spiritual rather than the physiological element that is important.

'Maybe the spiritual element is more important for *you*,' says He. 'But what about Barabanov, in the Department of Dialectical Materialism? What spirituality has he got?! He's a fool, a phenomenal fool. . .'

'Stop!' I reply, 'I'm talking about a spiritual element and not an intellectual one. And they're by no means the same thing. Barabanov may be a fool, but there is some degree of spirituality even in him.'

'I surrender,' He says, 'you're right, of course. No doubt sexual intercourse in our part of the world *is* becoming the carrier of something else - maybe even a kind of spirituality. That's worth thinking about. Who knows, perhaps you'll make an important discovery.'

'Where am I going to make any important discoveries?' I exclaim. 'But still, we're on to something rather interesting. Just imagine what a huge proportion of the population is caught up in such a network of sexual groups. They can spread information at lighting speed, they form opinions, judgments . . . That's a fair old source of power! And what if . . .'

'Don't get distracted,' He says, 'that particular net is very unreliable.'

As always, He contrives to be in the right. For instance, I was at a party on New Year's Eve. I took a fancy to one particular young woman. The feeling was mutual. We chatted about everything under the sun, danced a little. She said that she'd like to see me without my beard. I said that without my beard I was pretty ordinary. Now, without my trousers . . . She called me a braggart but later on expressed a desire to see how far my bragging corresponded with reality. I said that I had been speaking figuratively . . . We ended up going back to my place. We saw each other

for a while. When we got to the point where there were no surprises left, we split up quietly and without fuss. Our paths crossed from time to time after that but we behaved as if there had never been anything between us. And it's like that with all of them. It does have one advantage, however. You don't have any family worries and there's no wasted effort on their behalf. One of my female acquaintances has a son who will be leaving school at the end of this year. She's already beside herself with worry about his future. He's a lad of no particular ability and he's well and truly spoiled like almost all only children. He's got the choice: either to get himself into further education, whatever it takes, or to join the army. If her son makes it into higher education she can stay in the same social stratum to which she belongs at the moment. If it's the army, she'll drop down a stratum. Naturally she'll do everything she can to ensure the success of the first option. But it's turning her life into a nightmare. I shan't get married and I certainly shan't have any kids, if only for the reason that I don't want to end up in a similar situation. Anyway, in some respects I still feel a child myself.

*Women only interest me
In terms of sexuality.
And when the sexual urge has gone,
Why, then I'll sleep in bed alone.*