

On M. Volokhov's play 'Rublyovka Safari'

“... Volokhov himself has progressed further into the 21st century, to ‘Rublyovka Safari’, and in my view this is very significant. I would say the ‘Moscow-Petushki’ line has been extended (let’s say, Petushki-Vladimir). Firstly, Volokhov’s work is written in a tone that rules out superficial gratification; secondly, these unappetizing plotlines in ‘Rublyovka Safari’ are symbolic rather than naturalistic; and thirdly, they are not the main aim and certainly not an aim in themselves, only the means to reach a goal by the shortest route the author knows – by turning everything into a ‘carnival’ of sorts, if you recall. Incidentally, the aim here is not the hallucination that is called ‘catharsis’, but rather the characteristics of our idiotic reality couched in uncompromising, succinct and precise terms. ‘Holy shit – let the rest of them fucking croak. And if they can’t croak by themselves they’re asking to be fucking wasted, squashed like parasitic bugs.’ ‘He didn’t screw the important guys in government circles like he was meant to, ended up in the fucking shithole. In Russia you gotta play by the rules, specially if you rob the government of fucking great oilfields three times the size of Europe... I love my country, I’m no dissident, for fuck’s sake, I share it out with the government dudes that make thieving easy work.’ Try putting that another way and you get a term in jail (a journalistic term?). Volokhov presents a precise picture of Russian life by means of multiple, reciprocal fellatio; in his day Venedikt [Yerofeyev] achieved the same effect with his hero’s protracted dipsomania...”

Alexei BITOV

“Mikhail Volokhov fascinates me because when interviewed, one half of what he says is incomprehensible. He speaks in such a culturologically philosophical and complex language with cosmic thematic formulations. Even a top-notch intellectual would be hard put to interpret all his symbols. Volokhov – a living walking Joyce – is here among us. As soon as you open Volokhov’s play the Russian people, with whom he is apparently well acquainted, begin to speak in the language of the street, a language with elements of shocking cruelty, obscenity, thrash and underground. Either he himself hung out with them, or he traveled on the roofs of freight trains and served time with the characters from his play ‘Paris Bound’ ... I also saw an amazing production of his play ‘Lesbians Roaring Like A Tsunami’, with costumes by Vyacheslav Zaitsev. I don’t understand how anyone could become so familiar with our street life down to the finest detail. After all, Russia today is street life. The intelligentsia mean nothing here. Zero. And if an intellectual like Volokhov tackles thrash, then probably using thrash he can convey what the intellectual really thinks of contemporary Russia, and what Russia thinks of itself. Most likely it would be impossible otherwise. And in this sense Volokhov achieves a shocking and metaphorically complete form.

For me Volokhov is primarily an artist who has the talent to live and create. Despite the fact that he lives in troubled times. We live in an age when it is not fashionable, cool or indeed much fun to live and create in the grip of human passions. There’s no money in it... nothing. When theatre is still unable to recover and begin speaking the truth. And we are rather tired of socially uncompromising Post Modernism like Pelevin’s. We yearn for a little conservatism and, definitely, great art from our writers. Volokhov stubbornly continues to occupy himself with genuine art. Anybody else would have given up. Penned something a bit simpler, a little more refined, and wormed their way to acceptance. But Volokhov doesn’t do that. He doesn’t try to crawl through the eye of the needle. Doesn’t aim to gratify or curry favor. No! And that is remarkable – such

sincerity, the nerve of a true artist. Moreover, an artist with meticulous mastery of the written word.

Volokhov is a superb and original dramatist. Understandably Ionesco was enraptured by his 'Blind Man's Bluff'. And the erotica and non-standard vocabulary in his plays are not for épatage, but to jolt to our stifled emotions and feelings.

After reading his play 'Rublyovka Safari' some friends of mine remarked: 'That is real obscenity, you might even say Shakespearean. Magnificent!' ”

Irina KHAKAMADA (*from a TV interview*)

“The play 'Rublyovka Safari' is remarkable above all because it reveals the underside of Power with hyper-realistic humor. You believe in Volokhov's characters to such an extent that it seems this is not simply an avant-garde play whose arrival in the theatre world was set to demolish stagnant, narrow-minded and mediocre principles, but rather that life itself has become so mutinously avant-garde and theatrical that apparently no avant-garde exists without the dramatist Volokhov. As always we must give Volokhov his due: yet again his talent as a writer in succinct metaphorical theatrical form – a real theatrical game for high stakes – has encapsulated a truly tragic time with the metaphorical global precision of optimism engendered by cultural timelessness.”

Igor DUDINSKY (*from a TV interview, 2011*)