

Andrej Bitov

MIFACTS



Andrej Bitov was born 1937 in Leningrad, Russia. In 1962 he graduated as an engineer from the Leningrad Mining Institute, in 1967 as a scriptwriter from the Moscow High Cinema Courses. In 1973 —1974 he completed his doctoral thesis at the World Literature Institute of the USSR Academy of Science on the theory of literature — the dissertation "Psychology of the Genre" was submitted to the jury, the author, however, did not appear to take his oral examinations. Since 1958 he has been writing fiction and had published eight books by 1977. The publication of his novel *Pushkin House* in the USA in 1978 and his collaboration in the independent journal *Metropol* in 1979 led to a ban on any of his publications in the USSR until 1986. Major works: *The Big Balloon* (1963) and *The Apothecary Island* (1968; both collections of short stories); the novels *The Recruit* (1965), *Monachov in Departure* (1990), *The Pushkin House* (1989), *The Teacher of Symmetry* (1987), *The Monkey Link* (1993); *The Book of Travels* (essays, 1986), *Essays from the Novel* (1986), *We Woke up in an Unknown Country* (1991), *The Counting of the Hare* (1992). Bitov's books have been translated into many languages and been awarded several international prizes. He is President of the Russian PEN-Centre. — Address: Russian Pen Centre, Neglinnaya 18/1, Moscow.

When I came to Berlin my passionate intention was to finish my next novel "Oglaschonnye" and I managed to fulfill that task during the first half of my stay. It will be published in April next year in three languages simultaneously: in German by Rowohlt, in English by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, and in Russian by the Russian PEN Publishers. The original title seems to be untranslatable and may end up as "Zwei Menschen" and "The Monkey Link" respectively. It would be difficult to recount the substance of the novel here as the plot is rather complicated. The book deals with some sort of endless discussion on the matter of the identity of human beings from the point of view of different animals, the Creator, and of a human being — the "Russian Faust", so to say — on the historical and geographical phone

of the last years of our Empire. The last section which I wrote here in Berlin describes the life of a dissident writer in real time 1984 with an epilogue set against the backdrop of the coup d'Etat of 1991. But, to tell you the truth, the novel is not political at all.

I am especially grateful to the Wissenschaftskolleg and Dr. R. Meyer-Kalkus for the idea and organization (later on in cooperation with the institution "Literarisches Colloquium") of a special seminar called "Nabokov's Triangle" on the problems of translation. For that purpose my two translators Rosemarie Tietze (Munich) and Susan Brownsberger (Boston) were invited to come to Berlin. Together we discussed all questions connected with our work on the German and English version of my novel. On the 14th July 1993, we had a public talk on the subject in the "Literarisches Colloquium Berlin".

Another project during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg was to extend my work on the program "Freedom to Pushkin" (in collaboration with the Georgian artist Rezo Gabriadze). My colloquium on the 1st of June 1993, which I called "Experience in Mythology and Mythological Act" dealt partly with this work. I tried to describe the phenomenon of MI FACT (which is a term of my own and can be translated from Russian as something between "myth-act" and "myth-fact") — as part of EXISTART using Pushkins style of existence as an example. It has nothing to do with the so-called SIMULACRUM or AVANT-GARDE actions. The idea was to create a context of life and work, of fate and behaviour, of writing and biography as a WHOLE, as one entity.

In the context of my work at the Wissenschaftskolleg I wrote several essays: "Reality of Paradise (A Berlin Installation)", "A Brief Astrology of Russian Literature", "Three Plus One" (on the 150th anniversary of the *Three Musketeers* and the Russian tradition of the Literary Protagonist), "Translation as Original", "Intellectual Primitive as a Major Literary Genre". Together with three others, which I started here, the above mentioned titles will form the next book (a surprise outcome even to the author) with the working title "Eine kleine Arithmetics of Russian Literature".

O, Wissen! o, schafths! o, kolleg!

O, fellows ...