

ŠVEJK
AMONG
SOVIET
TRICKSTERS

Mark Lipovetsky
(*Columbia University*)

Tricksters: mythological and modern

- Loki of the Norse pantheon
- Hermes, Prometheus and **Odysseus** in Greek mythology
- Anansi, Eshu and Ogo-Yurugu in African folklore and myth
- Coyote, Wakdjunkaga, the rabbit Manabozo or Wiskodyak in North American Indian mythology
- the Raven in Paleo-Asiatic folklore.
- The Fox-changeling in Chinese mythology;
- The Devil in European folklore, as reflected in the novellas and fabliaux of the Renaissance
- Renard the Fox from the medieval *Roman de Renard*.
- Till Eulenspiegel in German folklore
- Hershel of Ostropol in East European Jewish folklore
- Panurge from François Rabelais' *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*. (1533-64)
- Cervantes's Sancho Panza (*Don Quixote*, 1615)
- Rogue in picaresque novels: Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599; Le Sage's *Gil Blas* (1715), Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722); Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743) and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749).
- Beaumarchais's Figaro (1775-92)
- Gogol's Khlestakov (*Revizor*, 1836)
- Dostoevsky's Verkhovensky (*Besy*, 1872)
- Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn (1876, 1884)



The trickster-trope

- Sacred/profane inversions
- Mediation
- Shape-shifting
- Blurring of binaries

Deception, trickery

Immorality, lies

Hypersexuality

Demonic

ambivalence

transgressivity

Anti-structures

Marginality,
homelessness

Between and
betwixt

Parodic doubling of
power (from
imitator of gods)

Narrative
power/Parody of
the author

Situation-inversion

laughter

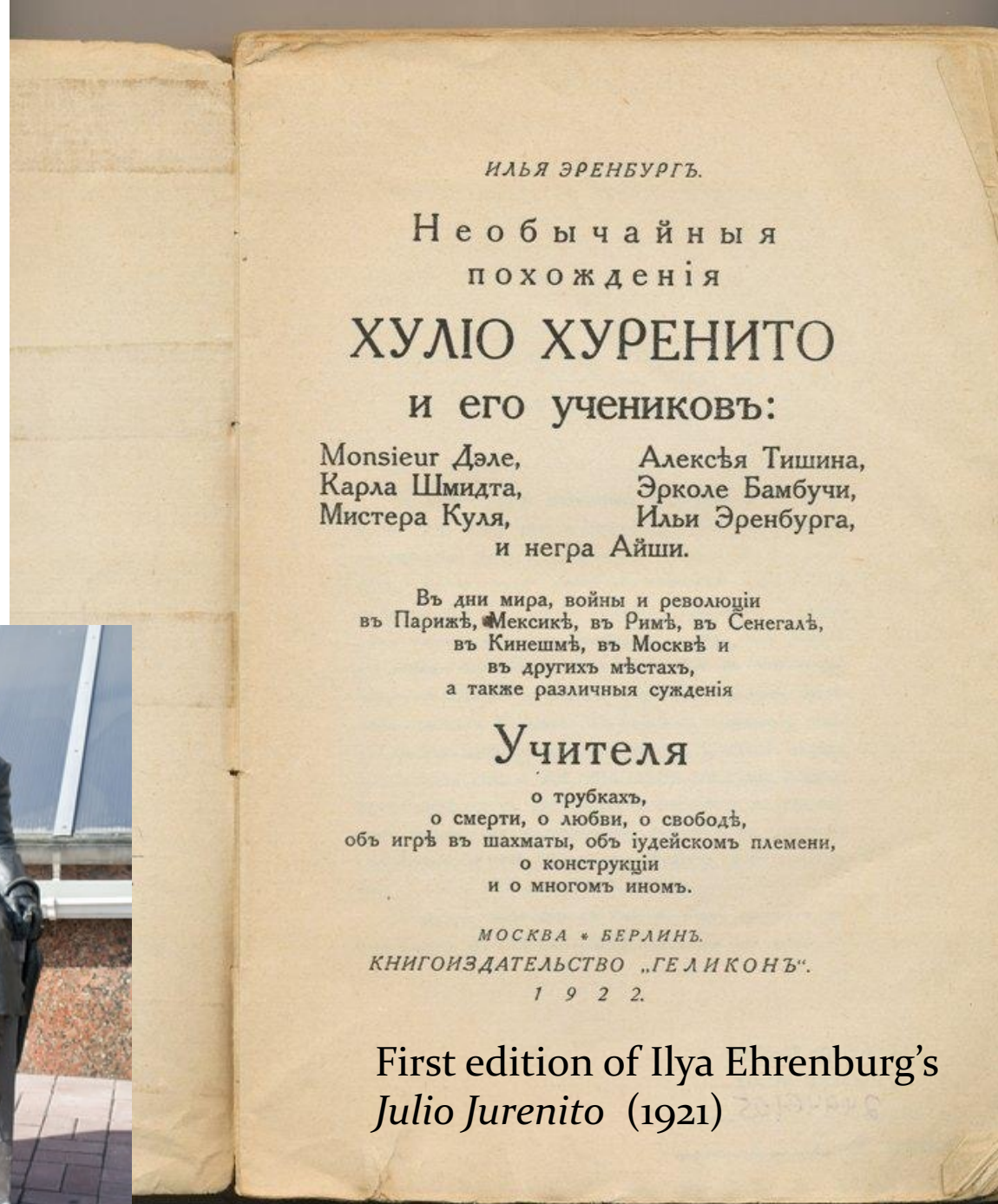
liminality

A poster for Vladimir Vilner's
film *Benya Krik* (1926) based
on Isaac Babel's *Odesskie rasskazy* (1924)





Ilya Erenburg,
*Turbulent Life of Lazik
Roitshvanets* (1928)



Ivan Babichev Envy (1927)
By Yurii Olesha

Ill. by Nathan Altman



ОКЛЯБРЬ

ЛИТЕРАТУРНО-ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ
И ОБЩЕСТВЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ

ЖУРНАЛ

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

Б. К. ФРИЧЕ

РОМАНЫ, ПОВЕСТИ,
РАССКАЗЫ

Ф. ДАВЕРГЕ
А. ПЛАТОНОВ
Н. НАКАРОВ

СТИХИ

В. БАЛЧЕНКО
М. ИРНИН
А. КОРИН
С. ПАЛОВ (С. Трушкин)
В. БАРИУЖ

ПЕРЕЖИТОЕ

В. ЛУДЗЕРТ

ЗАПИСКИ ПИСАТЕЛЯ

М. КУРИН

ОЧЕРКИ, ФЕЛЬЕТНЫ

С. МАКСИМОВ
А. ИСАЕВ
Г. ДОРЖЕВ

КРИТИКА

К. ДОЛЖИНСКИЙ
И. ГРОССМАН-РОШИН
Р. КУЗНЕЦ

БИБЛИОГРАФИЯ

КНИГА

ДЕВЯТАЯ

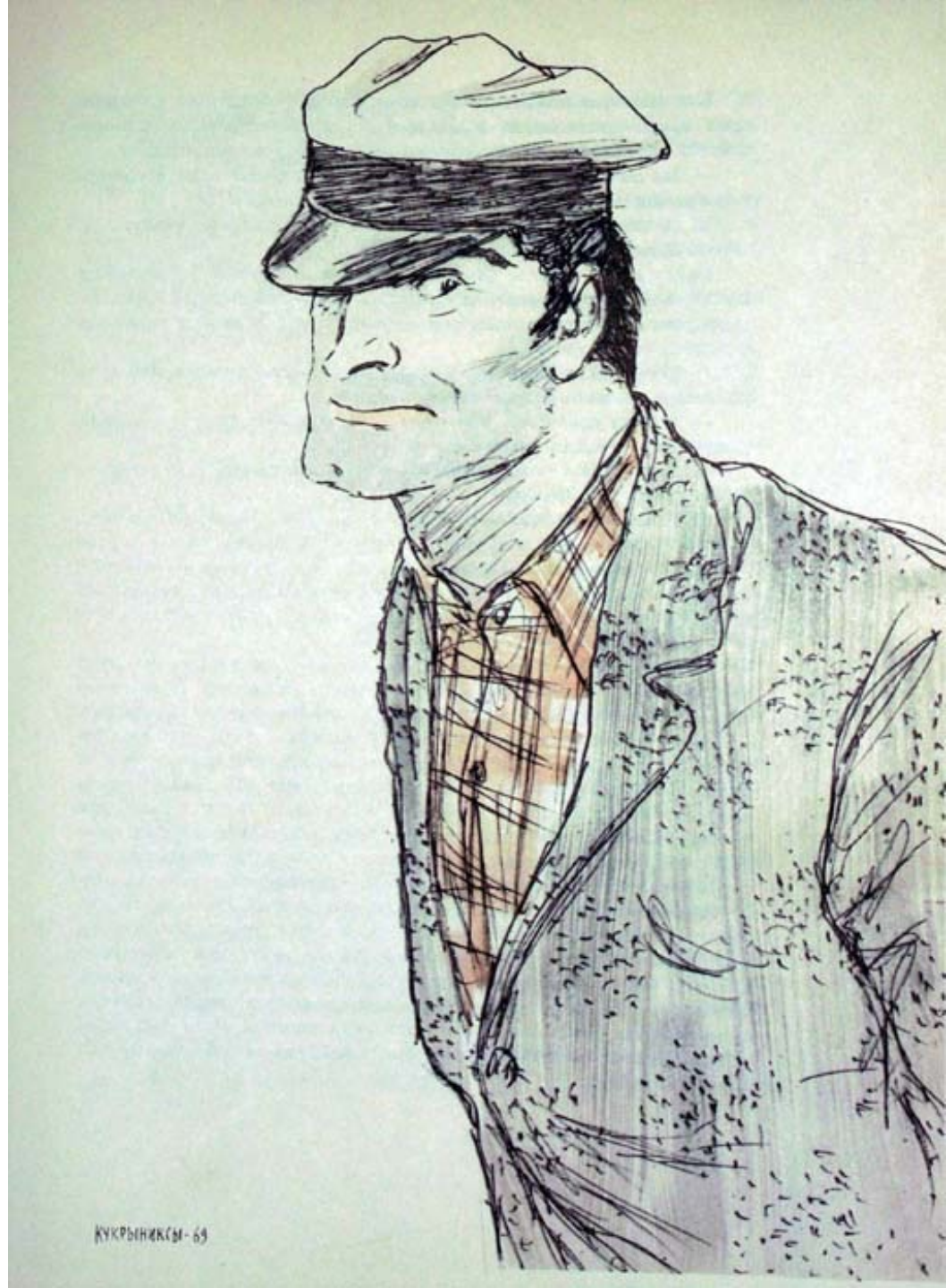
МОСКОВСКИЙ РАБОЧИЙ

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Andrei Platonov. "Doubtful Makar" (1929)

Ostap Bender,
the protagonist of
Ilya Il'f and Evgenii Petrov's
Dvenadtsat' stuliev (1928) and
Zolotoi telenok (1933).
Ill. by Kukryniksy.

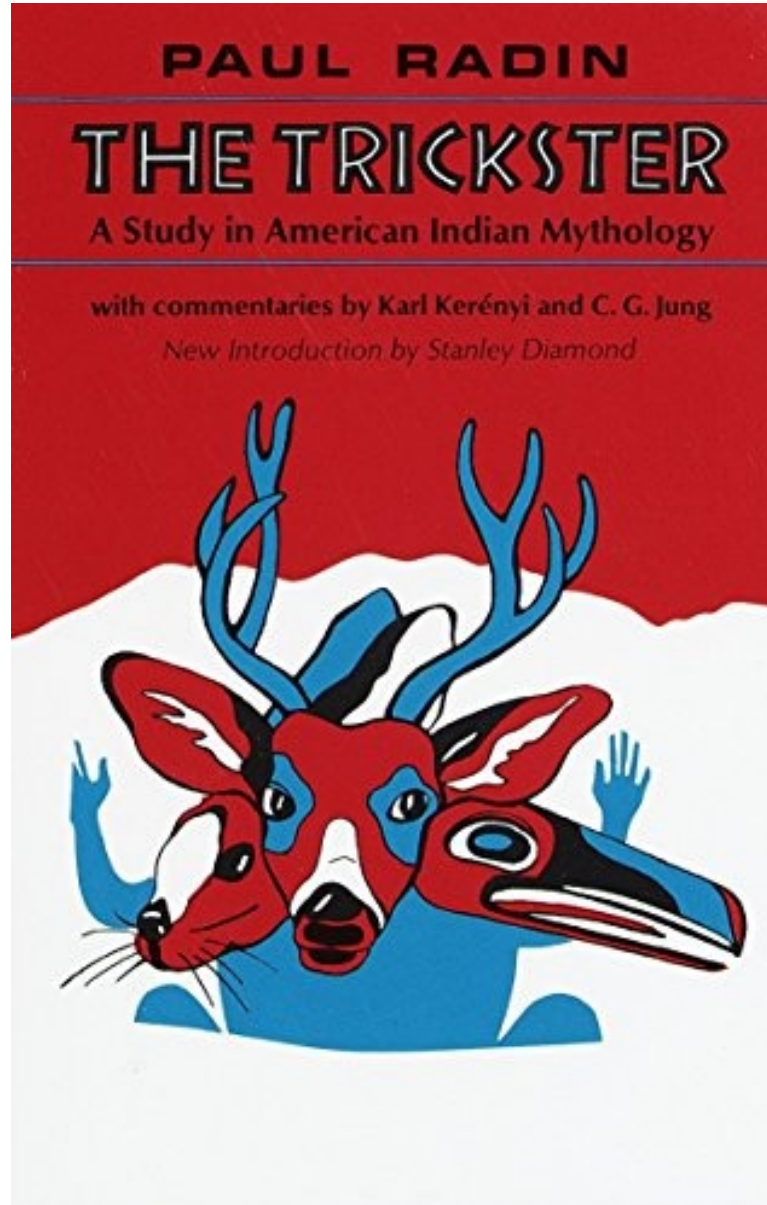


The fool's time-honored "right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not "to be oneself"[...] and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets" (*Dialogic Imagination*, 163).



Mikhail Bakhtin.
"Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel"

The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology (1956)



- **Karol Kerényi:**

“Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster. His function in an archaic, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, and experience of what is not permitted [...] Dionysian ecstasy has the same function as the trickster myth: it abolished the boundaries, not least the boundaries of sex”

“The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology”



“This man, sir, pretends to be a half-wit for the sole purpose of concealing his rascality under the mask of imbecility” (p.722)



“... rogue who dons the mask of a fool in order to motivate distortions and shufflings of languages and labels, thus unmasking them by not understanding them” (*Dialogic Imagination*, 404-405).



“I should like to see something else, the next stage, the thing still shrouded in mist. Here comes a man with a pile of papers. On his hip, in a special pocket, he carries a Browning. Don't be afraid, he isn't a bandit, he's an honest official. This morning having typed something under a serial number, he has shot a man who has disagreed with him on some issue or another. Now he has dined and is briskly walking to a meeting.” (Ehrenburg, 300)

Ivan Babichev Envy (1927)

By Yurii Olesha

Discussions ensued about the new prophet.

A citizen, a stranger (who wore a bowler, according to the details, a shabby suspicious man, none other than Ivan Babichev himself), who went to wedding for a bill collector [...]

The guests departed , greatly offended, whereupon it seems to have been discovered that the port wine in all the bottles on the feast table had turned to water” [...]

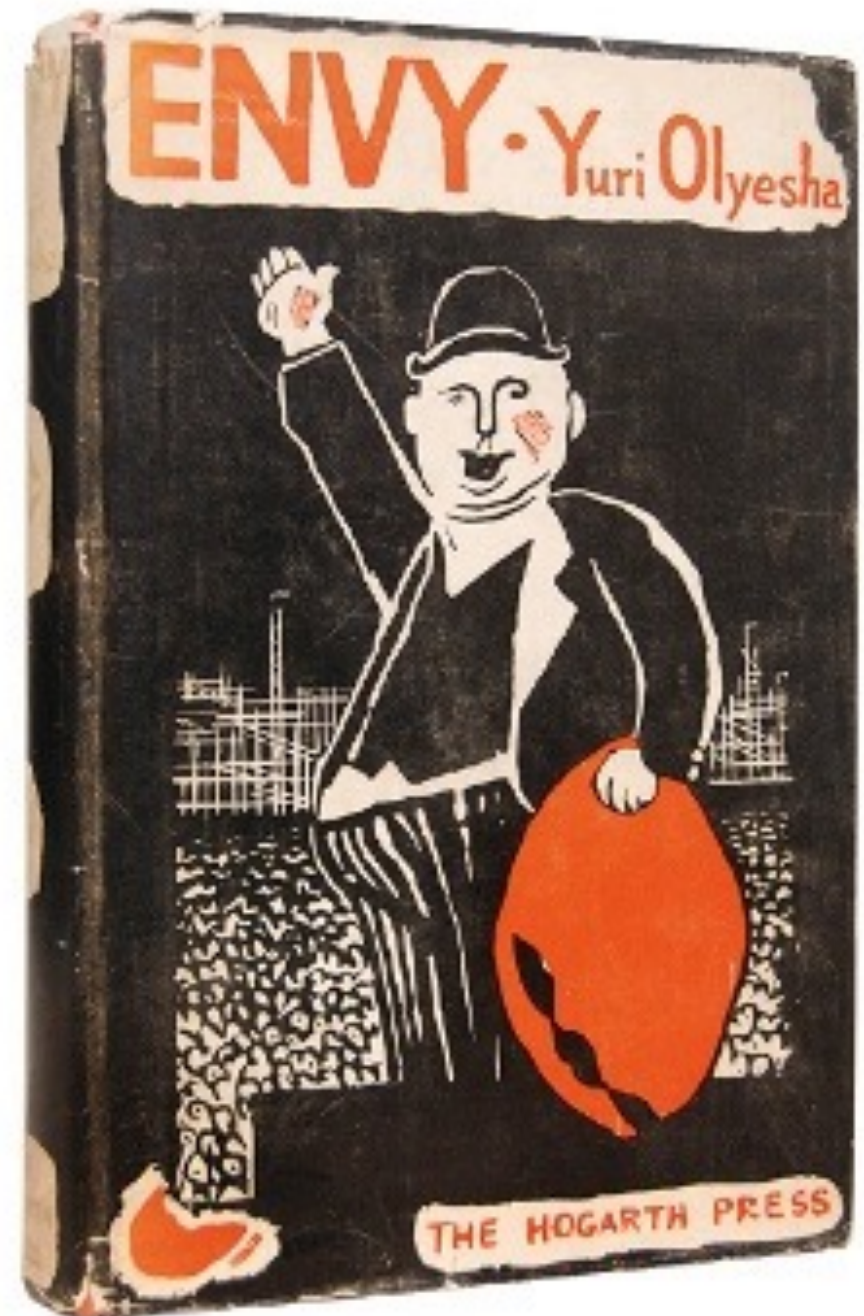
What did they accuse him of at the GPU?

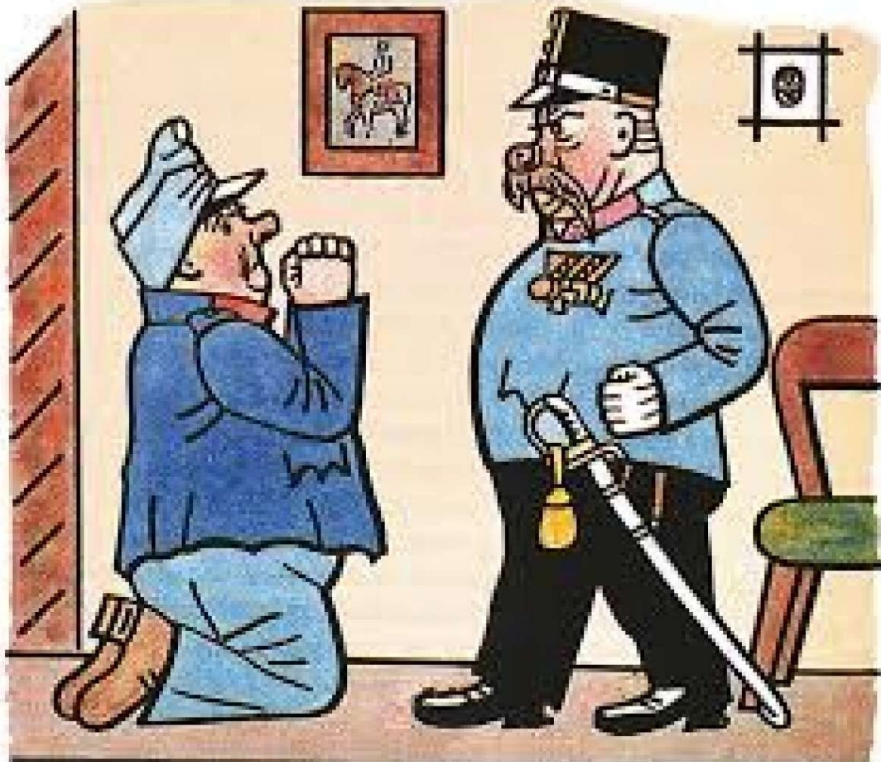
“Have you been calling yourself a king?” the investigator asked him.

“Yes... king of the lowlifes.” (*korol' poshliakov*)

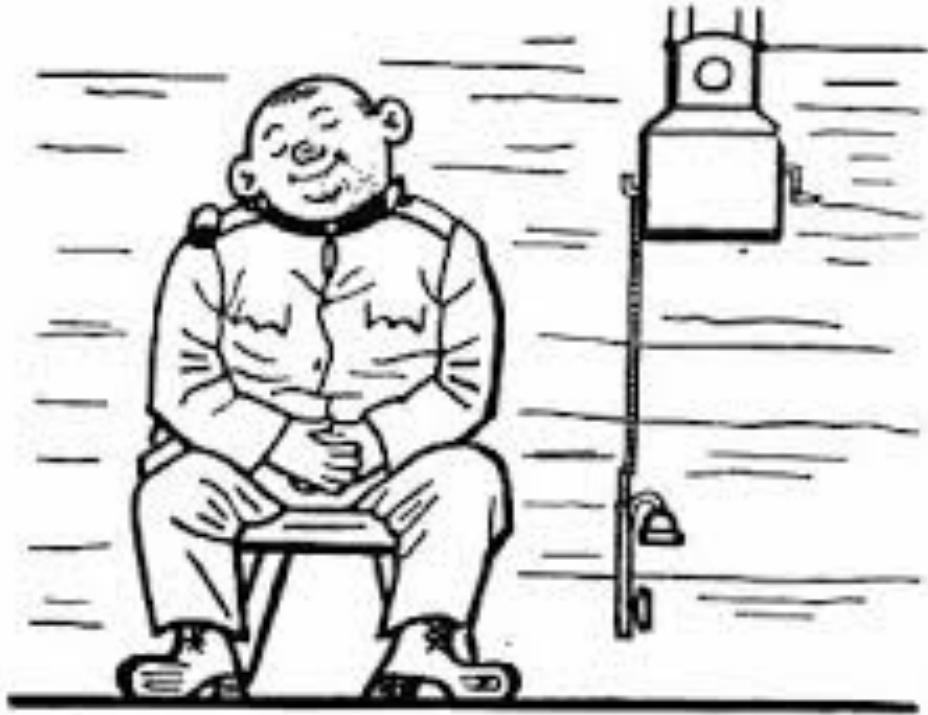
“What does that mean?”

“You see, ‘m opening the eyes of large category of people...”





- “Mounting the staircase to the Third Department for questioning, Švejk carried his cross up to the hill of Golgotha, sublimely unconscious of his martyrdom” (19).
- “Police inspector Braun set the scene for the meeting with Švejk with all the cruelty of Roman lictors in the time of charming Emperor Nero. With the same ruthlessness as they said: “
- ‘Throw this scoundrel of a Christian to the lions,’ inspector Braun said ‘Put him behind bars’” (36)
- “...at the head of the strange procession marched Švejk, grave and sublime, like one of the early Christian martyrs being dragged into the arena” (544).



“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given... This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand...” (Matt, 13:11)

““Tomorrow they’re going to hang me. This is what they always do on these occasions and they call it spiritual consolation [...] And why they are going to?...” [...] ‘I don’t know, replied Svejk with a good-natured smile. ‘I haven’t the faintest idea. It must be fate” (100).

“a woman [who] was sentenced for strangling her newly-born twins. Although she swore on oath that she couldn’t have strangled twins, when she’d given birth to only one little girl whom she had succeeded in strangling quite painlessly” (18).

“Kynical reason culminates in the knowledge—decried as nihilism—that we must snub the grand goals. In this regard, we cannot be nihilistic enough” (Peter Sloterdijk, Critique of Cynical Reason, 194).

“an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. It is characterised precisely by the fact that with affirmation there is simultaneously taking place a distancing from, or revelation of what is being affirmed. In subversive affirmation there is always a surplus which destabilises affirmation and turns it into its opposite.”

Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse

Subversive affirmation



**Vitali Komar and Alexander Melamid. “The Origin of Socialist Realism” and “Stalin With Muses” (1981-84).
From the series *Nostalgic Socialist Realism*.**



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