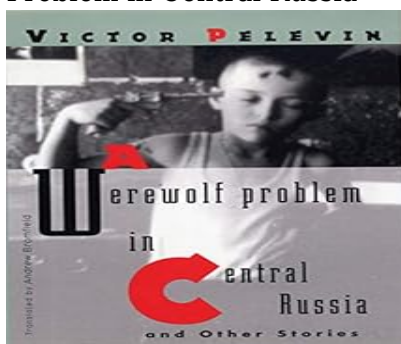


A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia By rapo88.org Pelevin—whom Spin called a master absurdist a brilliant satirist of things Soviet but also of things human—carries us in A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia to a land of great sublimity and black comic brilliance. For about the last 90 years it seems no Russian or Soviet writer is able to avoid wandering off into ruminations land a phantasmagorical place where nothing is real there's no plot or characters and the story degenerates into a dialog between two personalities of the same mentally disturbed person debating with himself over the nature of Christian theology death and Stalinism. For example in Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream a femal bathroom cleaner philosophizes on the meaning of existence stumbling into the metaphysical position of solipsism potentially losing her mind (or perhaps changing her reality. While each story is unique in its own right they all share common themes: the characters all go through the motions of living while in reality they are asleep (as in the short story Sleep) each character following the central organization of Soviet life no one complaining or raising a fuss each person living the lie (to borrow from Havel.) Another theme that ties the stories together are the inside jokes that only Russians (or those familiar with the Soviet system) would be likely to catch: references and allusions to the New Soviet Man socialist realism and What is to be Done are likely to fly over the heads of most readers but which I found worthy of a belly laugh. The frustration with the Soviet system and the meaninglessness and bleakness of existence is also common to all the stories whether it be a description of life in prison or a heavy equipment operator seeking to bulldoze his way out of the system Pelevin emphasizes if not the triumph of the human will to be an individual then its struggle to do so.)While the stories are perhaps a bit avant garde in their surrealism and the Soviet age references and jokes may be missed this is an excellent collection of contemporary Russian fiction and a marvelous read.

The absurd becomes the truth in these magnificent eight short stories by the contemporary post Soviet Union author. Victor Pelevin is the only young Russian novelist to have made an impression in the West (Village Voice): A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia the second of Pelevin's Russian Booker Prize winning short story collections continues his Sputnik like rise: The writers to whom he is frequently compared—Kafka Bulgakov Philip K: Dick and Joseph Heller—are all deft fabulists who find fuel for their fires in society's deadening protocol, At the very start of the third semester in one of the lectures on Marxism Leninism Nikita Dozakin made a remarkable discovery begins the story Sleep, Nikita's discovery is that everyone around him from parents to television talk show hosts is actually asleep: In Vera Pavlova's Ninth Dream the attendant in a public toilet finds that her researches into solipsism have dire and diabolical consequences: In the title story a young Muscovite Sasha stumbles upon a group of people in the forest who can transform themselves into wolves, As Publishers Weekly noted Pelevin's allegories are reminiscent of children's fairy tales in their fantastic depictions of worlds within worlds solitary souls tossed helplessly among them: A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia



Ultimately it's an unsatisfying work. It starts out wonderfully the first 2 or 3 pages of the titled story are great. Then it falls into what can only be described as the Russian curse. With Bulgakov Krzhizhanovsky or Plantonov you could chalk it up to never being finished edited or published in the author's lifetime, With Tolstaya (the Slynx) and Pelevin there's simply no excuse, A Werewolf Problem could have been a great story but instead it's a personal reflection on how the character

feels about taking his own pulse, He showed great potential with these tales but Pelevin drops the reigns and lets them all sort of melt and dribble on the floor, And it's not simply a matter of needing at least a smattering of background on Russian literature and history either: That old saw show your audience don't tell them is still valid but if you have to tell them at least tell them *something* and don't beat them over the head with it. It's as if we've taken a huge leap backward to before Gogol stated things rather directly and Pelevin is trying to be so subtle so light that no one gets the joke, Not to say satire has to be broad but one of the stories here The Ontology of Childhood isn't even a story. All in all if you've read his great short novel Omon Ra you've got everything that's covered here but with a tightness coherence and humor that's lacking in these stories. 224 pages Pelevin's short stories are surreal and absurdist but so was the Soviet period of Russian history which Pelevin writes about. The nonsensical nature of the stories may be off putting to readers as the situation plot and resolution are all weird:) In The Prince of Gosplan working for the Soviet economic planning agency becomes a literal computer game the object to control the characters to level up and advance. This is especially apparent in the title short story A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia (which was incidentally also my favorite of the collection. Kudos as well to Andrew Bromfield the translator whose work with Boris Akunin's mysteries drew me to these stories. This is a good starting point for those looking to get into Pelevin. No one to tell them what's what and what works. We get it. There might not even be a joke. It has no characters dialog action or plot. It's an essay. Highly recommended. 224 pages A great collection of stories. Genius. 224 pages I love this writer. Had the book in the past and lent it away. Used the werewolf story with my students for Halloween. Thanks 224 pages.