

THE DARK

by Leonid Andréiev

For those of us who are used to browsing Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>), it is no surprise that we occasionally come across authors who fill us with joy, even though we have never heard of them. It is natural: different times, different languages, different cultures, sometimes thousands of kilometres and even political distances hide them from us. On this occasion I came across Leonid Andreyev, who soon ceased to be a complete stranger when I heard Anoushka, a Russian student I had in my class at the time, talk about him with great enthusiasm.

The story (relatively long for a story, forty-five pages) entitled *The Dark* is basically a psychological tension building to a crescendo with an unexpected ending. This tension is the struggle between the moral and the immoral, between good and evil, and, of course, between the good guys and the bad guys. The main character is an anarchist (set before the Russian Revolution of 1917) who is about to commit an assassination and is even prepared to lose his life in the attempt. Pursued by the police, he takes refuge in a brothel, and inside the brothel in Liuba's (Beloved) room. But not only has this twenty-six-year-old terrorist never set foot in a brothel, he has never been with a woman. Therein lies the drama, two such different beings locked in the same room: confrontation is inevitable. At one point she tells him: 'You've never been with a woman, you coward! And you dare to tell me, I have possessed all men, all of them!'

One of Andreyev's discoveries in this story is the description by sound, not by sight. This seems to reinforce the darkness of the title, which is, incidentally, an apt one. To give a few examples of this literary device: 'Suddenly there was a sound of voices and footsteps in the corridor, a jingling of spurs, very soft and elegant, like those of young officers'; '...he dragged the girl along with him, her high French heels tapping on the parquet floor'. Through the sounds, without the author saying so, the room darkens, becomes absolute darkness, like the lives of the terrorist and the prostitute.

Leonid Nikolayevich Andreyev was born in Oryol, Russia, in 1871 and died in poverty in Finland in 1919. A firm believer in democracy, he always spoke out against Communist excesses. It is even speculated that his untimely death from heart failure may have been due to the anguish caused by the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war, of which the regime has left us little news.

Andreiev was a great discovery for me. I hope he will be for you too, if you haven't already discovered him.