

Excerpt from Valleri J. Robinson, *Belarusian Theatre and the 2020 Pro-Democracy Protests: Documenting the Resistance*. New York: Anthem, 2024.

Forced to flee the country as a member of the Coordination Council working with perceived winner Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's team, Andrei Kureichik steered his energy to write the documentary play, *Insulted. Belarus*, which is about the 2020 presidential elections, subsequent protests, and violent crackdown by Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime. The play is a blend of verbatim material from speeches and interviews that grounds the play in the historical moment interspersed with created dialogue to portray chaotic emotional shifts and create a narrative arc. Kureichik examined over 400 publicly available documents – letters, testimonies, newspaper editorials, and interviews. The play centers on seven characters who represent various perspectives and roles in the events surrounding the elections. This includes Oldster (Lukashenko), Youth (his son), Novice (Tsikhanouskaya), Cheerful (Maria Kolesnikova), Raptor (a pro-Regime mercenary riot policeman), Corpse (the first victim of the Regime's violence, Aleksandr Taraikovski), and Mentor (a pro-Regime election official and teacher). Mentor has benefitted from the regime's corrupt political system, and Raptor, is a career riot policeman who worked the 2014 Maidan protests in Ukraine and aspires to a more settled position in Russia. Many speculate that Lukashenko has been grooming his third son, who often attends official international diplomatic events with his father, to become his successor. In the play Youth threatens, "If you don't turn on the Internet, I'm not going to be president after you!"

The opposition to the regime is depicted by Novice, Cheerful, and Corpse. As Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya early in her political career, Kureichik presents her as she often represented herself. A reluctant politician and mother, she took on the role of leader of the opposition and presidential candidate when her husband was denied the ability to run. In the play, she grows from an uncertain and overwhelmed woman to a resolved, unrelenting political leader.

In the play, Cheerful is an election observer and sister to the fiancée of the Riot Policeman, Avian. At the opening of the play, she fully believes the election is fair and that Tsikhanouskaya's win will be honored. She's stunned and disoriented when false election results are presented, and she and others are brutally handled by the riot police when they protest. But in the prison van, and later in prison, she finds signs of love and hope. This parallels the images of Maria Kolesnikova dancing a year later in a glass cage in court prior to the announcement of her 11-year sentence for conspiracy to seize power.

The world premiere of the play took place at Mikola Kulish Academic Theatre in Kherson, Ukraine and was directed by Siarhei Pavliuk. In addition to the numerous live performances of this play, several cinematic adaptations of it were made.

For performances rights for staging for the public *Insulted. Belarus*, please contact egret@laertesbooks.org. Please also see [Insulted. Belarus: performance rights application](#).