

literary fiction

# Description of a City

**Novel.** AST. Moscow 2012. 130 pages

**Publishers:** Macedonia - Prozart, Netherlands - Douane

Twelve repeated visits to a city not too far from Moscow and with good rail connections. Your average industrial city with a slight Soviet patina, very few sight-seeing attractions. People go shopping, stay in hotels, travel by bus, taxi, tram. But this description of a city has nothing to do with sightseeing tours with the names, addresses, opening hours of museums, hotels, restaurants and the like. There is seemingly nothing special to see, to experience, to notice or to remark on in this city. It is precisely because Danilov is interested not in what is special but in the usual that this city became his choice. The city is walked, researched, described so that it becomes "flesh and blood" in the end, in the words of Danilov's narrator. And this at two levels: the narrator in the midst and the reader faraway from the city that remains nameless. Both seem to switch roles in a bizarre mimicry. In the end, as the reader you no longer have the feeling of having accompanied the narrator on his walks through the city, it instead feels as though your own stroll through the city has been accompanied by the first person narrator. This description of a city teaches you to explore spaces and to rediscover yourself therein.

It could be any city in the world. Danilov's city, however, has two levels because it is the home city of the author who accorded its cult status amongst Russian literature aficionados with the novel "City N." by Leonid Dobychin. The building where he lived – now disappeared. He himself – disappeared in March 1936, after his novel "City N." was torn apart by Stalinist critics. The theme of absence has three constants in Danilov's city and book: silence, emptiness and greyness – little dialogue, few characters and the lack of action. And the more absence, the more that is missing, the more this city, this book gets under your skin.

On top of that, Danilov's ironically enjoyable, at times hilarious and very down-to-earth attempt to feel at home in a strange place is also a real treat for those who prefer to explore cities on trams. Football fans don't do too badly either.

"Buster Keaton humour with a deadpan expression." *Ex Libris*

"The absence of subject, events, psychology makes Danilov's prose a transparent glass disc through which we see nothing but our own experience... Danilov focuses attention on what we see without seeing it, what we hear without hearing it, what we do without noticing." *Kommersant*

"We are faced with a consummate, unconventional prose writer." *Kultura*

Danilov was born in Moscow in 1969. He has published four books to date, mainly short stories and novels. His texts have been published in magazines in the USA, Holland, Belgium and Italy. He is editor-in-chief of the official blog of a large car manufacturer. Danilov lives in Moscow.



## THE AUTHOR

**translations**  
4 languages

**awards**  
Premio Letterare Internazionale  
Citta di Cattolica 2016  
Novy Mir Award 2012  
Big Book Award shortlist 2011  
Andrei Bely Award shortlist 2010

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# Dmitri Danilov