

Russian narrative non-fiction

A...a

Novel. Makhaon. Moscow 2010. 254 pages

Have you ever been to America? Even if not – the space „...“ between the „A“ and the „a“ has been filled with innumerable imagined details by each of us since childhood. And even if the answer is yes – our own mental pictures of America often feel more real and intimate than the actual America. Not that the author would think of refusing to go to America. The whole world wants to go to America. Columbus wanted to go there, even before America was discovered. Even extraterrestrials, should they ever travel to earth, would first aim to land in America. One believes the author immediately. One nods, grins, laughs, shakes one's head, feels understood and caught out, all the while following the author on his unconventional journey to discover America.

Dressing up as a cowboy for the kindergarten carnival. Finding a Colorado beetle in grandmother's vegetable patch. Proudly wearing the jeans with the stitched-on „Montana“ badge. Superman or Spiderman zooming between the skyscrapers of New York. And Marilyn and Elvis could never have existed anywhere other than America. The expanse of the plains, the torrential rivers and the unending forests, all mastered by the heroes in the novels by James Fenimore Cooper, always searching for gold and a happy life. Russia is bigger, the earth is also hard and there are uncharted regions and torrential rivers. But in Russian films and books, the men are emaciated and bearded, the women unhappy and silent, the children hungry and scared. It is not surprising that the long-distance lorry drivers have pin-up girls from Playboy and Penthouse magazines in their cabs and that they, when they take a break while on the highways in Ural, Siberia, Karelia and the furthest East, stop off at service areas called Ranch, Montana, Sheriff Bar, Café Elvis, Hollywood or Chicago. And it is not only since Donald Trump that everyone in the world, even in the remotest backwoods of Russia, knows the name of the American president as well as that of his or her own head of government.

Written before Trump was elected president, Grishkovets shows us with his humorous, ironic, cheeky tribute to cultural kinship just what is now really at stake. Currently Russia and the USA are once again at odds with each other and yet they are so similar – both had great dreams and are now well on their way to destroying them and also the world as we know it. Grishkovets finishes the novel with the words: „Should I ever, or better, when I travel to the real America and should it attempt to destroy mine, then I will fight and defend mine.“

“There only are two kinds of readers: those who like Grishkovez, and those who have not read him yet.” *Echo Moskvy*

“Exactly what was needed: Literature for an intelligent, educated reader, which combines a refined sense of irony with a positive view of the world.” *Knizhnoe Obozrenie*

Grishkovets was born in 1967 in Kemerovo. He became famous in Russia for his plays, which he writes, directs and acts in. He has been awarded two major Russian theatrical prizes for his plays which have also been performed in Germany, France and Poland. His first novel, “The Shirt” (2004), was an event in the literary life of Russia and brought him a prize for the Best Debut, and the Anti-Booker prize. Grishkovets lives in Kaliningrad.



THE AUTHOR

translations
13 languages

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Big Book shortlist 2018

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english

other works
Vodka is Much Bigger
The Shirt
The Rivers
Asphalt

Evgeni Grishkovets