

Russian literary fiction

Tales from the Last Days

Captain of the Steppe – The Matiushin Case – Requiem for a Soldier

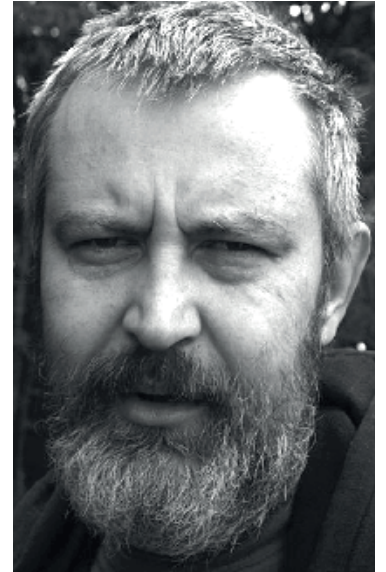
Trilogy. Moscow 2001. 550 pages

Publishers: China - People's Literature, Croatia - Fraktura, France - Noir sur Blanc, Hungary - Magveto, Italy - Odoya, Macedonia - Ars Lamina, Netherlands - Cossee, Poland - Literackie, UK - Andotherstories

The settings of the three "Tales from the last Days" are military posts in the Kazakhstan steppe, which Pavlov knows from his own experience. Using the fates and fortunes of his heroes – unimportant and humiliated soldiers – and with great linguistic intensity and an expertly crafted composition, he demonstrates the eternal struggle for physical and mental survival under the hardest of conditions. The view from inside the penal camps has produced many famous books: Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, Platonov, to name but a few. However, the desolate situation of Russian soldiers in general, especially of the soldiers with simple guard duties, has never before been so grippingly and poignantly expressed.

Although Pavlov's "Tales" are set at the end of the era of the Soviet Union, they do paint a fundamental picture of the situation in the Russian army, a situation that has scarcely improved since the time of the Soviet Union.

Death is ever present, and in the places of death life prevails. Anarchy and chance are the only means by which the individual can survive inside the strictly hierarchical structure. Those caught in this system are all weak and dejected, cruel and immune to suffering. The few moments of human warmth are seen as sheer happiness.



THE AUTHOR

translations
10 languages

awards

Angelus Award 2017
Solzhenitsyn Prize 2012
Znamya Award 2009
Russian Booker Prize 2002

sample translation available

full english
full french

other work

Notes of a Hospital Receptionist

"His tales delve into the world of soldiers sent to the bleakest regions of central Asia, where their hopelessness ends up matching that of their prisoners, whose absurd routine, hunger and boredom they share. This is Berg's Wozzek set in Buzzati's Tartar Steppe." *La Libre*

"An extraordinary portraitist, with a nose for trenchant, black humour, Oleg Pavlov delves into the shadowy outer edges of existence." *France Culture*

"Poetry, sensuality, humour, metaphoric genius." *L'Express Culture*

Pavlov was born in Moscow in 1970. He served in Karaganda as a prison guard. After leaving the army at the age of twenty, diagnosed for with 'mental instability', he went on to study at the Institute of Literature in Moscow. He published his first novel at the age of twenty-four. Working as a literary critic he continued to publish novels, short stories as well as essays. Pavlov has passed away in 2018.

Oleg Pavlov