

literary fiction

Eternal Frost

Novel. Rubezh. Vladivostok 2020. 820 pages

Awards: 2021 Book of the Year WINNER
2021 Big Book shortlist
2021 National Bestseller longlist

Publishers: Germany - Hoffmann&Campe

The novel is set against the background of the construction of the "Great Stalin Railway" on the Arctic Circle in Siberia, on which up to 80,000 prisoners of the GULAG were simultaneously working between 1947 and 1953. It is one of the most tragic projects of the Stalinist machinery of repression.

Like the Enisei, this novel is a mighty, broad, calm river. No sudden unexpected turns, no rapids. But once you have stepped aboard Captain Belov's tugboat, you can no longer escape the power of its currents and undercurrents. Belov is one of the main character in this large-scale Siberian epic, which actually describes only about 5 years between 1949-53, but focussing on these few years describing at the same time the whole human tragedy and the murderous madness of the Soviet century. We see people and nature little by little caught in the spider web of the GULAG labor camps and subjected to an insane project - the construction of the "Great Stalin Railway" personally ordered by Stalin.

In the novel the river Enisei, which is only navigable for a few months of the year for the replenishment of people and material and otherwise frozen under ice, not only symbolically represents the relentless living conditions of a country in eternal frost. Up to the branches of the tributaries, we experience the diverse beauty and richness of a barren landscape into which humans invade in order to subjugate them, enslaving and destroying not only nature but also those of their own kind. A research down to the smallest detail gives this novel almost documentary authenticity. We get to know all the shades of human dignity and greatness and low motives, even in the minor characters. The progressively tragic interweaving of the individual main characters unfolds an underlying tension and emotionally lasting impact thanks to the stylistically withdrawn narrative style.

It is Remizov's trademark not to exaggerate or disguise reality in literary terms, but to present it as bare as possible. In his novels, the evil is no more diabolical than it is, the good is not canonized. He shows us every single act as an emotional decision by people who at least try to stay true to themselves or to some extent upright in the flow of life. Or just not to go under. Because their flow of life is the maelstrom of Stalinist repressions. With Stalin's death, the project of the railway is crushed and many prisoners are released in a general amnesty. What remains is a grimly disfigured landscape of building ruins and half-disbanded penal camps. And the fates of humans cruelly and senselessly destroyed.



THE AUTHOR

translations
7 languages

awards
National Bestseller longlist 2021
Big Book Award shortlist 2014
Russian Booker Prize shortlist 2014
NOS Award shortlist 2014

sample translation
english

other works
Free and Wild
Temptation

Remizov was born in Saratov in 1958, where he studied geological prospecting at college. After serving in the army Remizov studied languages at Moscow State University. He worked as a surveyor in the taiga, a school teacher of Russian literature and – for the longest time of his professional career – as a journalist. Viktor Remizov lives with his family near Moscow.

Viktor Remizov

"Thanks for the truth. It is the truth without a doubt. We have to remember that. That's how it was."
LITRES

"This is by far the most interesting sample text I have translated in recent times."
ANDREW BROMFIELD

"Remizov's novel contains many valuable details that cannot be invented. He collected them all, listened, spied, saw, remembered. Many historical details that cannot be found in Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov and others."
NATSBEST VERONIKA KUNGURTSEVA

"«Eternal Frost» is a Siberian, northern, historical, industrial novel ... The death in it is always connected with life that arises and continues even under these most inhuman conditions. A seemingly gloomy story into which a light shines that always comes after darkness and that cannot exist without darkness."
NATSBEST VASIL AVCHENKO

"Remizov's novel is neither ideological nor precocious: the author succeeds in immersing the reader in a past that is so meticulously and thoroughly described that one feels carried away by the plot – on a densely populated construction site, in a breathtaking natural setting, in taiga and tundra, in the prison camp, in the torture cellar of the NKVD, in the village restaurant on New Year's Eve, at school, in Aul in Kazakhstan, in the shelters where exiled settlers have surrendered to the grace of the elements. The book contains a lot of Soviet pathos from those years, slogans, red-brown posters, party conferences, but not an ounce of pathos from the author. Like his young captain, he leads the reader confidently through the wild nature of the taiga river, on which his three hundred hp steam tug «Polyarny» drives and supplies material for the construction site, coal and lawless people in the sealed, stinking holds of the barges.

You think you've already read a lot, but thanks to the amazing abundance of material everything looks new: details, terms, boats, breaks (barges with flat bottoms), steamers and people, their clothes, gait, experiences, fear and courage are described meticulously and lovingly so that you believe the text and turn the pages of this epic novel without being able to tear yourself away. Everything serves the one plan: to immerse the reader in the past, to allow him to listen to the endless conversations of the characters, to discuss, praise, condemn the time in which they happen to live or some also die... In this eternal frost there is also a place for love, desperate but reliable; honesty, sometimes naive; ideals, strong and unchangeable."
NOVAYA GAZETA PETR ALESHKOVSKI

"A great book. Excellent prose and wonderful language. An epic about our recent Soviet past and the last of the great Stalinist construction projects. The novel does not contain the horrors of Shalamov's prose. On the contrary, it is a leisurely, almost everyday description of the hero's life, whether in Moscow, in Siberian cities or behind the barbed wire, that takes the reader into that world. The book is amazingly cinematographic. The text is projected onto the screen, so to speak, and one involuntarily begins to see and experience the events with the heroes. Many events in the novel take place against the backdrop of the endless Siberian taiga and the Yenisei. These two forces of nature, infinitely free and stubborn, are also heroes of the novel. I repeat that the novel does not contain a description of the horrors of the camp, but the acquaintance with everyday camp life caused a real emotional shock in me.

The book is very sincere, you won't find anything invented or any of the cinematic or literary stereotypes about that time. On the contrary, the actions and feelings of the heroes, the everyday details of their lives and the unwritten laws of the GULAG are perceived as if the author had experienced it first hand."
NIKOLAI OBRAZTSOV

"I haven't read anything like that in Russian in the 21st century! A really great novel that is not inferior to the most important works of the 20th century. It is absolutely impossible to put it down. But above all the power of the effect. Let me give you an example. At home, it's usually 22 degrees and my clothes at home, like many others, are a T-shirt and shorts. And so I sit at the computer and read an episode of how a barely alive horse pulls a drinking water sledge through Ermakovo during the terrible frosts. And how terribly the harness creaks. The frost is creaking, the insulation on the tap ... And suddenly I realized that I was not sitting there in a T-shirt, but in a winter down jacket that I had taken out of the closet without even realizing it."
RUMATA ESTORSKI

Viktor Remizov