

Russian literary fiction

The Eltyshevs

Novel. EKSMO. Moscow 2009. 320 pages

Publishers: China - Heilongjiang, Finland - Into, France - Noir sur Blanc, Hungary - Europa, India - Prakahsan, Italy - Fazi, Netherlands - Douane, Poland - Noir sur Blanc, Serbia - Arhipelag, Sweden - Bonniers

Nikolai Eltyshev is a policeman on duty at a station with a sobering-up cell, the mother Valentina works as a librarian, her youngest son is in prison and the older one is just killing time at home. A completely normal Russian civil servant family. When the father is too heavy-handed with a drunken journalist he loses not only his job but also his staff accommodation. The move back to their home village which the Eltyshevs see as an initial emergency solution and from the reader's perspective at first appears as a return to their roots with the chance for a new beginning soon turns out to be the start of a protracted decline that is to pursue the family into the third generation. This novel with the family name as its title is an intimate chronicle of the fight for survival of this very normal family forced to leave the city and return to the village at the start of the 21st century. It is not the village to which the city folk come to spend the weekend in their dacha with BBQs and relaxation. The Eltyshev's village is THE village, provincial Russia with all of its brutal present day reality. The ruins of a past era. Senchin's almost silent take on things is hard and remorseless. He places the reader directly in situ. He shows how decent people confronted with the existential issues of everyday survival gradually lose their human countenance. Physical weakness, apathy, betrayal, alcohol, violence, wrong decisions, even dependency on natural cycles are cleverly depicted with an air of fatality. This novel never adopts the tone of a parable, however. It is not Senchin's intention that his characters be indicative of something else, he does not judge, he simply shows people as they are. And in doing so he portrays part of the Russian catastrophe: the understanding of guilt, transgression, remorse, justice, charity or compassion as the basis for human solidarity that has been lost for several generations.

Senchin's prose itself reads as if cleansed of all literary tricks, paragons and clichés, however, and so, paradoxically, it retains for the reader that which there novel's characters are ultimately denied: cleansing and catharsis.

Andrew Bromfield on the book:

"Among a multitude of books dealing with Russia's new urban society and its obsession with the trappings of success, the story of the Yeltishevs stands out in stark contrast. Forced out of the town by a scandal at work, a policeman and his family move to a relative's house in the country to start a new life, but encounter an aggressively hostile environment in which they slide further down the slippery slope of degradation and failure to total extinction. Compellingly narrated by Senchin in precisely modulated and understated prose, this tale of uncompromising darkness without a single positive character offers a significant insight into the "other side" of modern Russia."

Senchin was born in Siberia in 1971 where he subsequently grew up. Having completed his engineering studies he then went on to study at a Moscow literature institute where he still lectures today. His prose has made him one of the most prominent exponents of "New Realism". His works have so far been translated into German, French and a number of other languages. Senchin lives in Ekaterinburg.



THE AUTHOR

translations
13 languages

awards

Big Book Awards 2nd Prize 2015
National Bestseller shortlist 2010
Big Book Award shortlist 2010
Russian Booker Prize shortlist 2009

sample translation available

full english, full french

other works

Flood plains
What do you want?
Rain in Paris

Roman Senchin