

Russian literary fiction

Flood Plains

Novel. AST. Moscow 2015. 280 pages

Big Book Award 2nd Prize 2015

Publishers: Egypt - Al Arabi, Finland - Peace Committee, France - Noir sur Blanc, Serbia - Samizdat

A private investor completes the construction of a half-finished, forgotten hydroelectric power station. It is a matter of electric power for China. The money for the construction comes from Russian public-sector loans, from offshore accounts. A huge area will have to be flooded. Individual profit verses public welfare. It is a simple story that can be found everywhere in the world. And one that is often told: Naomi Klein tells the story in her non-fictional analysis "This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate". Andrey Zvyagintsev in his Oscar-nominee cinematic drama "Leviathan". And Roman Senchin tells it in a novel.

No pent-up anger. No scandals. Senchin, who for good reasons is ranked among the "new realists", does not need a fictitious plot to transport facts with fabricated emotions. His story almost tells itself. Coolly and calmly. And possibly because of this it affects the reader all the more deeply. The undercurrent of the novel is like the Siberian river that once flowed freely: crystal-clear, fast and full of fish. Now a dam has been erected. Infection spreads. Occasionally the rowing boats of the locals get tangled in the tree-tops of the drowned forests, as if the trees wanted to drag all remaining life down into the depths. But below the foul surface that positive current reappears again and again. With the emotional forcefulness of an irrevocable farewell Senchin describes the life in the doomed villages in the centre of the fertile and nourishing countryside while the water inexorably rises. The resettled villagers had loved their river, their life-blood. At the end there is only remembrance, a fond memory. The morass of bureaucracy, nepotism and corruption has become impenetrable. Even for the journalist Olga who, following the entries in the social networks, observes the complaints about injustices, illegal practices and even of forced relocations and as a consequence begins researching the situation of the helpless victims. Olga's requests for information from the authorities are ignored. Relocated villagers who regularly discuss their situation are separated and dispersed by the militia. Old Ignati manages to gain the attention of his grandson Nikita. Despite the distractions of his smartphone, Nikita listens to Ignati's descriptions of the former life and of the old customs. At Easter they visit the new cemetery where the villagers' dead have been reinterred and Nikita suddenly notices the water rising higher than planned. Even the new cemetery will soon be flooded. Nikita has listened and now he begins to see and to understand.



THE AUTHOR

translations
13 languages

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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.

Roman Senchin