

literary fiction

Happiness is Possible

Novel. AST Publishers. Moscow 2009. 189 pages

Big Book Award shortlist 2010

Publishers: Italy, Spain, UK

A writer, living in Moscow with a small dacha on the outskirts of the city, is hard up and so hires himself out to a large publishing company. He is required to deliver a positive novel on time but he has been unable to come up with anything positive since his wife Tamara ran off. She continues to visit the dacha, however, complete with new lover, to whom he is also required to show the best fishing spots. All that the writer is able to produce is notes about the happiness of others. The country boy (a caricature of himself) who comes to Moscow to land a rich woman, for instance. Yet the writer not only observes happiness, he initiates it, too, by bringing two lonely neighbours together, by giving a new chance to a teacher and her former pupil, whose love was once mercilessly suppressed. Or is he inventing all of this just to console himself? But then happiness does seem to catch up with him, too. Instead of punching the neighbour disturbing his work with the noise of his building work in the nose, in the end he lends him a helping hand with the renovations. And Tamara suddenly starts spending the night in the Moscow flat now and again, ultimately with the news of what had not happened during all the years of marriage: she is pregnant – by him.

HAPPINESS IS POSSIBLE is not only an enjoyable and precisely detailed book about the new type of human beings to be found in the city of Moscow, it is also a mini philosophical guide to happiness. Deadened by the density of the residential tower blocks, the anonymous masses, Zaionchkovski nevertheless teaches his characters to also smell the roses growing through the city asphalt. He teaches them and us about everyday happiness.

"As if coming out of nowhere, an absolute harmony of style and drama." Time Out

"Zaionchkovski has written an astute book but one that comes from the heart..." Andrei Nemzer

"Zaionchkovski is one of those narrators with a natural charm, so at ease with themselves and so self-sufficient that they have no need of an energizing topic or a genre as a crutch, no superfluous dramatics – he simply has enough talent by himself to create something." Lev Danilkin

"The new novel from Oleg Zaionchkovski is a successful combination of everyday stories and a philosophy of patience and empathy – precisely what once characterised Russian literature." Natalya Kurchatova

Zaionchkovski was born in Kuibyshev, now Samara, in 1959. After leaving high school he worked as an inspector in an aircraft factory. He has been writing prose since his youth but it is only recently that his work has been published. His second novel "Sergeev and The Town" reached the Short List for The Booker – Open Russia Literary Prize in 2004. Zaionchkovski lives in a small town near Moscow.



THE AUTHOR

translations
3 languages

awards
Big Book Award longlist 2011
Big Book Award shortlist 2010
Russian Booker Prize shortlist 2004

sample translation available
full english

other works
Petrovich
Walks in the Park
Sergeev and his Town
The Wedding Anniversary

Oleg Zaionchkovski