

Russian non-fiction

Happiness

Nabokov's Summer in Berlin 1926

Documentary non-fiction. Babel. Tel Aviv 2024. 80 pages

The book recounts the summer of 1926 as a standalone adventure. A close-up of Nabokov's life. Like a film where a single event, a single incident, is chosen instead of the biography of a historical figure. Important here: happiness in a situation of poverty, emigration, and an uncertain future.

The psychological starting point: A young writer has just published his first novel and married, enjoys great success in exile, considers himself a genius, and is convinced that his novel will soon be translated into every language and that he will regain the riches he lost in Russia. Therefore, he is happy despite his poverty. The paradox is that his plans will come true, but only thirty years later, something he doesn't yet know.

The author's aim was to create a book-object, a book-souvenir, which is facilitated by the small size and the collage method: very short chapters, many short quotations from letters and from the „Rul“ chronicle (a Russian exile newspaper), scans from Russian newspapers, a magazine cover, credits from a German film, graphics by the author, etc.



THE AUTHOR

awards

Andrey Bely Prize

“Kuritsyn's „Happiness“ is a small book that reveals much about Russian life in Berlin (then and now): about the qualities of passion, the nature of literary talent, and the debris from which this gift (one could also say „The Gift“) emerges. The book is completely non-committal, like the story it tells, and yet it seems illuminated by a ray of sunshine that conveys to the reader the blissful experience suggested by the title. The details suddenly become a kind of telescope through which one can see far in all directions.” KINOPOISK

“Kuritsyn, a lover of curiosities and a master of the poetics of curiosities, remains true to himself in this book again. On the one hand, he has a brilliant command of the material, and his meticulous attention misses no detail, no matter how small, of the writer's biography, no subtle passages in Nabokov's letters and texts, and much more, which Kuritsyn sometimes reconstructs intuitively, yet one trusts this reconstruction. On the other hand, Kuritsyn plays with the text, creating collages of texts and visual artifacts, deliberately chatting about trivialities (a triviality, when magnified by a researcher's attention, can sometimes reveal more about a character than he himself can in a monologue), graphically highlighting certain fragments, and finally simply adding his own humorous drawings to the book. All this brings the classic to life without diminishing its literary status. Why not show a living Nabokov—young and happy?” ZNAMYA

Vyacheslav Kuritsyn was born 1965 in Novosibirsk. He worked as a literary reviewer and journalist for many publications. Over the years, he was editor-in-chief of several literary magazines. He created literary websites, organized humanitarian conferences (jointly with the Ural State University) and curated art exhibitions, including the largest exhibition of Russian contemporary art, „Davai“ (Berlin-Vienna, 2001-2002). He is also founder and host of the Russian Poetry Slam (in Moscow and St. Petersburg since 2001). He founded and co-owned of the St. Petersburg musical and literary club „Platforma“. He edited an anthology of St. Petersburg poetry and hosted a television program. Over the years, he was a member of the Pen Center, the Media Union, and the Academy of Contemporary Russian Literature; he has left these organizations. He is a laureate of the Andrei Bely Prize.

Vyacheslav Kuritsyn