

Belarusian literary fiction

Paranoia

Novel. AST. Russia 2009. 382 pages

Publishers: Finland - Like, Germany - Voland&Quist, UK/US - Northwestern University Press, Sweden - Ersatz

A totalitarian regime in Eastern Europe. The young author Anatoli leads a relatively unnoticed life – until he meets the mysterious Yelisaveta and begins a passionate affair with her. Slowly though, Anatoli has increasingly the feeling that Yelisaveta is leading a double life: apparently she also has a relationship with the head of the intelligence service. The ménage à trois explodes when Yelisaveta becomes pregnant. All of a sudden she disappears without a trace, and Anatoli is summoned to a meeting with the all-powerful intelligence service. After several interrogations, the boundary between apparent reality and intelligence-service-speak becomes blurred. And Anatoli has to accept that every breath is monitored and recorded, that every smile is registered, that the one and only function of the walls around him is for eavesdropping, and that in the streets there is no such thing as a chance meeting. Paranoia takes over.

An electrifying political thriller and a tragic story of love and betrayal, which if nothing else shines a spot-light on the methods of Big Brother in the 21st century. As Martinovich himself says: "One does not need to write a new '1984' anymore, one just needs to look around."

"No political novel could be more up-to-date or oppressive."
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

"PARANOIA is an excellent novel that has to be read: on the one hand, because it exposes the mechanisms of a paranoid state-apparatus in a most thrilling way. And on the other hand, because it is a love-story with an intensity that is rarely to be found in modern-day literature. And a damned tragic love-story at that ... His use of language, his feeling for rhythm and his inventiveness are overwhelming. You don't just read this chronicle of paranoia foretold, you get steamrolled by it."
Deutschlandradio Kultur

"PARANOIA has an energy and a nerve of its own – a refreshing sign that cultural life in Belarus has not been defeated."
The New York Times



THE AUTHOR

translations
4 languages

awards
Bogdanovich Literay Award
2012
Best European Fiction anthology
2011 (Dalkey Archive)

sample translation available
english

other works
Lake of Joy
Mova
Revolution
Night

Martinovich was born in Oshmiany, Belarus in 1977. He is a political scientist, doctor of art history, and professor at the Vilnius University. He is a regular contributor to the German weekly DIE ZEIT. His literary works are published parallel in the Belarusian and Russian languages. Paranoia, published in Russia at the end of 2009, was immediately banned from sale in Belarus (unofficially prohibited). In 2017 he was Writer in Residence at the Literaturhaus Zürich and PWG foundation. Martinovich lives with his family in Minsk.

Viktor Martinovich