

Olga Slavnikova

title

Legkaya golova – Lighthead

Novel. AST. Moscow 2010. 231 pages

Sold to: China, Egypt, France, Italy, Macedonia, Poland, Romania

Maxim Ermakov weighs four kilogram's less than a normal person. Even as a child, his head felt as light and empty as a balloon and he wondered what human beings actually used to think. For thinking is Ermakov's forte. With his good grades and a good deal of application he manages to become the PR manager for a chocolate factory. Ermakov is an almost normal representative of the new Moscow middle class, what he earns is not bad, he loves the free market, his Toyota and his apartment (apart from the landlady). He enjoys the little personal luxuries he has worked for. Ermakov is still single. Then he receives a visit from two gentlemen from the state Institute of Social Prognosis. They maintain that tests reveal that he radiates a damaging alpha field triggering world catastrophes. Ermakov is responsible for climate damage, terror attacks, car accidents, fires and, illness. He needs to end his life voluntarily for the good of mankind. The alpha field will be eradicated only if he commits suicide. The state will make him a posthumous hero, complete with proper compensation as well.

Ermakov does not want to, however. He has had too much of a taste of individual freedom and determining his own way of life to be able to sacrifice himself for the reasons of a state with he no longer identifies at all. He feels himself to be more a citizen of the world than a state citizen. Anyone who does not listen to Russian authorities must be made to feel. Ermakov is put under pressure and under obvious surveillance, the door to his apartment smeared with slogans, his landlady gives him notice, his company demotes him and the mob demonstrates on the street against the man refusing to grant salvation from evil.

Only one person sticks by him, little Lyusia from his company. Having lost his job, money, apartment and reputation he finds a safe little haven of love and marriage with her. And then the Institute of Social Prognosis announces that they had made a mistake. The pressure is off him. And Lyusia falls pregnant. Anyone believing in a happy ending for Russia is very much mistaken, however. With sound, witty punch lines and razor sharp analysis, Slavnikova's quasi-literary experiment puts archetypal Russian qualities under the conditions of globalisation to the test: individualism versus communism, self versus society, the willingness to make sacrifices versus egoism. What is the Russian soul still worth today? A scandalously entertaining book as the logical sequel to the author's analysis of Putinocracy in her successful novel "2017", just in another genre. One could define LIGHT HEAD as a political farce if it were not for the very bitter ending, as bitter as that in the Orwell adaptation of Monty Python's BRAZIL.

press reviews

"The irrational absurdity does not disturb the reading, on the contrary, it reinforces the tragic impression." – EX LIBRIS

"A high-tension, entertaining, but absolutely frightening novel devoid of hope." – VEDOMOSTI

biography

Olga Slavnikova was born in 1957 near Ekaterinburg. She writes reviews and essays for Novy mir, Znamya, Oktyabr. She was a member of the Russian booker prize jury in 1999. In 2000 she was part of the board for the Novy mir Prize for short stories and now organizes the Debut Prize of the Pokolenie fund. Her novel "Strekoza, uvelichennaya do razmerov sobaki" was shortlisted for the booker prize in 1997. "Odin v zerkale" won the Bazgov Prize and was nominated for the Booker Prize in 2000. Olga Slavnikova lives in Moscow.

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awards

National Bestseller shortlist 2018
Gorky Award Italy 2012
Gjenima Prize (US) 2006-2007
Russian Booker Prize 2006

sample translation available

english
french

other works

2017, The Immortal, The Jump

O. Slavnikova