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### **Selected list of contemporary Russian authors**

**Extended synopses, additional materials, and in many cases excerpts in English are available upon request for all the authors in this list.**

**Liza Alexandrova-Zorina**

**Maria Arbatova**

**Dmitry Bykov**

**Alexei Gatapov**

**Dima Ivanov**

**Nikolai Klimontovich**

**Grigory Kruzhkov**

**Andrei Kuzechkin**

**Leonid Latynin**

**Mikhail Levitin**

**Alexander Melikhov**

**Larissa Miller**

**Vladimir Orlov**

**Victor Pelevin**

**Valery Popov**

**Yaroslava Pulinovich**

**Alex Ray**

**Alexander Selin**

**Alexei Vinokurov**

**Ivan Zorin**

## **Liza Alexandrova-Zorina**

A prize-winning author, essayist, popular columnist on some leading periodicals, and a public activist. Born in 1984 in a little town beyond the Arctic Circle (the setting of her novel *The Little Man*) Liza moved to Moscow after school. Winner of the Northern Star Prize (2010) Liza was a finalist in two important literary competitions: Debut Prize and NOS with her novel *The Little Man*. Critics compared *The Little Man* to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Readers' reviews associated it with Zvyagintsev's prize-winning film *Leviathan* which is set in the same location. This talented young author writes about "a society on the verge of nervous breakdown", to quote her own article.

Her books include the collection of short stories *The Rebel*; the novels *The Broken Doll*, *Man Is a Noun*, and *The Little Man* which was published in English, French and in Arabic. *The Broken Doll* came out in French.

**"Liza is a fabulous writer. She has created an original universe which is typical of Russian literature."** Bernard Werber

**"Even though it's so dark, there's something that shines through as redeemable - perhaps it's just the ability to reveal the darkness for what it is without condoning it."** – Melanie Moore, translator of *The Little Man*

**"Live dialogues, vivid imagery, striking metaphors. Colorful ethnographic details... Merciless and beautiful prose, pithy and precise, leaves no one unmoved..."** – Ex Libris

### **Liza Alexandrova-Zorina, *The Broken Doll*, a novel**

**ENGLISH SAMPLE IS AVAILABLE**

An energetic modern woman called Iva Nova, a social psychologist, stages sophisticated psychological experiments on her patient to demonstrate that a person is a hostage of circumstances and his/her ego is just a sum total of preconditions. But then she herself becomes a victim of a cruel and cunning experiment intended to remove her from her cushy job and teach her a lesson in humility. One day her life collapses like a house of cards. On the day she moves into her new apartment she shuts herself out without her keys, half-dressed, with no documents and money. The concierge drives her away because Iva can't prove she is a new resident.

She tries to get various mechanics and an emergency service to break the door but they refuse without proof that she is the owner of the apartment. Thus the door to her home and to her former life is firmly shut to her. Moreover, having lived her life on the principle: "everyone for oneself" she gets no help from her friends or colleagues who are actually only too happy to see this arrogant upstart in misery. She finds herself facing an indifferent and heartless city.

Previously Iva found herself a double to replace her on business trips. The stylists created an almost exact likeness of the real Iva. Now the double appropriates Iva's reputation and her job. Soon the double starts living in her apartment, wearing her clothes and inheriting her friends and lovers. Meanwhile, in the harsh fight for survival the homeless Iva looks less and less her former well-groomed self. At some point we learn that it was in fact the double who had arranged the whole thing. The closed door was not at all accidental.

Iva has to pass through all the circles of hell: she has to beg for food at the train station, she works 12 hours a day for a recruiting company which takes away her earnings, she lives a life of a tramp among other outcasts. Finally Iva's consciousness is completely transformed, her former property and position are no longer of interest to her, and she is ready for a new future.

### **Liza Alexandrova-Zorina. *Man is a Noun*, a novel**

The novel is about the tragedy of being different in an indifferent and intolerant society, of being humble and introspective in the atmosphere of lawlessness. Traditionally for the author she is concerned with the Chekhovian theme of the "little man", a meek person not aspiring to wealth and power and, therefore, helpless and vulnerable. Such people always have to bear blame for

whatever goes wrong while the real culprits, if they are big and mighty, go unpunished. However, in the end the protagonist comes to the realization that each person is guilty of something anyway and we all have to bear punishment for the wrongs we've done.

The novel opens with a mysterious murder of a middle-aged woman Elsa whose hobby was spying on people from her window using her binoculars. The protagonist is a social worker whose job is to provide the first psychological aid to all sorts of misfits. At the age of 40 he had a minor stroke which left him with face blindness and hand tremor. Fearing dismissal he has to conceal this defect. He is arrested as a suspect in Elsa's murder whom he visited three days before. Elsa confided in him that she had seen a crime committed in the house across the street.

Languishing in a solitary cell the protagonist unravels the crime: his boss murdered his wife and declared her missing; later he announced the return of his wife and although it's obviously a different woman, everybody pretends not to notice it; the prying Elsa observed the murder from her window and intended to blackmail the boss; the boss incriminated the modest social worker in the murder of Elsa, and later offered him to assume the blame for a price.

At some point he is transferred from his solitary cell to an overcrowded common cell where he is taunted, beaten and pushed around. He also hears all sorts of stories about how his inmates landed in prison, not all of them for real crimes.

The investigation and the trial show how biased and corrupted the police and the judges are and how skillfully they juggle the evidence. During the investigation everybody turn against the poor social worker. No one is on his side. He is generally disliked for being different.

Thinking about his past life the protagonist feels increasingly guilty for his passivity towards people's misfortunes. He feels psychologically crushed and doomed. When the time comes for his concluding statement he suddenly blurts out that he is guilty. He means in general, for living wrongly, but his words are taken literally. The real culprit is pleased thinking that it was due to his pressure that the desired verdict has been made exempting him from any guilt.

**Liza Alexandrova-Zorina, *The Little Man*, a novel**

**The novel was a finalist in two major literary contests: NOS and Debut.**

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION AVAILABLE**

A group of gangsters takes a complete control of a little northern town, including the corrupt local authorities, business, and police. The author grew up in a town like this and knows its seamy side well. Defending his daughter the protagonist, a modest clerk called Savely, accidentally shoots the chief gangster and walks away in full view of the stunned crowd while policemen are afraid to arrest him. He joins the homeless tramps living in the dumps with them while he is hunted by the gangsters. The townsfolk are eager to deliver him into the gangsters' hands for the promised prize; his querulous wife refuses to hide him and even discloses his whereabouts to the new chieftain. Savely has to hide in the forest living with the Saami deer-breeders (which gives the author a chance to describe their unusual habits, legends and traditions). Due to his ordeals Savely is completely transformed from a nonentity to a people's avenger – he returns to town and kills the corrupt mayor, the chief of police, the biggest businessman, and the gangsters' chief. The townsfolk are overjoyed. However, when a prize is offered for his head they rush to capture the new Robin Hood. In the end, Savely's murders are put down to the local factory's owner who needs to be removed and despite the many witnesses Savely is acquitted from his crimes. The town returns to its normal life controlled by new gangsters. The novel shows that people don't really want changes and would rather put up with the known evil.

This talented author paints a disturbing vision of Russia: this is how the younger generation see their country today, but the real merit lies in her willingness to confront, not shy away from the real problems of contemporary Russia, and to expose the darkness in all of its forms.

## **Maria Arbatova**

The first woman writer with an openly feminist ideology is widely known as "**Erica Jong of Russian literature**" (*The Moscow Times*). Arbatova is a dramatist, novelist, essayist, and a leading activist in the Russian feminist movement. She has some 30 books to her name as well as 14 plays staged in Russia and abroad. Her best-known books include *My Name is Woman. A Visit from a Not So Old Lady*, autobiographical novel *I'm Forty*, *Chevrolet-Caprice* (about today's new rich), *A Taste of India*, to name a few. *How I Attempted to Get Elected to the Duma* is based on her personal experiences to get elected. Since 1991, she headed a feminist club for psychological rehabilitation of women. And since 1996, her club "Women Intervene in Politics" has been involved in seeking a more equitable representation of women in the Russian political establishment.

### ***THE IRON PHILATELIST* by Maria Arbatova & Sumit Dutta Gupta**

A documentary novel.

**ENGLISH EXCERPT IS AVAILABLE**

THE IRON PHILATELIST is a true story of a living legend, one of the most successful Russian spies. Alexei Kozlov, alias Otto Schmidt, exploiting his irresistible charm and flair for learning languages, crisscrosses the globe as a shrewd merchandiser, developing his network. He becomes a custodian of secrets in whom influential Jews and Arabs in the Middle East confide with total trust. He is finally captured in South Africa and despite the sadistic tortures he does not own up. He is later cross-examined by intelligence officials from Germany, Italy, France, Israel, Britain and the U.S. but Otto refuses to cooperate. Otto is forced to stand upright without support for 26 hours when any tottering leads to bouts of beating; he is tied to a scalding-hot iron cage in the 50<sup>0</sup>C heat of the desert, and then incarcerated in a dark cell until the skin on his hands crack and bleed from the lack of light. He is transferred to the death row; from a cell adjoining the gallows, he gets a close-up view of the execution theater. One day, Otto is confronted with a photograph of himself and his wife bearing his real name on the back. He understands that any further denial is futile, and curtly admits: "My name is Alexei Kozlov. I'm a Soviet officer and that's all you will learn from me."

### **Maria Arbatova, *A Visit from a Not-so-old Lady*. a novel**

Former childhood friends get together after seven years of separation which were filled with turbulent events in the country (perestroika, new market economy, failed reforms) and in their private lives (divorces, new marriages). They are gathered together by the sister of their allegedly deceased friend, Dima, who had emigrated earlier on. The sister, called Di, arrives from America to distribute his money among his friends. Through a series of her psychological traps, each of the characters has to tell about his/her life and relationship to Dima. Thus they all reveal their inner motivations. In the end it turns out that the so-called sister is the brother himself in disguise and the non-existent money is a pretext to sort out complex relationships among ex-friends and make them look at themselves with new eyes.

### **Maria Arbatova, *My Name is Woman*, autobiographical novel**

**ENGLISH EXCERPT IS AVAILABLE**

"All this happened to me for the sole reason that I was born a woman. As long as there are people who refuse to discuss women's rights the same things will be experienced by other women, because to be a woman in our country is still not honorable even at the moment when she gives birth – the only thing that no man is able to do."

Arbatova writes about uneasy relationship with her overprotective Jewish mother, her domineering school teachers, and the then everyday life. A victim of polio she was left lame for life but as a way of self-assertion she made numerous love conquests and a brilliant career as a

public figure. Arbatova dissects her education at the hands of malevolent or lecherous teachers. Dysfunctional families and deficient educational systems are exposed with wit and humor. Written in a dynamic and colorful style, Arbatova's book is a forceful protest against the sexist world she had to live in.

## **Dmitry Bykov**

A prize-winning novelist, popular essayist, poet, and a major public figure. Born in 1967 in Moscow, Bykov is the winner of more than 20 prizes including the International Strugatsky Prize for the novel *Orthography* and *Evacuator*; the National Bestseller Prize and the Big Book Prize for his biography of Pasternak. A prolific author Bykov has published a dozen novels to date, several collections of poetry, a book of fairytales, three books of essays. His novels show a clear fondness for dystopian fiction and alternative histories and invariably inspire heated public debates. According to one critic: "Each of Bykov's recent successes could easily have been a crowning achievement of someone else's entire career." Bykov is a very prolific author and one of the most interesting thinkers in Russia today. His language is always precise, rich and figurative, and his each new novel is highly original and imaginative.

His better-known novels include:

*Acquittal*, a novel, his personal favorite, is an alternative history of Russia.

*Orthography*, a novel, an intense personal saga set in revolutionary Russia, was met with eager response by readers and critics alike, and was universally considered the best novel of 2004.

*The Evacuator*, a novel, is a morality parable posing as an anti-utopia.

*How Putin Became President of the USA*, a collection of political satires.

*BORIS PASTERNAK*, a definitive biography of the poet as well as an exciting portrait of Russia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was published in French by Fayard. Bykov also published biographies of Vladimir Mayakovsky, Bulat Okudzhava, Maxim Gorky.

## **Praise for Bykov**

"Dmitry Bykov, a highly versatile author whose output includes a novel described as a bombshell, which is a dystopian satire about ethnic conflicts. The novel portrays clashes between peoples clearly intended to represent Russians and Jews. Bykov, who calls it the best book that can possibly be written today', has no less candidly said it is fiercely Russophobic and fiercely antisemitic, depicting both Russians and Jews as virus nations which bring misfortune and decay to whatever they're trying to colonize". -- **The Guardian**

"The novel is certainly a magnum opus, presenting everything Bykov thinks and feels about Russia, and his thoughts are abundant." – **Novaya Gazeta**

"ZhD is a veritable encyclopedia of Russian life today... This is, without a doubt, a very important book, the best Bykov has written to date." – GAZETA.RU

"ZhD is an epic novel about the humankind rather than human individuals. The war he describes is not really over the territory but over the right to establish a new ideology." - Booknik

"Bykov offers answers to practically all the fundamental Russian questions. ... A masterful epic novel with Gogolean wealth of verbal expressiveness and symbolism." – Book Review

"ZhD is an anti-liberal and at the same time anti-totalitarian novel. Bykov is equally critical of the powers that be and the reformers, depicting both in a grotesque manner." - Ex-libris

**Dmitry Bykov, *Orthography*. A novel**

**French translation – 2009 Editions Denoel**

*Orthography*, a multi-layered novel somewhat reminiscent of Doctor Zhivago, but with an element of fantasy, is an intense personal saga set in revolutionary Russia. It was met with lively response by readers and critics alike, and was recognized as the best novel of the decade. The novel abounds in vivid scenes, intense dialogues, striking ideas, and memorable characters.

**Dmitry Bykov, *The Quarter***, a novel.

The famous “enfant-terrible” and oppositionist Dmitry Bykov produced an experimental novel-quest, novel-game, called *The Quarter*. He claims this is a new word in world literature, something that no one has ever written before. Reviews compared the novel with Gogol and Bulgakov while Bykov himself insists that he has launched a new genre of novel-solution.

The reader is supposed to be the main protagonist while the author assumes the role of his/her guide who compels the reader to do all sorts of strange things which supposedly will make them rich (many readers confessed they swallowed the bait and were actually tempted to follow the author’s instructions.) In fact this ruse is a pretext for both the author and the reader to review their past and present life, remember the dear ones they’ve lost, and revive their unrealized hopes.

**Dmitry Bykov, LIVING SOULS**

(Russian title: ZhD, English excerpt published in Glas as “Jewhad”)

**Winner of the “National Bestseller” Prize and several other prizes.  
Short-listed for the Russian Booker and “The Big Book” Prize  
Published in English by Alma Books, UK, in 2011.**

### **ENGLISH VERSION IS AVAILABLE**

The novel is set in Russia’s not-so-distant future (although the events and situations described are drawn from the present-day) when her oil and gas become of no use to other countries because of the newly-discovered sources of energy. Having nothing to sell Russia is now of no interest to the West and left to its own devices. Russia gets increasingly bogged down in the national strife and war for power and for domination over territories, depleting the country’s already meager resources even more. (Unfortunately, Bykov’s predictions are quickly coming true.)

We follow the fates of several people set against the background of a low-key war between Varangians and Khazars going on in what is now Russian territory. According to Bykov, since the seventh century Russia has been moving in a vicious circle consisting of revolution – tyranny – thaw – chaos – a new revolution, which is repeated again and again in Russian history.

The novel shows the fight of two forces, both invaders of Russian territory, tearing the country apart: the “Varangians” (or “Northerners, that is, Russians”) and the “Khazars” (or “Southerners, that is, Jews”), alternately taking the upper hand and overthrowing the other. The Varangians are nationalistic patriots of various persuasions and supporters of state power, while the Khazars are western-minded liberals and supporters of the market economy. The activities of the belligerent and totalitarian-minded Varangians lead to the destruction of everything, including themselves. However the cunning Khazars also cause much destruction, demoralization and eventual decline. Both parties accuse one another of seizing the territories originally belonging to them.

There is also the indigenous population of meek and tolerant natives, the keepers of folk wisdom, who seem to be indifferent to the goings-on and in general too adaptable for their own good. They submissively provide food for the army and let them kill each other. They speak their own secret language by which they recognize one another in the crowd. They are by turns either preserved as an ethnic minority or exterminated during severe food shortages.

Several times in the novel Bykov says that any society easily splits into Varangians and Khazars, and thus the Russian experience is not entirely unique.

**Dmitry Bykov, THE LIST**, a novel.

The protagonist of this novel parable and political satire, a TV scriptwriter called Sergei Sviridov suddenly discovers that his name figures in some mysterious list together with 180 other persons of different professions, ages, genders, etc. The people in the list are bothered by the authorities in

various ways, such as sudden summons for medical check-ups at a special clinic, inquiries from the customs and tax inspectors; some of them are sacked and even detained under false pretexts. No official accusations are given and the unfortunates are racking their brains what they might have done wrong which is different from the minor demeanors committed by everybody around them.

Sviridov is made redundant, his whole career is at risk and on top of this his girlfriend abandons him. Pondering on the reasons of his trouble he believes that he is different from the others only in that he has always stood his point and tried to remain true to himself, although circumstances had invariably forced him to make compromises. The fellow sufferers finally meet, having found one another through the internet. They compare notes but nothing transpires and no common denominator suggests itself.

Bykov parades an impressive and convincing gallery of social types, people from different walks of life all of whom are psychologically ready for persecution. Bykov models one more Russian matrix, this time one of social behavior, mainly the herd instinct compelling people to join all sorts of lists and groups, including internet blogs and forums.

The novel ends with the protagonist appealing to God: "Why did you give me light if I'm still in the dark? You have no answer? To hell with you, then."

### **Alexei Gatapov**

Gatapov was born in 1965 in Buryatia and lives in Ulan-Ude. A History graduate from the Buryat Teacher-training Institute, he has been specializing in ancient Mongolian history and in particular the early years of Genghis-khan, when he was still called Temudzhin. The life of Mongolian nomadic cattle-breeders has been the invariable background of his work. His better known books include the novels *Birth of a Leader*, *The First Nuker of Genghis-khan* (later screened as a like-named feature film), and finally his most famous novel *Temudzhin*. Gatapov has also prepared and published the *Mongolian Historical Encyclopedia* embracing events and facts related to Central Asia from ancient times through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Alexei Gatapov, *Temudzhin*, a historical novel.**

The novel is devoted to the formative years of Genghis-khan when he was still called Temudzhin and lived far away from any centers of medieval civilization. Gatapov, a specialist on ancient Mongolian culture, traces his path to world leadership from an uneducated youngster with outstanding physical and intellectual qualities. After his father's death, the young Temudzhin becomes the leader of his clan and experiences all the hardships of nomadic life, the raids of the neighboring clans, betrayal, captivity, cruelty, and much else. These ordeals tempered his body and spirit which enabled him to become the great Khan at the age of 14.

The book contains a wealth of ethnographic and historical materials immersing the reader into the everyday life of ancient Mongols. Apart from the numerous battle scenes, religious ritual, and inter-clan intrigues, love is also presented in all its aspects: love for your child, your parents, a woman, a friend, and each love is different, deep, and unsentimental as befits a great warrior.

As Sholokhov immortalized the Cossacks in his works, Alexei Gatapov did the same for the medieval Mongols.

### **Dmitry Ivanov**

Born in 1969 in Kishinev (Moldavia) Ivanov currently lives in Sochi. There he witnessed the preparations for the Olympic Games, including the radical reconstruction of the local environment and destruction of whole residential areas to make room for new sports complexes. His observations of those events and of the motley population of Northern Caucasus make the basis for

his new novel *Where Sleep the Gods*. Both funny and sad the novel is packed with action and offers revealing asides on many aspects of the local life and history.

His writing is often mosaic-like to convey typical thinking of the modern man whose mind is overloaded with information and impressions, preventing him from delving deep into any subject. Says the author: “The novel is basically about a modern man, with his fragmented consciousness and uncertain moral principles, who seeks to return to his roots, to the deep-going traditions as the purest source from which one can drink without fear of getting poisoned.”

**100,000 “likes” on SNOB alone.**

“Ivanov introduces in his adventure plot a deep-going layer of folk tradition which is usually hidden from view, and this penetration into the subsoil of human culture inspires association with Marques.” – **Ludmila Ulitskaya** “Funny and said as well as highly relevant.” – **SNOB**

**Dmitry Ivanov, *Where Sleep the Gods***

A novel, 360 pp. (in Russian. 2015, Eksmo)

**ENGLISH EXCERPT IS AVAILABLE**

Anton is a successful conceptologist working for a Moscow PR company called “PRopaganda”. One day he gets an assignment to create a positive image of the Sochi Olympics among the local population who regards the coming giant project as a disaster. Anton goes there to study the situation on location. In Sochi he realizes that he is supposed to create a positive image of a social and ecological catastrophe which involves diverted rivers, felled forests, garbage cluttering mountain gorges, resettlement of whole villages together with their cemeteries, and much else. Next he comes up against corrupted local bureaucracy and has to solve such problems as fast disappearing budgets and local discontent.

Sochi and its environs are mostly populated by Armenians and Abkhaz but together with Anton we also learn about the most ancient indigenous tribe of the Ubykh and their secret rites. The novel abounds in historical anecdotes and local lore about the strife between Georgia and Abkhazia with cruel marauding on all sides, and stories of refugees from different wars.

At some point Anton drives deep into the mountains alone and as he stands there admiring the gorgeous views an avalanche suddenly breaks out. Anton gets hit by a boulder and carried off by a mudslide. He comes to three days later deaf and concussed. He’s been found by Sokrat, a seven-year-old local boy. Anton lost his memory and could not tell the villagers who he was and what had happened to him. His saviors take care of him and nurse him back to life. They tell him their personal stories and the histories of various local tribes and a whole new world is opened to him.

One day Anton and Sokrat come across a bison in the woods. In a superhuman effort Anton kills the bison with Sokrat’s saber and falls from a cliff together with the animal. He survives miraculously but breaks his ribs and legs. After a few delirious days when Anton balances between life and death his memory suddenly returns to him. Finally he meets his former colleagues but he no longer wants to return to his former life in advertizing. He stays in the mountains for good.

**Nikolai Klimontovich**

**ENGLISH EXCERPTS AVAILABLE**

Klimontovich is known as “the Soviet Casanova of Russian literature”. He is a novelist, playwright, and literary journalist, a prolific and successful writer with two dozen prize-winning novels and plays to his name. Some of his stories and plays have been translated into Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Polish. His novel *The Road to Rome* came out in English translation from Glas. Many of his novels were nominated for the Russian Booker and other major prizes.

Born in 1951, the son of a famous physicist, an Academician, he was also trained as a physicist while writing stories and plays from the age of 19. In 1977 he was lucky to have a collection of his early stories published by a big Soviet publishing house (as part of their short-lived campaign of “encouraging young talent”). Although the reviews criticized the book for its lack of “ideological

stand” Klimontovich was able to join the Writers Union, which gave him the official status of a professional writer. However, his subsequent works never passed the Soviet censorship and were rejected by publishers and journals alike on grounds of their “erroneous aesthetic and ideological views.”

The appeal of his books lies not only in their infectious eroticism, ready wit and healthy humor but mainly in their masterful portrayal of Soviet and contemporary Russia through a multitude of cleverly observed details. He seems to be playing with the reader but behind his banter there is a serious pondering on profound existential problems facing humans.

His book *The Last Behests* so enchanted the late translator Kate Cook that she started translating it on her own in her conviction that it would surely find a publisher abroad. Unfortunately she died prematurely having translated only one third of the text.

## Grigory Kruzhkov

One of those children’s authors whose books are equally enjoyed by adults. His tales sparkle with fantastic imagination, and inventiveness, they are loved by readers of all ages for their gentle humour, wisdom, and kindness. His work embraces the entire European fairytale culture and addresses the children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ENGLISH SAMPLES ARE AVAILABLE.

In the introduction to the cycle of his short fairytales “Where Things Came From” Kruzhkov assures his little readers that he translated those tales from various exotic languages such as bears’ language, and that of dandelions, and extraterrestrials, and magicians’.

In his long fairy tale “Guillaume the Gnome and the Moon Kitten” the poor gnome learns to his horror that he has only one thousand years left to live. He decides to stop the time by damaging the main World Clock. So he decides to collect all the omission dots, mainly from verses which abound in them as you know, and pour them into the clock’s mechanism.

In 1996, Kruzhkov received an Honour List Diploma from the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People). He also won a number of top Russian prizes for his children’s books, including: *Cabbage Manuscript*, *Rainy Island*, *Letter from the Boat*, *Cloud with a Porch*, to name a few. Kruzhkov is also a brilliant translator of English-language poetry and a literary scholar.

## Andrei Kuzechkin

Born in 1982, Kuzechkin lives in a small town on the Volga. He had worked as a village teacher, street cleaner, hospital security guard, librarian, and journalist, as well as being a well-known rock musician. Winner of several literary prizes his published books include *Aborigine-digest*, *All Ten Fingers*, *Mendeleev Rock*, *I Won’t Grow Up*, and *Magma*. Kuzechkin’s latest novels are coming out from Eksmo in 2016: *Insane Lily*, *The Town of Svyatokamensk*, *City Without Qualities*, and *Limits-21*.

Kuzechkin’s novels are intended for young adults and describe provincial life with their recognizable types: radically-minded youths, ruthless thugs, drunken intellectuals, sectarians, the local elite and failed fortune seekers. They yearn for faraway glamorous cities and try to find their identity. His novels present a vivid portrait of the modern generation of young Russians stunned by their first painful contacts with the harsh reality.

**“Kuzechkin’s style sparkles with colorful dialogues, street talk and bon mots... Very good read... For many people this novel may become a manual of survival...” – *Novy Mir***

**“Kuzechkin’s book reads effortlessly... it is a fine contribution to the Volga page in Russian literature.” *Novaya Gazeta***

### Andrei Kuzechkin, *Insane Lily*, a novel

Lena is a problem teenager whose hobby is to secretly photograph shocking scenes and send the pictures to her unsuspecting models. She is also a gifted artist drawing horror comics which she

sells to a local online magazine. She hates all people and especially her mother's new husband and his daughter Julie, also in her late teens. One day the step sisters' confrontation turns into its opposite: they suddenly become illicit lovers, exploring passionately the forbidden field of Lesbian love.

At the same time Lena is being blackmailed by someone calling himself Mortibus who gives her various assignments and threatens exposure if she disobeys. Her life gets increasingly complicated and tense, but she can't find an outcome. In the end it transpires that Mortibus, who has been poisoning Lily's life for two years, is none other than her step sister, who seduced her into forbidden sex. Finally, Lena's mother and Julie's father separate and leave. Lena is finally free. Life takes its normal course.

This novel-provocation gives the reader an insight into the inner world of a young person who is different from the crowd.

### **Andrei Kuzechkin, *Mendeleev Rock*, a novel**

The hero used to be the leader of a rock group "Adenoma" that had brief success at some point in the past but then fell apart. In search of positive inspiration, he visits all sorts of weird places including a religious sect and a local criminal gang. The hero is torn between his two loves, and finally makes his choice in favor of a wild punk girl just to be abandoned by her without any apparent reason. Kuzechkin traces the fatal periods in each character's life as if it were a case history of a mortal disease. The titles of the chapters are quite telling: infection, incubation period, illness, crisis, agony, clinical death. However, the epilogue is aptly called "Reincarnation" offering a life-asserting finale.

### **Andrei Kuzechkin, *Aborigine's Digest. Notes of a Rural Teacher***

#### **(Reminiscent of Bel Kaufmann's "Up the Down Staircase")**

Harsh and witty, this is a starkly frank story of a philology college graduate nicknamed Aborigine who takes a job at a rural school and tries to cope with the wild local schoolchildren. The setting and the spirit are reminiscent of Bel Kaufman's "Up the Down Staircase" – this is what she would write if she landed in that god-forsaken village. Finally the teacher and his students come to terms in a way and learn to respect and appreciate one another.

**Leonid Latynin** was born in 1938 in a small town on the Volga and was early introduced to old religious books and Russian folklore. Since childhood he has been fascinated with pre-Christian Russian culture, which gave the basis for his profound and highly original novels. Latynin has a degree in philology and is an expert in pre-Christian culture and Russian icons.

His work can hardly be classed with any existing literary trends or movements. He has several collections of poetry to his name, his best-known novels include *Alien Blood*, *The Face-maker and the Muse*, *Sleeper at Harvest Times*, *Stavr and Sarah*. *Sleeper at Harvest Time* was published in French by Flammarion, and in English by Zephyr Press.

### **Leonid Latynin, *THE FACE-MAKER AND THE MUSE*, a novel-parable.**

#### **ENGLISH VERSION IS AVAILABLE**

In a city where it always rains some people have names while others have only numbers. By means of plastic surgery all are made alike, both outwardly and inwardly. *The Face-maker and the Muse* is an anti-utopia about the society where work is a giant machinery mutilating human beings, where everybody desperately tries to climb the social ladder, but the success depends on the degree of the person's likeness to the Model Face, created by the Chief Face-maker. From time to time the Model is changed, overturning the entire social structure and causing terrible ordeals. But they are

overcome by an unbelievable love of two human beings for each other: love is an outlet and a promise of renovation and rebirth of the human spirit after all the martyrdom of this century.

**Leonid Latynin, *Alien Blood*, a novel**

**ENGLISH EXCERPT IS AVAILABLE**

This mythological narrative about the adventures and reflections of Emelya, who is half-man and half-bear, a popular character from Russian folklore. Emelya travels in time and witnesses all the main events and crucial turning points in Russian history, beginning with the forcible baptism of Russia in 980.

Emelya's early life coincides with the plague which carries away most of the people in his native village including his mother, a sorceress. He lives in the forest with his father the Bear who teaches him the laws of the forest and freedom of will. The forest is located on the exact site of the future city of Moscow which will be built many centuries later. The bears' schooling is cruel and complex, and it is quite contrary to the Christian faith which Emelya will be taught later. This is the school of fighting and conquest, with no room for compassion or excuses.

The scenes of forest life and Emelya's vivid dreams during the bears' winter hibernation in the lair are interspersed with scenes of Emelya's first love and a series of fires which burnt the forests around the Moscow seven hills. Thanks to Emelya's beloved Zhdana the fires are finally extinguished. Emelya's life in the forest comes to an end after the death of his father the bear: he was killed by the knights of Prince Boris. Before that Emelya was seized by Prince Boris's men and was put in prison. He fights the knights in a bear-like way, and his four combats with four warriors from different parts of the world symbolize the Northerner's distinction from the cultures of the South, the East, and the West.

**Praise for Latynin:**

"Latynin's apocalyptic novel has been published just at a time when his grim predictions are coming true..." — *Le Monde*

"...over-determined allegory ... it resonates with beguiling ideas." — *The Guardian*

"...A thought-provoking work... Intrigued readers of this demanding novel will be rewarded by its depth and originality." — *Publishers Weekly*

"The novel's true hero is its language which even in translation achieves a poetic intensity and a musicality that are mesmerizing." — *New York Times Book Review*

"Latynin is a convincing and disquieting ethnographer, perfectly at home in this fragmented age. His incantations possess a magic power..." *Magazine Litteraire*

"Leonid Latynin is one of the most original of the "post-realists" of Russian literature since the mid-1980s. His action and reality extend in a homogeneous, elastic temporality from the pre-Christian Russia through a near future of social decomposition. The novel makes an individual memory out of the total memory of a people." — from the "Postface" to the French edition

**Leonid Latynin, *Sleeper at Harvest Times*, a novel**

**ENGLISH VERSION IS AVAILABLE**

Based on pagan rituals, folklore, and mythology, this book is not so much a novel as it is a chronicle of one thousand years of Russian history. Its principal hero is Emelya, the "sleeper" who observes and surrealistically dreams his way through the cataclysmic "harvest" of Russian history. Fire and particularly blood are the salient themes, marking the human sacrifice that has been the cruel destiny of the Russian people. Emelya has been conceived by a Russian woman and fathered by a bear. The novel begins in the eleventh century and develops through the ages, reaching its climax in a terrifying execution scene in the twenty-first century at the very same spot on the Moscow River where it had begun. Latynin takes his protagonist through various stages of Russian history, exposes him to pagan rites and a decadent fascination with sex, and forces him to witness multiple forms of violence and cruelty.

## **Leonid Latynin, *Pre-Christian Russian Folk Arts***

Nonfiction, 150 pp. 24 color plates representing over 100 objects.

This book goes back to the times when there were no written languages and people were writing their books using the languages of ornamental patterns, images of birds, animals, humans and plants. In this way people were able to relate the stories of their lives, their beliefs, traditions, their views of the world, in short, they were able to speak both about the surrounding world and their inner life. Many centuries after the invention of written languages, even in our present day, people continue recreating folk images and legends, folk memories and signs without being aware of their true meaning.

## **Mikhail Levitin**

Born in 1945, Levitin is an internationally renowned stage director and prize-winning author. Since 1987 he has been Artistic Director of the famous Hermitage Theatre in Moscow. Levitin has written sixteen books to date which won him important literary prizes. He was short-listed for the Russian Booker Prize and won a number of prizes for his books and theater productions...

Levitin's eccentric writing – branded as 'ego-realism' by critics – is distinguished by its strong element of the absurd, in the spirit of the absurdist writers of the 1920s. For him the absurd is a view of life from its seamier side, where so-called normal people appear insane and eccentricity is a way of preserving one's sanity and saving the world's beauty.

"As director of the Hermitage Theater, Mikhail Levitin has a reputation as a Quixotic absurdist, a chaotic genius whose brilliant mess often transports his audiences... His fiction, confessional and ironic in tone, evokes similar reactions. In his fiction Levitin is always a good show." –*Russia beyond the Headlines*

"His theatre has very often brought me to laughter or to tears and has, just as often, shocked, startled or amazed me by the originality of its productions. This to be sure is the hallmark of its protean director Michael Levitin, whose novel *Total Impropriety* had been short-listed for the Russian Booker Prize. Somehow even the name of the book gives a vision of its author, of his outrageous iconoclasm to which all responded with enthusiasm." –*Francis Greene*

"I was lucky to have my play staged at the best theatre in Russia. What I saw was the work of a true master, a magical spectacle. Mikhail Levitin, the director, is a genius. I saw his other productions too, which made a powerful impression on me." – *Kurt Vonnegut*

## **Mikhail Levitin, *Total Impropriety*, a novel**

**ENGLISH EXCERPT AVAILABLE**

**Shortlisted for the Russian Booker Prize**

Levitin's novel *Total Impropriety* is an unusually structured tribute to the 1920s left-wing theatre director Igor Terentiev, with three chapters focusing first on Terentiev's mistress Emilia, then on Terentiev himself, and finally on his long-suffering wife Natasha. It is a highly sympathetic attempt to imaginatively recreate an intimate portrait of an overlooked genius from the 1920s. Such major cultural figures as Mayakovsky and Lily Brik, Kruchenykh, Malevich, and Meyerhold appear fleetingly as the reader is immersed in the whirlwind of those turbulent times.

Levitin's narrative weaves a complex pattern within its tripartite division, with the reader having to unscramble the chronology. It evokes the irresponsibility and self-assuredness of the revolutionary theatrical milieu, and their total separateness from the supposedly left-wing regime which, for a time, they were allowed to serve. Levitin often leaves the reader unsure of where reality ends and fantasy begins, but the novel conveys a striking sense of authenticity.

**Mikhail Levitin, *With Only Sandals on his Feet*, a short novel**

**ENGLISH EXCERPT AVAILABLE**

The story follows the adventures of the 15-year-old Victor Kuza. A precocious teenager with a passion for theatre, Kuza discovers a book about the mysterious Chamber Theatre in a secondhand bookshop and makes it his mission to find out more about it. During the course of his quest he briefly acquires an enigmatic mentor, locks horns with the school's illustrious theatre director, gets beaten up and loses his best friend. But he also discovers the strength in other friendships and meets the owner of a magical voice, who is able to provide him with some of the answers he's looking for.

**Mikhail Levitin, *A Jewish God in Paris*, short novel**

**ENGLISH EXCERPT AVAILABLE**

In *A Jewish God in Paris* the protagonist, suffering from a guilty conscience after his latest love affair, takes his wife and children to Paris in a final attempt to save his marriage: "Paris was my last hope." But his beautiful wife resists his ingenious peace-making efforts with silence and "unrelenting hatred." He has been unfaithful to her once too often and the situation has gone beyond the point of forgiveness. In fact he appears to be incapable of limiting himself to a one-woman relationship viewing his infidelities as a way to embrace the wide variety of the world. He is essentially a free spirit who refuses to grow up or to accept responsibility for his actions. Nevertheless he is sincere in his soul-searching, mercilessly examining the darkest corners of his soul and apparently inadvertently allowing the reader to witness his torment.

**Mikhail Levitin, TAIROV, a fictionalized biography. Illustrated.**

The name of Alexander Tairov (1885-1950) is well known to all those who are at all familiar with the history of the Russian theater. This outstanding stage director was an opponent of both the life-likeness of the realist theater of Stanislavsky and the abstractedness of Meyerhold's symbolic approach. His was a "synthetic theater" which combined dialogue, music, dancing, and circus. Tairov creatively realized his ideas in the Chamber Theater, founded on his initiative, extolling the beauty of the human body and spirit in a wide range of styles: from the tragedy to buffoonery. In 1949 Chamber Theater was closed down by the authorities. Tairov took it very much to heart, he fell ill and soon passed away.

The book follows the principle used by Mikhail Bulgakov in *The Life of Monsieur de Moliere* which Levitin took as his model.

## **Alexander Melikhov**

Born in 1947 Melikhov spent his childhood in Northern Kazakhstan where his father, a historian, fearing a second arrest, fled to avoid persecution for his non-orthodox views on Russian history. Melikhov graduated from Leningrad University majoring in mathematics. A prolific writer he was unable to get published under the Soviets but in post-Soviet times he soon won a reputation as one of the most important living authors. A typical representative of the St Petersburg literary school Melikhov always focuses on the most momentous social problems such as the ages-old anti-Jewish sentiments in Russia, the growing suicide problem, the sorry state of the disabled, generation gap. A recognized master of intellectual fiction Melikhov is also a fine lyricist and psychologist who closely examines the characters' inner world and the social-intellectual characteristics of the various sections of society. Melikhov's books continue the tradition of the great 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature known for its intense spiritual and intellectual quests.

**Critics also compared Melikhov to Nabokov and Thomas Mann.**

Winner of the Nabokov Prize, of the Russian PEN Prize, the Gogol Prize, and a number of other prizes, short-listed for the Russian Booker and the Big Book Prize, Melikhov has some 20 books to his name which are all constantly reprinted.

**Alexander Melikhov, *The Confessions of a Jew*.** A novel.

[English excerpt available](#)

**Nabokov prize from the St. Petersburg Union of Writers**

This autobiographical novel describes the author's hungry but happy childhood in Kazakhstan when he thought that "Jew" was a kind of a swear word and had nothing to do with him, when his world was frightening but whole and logical. He draws loving portraits of his parents and depicts all sorts of local residents, good and bad. His father was revered as a local saint for his readiness to help all and sundry; he "taught foreign languages, geography, and history, becoming for several generations a symbol of a perfect Teacher." A science prodigy, Melikhov left his home to enroll at the Mathematics Department of Leningrad University. "For a Jew my scientific career progressed bearably, although with all the expected humiliations."

The protagonist had always wished he could be like everybody else and just go with the crowd, but he was invariably an alien. He depicts the tragedy of alienation he learnt to live with, but that was not something experienced by Jews alone – it was the tragedy of any thinking individual tempted to take a refuge inside a herd while retaining his independence of mind.

In Melikhov's novel the past is filtered through a triple lens of loss: the exclusion from the "unity" of the nation, membership in which required the destruction of the father's memory, and subsequently, the loss of Soviet Russia. And thus the son destroys the father's nostalgia.

**Alexander Melikhov, *Escape from Retribution*,** a novel

The protagonist sees a dream in which his dead father asks him to punish the investigator Volchek, who had incriminated him on a false charge in 1936 as a result of which he had to abandon his academic career and make do with a pitiful life of a village teacher. The father's spirit tells him to find Volchek's children and reveal to them the true nature of their father. So the son first goes to a firm called "Family Tree" to find Volchek's successors. He thirsts for retribution and swears to avenge his wronged father. But his personal investigations bring out so many different truths and motives whereby certain scoundrels appear as heroes and executioners as victims. In the end the river of oblivion has washed away all of them, even all memory of them, and the only one spared is the protagonist's worst enemy: that very heartless prosecutor Volchek. He has lived a full and satisfying life amidst loving family, wealth and respect.

The novel is a combination of phantasmagoria, detective story and romance. The author provides a convincing explanation of Russian people's love for Stalin which is in actual fact a yearning for historical glory. This idea, underlying the novel, makes it more important than just a work of fiction – it is a profound analysis of the current state of the nation's mentality.

**Alexander Melikhov, *Red Zion*,** a novel.

Bentsion Shamir is a well-established Israeli writer and *Red Zion* is both his autobiography and the story of how he wrote it. As a young boy living in a town on the Polish border in the 1930s, he had a happy childhood among his brothers and sisters, his mother and father, a doctor. When Germans invaded Poland, Bentsion and his family had to flee to Soviet Russia where one by one the whole family perished in the gulags and only Bentsion survived in an orphanage.

Bentsion befriends a hunchbacked Jewish shoemaker Berl, an ardent Stalinist, who believes in a happy future for the Jews in the Jewish republic of Birobidzhan. However after the war, Bentsion makes his way to Israel instead. Despite his apparent success there he loses his sense of purpose and decides to visit Birobidzhan. There Bentsion discovers a tiny museum to the Yiddish writer Meilekh Terlits, a representation of the real-life Yiddish author Buzi Miller (1913-1988) who lived in Birobidzhan and edited *Birobidzhaner shtern*. Convicted on the charge of nationalism in 1949,

during the outbreak of a particularly severe anti-Jewish campaign, he spent seven years in the Gulag. In the novel, the so-called museum to the Yiddish writer is located in his apartment, lovingly maintained by his widow. Bentsion decides to imitate the Yiddish writer's simple style. And so he writes a piercingly sad and noble tale of an unrealized Jewish homeland.

**Alexander Melikhov, *Romance with Prostatitis*, a novel.**

**Winner of the Russian PEN-Prize.**

**Named among the three best books of the year.**

The novel is based on Melikhov's experiences of the early perestroika years when for lack of a better job he "shuffled" goods from abroad for resale at home in the company of women traders who used him as a loader and a lifeguard. He describes the society in the throes of violent change which is also going on in people's minds. The Schweik-like protagonist keeps philosophizing in a most hilarious way as the group travels all over Russia, China, Turkey, and other places.

The novel is also about the serious tests to which a romantic-minded person is subjected by cruel circumstances. By his middle age he has two failed marriages behind him and lives with his third wife who is over solicitous reminding him of his mother. Then comes the downfall of the Soviet Union and for many people the habitual life comes to an abrupt end. At this point he meets his beautiful classmate Sonya and falls in love with her. Their love unfolds very poetically – night strolls in the moonlight, poems, flowers, etc. Each such encounter ends in an acute fit of prostatitis. The contrast of the high and the lowly, the embarrassing symptoms and medical treatments, are all described frankly and expressively.

**Alexander Melikhov, *The Plague*, a novel**

Based on his attempts to save his own son from drug addiction Melikhov closely examines this disease plaguing the modern world. The meek and dreamy teenage boy Victor develops an unusual hobby: he invents all sorts of locks to shield himself as it were from the dangerous outside world.

He marries a nice girl Anna and her presence in his life calms him down so he can now face life with more courage. They have a happy marriage and adore their son, a handsome and talented boy but mentally unstable. He drops out of college and goes to Israel in search of adventures. He works there as a prison guard by night and studies at the university during the day. But then his parents learn with horror that their son is a drug addict. The boy inexorably turns into a moral freak, and then both his wife and his own son also become addicted. Each time Yuri wants money for the drugs he threatens suicide or fakes one, and the parents give in.

The world of drug addicts and unscrupulous drug peddlers, and the situation in drug clinics are depicted in vivid and accurate detail drawn from real life and personal experience.

Finally Victor can't bear to see the moral degradation of his son: one night his desperation reaches a climax and he kills his son by throwing him out of the widow.

**Alexander Melikhov, *Community of the Feeble-minded. In the Valley of the Blessed***

These two novels form a dilogy in which the real world is juxtaposed with the home for the mentally retarded. Melikhov examines various forms of love, all of which are seen as phantoms and illusions. The inmates dream about a certain international community where they will all retire one day. Melikhov has for many years been involved in rehabilitation programs for the disabled in St Petersburg.

**Alexander Melikhov, *Orpheus' Helper*, a novel.**

An unfortunate husband desperately looks for a remedy to cure his wife from alcoholism. A man called Orpheus tells him to fulfill three assignments promising to save his wife.

## Larissa Miller

### ENGLISH EXCERPTS AVAILABLE

A major lyrical poet, Miller also writes memorable reminiscences embracing the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She is the author of ten books, including *Nameless Day*; *My Land and Home*; *Let's Talk about the Paradoxes of Love*; *Holidays, Holidays*; *Between the Cloud and the Pit*.

*Dim and Distant Days* is her book of memoirs looking back over nearly five decades of Soviet history to her hungry but happy childhood in post-war Moscow; her coming of age as a Jewish girl in an anti-Semitic regime; her encounters with the KGB as an English interpreter in the 1960s, and again in the 1980s as the wife of the famous human rights activist Boris Altschuler.

Winner of several poetry prizes she was short-listed for the State Prize in 2000.

She has been published in translation in many countries, including two poetry collections published by Arc Publications in the UK.

## Vladimir Orlov (1936-2014)

A prolific and highly popular novelist and essayist, author of some 20 titles. He won his instant nationwide fame with his novel *Danilov: The Violist* (1980) and his equally successful *The Apothecary* (1988) both written in the manner of magic realism, obviously influenced by Bulgakov and Gogol. Both novels were so funny, thought-provoking, and cleverly written that they soon became cult books and a must for all Russian intellectuals.

### Vladimir Orlov, *Danilov: The Violist*, a novel

published in Russian in 1980, came out in English (W. Morrow) in 1987 followed by editions in many other languages. Its main theme is the devilish origin of a genius. Danilov is a virtuoso violist, the son of a peasant woman and the Devil, a half-demon who falls in love with the Earth and the earthly woman Natasha. For the sake of his love Danilov severs all ties with the Devil and rejects the satanic power of his viola which he received as a gift from the Rulers of the Nine Circles. Amazingly for him, his musical gift does not disappear but becomes more human and moving and this signifies the victory of humanity in a person over the Devil's magic. The author examines the conflict between people's creative, lofty natures and their lowly consumerism.

"Ironic and often funny..." *Publishers Weekly* "Orlov has written a generally engaging novel that satirizes human behavior, individual and bureaucratic."- *Library Journal*.

### Vladimir Orlov, *The Apothecary*, a novel

A modest apothecary and his two boon companions in a beer pub open an ordinary-looking bottle of beer from which a magic woman suddenly emerges, introducing herself as their keeper. From then on she accompanies them in various guises creating all sorts of embarrassing situations for them. In the end, it becomes clear that humans need no help from supernatural forces to be successful in life and help people. The apothecary has been willingly bringing relief and advice to all those who came to him with their problems and pains.

## VICTOR PELEVIN

Born in Moscow in 1962, Pelevin is one of the most successful of Russian writers today, and most enigmatic. He enjoys that rare combination of cult and bestselling status, he polarizes his critics and has won most of the important national literary awards. Pelevin seldom promotes himself or his work in the media which some of his critics call a "sophisticated PR strategy". In fact his books have long been promoting themselves, each becoming a bestseller as soon as it comes out. His books in Russian alone have sold well over three million copies.

Some years ago he was selected by *The New Yorker* as one of the Best European Writers under 35 and by the Observer (UK) as one of the “21 Writers for the 21st Century”. His bestselling novels and stories have been published in 33 countries.

## **Valery Popov**

A major prize-winning author Popov was born in 1939 in Kazan. A long-time resident of St Petersburg he is a leading representative the Leningrad school of writing. He has more than 30 titles to his name: novels, collections of short stories, literary biographies, books for children and young adults. Popov is the President of the St Petersburg section of the Russian PEN and Chairman of the St Petersburg Writers Union.

Popov is sharp-sighted and perspicacious, but he is particularly famous for his irrepressible love of life which introduces good cheer even into his most sad stories based on real-life events and experiences. His style is light and witty, his writing is intelligent, positive and perceptive. He follows in the footsteps of Gogol in describing life as a tangle of fun and horror where fear is overcome with cheer and humor helps to hold on.

### **Valery Popov, *Dancing to Death*, a novel**

The story of the author’s relationship with his only beloved daughter, from her birth to her last day on earth. She died early of cirrhosis after many years of alcoholic indulgence. A brilliant storyteller Popov does not attempt to squeeze tears out of readers’ eyes and neither does he analyze the reasons behind her drama because his love is unquestionable. He reviews her life by episodes trying to spot the turning point in the fate of this adventurous and bright individual, a striking personality, and a talented artist.

### **Valery Popov, *Mosquito Lives while it Sings*, a novel**

This is a life of Popov’s father, an outstanding agronomist who had selected a number of new brands of wheat and rye. Embracing almost the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century his life was affected by the revolution, collectivization and purges, by the Second World War and loss of his near ones in the gulags. The story is a tribute to his staunchness and dedication to a goal. He is 94-years-old at the beginning of the book. He had always been a distinguished man but now has to cope with the indignity of old age: he can’t walk without help, he stumbles and falls frequently, he can’t even use a toilet without someone’s assistance, and even wets his pants. All this is described in detail quite frankly. However, the father is a strong personality and he manages to move his feebleness to the background and concentrate on his work. The novel is a monument to the tragedy and courage of old age.

### **Valery Popov, *The Third Breath*, a novel**

Popov describes the gradual degradation of his alcoholic wife who takes regular psychiatric treatments but then succumbs to drinking again. She lies and throws tantrums, hides bottles of vodka in secret places, and generally makes her husband’s life miserable, to say nothing of her own. Finally she becomes disabled and the husband, the narrator, cannot abandon her. He is the kind of man who voluntarily bears all the crosses life puts on his path, who feels responsible for all the ills of the world, and never gives up. Humor is the only thing that counterbalances the hell of his life.

## **Yaroslava Pulinovich**

Dramatist and short story author Pulinovich was rightly called “the voice of her generation”. Born in 1987 she grew up in Omsk (Siberia) and currently lives in Yekaterinburg (the Urals). She is the author of 30 plays which have been staged in more than 40 theaters around Russia, winning her many prestigious prizes: Debut, The Voice of the Generation, Eurasia, The Golden Mask, Harlequin, to name a few. Some of her plays have also been produced in London, Baltimore, Warsaw, Estonia, Ukraine, and elsewhere.

“Natasha’s Dream”, an earlier play which made her famous worldwide, was produced in many countries. Her play “The Bride of Clubs” was staged at the London Royal Court Theatre.

Pulinovich also writes poignant short stories about teenagers and young adults which contain so much dialogue that resemble plays while many of her plays-monologues read as short stories.

### **Alex Ray**

Born in 1973 in Lvov Alex Ray later moved to the oil-mining town of Urai in Western Siberia where he made a career in programming and system administration. Finally he founded a computer studio “Unit” and became a successful businessman. His first novel *Ganymede-6* was published in Moscow by Eksmo and had a print run of 13,000. After that came the novels: *Chance Shadow*, *Lagrange- 2015*, *In the Shade of our Wings*. He contributes his SF stories to the top SF magazines.

### **Alex Ray, *The Smell of Weapons, Death, and the Great Desert***

This semi-fantastic novel is about an opposition of two types of people: those who enjoy killing and bullying, which is a way of self-assertion for them and quite simply a way of life; and peace-loving people who are forced to take part in fighting against their will. The protagonist, an IT engineer loves to design solar power generators and wishes to be as far from any war as possible. In the beginning of the novel he goes on a business trip and just then a war breaks out. He gets drafted into the army there and then forced “to defend his country against the invaders”. Later he gets into the landing force of the Stellar Confederates which makes his life so miserable that all he dreams of is to escape and go back to his solar power generators.

However there is more in this book than fighting and adventure spiced with sex. It is mainly about how humanity keeps making the same blunders even if they are given another chance and that people don’t really change – war is in their blood while a pretext would always present itself. It is also about the constant confrontation between East and West, the nations’ claims to each other’s territories, wealth, and achievements, and mainly about the eternal clash between intellect and brutal force.

### **Alexander Selin (1960-2014)**

Selin was well-known for his satirical stories and plays. He grew up in the town of Volzhsk on the Volga. A graduate from the Moscow Institute of Physics Engineering he worked as a physicist for eight years also writing short plays, which he staged himself with theatre companies in Moscow and St Petersburg. He also wrote film scripts and humorous short stories published in literary journals and recited by comic actors. His novel *Videounter Menschen* is set in the world of television and advertising and, like a crooked mirror, reflects the state of society. It was published in French by L’Aube while his short stories came out in English by Glas..

Selin belongs to that rare Chekhovian type of writer who tells a story not straightforwardly but through a series of carefully chosen vivid details. Perhaps Selin has even more in common with Gogol – he demonstrates the same kind of healthy humor and rich imagination. Many of his stories resemble video-clips in form and are just as visual, sparkling with humor, aphoristic comparisons, apt observations, and ready wit.

### **Alexei Vinokurov**

Born in 1969 in Perm Vinokurov graduated from the Teacher-training Institute in Moscow, majoring in Philology, and worked as a script writer for television where he was called “a fun-producing factory”. His early publications date back to the late 1990s: the novel *About Poor Dwarf, Where We Are Not*; the children’s books: *The Country of Three Lands*, *Merlin’s Successor*; and *Denunciation of the Black Dog*. Later his sparkling humor became infested with elements of horror while ordinary events revealed their metaphysical underside. Mystical elements are never

straightforward in Vinokurov's work. He resorts to Hoffmanesque double-worldliness when one and the same event is simultaneously presented in fantastic terms as well as appearing as perfectly realistic. His later novels look at the world as a metaphor and have been influenced by ancient Chinese culture which he has been studying in depth for many years.

Distinctions: First prize in the drama competition "Honor, Duty, Dignity" for the play "The Guardian". Finalists in the competition "Russian Story" for the film script "The Four". The novel *Yankee in Russia* was nominated for the National Bestseller Prize. Winner of the national competition "Best Book of 2012" for the children's book *Denunciation of the Black Dog*.

### **Alexei Vinokurov, *The Guardian Angel*, a novel**

The author looks at the metaphysical undercurrent of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict which he sees as a final stage in the eternal fight between the forces of Darkness and Light. Apart from real people, some of them well-known public figures, the characters include the so-called guardian angels: low-ranking angels living among people in human guises, whose mission is to prevent violations of the ages-old agreement between Heaven and Hell to keep a balance between good and evil.

During a bombardment at the South-East of Ukraine a mental clinic is destroyed and only two patients survive: ex-priest Father Mikhail, who calls himself Archangel Michael, and simple-witted Katerina. Allegedly they have been sent to Earth to judge people at the Last Judgment and arrange the Armageddon. Just then the journalist Yuri Subbota begins to see nightly dreams about Father Mikhail's activities and writes about his dreams in the Facebook. Shortly afterwards some people from Legion Publishers approach him with an offer to write down his dreams which they would publish as a book and make it an international bestseller. Subbota suspects a trap but for want of other means of subsistence he takes the offer.

Captain Goloschok of the Ukrainian reconnaissance force falls in love with Katerina and takes the hapless saviors out of the war-ravaged zone. In Moscow Father Mikhail is supposed to meet none other than Lucifer himself, or a person he believes to be him.

At some point Subbota realizes that he had become involved with the forces of Evil. There are obvious benefits in being on the side of Evil: big money, unlimited possibilities, protection from all sorts of trouble. Subbota overcomes the temptation and tries to escape. Now everything depends on whether Father Mikhail meets the supposed Lucifer the Armageddon will be averted.

### **Alexei Vinokurov, *People of the Black Dragon*, a novel**

Black Dragon is the Chinese name of the River Amur marking the border between Russia and China. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Russian side of the border was settled by Russians, Chinese and Jews. Their explosive coexistence created conditions for most amazing and extraordinary events which would hardly be possible anywhere else on earth. Russians came to these parts in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century following the conquest of the Cossacks led by Vassily Poyarkov.

After the 1917 revolution some Chinese came here and founded their first settlement. Ten years later the Soviet government compelled the Jews to settle the vacant lands along the Amur. And finally the local Siberian women rose against the cruelty of their men and founded their own village nearby. They did all the men's work themselves and no men were allowed in the village except on special occasions intended for mating.

Among the remarkable settlers of the Amur banks there was the old Cabbalist Solomon who made the first Golem of the Black Dragon, the kidnapped Chinese girl who turned into a water sprite, Chinese demons of retribution who punished cruel killers, clashes with river pirates, a mysterious Dao magician who taught Chinese martial arts, an extraordinary healer who strived to overcome death. There were passionate love affairs and merciless fights, tragic deaths and joyful festivals, folk wisdom and colorful legends.

## **Ivan Zorin**

Born in 1959 in Moscow and trained as a nuclear physicist, Zorin has some 20 books to his name and about 400 short stories published in magazines. His recent novels include *The Second Coming*, *The House*, *Romance in Social Networks*, *The Clown's Avatar*, *Why Live if you Die Tomorrow*, *The Eternity of the Moment*.

Winner of the Voloshin Prize and the "Golden Knight" Prize. Critics called Zorin a Russian Pavic and a Russian Suskind. "Zorin works in different styles as if each new work has been written by a different person. And yet Zorin is recognizable in each of them because he is inimitable."

### **Ivan Zorin, *The Second Coming*, a novel**

This is a story of a middle-aged man's revolt against traditional values drummed into our minds from school. As part of a mysterious sociological experiment he is made to go to a secondary school again. He perceives familiar knowledge from the vintage point of his age and reviews his whole life. Finally he undergoes a transformation which is both tragic and wonderful.

### **Ivan Zorin, *The House*, a novel**

The story of the four generations of an overcrowded residential building, spotlighting individual lives, tragic and extraordinary, tied into a single knot by Russian history. This is a social portrait presented as an allegory and a mystery with elements of an anti-utopia.

### **Ivan Zorin, *Why Live if You Die Tomorrow*, a novel**

Psychoanalyst Vladislav and his pupil Anton, on the latter's initiative, start a most extraordinary game: to hunt out and kill each other unexpectedly. The deadly game introduces excitement into their colorless lives. Eventually their enmity is transformed into a friendship which grows into love and then downright passion. Their love is regarded as a perversion and a rebellion and rebels should be punished. Vladislav is sacked from his well-paid job while Anton is subjected to derision and humiliation. The two lovers dream to go to Indochina which they believe to be a promised land for people like themselves. One night Anton is attacked by some drunken youngsters and ends up in a hospital which he leaves in a wheelchair. Harassed and impoverished Vladislav still promises Anton to take him to Indochina. But instead, in a fit of hopeless desperation he shoots his partner in the head and immediately shoots himself.

### **Ivan Zorin, *Romance in Social Networks*, a novel**

#### **Short-listed for the "National Bestseller" Prize.**

The novel features some ordinary people immersed in social networks, who transform themselves into what they really want to be while their virtual, real, and invented lives intersect all the time. The chapters bear the names of famous Russian classics, such as "Dead Souls", "Three Sisters", "Poor People", "Crime and Punishment", etc. This is to underline the idea that today's people are pretty much the same as the well-known characters from classical Russian literature. Social networks give them a chance to be different, to try a number of masks, and thus to cope with their complexes. Some look for adventure and excitement in the internet, others for love and consolation. Occasionally they find understanding and sympathy, which give them the courage to change their real life. But in most cases they leave social networks disappointed and deflated.

### **Ivan Zorin, *The Eternity of the Moment*, a Novel by 200 Authors.**

The novel is a mystification and a literary labyrinth in the manner of the "Thousand and One Night". All the 200 authors are involved in their stories and tall tales on a par with their characters. Here reality and fantasy are mixed and action freely travels in space and time.