Beijing International Book Fair 2020

Fiction Front List

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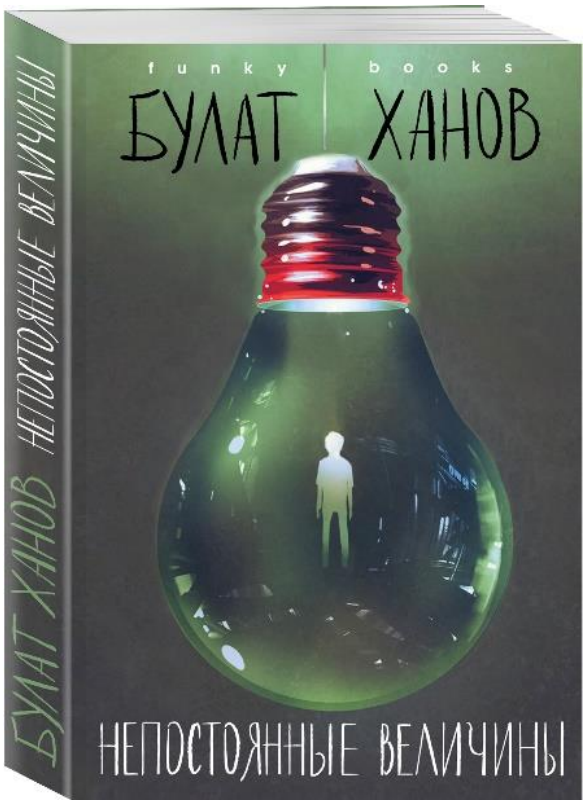
Bulat Khanov

Variable Values

The National Bestseller Award 2020 short list

The Lyceum Literary Award for young authors



Bulat Khanov's *Variable Values* (*Nepostoyannye velichiny*) was serialized in a literary magazine in 2017 and appeared in book form in 2019. As the title suggests, this is a multifaceted novel with a strong ethical and philosophical current. The term "variable values" is borrowed from mathematics: the protagonist is a schoolteacher.

To be more precise, he is a young scholar who, having suffered a crisis, decides to leave Moscow and become a schoolteacher in Kazan. With humour, a great deal of realism and occasional flights of fancy, Khanov depicts two worlds meeting: a young philologist from Moscow vs. the teachers, children and teenagers from a provincial town (depicted with a keen eye and without arrogance). There's something from *Up the Down Staircase* here, but also something from Shklovsky's *Zoo*: this novel, too, encompasses a series of letters allegedly "not about love" that the protagonist addresses to a woman who left him.

The novel is autobiographical enough to be authentic (the author has indeed worked as a teacher, and he lives in Kazan) – and yet original and broad enough to be a full-fledged novel and not a veiled autobiography.

384 pages, 2019

Praise:

That's cool. In every sense of the word. The plot – a story of a young school teacher arriving to his first job at a faraway Russian town to test himself as a teacher and falling into the hell of the place and profession – is cool as well as the language. That's fresh. That's gripping. That's sharp in the meaning of plot and representation. That's topical and set to success. The characters are all alive, eye-catching and cinematic. That's going to be read, shot and discussed.

Maria Golovanivskaya, writer

It is a sincere and deep search – not a cheap mockery over "cast-off" expressed by wealthy boys in red sneakers, who occupied one of the previous seasons of The National Bestseller. The protagonist's mental work brings about images of Dostoevsky's Adolescent, Goethe's Young Werther and Chekhov's student.

Olga Pogodina-Kuzmina, writer

Problems of school are eternal, but every new generation has to discuss them anew. Bulat Khanov does it in his own way.

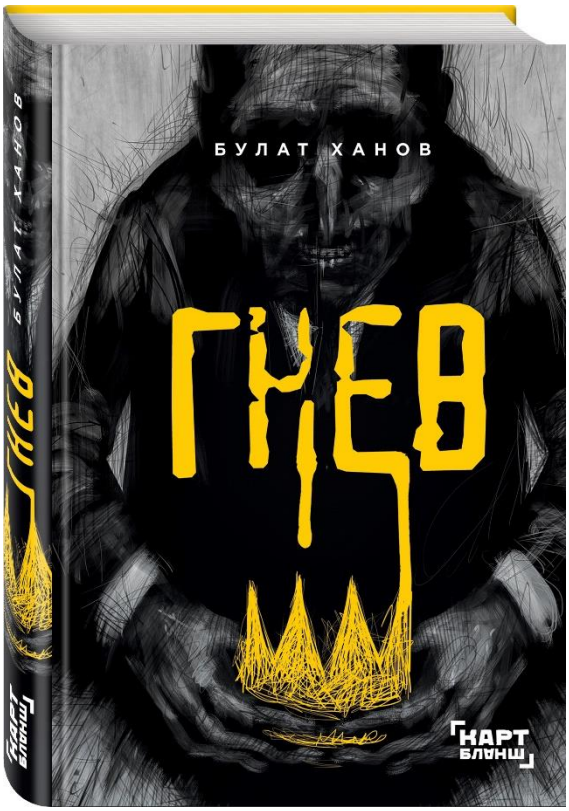
Mikhail Vizel, literary critic

Bulat Khanov

ANGER

The novel is speaking on behalf of a mature man who thought he was smarter than his wife, colleagues and his destiny. The aging intellectual Gleb Veretinsky reminds us of Humbert from Lolita: he is pedantically elegant, intelligent and educated, but he is a complete failure in his personal life. He lost all his feelings to his wife, and the young girls, though they like him, are all dead from the neck up. Art can be a remedy. Otherwise everything you loved will turn to anger. And in the end, the main character feels nothing but anger, which, as psychologists say, denote your powerlessness. The novel is written with a ruthless and acute pen, representing the most honest mirror young authors place to reflect the times we live in.

288 pages, 2019



Bulat Khanov is a very young author (born in Kazan in 1991), and yet already the laureate of several awards, most prominently the Lyceum Literary Prize (*Litsei*) and an award named after a novel by Aksenov, the Ticket to the Stars (*Zvyozdny bilet*). In 2020 Khanov is nominated and already short-listed for The National Bestseller Literary Award (*Natsionalny Bestleller)*. Khanov holds a PhD in literary studies; his thesis deals with the conceptualization of Soviet discourse in contemporary Russian prose.

Alexey Polyarinov

Center of Gravity

The National Bestseller Literary Award 2019 longlist

People's Choice Prize of The New Literature Award 2019 (NOS)

This novel by Aleksei Polyarinov resembles a complex system of lakes. It is a story of adulthood, political satire, dystopia, a lace of fairy-tales... But his characters - a young journalist, a hacker and an artist - live in Moscow and resist the brave new world as they can, protecting their center of gravity - themselves, their families and their homeland.

Center of Gravity is a meta-novel. It starts as a *Bildungsroman* about two boys trying to find a lost lake in a provincial Russian landscape in the 1990s. The novel then splits into three separate narratives. The first narrator is a mathematician working for an IT-company. While developing a face-recognition algorithm, he faces a moral dilemma as he realizes his work is being used for some ambiguous and unclear purposes. The second narrator is an anonymous performance artist who uses her art as a political manifesto against the authoritarian regime in Russia. The third narrator is journalist in a near-future Russia, trying to save a left-wing magazine he and his friends work for. The three narratives are strongly interconnected. They echo and comment on each other, creating a meta-narrative which explores the work of a writer at large.

480 pages, hard cover, 2018

Alexey Polyarinov is a writer, translator, and a literary critic. He is best known for his recent translation of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* into Russian. His debut novel *Center of Gravity* was released in summer of 2018, and received positive reviews from the critics. **The novel was nominated for The National Bestseller Prize in 2019**. Polyarinov also published Almost *Two Kilograms of Words*, a book of literary criticism, in 2019. *Almost Two Kilograms of Words* inquires into post- and meta-modern literature, and American and British authors such as Pynchon, Delillo, Marxon, Barnes, Ishiguro etc.

Selected praise for the Center of Gravity:

“….The author rhymes lives of different people, rising a question: what is a family – unity of souls or readiness to help or eternal test?...

…Somebody, however, might be bored by information background, which includes total spying by Defense Ministry and Intelligence Office, president’s clones winking from around the corner. One of the characters participated in war in Syria, the other is a lesbian artist. There is even a wall being built along the western border of the country!....

…..But I can’t stop telling that the novel is brilliant! I am serious. Even if it is not perfect and sometimes naпve.”

Elena Vasilyeva, literary critic

«That was really cool to address contemporary Russian fiction and find Alexey Polyarinov! Fresh, wonderful, and not frivolous at all.”

20 october 2019 г., 21:33 Lynette
https://www.livelib.ru/book/1002834497-tsentr-tyazhesti-aleksej-polyarinov/~2

“A new book in my baggage to add to those hardly describable in a couple of words. I‘ve been writing this review much longer than I had been reading the book itself. It is a meta-novel, Bildungsroman, cyber punk, political satire , dystopia, interlaced reality and fairytales, a story about the role of art in our life, about trauma and self-acceptance.”

EvaMalfoy
https://www.livelib.ru/book/1002834497-tsentr-tyazhesti-aleksej-polyarinov/~2

“Center of Gravity” is the case … when climbing the ladder of the novel, you suddenly discover all the elements of the puzzle! … This is a masterfully woven patchwork, where I managed to find the fibers keeping it unite.”

ReadGoodBooks написал
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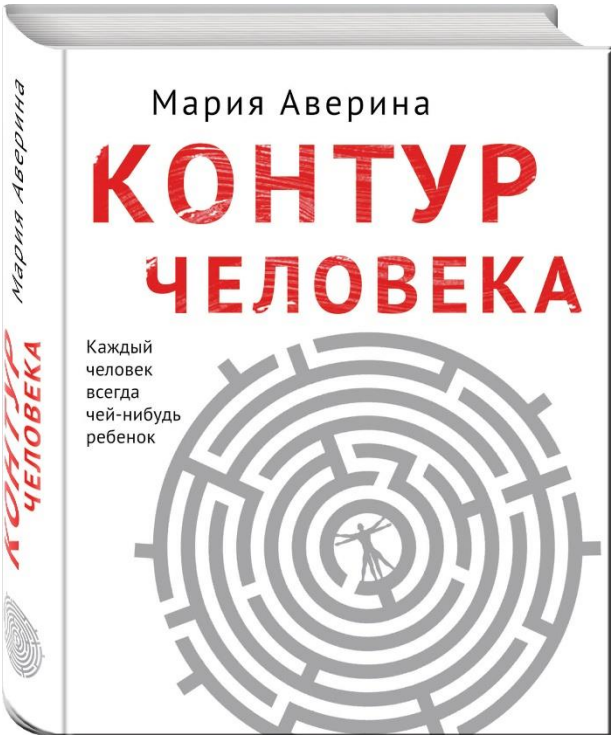
Maria Averina

Human Contours

World From Under the Table

Longlisted for National Bestseller Award 2020



Russia in the 1990s, as seen by a little girl.
Maria Averina's book is about the 1990s, when the main character Masha was a little girl. It was a time when all things that had been stable for decades changed in an instant, and you could no longer find any peace and quiet. The reader will appreciate the living story seen through the eyes of the child as if from under the table. From the child's point of view we can see the adult impression of everything that is taking place in the big world, and the external big world is, after all, Russia at the end of the 20th century: a hard time of change..

The characters of the novel are mostly women, who have found themselves in the path of history. They are at once ordinary and extraordinary, and radiate lots of light and warmth. When you read about them – how they raised their children, how they queued in stores, lived on food aid, watched TV film series, how they survived, staunchly and calmly and accepting their fate – you begin to appreciate what it took to survive in those difficult times.

412 pages, 2019, hard cover

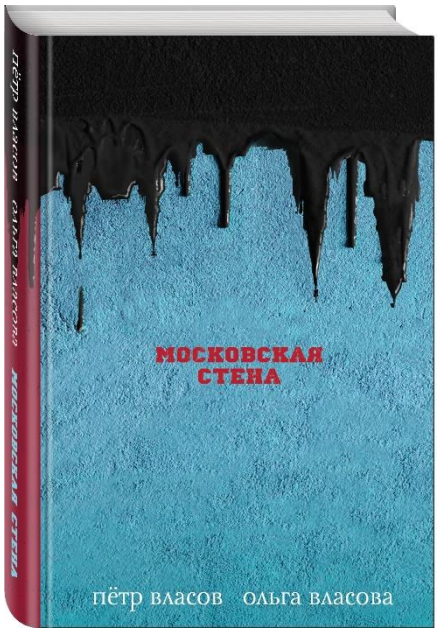
Maria Averina - poet and novelist, born in 1985 in Moscow. Alumnus of the Moscow State Pedagogical University, the Moscow Institute of Open Education, and the Moscow City Pedagogical University. She is a school teacher.

Peter Vlasov, Olga Vlasova

Moscow Wall

The Yasnaya Polyana Award 2020 – long list

The action takes place in 2020, in a world that has survived a severe crisis, which has been affected by a new type of Ebola virus. Almost all major states - the USA, Russia, China - plunged into chaos. The European Union was able to avoid such a fate, but here the ultra-right came to power and managed to use the fears of the population concerning the possible chaos and uncontrolled streams of millions of migrants from the deadly pandemic Africa and Asia.



What happens if another global crisis destroys the world we are used to? One of the options is described in *Moscow Wall*. Russia, the United States and China superpowers have fallen. In united Europe, the ultra-right have come to power, trying to manage the flow of millions of migrants and ensure oil and gas supplies from Russia, which has plunged into chaos.

This is the new Middle Ages. It is no wonder that Moscow, which has become a base for the European army, is surrounded by a 30-meter wall, and the forests near Moscow are full of partisans. The protagonist, an Englishman with Russian roots, goes to Russia “on a business trip”, but he will have to solve much more difficult tasks than he had presumed. To understand the Russians and to find out why the entire world has fallen is beyond his official mission.

448 pages, hardcover, 2019

Peter Vlassov is a Russian journalist and writer.
Graduated from Moscow State University with a degree in international journalism. He worked at the ITAR-TASS news agency in London. Peter Vlassov is a founder and first editor-in-chief of the RBC business magazine and the RBC daily business newspaper (2006–2009). He also worked as deputy chief editor for gazeta.ru, as vice-rector at the Moscow State Institute of Culture. Since November 2019, the chief editor of the newspaper "Culture".

Sukhbat Aflatuni

Paradise on Earth

The Big Book Literary Award 2019 short list

Two ordinary women live next door in a typical five-storey block. Plyusha (Paulina) is an unremarkable, undistinguished, plump and plain museum worker; her mother dies; her would-be-husband husband abandons her. Natalie is an ex textile maker, ex-businesswoman, ex-sportswoman, active and very alive... Her unloved husband dies, their son goes to study in Poland.

What remains for these two women? Only friendship. But friendship turns out to be a complicated thing: they are way too different. Natalie tries to "shake" and dispel Plusha all the time, to make her feel the taste of life, which leads to their breakup in the end...

And the place of residence far from being idyll: the windows of the block overlook the field where the Poles were executed in the late thirties.

The main events of narration unfold - though not directly - around this field. Plusha is half Polish; Natalie had a Polish husband. For some reason, men in the block either die or run away.

The field is about to become a construction site, but the construction, barely having started, stops. Catholic and Orthodox parishes are fighting for the field. Among those executed by shooting there believed to be an Orthodox priest Thomas Golembovsky, a Polish man who had adopted Orthodoxy and who is about to be canonized.

Plusha, working in the city museum of repressions, is engaged in his manuscripts. These manuscripts, especially "The Children's Gospel" (where all the roles are played by children) written by Father Thomas at the beginning of the thirties, constitute the second "layer" of the novel. There are two more "layers". One - the dates of a girl and the Death: Plusha's graduate thesis was devoted to a painting "A Girl and the Death", and it seems to enter her mind so deeply, it continued to live there, branching out. The other "layer" - the story of the fall and exile from heaven (which gave the title to the novel): the play about Adam and Eve is staged by the youth theater at the Polish cultural center, and as well as the story with "A Girl and the Death", the plot of the play begins to live its own life…

In the end, Plyusha founds herself alone. Natalie dies; the Director of the museum is seeking permission to start excavations on the field, but all of a sudden he strangely disappears. But life suddenly turns its bright side to Plusha: she gets permission to adopt a girl from an orphanage, and excavations begin on the field…

Praise:

This is a writer who will surprise us yet in a good way. He is a great at writing Russian novels.

Eugene Vodolazkin, an author of international bestsellers "Laurus", "The Aviator"

Aristocratic prose of such splendor, nobility has long been awaited.

Valentin Kurbatov, literary critic

The creative tool of Sukhbat Aflatuni - minimum of means and accuracy.

The accuracy of the image, the accuracy of the wording, the detail, which is accurate and appropriate in the right phrase and thus unforgettable in its sharpness.

Alexander Etoev, literary critic

Aflatuni's prose has a strong southern gaze that examines the smallest details in the bright, still light of the day.

Maria Galina, writer, critic

For me, Sukhbat Aflatuni has become one of the most important reading discoveries of recent times.

Vladislav Tolstov, literary critic

Sukhbat Aflatuni (pen name of Eugene Abdullaev) is a poet, prose writer and translator. Born in 1971 in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), he spent his childhood in Namangan. In 1993 he graduated from the Philosophy Department of Tashkent State University.

The novel "Clay letters, floating apples" by Sukhbat Aflatuni was staged in 2008 by the Tashkent theatre "Ilkhom".

He is the author of three poetry collections and five novels.

Laureate of the " Oktyabr" magazine literary prize (2004, 2006, 2015), "Russian Award" (2005), "Triumph" incentive award (2006).

He is the finalist of The Russian Booker Award and Yasnaya Polyana Prize (2016).

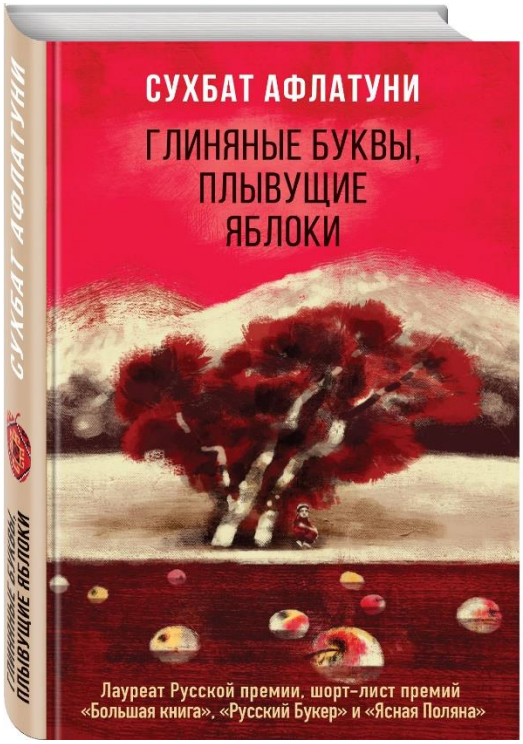
He was a member of the jury of "The Russian Booker", "The Russian Prize", etc. Sukhbat Aflatuni lives in Tashkent, works as editor-in-chief of the journal "East Above".

Sukhbat Aflatuni

Letters on Clay Tablet

Novelle

The worlds of the Uzbek author Sukhbat Aflatuni are fantastically curious as mirage in the sands of a desert. They cunningly imitate reality, but as soon as the reader believes and is ready to dive deep into an outlined genre, the author chases the mirage away, and the reader sees that stereotypes are not working here. The novelle of “Letters on Clay Tablet” prove this.



A new Teacher comes to a far away village, after his predecessor hanged himself, to teach children ancient mysterious alphabet which can help to return water to the village. People in the village are tormented by thirst, which greedy Leader hid in an underground reservoir.

On the one hand - modernity: cisterns with water, symbols of civilization remained from the Soviet times (a metal net bed in a house yard, TVs which do not work because there is no electricity), on the other - ancient construction as the centre of the rural world and untouched nature.

Water replaces money in this godforsaken corner, and allegedly serves a moral measure. No water - and there is less and less honor, kindness, conscience. "Evil conquers the good, because evil is stronger, smarter, more beautiful than the good", says Teacher. - But a miracle happens, and evil is at a loss". And a miracle comes - letters scattered on the walls of the old bathhouse are formed into a prayer, and grace descends on the dehydrated, dried up village - streams of water, which from now on will forever change the life of the land for the better.

In the novella "Penuel" the patriarch, the head of the once large family Ykov - is, of course, the biblical Jacob. On the one hand, he survived the whole controversial and bloody 20th century and died at the age of a hundred and six. On the other hand, his ordeals and life aspirations are not unique, everything is repeated and has analogies up to the Old Testament history, and the main thing for man has always been procreation.

In " Year of Ramb" the story of "new times" turns into a parable that everyone will be rewarded for his sins.

Praise:

Let’s save effort expecting transparent plot from Aflatuni. And this is it. The plot is evident, but just at first glimpse.

Ekaterina Tarasova, “Independent Newspaper – ExLibris”

Deliberately stylized language of “Letters on Clay Tablet” leaves some scratching aftertaste – like the one left by sweet baklava.

Kirill Ankudinov, “Vzglyad.ru”

His “Asian pieces” are in some way an ideal prose, if it would exist.

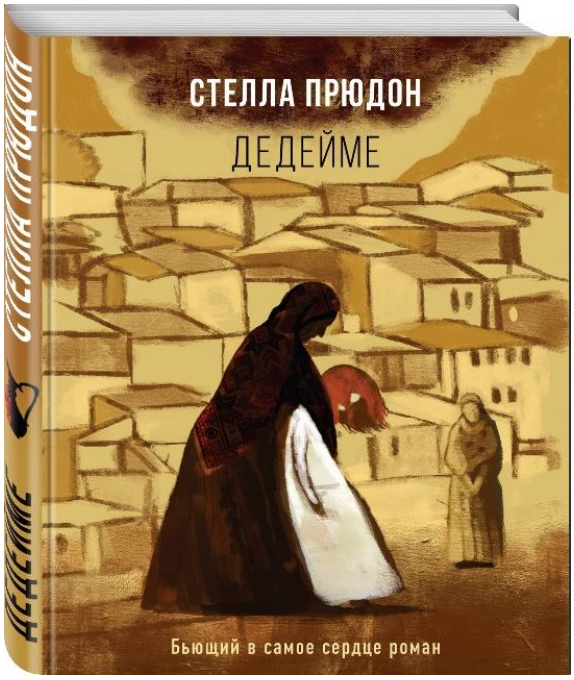
Oleg Kudrin, writer

Stella Prudhon

Dedeime

(means “mother” in the language of Mountain Jews)

Rights sold: Italy



Stella creates a unique image of the world of Mountain Jews of the Russian Caucasus, demonstrating their ancient and severe family traditions.
The center of the story is a large family of Savievs - mountain Jews, whose worldview hardly coincides with the current ideas about the status of women.
Time: early 1990-s. Location: Pyatigorsk and Makhachkala (Russia, Caucasus).
Nathan and Hannah gave birth to seven children, but Nathan fell out of love with his wife and frequently cheated her. However, as it is often the case with large Caucasian families, the couple continued to live together. Hannah had to accept her husband’s double life, but she let herself go completely. To feel young again, Hannah took the firstborn daughter from her son, Dovid, and was raising the girl herself as her own daughter. It appears that this is common practice in mountain families, no one can oppose the mother, who is the first after God.
The girl was named Shekker after her grandmother (again, it is a great honor to bear the grandmother's name). Hannah and Nathan were very rich, but stingy: money and jewels were given only to sons and grandchildren, and women were mistreated. Although Shekker was formally the youngest and most beloved in Hannah's family, she constantly missed her biological mother Zina (Dovid's wife). The intrigue is that Shekker always wants to go to his real mother and father, but customs and norms do not allow the teenage girl to do it.

Young Shekker's life is "programmed" for years to come - a heavy scenario does not imply the reunion with her parents, which she dreams of. By the way, all the female characters of "Dedeime" are endowed with a heavy fate. The heart of a detailed, authentic household description comprises stories about the agonizing growth, collision with traditions and attempts to be closer to the most important person on earth - the mother. The novel doesn’t seems to move in time, and the crumpled ending only reinforces the sense of futility: local customs are unchanged from one century to the next, and the voices of women captured by the author seem to sink in the roar of this sunny, noisy land.

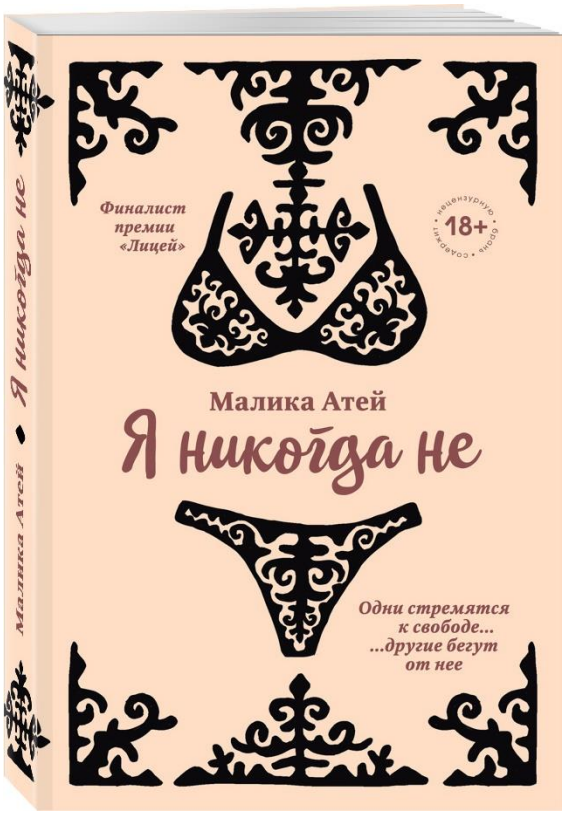
160 pages, 2019, Hardcover

Stella Prudhon was born in Pyatigorsk (Russia, Caucasus region). In 1997 she graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (International Relations Department), in 2005 she got PhD on Philosophy at Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf, Germany.
As a journalist who wrote for and Russian and German media. Then she took Writing Courses at the Literary Institute named after V.I. Lomonosov and was among the best graduates of creative writing school “LitBand” in Moscow.

Malika Atey

Never Have I Ever

The Lyceum Literary Award for Young Authors 2019 – short list



Modern human believes that there is nothing in common between his fate and the fate of his medieval predecessors, that a bank account and a washing machine make us gods, and we are no longer to comply with cruel laws of old times.
We do not have to hurry up with our lives – we are not going to die of plague, we can learn here and there and won't be a professional in anything - the civilized world won't let you down.
In a patriarchal town, where a bride has to be a virgin, but it is hard to build a long term relationships, Kora opens a lingerie studio. She believes that she is free to speak what she wants, have sex with whomever she wants and take revenge on those whom she doesn't love. Let's see how much time it takes for the disapproving society to destroy her little free world.
This is a book about gender inequality, about parents and children relations, friends, love and dreams.
This is also a reaction to the most topical and sharp issues of modern society from gas-lighting to abuse, which were forbidden to mentioning some years ago, but are coming to surface now. However, women's rights are not the only topic raised by Malika Atey. "Never Have I Ever" is a story of hypocrisy, decency, corruption and fairness. Kora, the protagonist, can make a half naked photo shooting, but she is not fine with people's meanness, she knows the price of success: doing something exceptionally well you may be far from being a success.
Malika Atey: "Robert Frost said: "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader." There is a huge gap between a reader taken by the author to the party and offered a Martini and a table dance, and a reader reading a party report. When I was writing a scene of Kora being driven to the mountains and beaten there, I listened Tom Jones's "Delilah" on repeat: "She stood there laughing. I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more." With each repeat of this beautiful and dreadful waltz I imagined this mountain road of horror in more and more details and was afraid myself."

320 pages, 2020

"Never Have I Ever" was shortlisted for The Lyceum Award (a prestigious Russian literary prize for young authors) in 2019 and was the only one non-Russian novel among 900 books. Malika Atey, a Kazakhstan author wrote a real-time story about young people of Kazakhstan in the style of Francoise Sagan and J.D. Salinger.