



Moscow to the End of the Line

Venedikt Erofeev , H.W. Tjalsma (Translator) , Ali R?za D?r?k (Translator) , Ali R?za Dink (Translator)

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In this classic of Russian humor and social commentary, a fired cable fitter goes on a binge and hops a train to Petushki (where his "most beloved of trollops" awaits). On the way he bestows upon angels, fellow passengers, and the world at large a magnificent monologue on alcohol, politics, society, alcohol, philosophy, the pains of love, and, of course, alcohol.

Moscow to the End of the Line Details

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From Reader Review Moscow to the End of the Line for online ebook

lisa_emily says

Funny & sad at the same time-people drink because life becomes too unbearable. Strangely it is the drink that keeps the narrator going. Caution: leave the drinking to professionals, especially if the drink calls for shoe polish.

else fine says

Imagine a drunken Dante on an epic railway journey to nowhere, pondering the merits of various cocktails made from furniture polishes and solvents, debating the meaning of life and the worth of his soul, hilarious and tragic by turns. That'll give you a rough idea of what it's like to fall into this book. A delight every time I reread it.

Edward says

From the Author

--Moscow to the End of the Line

El says

Oh, crap, another Russian writer without a beard! It always makes me so sad. Like seeing a squirrel without a tail. It seems unnatural, unfair. Freakish.

I'm impressed by his attempt at a Clark Gable 'stache though.

So in the little bit of research I did on this book I found that it's considered a "postmodernist prose poem" which I didn't necessarily pick up on while I was reading it. (The "poem" bit, I mean - the "postmodernist" part was quite evident.) Now I'm not sure what to think. I feel like I should re-read it in light of the whole "prose poem" thing, but no - Proust is waiting for me patiently at the bedside table and there's that whole book I'm reading for my real-life Pretentious Bookclub, so there's just no time for a re-read of this. So let it be known that it's a "prose poem". Maybe that will help you going into your own reading of it and then you won't have your world turned upside down like mine was.

Even though Erofeev didn't sport the Russian-classic (ie, *beard*), he did write about an alcoholic, so he gets to keep his Russian literary citizenship for that at least. Supposedly pseudo-autobiographical it follows the story of Venichka who has just lost his job as a cable fitter for charting how much alcohol he and his

coworkers drank. The majority of the story takes place on a train from Moscow to Petushki and involves the various discussions that take place between Venichka and his other travelers. Alcohol is consumed. Duh.

Petushki is where Venya's lover and child await him, it is his "salvation and joy"; unlike Moscow which obviously is meant to be all about restriction, destruction, and everything else bad about Russia in 1968 when Erofeev wrote the story. One thing I love about the Russians is their veiled references to their oppressive society - being a postmodern work it probably goes without saying that I missed more than I should have because I suck at reading postmodern works sometimes. I should be in therapy for this problem. But I am trying, so shove it.

I also want to give a shout-out to the fantastic cover art that was chosen, *Self Portrait with Demons* (James Ensor). Perfect fit.

S. says

If an epic can be brief then this is one – Erofeev's drunken journey to the end of the Moscow train line, stuffed with thoughts and ponderings true, tragic and hilarious. The first thing that strikes the reader is the overriding compulsion to make sense of the world – to catalog, categorize and assign values to things. It starts in on page one and pretty much follows on every page:

“One of my acquaintances says that Coriander vodka has an antihuman effect on a person; that is, it strengthens all the physical members but weakens the soul. With me it happened the other way around for some reason; that is, my soul was strengthened in the highest degree while my members were weakened. But I agree that this too is antihuman. Therefore, at the same time, I added two mugs of Zhiguli beer and an Albe de dessert port straight from the bottle.”

If the narrator could have given up drinking, he would have made a great mathematician or IT guy or infographic designer because he couldn't get enough of calculating and instructing and laying out (cocktail) recipes. For instance, he wants to know what is worse, paralysis or nausea? Nervous exhaustion or mortal sorrow? It doesn't surprise you that he is fired from his job for making graphs that chart the drinking habits of his coworkers relative to their productivity. But against this scientific instinct he also seeks to take the wrong path, to get life wrong, to throw his head back “like a piano player” and drink:

“What sort of hallway was it? I haven't the slight idea even now, and it ought to be that way. Everything should. Everything should take place slowly and incorrectly so that man doesn't get a chance to start feeling proud, so that man is sad and perplexed.”

The book is of course also a social commentary on Soviet Russia, and starts with the narrator talking about how he couldn't seem to find the Kremlin even if he tried, and ends with him finally in the Kremlin and not liking what he finds there.

Highly recommended.

SheaN says

Stumbled on this one by accident at the library. Don't start it without a bottle of hard alcohol nearby. This book is a hallucination.

Lori says

A fun and funny intoxicated ramble around Moscow. The man wrecked by affect disorders not fun.

I hoped the angels might help him, but they embarrassed and silent.

Valentina Chugunova says

I've read this book 'bout 1 000 times. It's ultimate answer to your pain, depress and even happiness.

Cosimo says

E giù a bere

La leggenda di Venedikt Erofeev ci consegna un antieroe negativo, un nomade metafisico, un profeta illegittimo nell'oscura cultura sovietica, come ben testimoniano le voci raccolte dall'ottimo e vitale Paolo Nori. Mosca-Petuskì è il suo trattato sul fatalismo necessario, dallo stile enfatico e burlesco; si tratta di un libro basato sulla convinzione che “tutti gli uomini di valore in Russia bevono come spugne”, perché in un mondo di menzogne solo l'alcol non mente. Si diffuse clandestinamente come *samizdat*, diventando un classico in breve tempo. Poema dello *zapoj*, l'ubriacatura di lungo corso, ammirato da Eduard Limonov, è un testo dionisiaco e fantastico, che mescola in una ricetta surreale quanto realista compassione e derisione, oralità e poesia, celeste e infernale. Giocando tanto con Gogol che con Bulgakov, il delirante viaggio di un vagabondo muove dalla città alla periferia alla ricerca di una chimerica ragazza, tra metafore del mal di vivere e viscerali rivelazioni linguistiche, inserendo il racconto dentro un'incompiuta parodia del mondo e moltiplicandone le forme in modo comico e catastrofico. Erofeev riesce a creare con la sua visione un'intimità universale, mentre un riso cannibalesco travolge sia la letteratura che la rivoluzione, dando un senso doloroso e grottesco alla nostra transitoria interpretazione del vivere.

“Perché la vita umana, non è forse un breve ciclone dell'anima? E' anche un'eclissi dell'anima. E' come se tutti noi fossimo ubriachi, solo ognuno per conto suo, uno ha bevuto di più, l'altro di meno”.

Pavel says

"And since then I have not regained consciousness, and I never will"

Venichka Erofeev never regained his full literary power after he finished this small book. Everything he had in his delicate beautiful sensitive soul, he expressed in this "poem", although it's written as a prose. His friends saw only allegiance in his drunkenness, he never cherished alcohol itself, but yet he created the greatest hymn to drinking as a way of life.

"Moscow to the End of the Line" is a very funny book, there's a lot of laugh in there. But Erofeev laughs on the subjects that are laughable already, and somehow turns them into tragedy. He never distances himself from the subjects he laughs on and as a result readers always end up sympathizing this poor drunk with his crazy cocktails... This one is my favorite, called "The Spirit of Geneva":

White Lilac 50g.

Athlete's Foot Remedy 50g.

Zhiguli Beer 200g.

Alcohol Vanish 150g.

Great stuff!

Jana says

He's a drunken fucker with alcohol veins instead of blood. I like one of his disturbing recipes: medicine for a toothache. Find wild strawberries (whole plant with berries and roots) and one mole. Take the root of that strawberry and press it against the rotten tooth while you suffocate the mole with your other two fingers. This recipe goes in the same category as the joke I heard when I was little: what is the difference between the elephant's ears and a yoghurt? Yoghurt can be liquid. It's been twenty years and my mind is still wrapped around it.

This book is considered to be crème de la crème of insane communistic Russian literature.

Caty says

One of the most *beautiful* books I've ever read, hands down. Through a haze of alcohol, Soviet repression, and the hypnotic rhythm of a subway journey, Erofeev turns his drunken slapstick into brilliant satire, his own maudlin self pity into the lyrically transcendent.

Jim Elkins says

Example of the Old Russia, Long Gone

A drunken novel about a drunk who ends up being beaten to death. The back cover describes it as a "classic novel of Russian humor and social commentary."

"Russian humor" in this sense seems to mean: wildly associative and perversely dissociative; unpleasantly sarcastic; bitter to a fault, irreproachably, impeccably pessimistic; voluptuously black; giddy in its drunken embrace of hopelessness of all kinds. Any book that opens with this line: "The first edition of Moscow to the End of the Line was sold out quickly, thanks to its being an edition of one copy" and ends with this line

(after the narrator has been beaten to death just for being a vagrant): "And since then I have not regained consciousness, and I never will" is not a book whose author will be likely to miss a joke or an opportunity to show what despondency really is.

"Social commentary" in this sense seems to mean that the government is corrupt and supports itself on crazy lies and misinformation. The people respond by living indolent lives as savage drunks and louts: but at the same time they are stupendously well-educated in the deep riches of Russian culture, and even when they are stuporously drunk they swim naturally in literary and historical anecdotes. People are romantic, funny, and talkative precisely because they know it is pointless to be romantic, funny, and talkative. From Erofeev's point of view someone like Beckett is probably a dried shell. But from the point of view of a reader brought up more on Beckett than Dostoevsky, the glitter and swill of sloshing, effervescent, pointless conversations about hope that people no longer have, romantic yearnings they hardly recognize, and culture that they despair of ever actually living, is all inappropriate. It's like someone dying on the street wearing a stage costume with feathers and baubles: it's maudlin and tiring to insist on frenetic empty celebration when emptiness itself is at hand.

And so despite all the acid wit, all this is old -- old Russian humor and social criticism, which never worked, which might not even have produced much solace, and whose pyrotechnics only became harsher, not more beautiful, after Dostoevsky and Gorky. There's a line about how Western eyes "buy and sell" and are "deeply hidden, secretive, predatory, and frightened," while Russian eyes are "constantly bulging but with no tension of any kind in them." (p. 28) All that has changed now. the book is a dead end, as far gone as Philip Roth's *America* (despite what the "Library of America" still hopes), or the Russia that Erofeev loved and hated.

Jan-Maat says

Maybe the best book about Brezhnev's Russia imaginable. If you are the kind of person who has ever got drunk with friends, stormed a police station and then declared war on Norway then you will find much here that is familiar.

It's a book rich in allusion starting from the title (*Moscow to Petushki*) and structure, which is reminiscent of Radishchev's *Journey from St.Petersburg to Moscow*, whose description of the country landed the author in a certain secure facility at the pleasure of her Imperial Highness Catherine II - it doesn't pay always to be too truthful about the homeland, but also in cocktail recipes (all of which are firmly in the 'do not try at home' category). My father once working with a pair of alcoholics asked them how do you know when you've become an alcoholic and got past the probationary period of merely being a heavy drinker, said the first: when you find yourself straining metal polish. To which the second said: Nah, nah, you know that you're an alcoholic when you drink your metal polish neat (view spoiler). And the cocktail recipes are much of that kind combining eye watering products such as Soviet medicated shampoos, the spiritual states that one finds ones self in after drinking are thoroughly detailed for the readers enlightenment.

It's a drunken, tragic, comic book with some beautiful graphs plotting the daily drinking of a small team of theoretical cable layers who due to the drinking never seem to reach the phase of practical application. These graphs cost the narrator his job. That's the kind of story this is. In other words it is a story about Brezhnev's Russia in which opting out is achieved curtsey of our old friend intoxicating liquor. But in a sense I've started this review from the bottom of the wrong glass. The narrator is on a train to visit his sweetheart, guarded by angels, with a bottle or two of spirits in his case in the event of the angels not being quite up to the job. He once worked laying cables in the vicinity of the Kremlin - a building he tells us repeatedly that he's never

seen. The work is reflective of Breshnev's Russia, they do a day's work in good weather, then rain obliges them to shelter in their rest hut with a bottle of the good stuff. Rain ruins cable, requiring them to relay cable in good weather. Repeat.

Anyway a degree of freedom is achieved through enslavement to the bottle. While journeying towards Petushki, the narrator meets, inevitably, other drinkers, and has a close encounter with the ticket inspector whose awful authority is warded off only through a Sherizhardian story touching upon the conviction and obsessive fascination that the Soviet people the author says have that foreigners are forever engaged in homosexual activity, and the coming of the end times when the femme fatal of the east will remove her final veil - a prospect that even in imagination proves too overwhelming for the unfortunate conductor - again I offer this up as no substitute for responsible professional advice, I personally have stuck to buying a ticket - not that I wish to suggest that Britain train conductors are adverse to good rambling story.

Any way our narrator has a rich cultural conversation with his fellow band of drinkers in which the author discusses, possibly even invents, the concept of vicarious drunkenness - so for example Goethe in Faust can remain a teetotaller, or a modest imbiber because he has sub-contracted his hedonism to his characters - just as in The Glass Bead Game through careful yoga and long meditation one can explore and experience lives one will never live so too writing for Erofeev allows authors vicarious vices. By analogy one notes that but for the lucky circumstance of a market for crime fiction its authors would be dangerous people to live near to. He has for me an unforgettable paragraph on the prim and proper and entirely sober Rimsky-Korsakov coming across Modest Mussorgsky , drunk and asleep in a ditch, prodding him with his walking stick and telling him to get back to work on his immortal opera Khovanshchina, only as soon as Rimsky-Korsakov's back is turned Mussorsky abandons the working desk for the bottle. And that's the kind of book this is. Mussorsky due to excessive drinking died with most of his musical projects unfinished, the orchestration generally done by other far more restrained hands including Rimsky-Korsakov's . And in a way the entire novel is an indictment or perhaps a statement of the way things are - after a hard day one reaches for a glass, in a hard society one reaches for a bottle, and being prodded with an elegant walking stick doesn't really rearrange the fundamental experience of life.

Argos says

Kitab? “ bu trajik sayfalar? ad?yorum” diye ba?lam?? yazar. Bence trajik de?il traji-komik denmeli, hatta mizah yan? daha a??r basan trajik bir otobiyografi denemesi de denilebilir. Yazar kendisini i?inden at?lan bir kablo tesisatç?s? olarak tan?mlayarak anlatmaya ba?l?yor. Alkolik Venichka bir tren yolculu?undad?r. Trende, farkl? insanlarla ve kendisiyle devaml? konu?ur. Siyaset, din, g?nl?k ya?am,felsefe, edebiyat gibi farkl? konularda d?ünceler kafas?nda belirir ve bunlar? ya tart??r veya ö?üt verir. Alkol hakk?ndaki derin bilgisini “kokteyl” tarifleriyle aktar?yor. Roman ilerledikçe kahraman?m?z daha da i?er ve içtikçe daha sürrealist, hayali ve kar??k anlat?mlar ortaya ç?kar. Roman?n siyasi bir ta?lama yeya do?rudan siyasi bir ele?tiri oldu?unu d?üünüyorum, her ne kadar önsözünde dinsel bir ele?tiri oldu?u yaz?yorsa da... Altın?l? y?llarda yaz?lm?? 1970’de bas?lm?? oldu?unu d?üünürsek (Brejnev dönemi) bu kitab? yazmak cesaret ister diye d?üünüyorum.

Kitab?n 27. sayfas?ndaki insan?n kendini nas?l hissetti?i konusundaki gözlemleri ile 90. sayfada bulan?kl?k ile ilgili yazd?klar? muhte?em. Kitab?n sonuna do?ru kendisini en iyi ?ekilde tan?ml?yor uazar “senin fikrini okumak imkans?z”. Öneririm.

Mike says

Recently, I drank beer with a friend whose native language is Arabic. As our bottles clinked, I asked him if there was anything we could say in Arabic that would be appropriate, such as 'cheers', *na zdorovya*, etc. "No", he laughed, "it is *prohibited!*" I then asked if there was an Arabic word for 'hangover.' No, he said. Not even some sort of impolite or forbidden word, I asked, or a word to describe people from other countries who've had too much alcohol, and what they experience when they wake up the next morning? No one who spoke Arabic ever observed such a thing and wanted to describe it? The closest thing, he told me, is a word that simply means 'out of one's mind', which, from the perspective of a native English speaker, isn't very close at all.

Yesterday I thought of this book, and I got to wondering how many words Russian has for 'hangover.' I know of one, *bodoon*, but I get the impression there may be others. On the last page of my used copy of *Moscow to the End of the Line*, or *Moskva-Petushki*, there is written in pencil, under the questions "make a fig?" and "money to buy drinks?", a "recipe" for a drink called "Tear of a Komsomol Girl", a recipe that looks to me like it's potentially fatal. When I asked my Russian teacher about it, she said that people really drank things like this during the Soviet Union. She also said the book is one of her favorites.

I think I can understand why. Along with *A Confederacy of Dunces*, it's one of the few genuinely funny books I've read- and like that book, also very sad. A man, having recently been fired from his job, gets on a train in Moscow, intending to go to Petushki- the end of the line. He meets all sorts of characters on the train, real and imagined, including, inevitably, the devil, who demands that the man answer impossible and scatological riddles.

I don't want to spoil anything, but as the book went along, and the man got closer to his destination, I got a clearer understanding of what Yerofeyev was trying to do- and the sense of tragedy, of a life passing by in a haze, and the large-scale tragedy of Communism, became more apparent. The book is a little like a night of drinking heavily; everything at first seems enjoyable and humorous, then you start to feel depressed and vaguely ill, and realize you shouldn't be urinating off the edge of the roof...and if you've *really* drunk too much, maybe you drift into some awful realm of the spirit like the one depicted in the last 20 or so pages. Maybe there's a word for that in Russian.

I don't know much about Yerofeyev's life, but I get the sense that he lived his book. I watched a small part of a documentary about him, and when he was interviewed he was lying on a couch in his apartment, barely able to move, speaking through a hole in his throat. I don't know how old he was at the time, but the back cover of the book says that he lived only to 55. *Moscow to the End of the Line* and *Walpurgis Night, or The Steps of the Commander* (which I haven't yet read) seem to be the only novels of his translated into English. The back cover mentions two other titles with intriguing names, *Annunciation* and *Notes of a Psychopath*, but I don't know if they've been translated.

Alexandra says

Amazing book :)))) For me it was hilarious and tragic, illuminating and devastating at the same time.

I really enjoyed Erofeev's humor, which was based on paronomasia, or play on words. The grace, with

which he interlaces words into most elegant and unobtrusive humor, was amazing and captivating. It is hard for me to judge, but I think that the novel in general and its humor in particular, might be hard to understand for people who is not closely familiar with everyday life of regular Russian people during late 60th, with policies and views of same period, with Marx' and Lenin's quotes and with Russian literature.

This is a pseudo-autobiographical prose poem about a cable fitter, intellectual and alcoholic – Venichka – who was fired from his job, for the graphs creation of his and his coworkers' productivity against the amount of alcohol they intake.:))))

The whole novel is set during Venichka's travel. While on the train, he drinks and engages in conversations with different people and with himself, discussing the wide variety of subjects from politics to religion, from philosophy to literature, from recipes to make different alcoholic "cocktails"(from eau de toilette, nails polish and other products that contain alcohol) to the meaning of life. As novel progress and as more Venichka drinks, novel becoming more and more surrealistic, hallucinogenic and dark.

Some view this novel as a sarcastic overview of the soviet life during late 60th. Other, consider it to be a cry for help, a cry for changes in the system and in the everyday life. I will not get into discussion on this, because I don't think that this novel can be easily classified.

Olga says

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Rodney says

If dialectical materialism were turned on its head, something like angels would probably fall out. If you got drunk enough to cross Moscow a thousand times without ever seeing the Kremlin, something like freedom would happen, despite the State. If poky old Petushki became Eden, just because you loved and it was there, materialism would be turned right side up again, but with the angels left in. That's Erofeev, whose incredibly Russian cocktail of sadness & joy, shame, spirituality, and sensual skewering of Lenin is Marxism's inadvertent glory & a gorgeous f-you to Kremllins everywhere.

Ellinor says

The book is a tragic-comic account of the narrator's (fictional?) trip from Moscow to Petuschki. The first half of the book is often very funny. The narrator's biggest worry is how to get his next drink - in fact, I don't think I've ever read a book in which anyone ever had that many drinks. And the characters drink everything: they even mix their own cocktails adding for example petrol or nail polish!

The book also talks a lot about the drinking habits of several authors (mainly Russian ones). It also describes what the characters do when they are drunk, for example declare war on Norway and other strange things.

In the second half - when the narrator and his fellow travellers are already very drunk - the characters started to philosophize a bit too much in my opinion (something I also don't like about drunk people in real life). At one point the narrator is so drunk that he doesn't know if it's night or day or if he's going from Moscow to Petuschki or vice versa. This second part spoiled my reading experience a bit. The first part of the book I'd have rated 4 stars but the second part (unfortunately) pulled the rating down to 3 stars.
