

About the author:

SVETLANA SATCHKOVA is a New York City-based writer and journalist. She received her B.A. in Philosophy from NYU and her MFA in Fiction from Brooklyn College, where she was a Truman Capote fellow and won the Himan Brown award 2022. Her job took her all over the world: she reported from Cannes, Venice, London, and Buenos Aires, interviewed Hollywood stars, politicians, and criminals, and wrote investigative features. Her nonfiction has appeared in *The Independent*, *Catapult*, *The Rumpus*, *Meduza*, and elsewhere.



Selected Bibliography

2021 — **Kirill**, *novel*

2020 — **People and Birds**, *novel*

2005 — **Vadim**, *novel*

2000 — **One Giraffe's Life, or a Woman of Childbearing Age**, *novel*

Nominated for the **New Literature Award 2021**

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Eksmo

Novel, 2020

480 pp

Translation rights sold

Dutch Uitgeverij Word In Blik

 English sample
available

People and Birds

Set in contemporary Moscow, this novel — part psychological realist drama, part madcap thriller with a magical twist — shows the fragility of a human being against life in Russia, suffused with violence, stupidity, and casual cruelty. Written by Svetlana Satchkova, who emigrated to the U.S. after a 15-year career in Russian media, it's a story that, despite everything, is going to warm the readers' hearts.

In alternating chapters, the book follows two point-of-view characters, Tanya and Sasha. They are regular people who could easily be your neighbors. Sasha is a small-time businessman who, at 34, finds himself trapped in an unhappy marriage, embroiled in a liason with a Japanese graduate student and on the verge of a professional and financial collapse. Is he a hapless, naive dreamer or is the system rigged so as to not let you succeed unless you participate in corruption? Sasha tries to save his enterprise, but we all know how that is going to end.

Tanya thinks she is a loser. At 26, she's never had a real job; she wants to devote her life to doing something important, but she's too touchy and introverted to even go on interviews. In addition, she believes she's ugly, whereas her twin sister Lisa isn't merely beautiful — she knows what she wants and how to get it. This world, in which even your close relatives are engaged in scheming and money-grabbing, clearly has no place for people like Tanya. Yet, when she meets a man she falls in love with, she hopes he will love her back. A dog she adopts by accident becomes a friend she so desperately needs.

As the narrative unfolds, both Tanya and Sasha — whose storylines converge briefly only to separate again — meet Mitya, an 8-year-old boy. His parents neglect him not because they are horrible people, but because they have better things to do. At night, he strolls the city alone and meets a man on one of his walks, a State Duma deputy and member of the ruling party who turns out to have malicious intentions.

What ensues is a dizzying series of events that coalesces in a satisfying ending, guaranteed to leave the readers breathless.

By turns dark, hilarious, and strange in the best possible way, featuring a colorful cast of characters, this novel is a sharp examination of what it's like to be a person in the world and an indictment of the culture in which indifference to other people's misery is synonymous with thriving. Satchkova gently pushes the readers to ask themselves what it means to reckon with your past and whether it's possible to leave your family history — and also your birth country — behind.

Selected quotes

If we are to speak about literary genealogy, Satchkova is the successor of that Gogolian line where the routine and the grotesque are two communicating vessels; where the familiar flows into the strange, the funny into the scary, and the language, as though against the author's will, turns out to be a conduit to semantic discoveries.

Alexander Stessin

the nationally bestselling author of The New York Rounds

A wonderful fairy tale that doesn't seem like a fairy tale even with the inclusion into the story of a fantastic ubiquitous character — everything's so convincing, vivid, painted meticulously. Descriptions of domestic life, relationships, dialogues — everything's working to construct this wonderful deception. This fairy tale is pretending to be the new realism so effectively that all that happens seems quite realistic almost to the last period.

Alexei Salnikov

the prize-winning author of The Petrovs In and Around the Flu

The novel "People and Birds" by Svetlana Satchkova is completely unconventional and at the same time traditional for modern literature. Its protagonists are our next door neighbors, we know them well. Here is Tatyana, who has a beautiful sister, but she herself is considered ugly. Here is Sasha, who owns a business and starts getting excruciating nightmares when someone steals his silvery foreign-made car. Here they are trying to be happy, but it's not working out. Pulsing with life, this is a sincere novel about people who can't find love and, above all, don't have enough inner courage and freedom to find it.

Petersburg Diary