



Happy Moscow

Andrei Platonov , Elizabeth Chandler (Translator) , Robert Chandler (Translator) , Eric Naiman (Introduction)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Happy Moscow

Andrei Platonov , Elizabeth Chandler (Translator) , Robert Chandler (Translator) , Eric Naiman (Introduction)

Happy Moscow Andrei Platonov , Elizabeth Chandler (Translator) , Robert Chandler (Translator) , Eric Naiman (Introduction)

Moscow in the 1930s is the consummate symbol of the Soviet paradise, a fairy-tale capital where, in Stalin's words, "life has become better, life has become merrier". In *Happy Moscow* Platonov exposes the gulf between this premature triumphalism and the harsh reality of low living standards and even lower expectations. For in Stalin's ideal city there is no longer a place for those who do not fit the bright, shining image of the new men and women of the future. The heroine, Moscow Chestnova, is an Everywoman, both virgin and whore, who flits from man to man, fascinated by the brave new world supposedly taking shape around her. In a variety of styles ranging from the grotesque to the sentimental to the absurd, Platonov lays bare the ways in which language itself has been debased, even borrowing slogans from Stalin's own speeches for comic effect.

In an age of spin doctors and soundbites, this anarchic satire has as much resonance as ever.

Happy Moscow Details

Date : Published 2001 by Harvill Press (first published 1991)

ISBN : 9781860466465

Author : Andrei Platonov , Elizabeth Chandler (Translator) , Robert Chandler (Translator) , Eric Naiman (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 153 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Russia, Literature, Russian Literature

 [Download Happy Moscow ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Happy Moscow ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Happy Moscow Andrei Platonov , Elizabeth Chandler (Translator) , Robert Chandler (Translator) , Eric Naiman (Introduction)

From Reader Review Happy Moscow for online ebook

Orkun says

Mutlu Moskova, Andrey Platonov'un Sovyetler Birli'i zaman?nda yazd??? ve ayn? dönemde Josef Stalin taraf?ndan yasaklanan bir kitab?. ?leri dönemde Rusya'da tekrardan bas?lan bu kitap okuyucularla bulu?mu?. Kitap asl?nda 3 ki?inin etraf?nda dönüyor. Bu 3 ki?inin tam ortas?nda ise kitaba da ismini veren Moskova Çestnova var.

Moskova henüz çok küçüktür. Uyku sersemi bir haldeyken pencereden d??ar? bakan Moskova, elinde me?aleyle ko?an bir adam görür. Ard?ndan duydu?u silah sesiyle birlikte me?ale karanl??a gömülüp gider. Bu sahne Moskova'n?n zihninden hiç silinmez, yıllarda silinmi? gibi görünse de. Bol?evik ?htilali ba?lam??t?r. Moskova ailesini çok küçük ya?ta kaybetmi?, kendisini bir yetimhanede bulunmu?tur. Ad?n? bile hat?rlamayan bu k?za Moskova ismi verilir. Moskova büyüme ba?lar ve içi içine s??maz. Hayata tutunmak için elinden geleni yapar, hep aray?? içindedir. A?k?n pe?inde de ko?an Moskova'n?n yolu Sartorius, Komyagin ve Sambikin ile kesi?ir. Hepsinin hayat?na dokunmay? ba?arabilen Moskova arad??? a?k? asla bulamaz. Devrim ya?anan bu topraklardaki insanlar?n hayatlar?na ???k tutan Platonov'un bu kitab?na çok da ?s?namad?m. Yer yer kitaptan koptu?um oldu. Yine de kitab?n can al?c? yerlerinde oldukça etkilendim. Kötü bir kitap asla de?il ama bir ?eyler eksikti. Biraz s?k?c? bir kitap olsa da anlam aray??? temal? olmas? aç?s?ndan kitap okumaya de?erdi.

Vit Babenco says

“A dark man with a burning torch was running down the street on a bleak night in late autumn. The little girl saw him through a window of her home as she woke from a bleak dream. Then she heard a powerful shot from a rifle and a poor, sad cry – the man running with the torch had probably been killed. Soon afterwards came the sound of distant, repeated shots and of uproar from the nearby prison.”

It's a greatest pity that translation can't convey all the magical individuality of **Andrei Platonov**'s language and style but anyway rendering of *Happy Moscow* in English is very good.

After the victory of the revolution, reality becomes irrational and everyone is wandering in it at random and aimlessly as if one has gone astray in some dreamland.

“Story by a Girl with no Father or Mother about her Future Life: We are being taught to have minds, but minds are in heads, there is nothing on the outside. We must labour to live truthfully, I want to live the future life, I want there to be biscuits and jam and sweets and always to be able to walk by the trees in the fields. Otherwise I won't live, I won't feel like it. I want to live normally with happiness. There's nothing to say in addition.”

This is the way little Moscow sees the world of her chidhood.

“Later Moscow ran away. She was brought back after a year and was held up to shame at a meeting of the whole school: how could she, a daughter of the Revolution, behave in such an unethical and undisciplined manner?

‘I'm not a daughter, I'm an orphan!’ Moscow answered.”

Revolutions don't turn people into the happy masters of the world. Revolutions make the homeless orphans out of them.

Caroline says

Stunning writing, in the sense of reader recognizing authorial genius but also stunning in the sense of

knocking your sense of a sentence awry over and over again in each paragraph. This is a slow read first because you have to pause and reread almost every sentence two or three times, then wrestle with it, then consider it, and then marvel.

Highest kudos of course to the translation as well. The Chandlers found a believable, ardent yet mature voice for the socialist aspirations of Platonov's Happy Moscow characters. Their notes are very helpful, as many characters, situations and passing remarks are based on actual people and events. Without Russian I can't tell if the tone captures Platonov's writing, but I am willing to take the prizes on faith.

This is a story of youth sold on the new Soviet dream. The new technocrats are committed to loving and helping everyone they see, and revising the course of history. They are also dedicating their lives to totally crazy and scientifically impossible projects. At the same time they are all in love with the woman-city Moscow who is vibrant, earthy, daring, physical. They are curiously intent on becoming everyone else they see on the street in order to understand them and to live a full life; one single person's experience and body is not enough to fill a lifetime. There is a very interesting commitment to patience in getting the social-benefit results they are working for, as well the more-expected relinquishment of personal desires in favor of community needs. And always, deep Russian soulful unhappiness.

But the new course of history requires a new kind of human being, and there is a deep underlying pessimism, I think, about whether this is possible, even if the State can find the necessary 'engineers of human souls' for the job.

But mostly it is the language and the observations about people and life that are compelling. In looking for great quotes the impossibility of choosing nearly leads to transcribing the whole darn thing. (Note: Happy Moscow itself is about 115 pages; the rest of the NYRB edition is a short alternate version, and related stories/screenplay and notes on translating Platonov by Robert Chandler. Also, as another reviewer noted, the short On the First Socialist Tragedy on pages 153-158 is excellent--on the relationship between nature and technology, among other things.)

Selected sentences:

The water pacified him but he immediately realized how much a human being is still a feebly constructed, homespun being--no more than a vague embryo and blueprint of something more authentic--and how much work must be done to unfurl from this embryo the flying, higher image buried in our dream. [amazing writing, just as amazing translating]

Usually though Sartorius did not dream at all, not possessing the capacity for empty experience.

Though inhibited by sleep, their concern for a definite structuring of the world still gnawed at their consciences, and from time to time they muttered words, to drive anxiety out of themselves.

The Republic was now sated-glutted--with platform balances, and the entire arithmetical computation of future historical time had been worked out, so that fate should become free of danger and never come point-blank against despair.

Ben Winch says

Platonov. Some big claims have been made for this fella, and I can't say as I can credit them. Not being Russian, I don't know, he *may* have revolutionised Russian prose; all I can say is I don't see his translators

revolutionising English. As to his status as satirist, hell, that may be lost in translation too; myself, I haven't laughed nor wryly grinned at one of his works, and when in *Happy Moscow* the protagonist says 'Love cannot be communism' I read it in the only way I know how, without inflection, because frankly it just baffles me, whatever its purpose. Thing is, I'm not even convinced Platonov knows how he means it. *Happy Moscow* – its translators agree – seems to start as an attempt to pacify the Soviet sensors and evolve into so-called satire. In other words, I'm not convinced Platonov is in control of his material. And therefore, to me, comparisons to Beckett are spurious, because while the events of his prose often careened wildly, Beckett was always scrupulously in control of his *tone*.

Confession: it may be my tastes are too staid for Platonov, that I value 'control' too highly, that wild caprice, unless justified/framed/contrived is too much for me. In his perceptive review of *The Foundation Pit* (a book I put aside after thirty pages) Eddie Watkins admits the possibility of Platonov's being unaware of his own effects (including humour), but praises him regardless, and manages to laugh at what I could only find numbing. In his passionate review of *Happy Moscow*, Chuck Lo Presti compares Platonov to post-punk band Flipper, finding analogy in their discord for prose which, to me, seemed often plain unmusical. Not always, it's true; the opening, for example, pretty much sold it to me:

A dark man with a burning torch was running down the street into a boring night of late autumn. The little girl saw him through a window of her home as she awoke from a boring dream. Then she heard the powerful shot of a rifle and a poor, sad cry – the man running with the torch had probably been killed. Soon after this came many distant shots and a din of people in the neighbouring prison... The little girl went to sleep and forgot everything she saw later in other days: she was too small, and the memory and mind of early childhood were overgrown in her body forever by subsequent life. But until her late years a nameless man would unexpectedly and sadly rise up in her and run – in the pale light of memory – and perish once again in the dark of the past, in the heart of a grown-up child.

Though even here there's that strange insistence on the vague adjective 'boring', the wan 'powerful' for the rifle-shot, and the still more wan 'pale light of memory'. 'Platonov is not a showy writer,' say the translators, though also: 'Platonov used language more creatively than even the greatest of the great Russian poets who were his contemporaries'.

And then there's 'Soul', the novella which introduced me to Platonov, though I read it in an earlier, maybe oversimplified translation as 'Dzhan' in *The Fierce and Beautiful World*. This was brutal, bleak, heartwrenching, but not 'experimental' in any way I could fathom, and I was underwhelmed (bewildered?) by Tatyana Tolstoyana's pronouncements in the introduction: 'At times it seems that Platonov's work was written by a creature from outer space forced to live among us.' Or: 'Reading a Platonov story, the reader encounters a range of sensations for which he has no sensory organ – and this organ may or may not develop in the process of reading.' Clearly, my Platonov-specific sensory organ is underdeveloped. But I wonder whether the sheer weight of hype crushes the prosaic reality of his translations into English. Maybe his translators are trying too hard? Maybe the lack of flourishes in 'Dzhan' made the transference of story and meaning more direct? 'He uses words awkwardly, incorrectly, he puts them in the wrong place in the sentence, where they don't go,' says Tolstayana. She's on the money. Maybe my problem is just I don't know if he knows where they *do* go. You gotta know the rules before you can break 'em, after all. Then again, Flipper weren't virtuosos.

Chuck LoPresti says

Absolutely stunning writer meets top translation for nothing less than classic results. It's obvious that Platonov ranks with the greatest of Soviet Era writers. His style is stark, lyrical and fairly simple to read and understand but it will take a poet or musician's ear to really appreciate the beauty of his craft. Like Walser's almost non-literary clairvoyance - Platonov scratches itches other writers fail to reach. Appreciating him is akin to understanding the monolithic impact of well-crafted post-punk in the 80s. In the midst of prog excess - bands like Flipper went full intuitive focus and produced music that initially is jarring and a bit tough to appreciate but those that stayed focused started to realize the feral efficacy of this direct style. Strip away the non-essentials and sheer visceral impact remains - that's Platonov. Fiercely intelligent, keenly observant and tuned to fine pitch - Platonov's recently discovered Happy Moscow should supplant Foundation Pit as his most essential work. It's also important to understand that the Soviet-era tag isn't merely a cultural signifier but a central point of focus. If it was to be banned it was in no way for a lack of love for a homeland. However Happy Moscow's efficacy in defining the Soviet condition is in equal parts radiant and individual that Platonov as compliant socialist seems to be in stark juxtaposition to the individuality mandated by his voice. On more than isolated occasions it's obvious that Platonov, despite his will to promote the Soviet state is aware that his vision is only proletarian by concerted effort to constrain a wildly individuated voice. In that aspect Platonov is akin to Mayakovsky in their likewise obvious negotiation of artist as sanctioned agent and human geared to offer more than a state could possibly ask in sublimation. So it's a resonance of individual and cultural operative that informs so many Soviet era classics: Sologub's Petty Demon, Zoschenko's Bees and People, Olesha's Envy, Grin and so many more unique talents and is probably most apparent in Platonov. "Wind and the movement of legs always tune the consciousness in your head and develop strength in the heart." If Platonov would have excluded a beauty informed by nature more than organization he might have avoided Stalin's wrath - but in allowing the most illuminating force to be only understood in musical terms he placed efficacy of creative will outside the state - something Stalin could have only understood as an affront. The additional stories in this collection are mainly component elements that were used to comprise Happy Moscow. If you're pressed for time - these stories are non-essential for the most part - but Happy Moscow will probably never leave your memory. Achingly powerful, unsettling and fiercely creative - Happy Moscow ranks with any modern Soviet era lit and renders the better part of it less essential. Easily the best writer I've discovered since Kosztolanyi. The NYRB book design is awesome as always, great cover painting, great article from the translator and copious explanatory notes. Mandatory.

Neglectedbooks says

A beautifully-written, somewhat dream-like novel of characters who've fallen by the wayside in the Soviet state. Platonov can manage to touch the stars in the same sentence as he grabs up a handful of shit.

Edward says

Introduction to 'Happy Moscow', by Robert Chandler

--Happy Moscow

Around 'Happy Moscow', by Robert Chandler

--The Moscow Violin

--On the First Socialist Tragedy

--Father (A Screenplay)

--Love for the Motherland or, The Sparrow's Journey

The Text and the Translation

Notes

Papatya ?ENOL says

moskova, dünya edebiyat?ndaki en özel kad?n karakterlerden biri bence. hayran oldum tek kelimeyle. idealist stalinci döneme kar?? toplumsal gerçekli?i böyle ?iirsel bir dille yazan platonov daha çok okunmal?, daha çok bilinmeli. platonov'un di?er eserleriyle birlikte ancak 1991'den sonra ortaya ç?kabilen bir roman "mutlu moskova". kompozisyon yazmak için bile olsa inekler ve gelecek aras?nda gelece?i seçen genç bir kad?n?n mutluluk aray??? temelde; ama do?aya, bilime ve insana övgü niteli?inde. moskova'n?n hayat?na giren ve ç?kan veya kenar?ndan geçen insanlara dayanarak toplumsal bir biçem olu?turuyor platonov. eme?in, umudun ve terin birle?iminden edebi bir eser ç?k?yor ortaya. rus edebiyat? hep bir ad?m önde. ?iddetle tavsiye ederim.

El says

The time for me to read Russian literature is in December. Possibly January. February at the latest. Definitely not April.

This is the first of anything I have read by Andrei Platanov, a Soviet Russian writer. I picked this book up, of course, because it's a NYRB edition and I have a thing for NYRB edition covers. I didn't realize until I started reading that *Happy Moscow* is an unfinished novel, unpublished before his death, and that the rest of this edition includes some other shorter pieces of his, including a screenplay.

Because it's not the right time of the year for me to fully appreciate Russian literature, I struggled a bit with this. *Happy Moscow* itself is fairly decent. Moscow, in this story, is a young woman who grew up during the October Revolution. She's an orphan, and a parachutist, and I will admit right now that I recently read another book that starts out with a parachutist-of-sorts floating down from a plane (WATERSHED), and I was so busy wondering if *Happy Moscow* was some sort of inspiration for that character that I kept waiting for sex to be mentioned. (Sex was not mentioned.)

Moscow is trying to find happiness, hence the title, as are we all, but Platanov writes a heavy-handed metaphorical story that would have benefited with some nuance at the very least. The story begins with her childhood and follows her as she grows up, but there's no real plot here. It's a meandering sort of story, but not poorly written. Everything relates to the Soviet state, in some way, and even with a pedestrian knowledge of Russian history, I felt everything, every word and sentence structure, was meant to point out some power struggle, some political action, some cultural drama.

Moving on after *Happy Moscow* and reading the other short pieces included in this edition, specifically *Father*, Platonov's screenplay included, I realized that all of his writing was like that. There's nothing inherently wrong in authors pointedly writing, but sometimes it comes across as too intentional. Forced.

As a whole, this is a fine little collection, and it's not boring to read. But, again, this is just not the right time of the year for me. I should have realized that sooner, and now I'm also struggling through *Dead Souls* for the same reason. I still, however, want to read Platonov's *The Foundation Pit*, even though I imagine it will be just as much about what was happening in Platonov's world as *Happy Moscow*.

Peter says

'Happy Moscow' is this month's selection for our Russian (in translation) reading group this Friday (November 2). Inevitably the group always want to be advised of the best translation, and as all but one of us, who is Russian, speak virtually no Russian this always strikes me as an invidious question - when half a dozen translations are available for many of the classics one may as well go for print size, look and what works best for you in English. Nevertheless it's usually the first question I ask...

Andrei (Andrey) Platonov presents, from the translation perspective, a fairly unique set of circumstances. Nearly all translations of his works into English are by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler with an acknowledged army of assistants, primarily Russian. If you buy the out of print editions via Amazon they'll quite often come from Robert himself, the paddy bag stuffed with pages and pages of helpful photocopies; additionally he also signs it! A gentleman indeed.

The Chandlers and friends have translated 'Happy Moscow' twice and without doubt it is this New York Review Books edition (2012) and not the earlier Vintage (Harvill) edition that is authoritative. Robert Chandler explains his new translation and change in approach in detail in the NYRB edition (SEE 'The text and the translation') that is was after attending a seminar for translators of Platonov at Ghent University in 2011. The changes are considerable - in the first paragraph alone I noted over half a dozen.

There are two other reasons for choosing this edition, first the notes have almost trebled and are more comprehensive than in the earlier editions; second, the additional material to include short stories and a film script more than doubles the length of the volume providing context and understanding of Platonov's development as a writer.

TBC

Anna says

This is a beautiful and rather mysterious novel that reads like a prose poem. It vaguely follows a woman called Moscow, who personifies all women, or perhaps the city of Moscow, or perhaps socialism, or even all three at once. This is not a book to read for character development, but for philosophical musings and delicate satire. The delicacy of the satire is naturally a function of being written in the USSR during the 1930s. Having read *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* recently throws a frightening light on 'Happy Moscow' and the recurrent dissatisfaction of its characters. At the time, Stalinist purges led to untold thousands of arrests, jailings, and arbitrary executions. Platonov is very careful not to criticise the regime on any remotely literal level, he seems instead to examine the paradoxical effects of its stated ideology on individual states of mind. I found the introduction (to be read last, as ever) explained some of the references and themes very helpfully, including some specific scenes that parody speeches by Stalin. 'Happy Moscow' wasn't published until 1991 and is unfinished, another fascinating glimpse into the inner life of those repressed in Stalinist Russia. Although I wouldn't say that I properly understood it, I enjoyed the juxtaposed yearnings for collectivity and individual happiness, the theme of reinvention and progress, and the untranslatable word 'toska'. Platonov has a unique and rather playful way with words, which comes through well in this translation. A few examples that struck me, all gently poking fun at the Soviet utopia:

”My skin always feels cold afterwards,” said Moscow. “Love cannot be communism. I’ve

thought and I've realised it just can't. One probably should love - and I will love. But it's like eating food - it's just a necessity, it's not what matters in life.”

‘Summer came to an end and the rains began, as long and as dismal as in early childhood in the days of capitalism.’

‘Sometimes Komyagin would think to himself: “In a month or two I shall begin a new life - I'll finish the paintings and poems; I'll thoroughly rethink my world outlook; I'll get my documents in order; I'll find a solid job and become an exemplary shock-worker; I'll fall in love with some woman and she can be my wife and a friend to me.” It was his hope that in a month or two something special would happen to time, that it would stop for a moment and take him up in its movement, but the years passed by his window without any pause or fortunate event. And he would get up from his bed and go out, as a member of the volunteer militia, to exact fines from the general public at the sites where it most tended to accumulate.’

Calzean says

Obviously a lot of work went into writing, publishing and translating this work. It has its moments - Happy Moscow should have been called Unlucky Moscow as she experiences a series of personnel disasters. The male characters represent Russian science, research and medicine. There is a lot about hope and belief in the promised miracles of communism. But I just found the writing really hard to follow, the various parts of the story sometime just did not seem connected and in the end I was happy Calzean to see the last of Happy Moscow.

Alan says

Bizzare. Review coming..

should have read the intro before reading, then I would have taken aboard the reason for some of book's more ludicrous passages. Moscow is a woman not a city (although everything has double triple meanings here) and she is a parachutist (at the start anyway), and on one jump she lights a cigarette with a whole box of matches causing her straps to catch fire and she crashes to the ground. Apparently this is a reference to a Stalin speech. Thus I missed many nuances. The book is about language as a force for change, about sloganeering and incantation. During the 30s Stalin wanted to present Soviet life as happy and its citizens as merry consumers, and this book punctures that propaganda in an oblique way. It is unfinished.

Banushka says

stalin döneminde geçen roman moskova adındaki genç kadına odaklansa da bir yerden sonra moskova'yı anlatmayacak bizzare. platonov. aslında kendi gençliklerinden, hayatlarından topluma vazgeçmi, tabii ki o dönemki eğitim vs sebebiyle doğrusunun bu olduğunu düşünün, bilime, faydaya inanan bir grup gencin hiçbir zaman kaçamadıkları mutsuzlukları roman bu.

her şey iyi olsun diye uzağa satılan aralarında anlatılan sefalet, hele pazarda poğaça çalan bir adamın dayak yerken bile poğaça hazırlanması ve bitimlenmesi var ki... işte platonov'un

romanlar?n?n niçin y?llarca yasakland???n? anl?yor insan.
evet anlatt?klar? çok de?erli ama sanki üstünde pek çal???lmam??, yar?m kalm?? bir roman mutmu
moskova. karakterlerin i?leni?i, olaylar?n h?z? ve karma?as? bana fikir aç?s?ndan de?il ama edebi aç?dan
ba?lar? gev?ek bir roman gibi geldi.

Eric says

Tolstaya says that Platonov writes like an alien observing humankind--but that doesn't begin to suggest how weird he can be. 'Enstrangement' is no mere literary device with Platonov, it's his entire style. He really takes it to the edge; his poker-faced laconism sounds at once childishly naive and mockingly ironic. And the story's action is infinitely picaresque, all errant digression: just the comings, goings and hare-brained utopian daydreams of Moscow and her various suitors and orbiters; characters fade in and fade out; the last twenty or so pages tracks one of the suitors as he forgets about Moscow, changes his identity and moves in with a widow who beats him. The introduction says Platonov left this novel unfinished, but you'd never know that if they didn't tell you--how would Platonov have 'finished' a totally non-linear story? This is the only novel I've read that is truly 'plotless.' An extreme stylistic experiment.

I like the brand of 'surrealism' Platonov practiced and then handed down to Tolstaya. His point of view is so fancifully detached, so defamiliarized that he doesn't have to resort to self-consciously fantastic incidents in order to create grotesque or monstrous impressions. All the characters in 'Happy Moscow' obey physical laws and behave fairly plausibly in the course of their routines; Platonov simply orients us so that we see how deeply strange those routines can appear. Platonov looking at a street musician or a flea market is really a kind of revelation.
