



## All This Belongs to Me

*Petra Hřlová , Alex Zucker (Translator)*

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Petra Hulová became an overnight sensation when *All This Belongs to Me* was originally published in Czech in 2002, when the author was just twenty three years old. She has since established herself as one of the most exciting young novelists in Europe today. Writings from an Unbound Europe is proud to publish the first translation of her work in English.

All This Belongs to Me chronicles the lives of three generations of women in a Mongolian family. Told from the point of view of a mother, three sisters, and the daughter of one of the sisters, this story of secrets and betrayals takes us from the daily rhythms of nomadic life on the steppe to the harsh realities of urban alcoholism and prostitution in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. *All This Belongs to Me* is a sweeping family saga that showcases Hulová's genius.

## All This Belongs to Me Details

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## From Reader Review All This Belongs to Me for online ebook

### Erika says

Sommarens mest planerade semesterläsning blev en besvikelse. Jag gillade möjligheten att uppleva Mongoliets stäpper i romanform, därav började läsoplevelsen som fyra stjärnor. Aftonbladets recensent skrev att "läsaren försätts i ett nästan meditativt tillstånd" – men jag har semester och föredrar att uppnå meditativa tillstånd i blåbärsskogen. När jag läser vill jag att berättelsen ska ha styrfart, och det hade inte den här. Läste ut den mest av plikt känsla, därav landade slutbetyget på två stjärnor (för miljöskildringen och fönstret mot en annan tillvaro).

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### Ka? Janotová says

O tom jak se "mozna" zije v Mongolsku pohledem tri generaci zen jedne rodiny. Skvela knizka, ktera vtahne tak, ze se pak cloveku v noci zda o nekonecnych stepich plnych koz a osamelych geru s barenymi truhlicemi, o cervenych kamenech ohoblovaných vetrem, smradlavých ulanbatarských kurvach postipanych od blech, mastne lojove polivce a kusech suseneho masa, o rudolicich mongolkach s cernomodryma copama, co umi jezdit na koni nejlip na svete. Pribeh s tezko rozeznatelnou hranici zivotniho dobra a zla, prostoupeny drsnou mongolskou kulturou. Tahle kniha umi carovat tak, ze po jejim precteni ihned googlujete vsecko o Mongolsku a ihned tam chcete odjet.

Merged review:

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### Jess says

Leaving aside the minor miracle of a novel about three generations of Mongolian women written by a young Czech author translated into English and showing up at my local library, this book never came together into a coherent whole, remaining instead disparate, and occasionally repetitive, fragments.

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### Kate?ina says

Amazing! The storytelling is so great! Interesting setting as well.

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## Katja says

Well, this was different from the Wolf totem. This is a second book set in Mongolia that I read after the trip. And for all the romanticism and sentimentality the Wolf totem was soaked in, this one is way way all the way on the other end of the spectrum. *Lasciate ogni speranza, kiddos.*

First things first: I was and remained impressed by the fact that this was a debut novel written by a very young author (it came out when Hulova was 23). The format, the bold and creative similes and metaphors, the no-nonsense down-to-earthness, the kind of cynicism seeping out of the characters that you normally feel only in very old or very disappointed people... I was floored. Honestly. I might check out some other works by this author (after I have made sure they won't burn my soul like this one did).

So, the story is told by five female members of a family. The story is terrible. It does not get good for anyone involved at any point. Incest, rape, prostitution, alcoholism - you name it, this book has it. Now, I can take the ugly and the terrible and the cynicism, but there is not a sliver of hope for any of the characters ever. The book does keep you reading - it is written from five different POVs, and they all read a bit like a stream of consciousness. Very quickly I began to feel as if I were sitting across from the character, and she was telling me her story, sometimes rushing coldly through a series of events, sometimes lingering on the details for a while. I liked that. But as far as the plot is concerned, there are no good 'hooks', nothing to give you hope; about halfway through I realised it would not get better, it is just one shitty thing happening after the other, and once one character has had her fill, the story moves on to the next. I was telling Matilda yesterday, "I can't wait to finish this book, it's torture for both characters and myself". What I perhaps disliked the most is the fact that characters are not even likeable. Not only in the sense that they are not very good people, but they are also not quite fleshed out enough, so it was sometimes hard to empathise, as you kind of end up reading about disgusting things happening to half-baked people you don't care all that much about, feeling all around awkward and wanting to leave the planet Earth.

In a way, my going from the 'Wolf Totem' to 'All this belongs to me' mirrored our trip's trajectory from the Terelj park to Ulaanbaatar. In Terelj, we spent two days basking in the sun and silence, kept warm by our host family's kindness and openness. In Ulaanbaatar, two days in, a situation that struck me and will haunt me was one involving a little girl of maybe 5. We were out in a pub after our friend's wedding, and there was this little girl, selling chewing gums to tourists. She passed by the first time around midnight, and already then I was surprised why such a small kid was still up. Her head was shaved. Three hours later, she was still there, squeezing past drunken people, patiently waiting for someone to buy the gums, and not saying anything when people pinched her cheeks. Some of us did not want to give her money, so as not to perpetuate the cycle. Instead we went and bought some fries. When we offered it to her, she looked around and shook her head. Eventually we managed to persuade her to take at least one, but when she took it her hand was shaking. When she finally left, we saw she was intercepted by a woman who checked her pockets. She was definitely scared. Our friend explained to us that this was not all that unusual in UB; it's still a developing country. But honestly, Brussels or UB, scenes like that are brutally normal.

Since 'All this belongs to me' deals with prostitution, I looked up a bit what it was like in UB some 20 years ago, around the time when Hulova spent her year there. Apparently, child prostitution was an issue at the time (one journalist reported a heartbreaking story of a 7 year old prostitute with a 10 year old pimp). This book does not deal precisely with child prostitution (thank God, at least not that), but it does paint a very bleak picture of Ulaanbaatar, which made me think, if I witnessed that situation with the little girl in my three days in UB in 2018, what did Hulova see during a year in early 2000s?

All in all, this book is exceptional and decently written, but it drained me emotionally. It's a good book I would recommend to no one.

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## Mirela says

3,5 p

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## Emma Deploras Goodreads Censorship says

Goodreads recommended this book to me when I looked at Aitmatov's *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, but while both books are set in the same general part of the world, that's all they have in common. The biggest difference being that Aitmatov's book is well-written and enjoyable, and this one is not.

*All This Belongs to Me* is the story of a family in 20th-century Mongolia, narrated by five women. The primary narrator, Zaya, gets more than half the book, and we follow her for decades, as she grows up in her family's ger (yurt) in the remote steppes, goes to boarding school in town, then moves to the capital city of Ulaanbaatar and tries to make her way there. Her daughter, mother, and two sisters also get 15-20 pages each. Their voices are not distinct, but I hardly expected that in a translation; authors have a hard enough time with multiple narrators in their own language.

I'll grant that the author is somewhat clever with the multiple narrators, who have sometimes differing views on events and aren't always reliable. Oyuna, for instance, alternates between telling us what a wonderful person she herself is and spewing venom about her sisters; Hulová doesn't have to point out her bitterness or hypocrisy, and doesn't try. Additionally, the Mongolian setting is fascinating and I did learn some things about life there. There's even some decent imagery. That's about all I can say for it.

And, unfortunately, the writing is just bad.

First, there's no structure, just a bunch of things that happened, and often told out of order. The story doesn't seem to have a point other than summarizing the characters' lives; it doesn't move toward anything and certainly doesn't have a climax.

Second, there aren't really any scenes, just endless narrative summary. There is exactly one line of dialogue in the entire book (is it "dialogue" when no one has a chance to respond before the author leaps back into narrative summary?); it's on page 88. Some authors can do books driven by narrative summary brilliantly (take Isabel Allende for instance), but Hulová isn't among them. And even Allende will throw in a couple lines of dialogue every few pages at least. I doubt the bookjacket writer who praised Hulová's "dead-on ear" even read this book.

Third, the writing is confusing and contradictory. Sentences and paragraphs are disjointed, not connecting to one another in any logical way. Multiple sex scenes are unclear as to whether the woman consented or was raped. The author contradicts herself from the very first page; in the same sentence, Zaya tells us that if she went out in a dust storm she'd choke to death, and then that she sits outside and watches the storms because there's nothing else to do (because if she went outside she'd choke to death). When discussing Inner Mongolia, the Chinese province, she tells us that "[t]he only Chinamen there, though, are the tens of thousands of bastards that our women who are enslaved there give birth to every year," and then two sentences later, that "[t]here are too many Chinese settlers." Not to belabor the point, but if there are Chinese settlers, then there are in fact Chinese people there.

The upshot of the aimless plot, lack of scenes and incoherent writing was that I never enjoyed the story, nor had any true sense of the characters. Hulová might have had some decent characters in her head, but her reluctance to quite let us see them interacting with the world or each other--this insistence on summarizing

everything instead, and not even doing that well--means they never come alive. I try to give foreign writers the benefit of the doubt, and maybe this type of writing is normal in her native Czech Republic, but in this case two stars feels generous.

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## Rusalka says

This has taken me several nights to write this. Mainly as I get started googling Mongolia and can't stop.

I got gifted this book by two very special friends. Interestingly it was from my Czech friends by a Czech writer, but I got no Czech while I read this book. I was expecting a glimmer or two of Prague or somewhere similar and then a dive into the deepest and darkest Mongolia. But on that front I was disappointed

What I was I was thrown into, and then stayed, was into the lives of a family living in the shadow of the Red Mountain as they called it. I'm not sure exactly the population, but thanks to wiki, I can tell you how many livestock animals live in the area. Kind of shows what is the most important thing in these peoples lives. Who cares about how many people there are, they all are stuffed without livestock.

We are introduced to a family living in a ger (yurt) under these mountains, which includes 4 daughters, no sons. This is an element of tension already in the family, but add in that the two middle daughters seem to be products of infidelity (given away really by different racial characteristics), and this makes for a happy family of 7 (grandma's there too) in a small tent. The book is then told in 6 parts, 4 by 3 of the sisters, 1 by the mother, and 1 by a daughter of one of the sisters.

It's a fascinating story really. You have the life on the land in the family ger, the girls being sent off to socialist state boarding school for nomadic kids (compulsory I have just learnt. Due to this policy they pretty much got rid of illiteracy!), some of the girls moving to the capital city and dealing with an incredibly different world, and the challenges they and their family have with this cultural change.

There is so much change occurring in the this book. Socialism to capitalism. Traditional culture to modernity. Rural to urban. And then other underlying problems tied to the above such as poverty and alcoholism. It's a thin book (under 200pp) but it is full of issues.

I loved learning about the culture (hence the constant googling). I have had a fascination with Mongolia since I was a little kid. People living in tents in high mountains and freezing conditions or deserts, moving around whenever they wish. For an urban aussie kid, this was a magical place. You really feel the remote landscape while in the family home, which is impressive to convey the feeling of remoteness while focusing on a tent with 7ish people crammed inside. Again, as with a few books I've read lately, none of the family were instantly likeable. And I feel this is what let the book down. I just needed someone to engage with, and that was lacking. And for me, that's what I need to take a good book, to an amazing one.

For more reviews visit <http://rusalkii.blogspot.com.au/>

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## Rinda Elwakil says

"?? ????? ????? ??? ????? ????? ????? ?????? ?????? ??: ?????? ????? ????????? ?????????? ??????"



## Barbora Romanovská says

Petra Hřlová nadchla! Dlouhou dobu jsem se autorce vyhýbala, důvodem bylo příliš velké očekávání a také to, že si k ní jako k osobnosti nemohu nalézt cestu. Něčím mne fascinuje a něčím irituje. Ale to je naprosto irelevantní, nikdy nesmřuji autora a jeho dílo (to bych dopadla, kdybych smřřovala — co pak takový Hanus, Palán, Hradecký?!)

Tedy zpátky ke knize. Teř ze sebe udělám trochu pitomce, ale já tuhle knihu řapla, aniř bych vřdřla v jaké lokalitě se bude dřj odehrávat. Vřdřla jsem jen, ře jde o debut ve kterém zaznřvají hlasy řen řtř generací řen. Takře asi umřte představit to rozřarování, kdřř jsem asi na dvacátě straně zjistila, ře se to odehrává kdesi v mongolsku! Tedy v Mongolsku. Ale ono zase jihořeská vesnice a mongolské stepi, to se nutně musí promřtnout do charakteru postav. Třetina knihy pak zachycuje přřsek řivodem řeny, od jejího dřstřví s cejchem erlřce až po její střř v ajmaku s rodinou své mladří sestry, kde obřvává ger po svřých rodiřřch (třch mongolskřých slov jsem se nauřila mnohem víc, aby bylo jasno!) A tato historie je pak nahlřřena z perspektiv dalřřich řen rodu — její matky, dcery, dvou sester, tet. No a s přibřvajícími pohledy roste exponenciální řadou také řřenost, která kulminuje kdesi u incestu.

Nakonec, řivot je jen fasetami pohledř, které se na sebe vrstřvř.

Komunikaci, kterou Soukupová v románu *K moři* detailně rozpitřvala na přvořinitele, Hřlová vzala z vřtřř perspektivy, takře je pozornost vřnována spřře samotnřch vztahřm neř slovřm. Bavř mne knihy, které mají ambici řtenářř připomřnat to, na co lehce zapomřnám — ře za situacemi je kontext a dalřř lidř.

A tady je ten seznam slov, kterřmi jsem obohatila svřj slovnřk: erlřc, ger, ajmak, chřřřl, árřl, nochoj, argal, ovř, děl, chřřhdijn cecerleg (no dobře, na tohle jsem se musela znova podřvat do knihy)...

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## Ronja says

Tolik dobrřch nápadsř, které se nepovedlo pořřdně vyuřřit. Hodně zajřmavě mi přřšlo zasazenř dřje do Mongolska, o jehoř kultuře jsem dotěř prakticky nic nevřdřla. Bohuřel se dovřdám pouze o urřitě vrstř tamřřř spoleřnosti, celá rodina prakticky ustrnřla na dvou pozicřch (rodinně hospodařenř v jurtech ve stepi a mřstská linie jednoho povolánř ze dna spoleřnosti), nikomu se nepodařřlo zabrousit nřkam jinam, přestože snahy byly; jasné, pak by to nemřlo ten náboj, který tomu autorka chtřla dāt, coř je ale dalřř vřc, která mi vadř — celř ten dřj nřjak postrádá celkově vyřstřně, celou dobu je jednoduře vře přř starém a tak to i zřstane. Vážně řkoda, ře se nepodařřlo zakomponovat řirřř obraz mongolské kultury, troufám si tvrdit, ře velká řast řeskřch řtenářř je na tom se znalostmi o nř podobně jako já a vřtřř nřhled by mohl knihu posřlit. Dalřř vřc, která mohla břt skvřřlá, ale je jen přřmřrná — perspektiva vypravřře. Postupně o stejnřch udāllostech hovořř přt hrdinek, takře se hezky ukazuje nejen jejich charakter, ale i to, ře se vlastně ani nejbliřřř lidř doopravdy neznajř. Bohuřel, vřechny mluvrř řplně stejně, není tu řždňř idiolekt vlastnř každě postavř, vřechny majř stejně hovorově vřrazy a dřlajř stejně chyby (takovou zámřnu ji x jř jsem byla schopná skousnout u přvnř vypravřřky, u vřch dalřřich jsem skřřpřla zuby). Minimálně ty, které vřtřřinu řasu strāvřly ve mřstř v řplně jiném regionu, musely řasem pochytit jině vřrazivo, vřdřř bylo i nřkde zmřno, ře se rodinněmu přřzvuku jinde smālř — ale ne, tady dokonce i malá Dolgorma, která kromě pár prázdnřn u prarodiřř vylořeně nezná nic jiněho neř hlavnř mřsto, mluvrř stejně jako jiná řena, která v řivotě nevytáhla paty ze vzdālenně stepi.

