Diogenes

Book factsheet

Andrej Kurkow
Grey Bees

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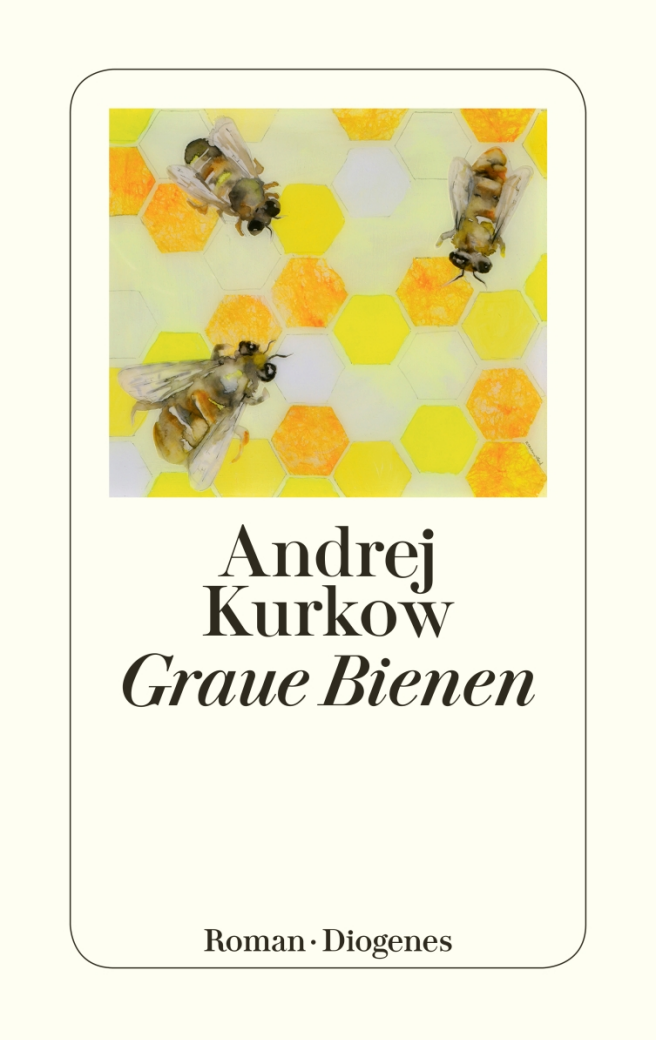
Original title: *Serye pchely*



When honey tastes of war.
Grey Bees is a novel about a war that has almost been forgotten, a novel full of atmosphere and wisdom, which forces the reader to slow down, reminding him of what matters most: preserving the integrity of nature.
Beekeeper Sergey lives in Donbass, where Ukrainian fighters and pro-Russian separatists exchange gunfire on a daily basis. He survives by following the motto: Hear nothing, see nothing – stay out of it. His only concern is the well-being of his bees. Because the bees' world continues to be ruled by intelligent order and wonderful productivity while mankind wreaks havoc. One spring, he sets off: He wants to bring the bees to a region where they can collect nectar in peace.

Contemporary Literature
448 pages
11.3 × 18 × 2.5 cm
March 2021

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Slovak (Slovart)
Slovenian
Spanish/world (PRH Grupo (Salamandra, Lumen, etc))
Swedish (Natur och Kultur)
Telugu (Chaaya Books)
Turkish (Siren)

Awards

2026 Andrej Kurkow erhält den ›Orwell Prize‹ in der Kategorie *Spezial Prize*

for 'one of the finest bodies of work in contemporary literature'
2024 Englische Übersetzung von *Samson und Nadjeschda* auf der Longlist des ›International Booker Prize‹
2023 Italienische Übersetzung von *Samson und Nadjeschda* für den ›Premio Strega Europeo‹ nominiert
2023 englische Übersetzung von *Jimi Hendrix live in Lemberg* auf der Longlist des ›International Booker Prize‹
2023 Als ausländisches Ehrenmitglied (Foreign Honorary Membership) in die ›American Academy of Arts and Letters‹ aufgenommen
2022 ›Geschwister Scholl Preis‹ für *Tagebuch einer Invasion*
2022 *Graue Bienen* nominiert für den ›Prix du meilleur livre étranger‹
2022 *Graue Bienen* auf der Shortlist des ›Prix Fémina‹
2022 ›Prix Médicis étranger‹ für *Graue Bienen*

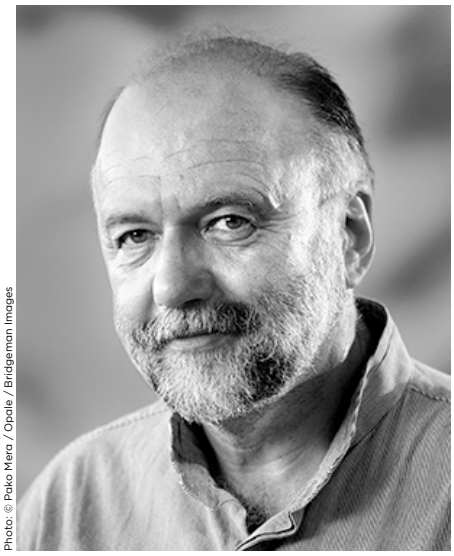
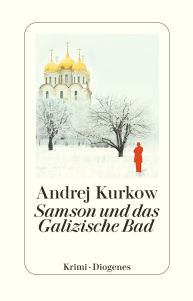
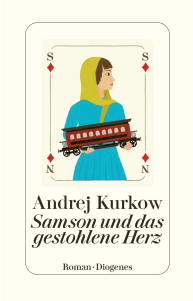


Photo: © Pako Mera / Opale / Bridgeman Images

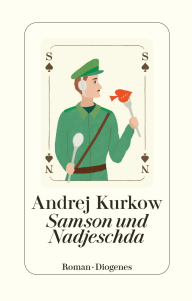
Andrej Kurkow, born in 1961 in what was then Leningrad, has lived in Kyiv since his childhood. He studied foreign languages and became a newspaper editor and screenwriter. Since his novel *Death and the Penguin*, he has been considered one of the Ukraine's most important contemporary authors. His work has been translated into forty-five languages. Kurkow lives with his family in Ukraine as a freelance writer. In 2023, he was made an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.



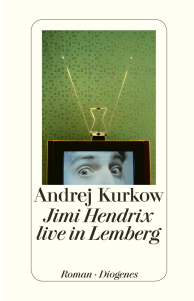
Samson and the Galician Bath
480 pages
2025



Samson and the Stolen Heart
432 pages
2023



Samson and Nadezhda
368 pages
2022
Award winner
Bestseller



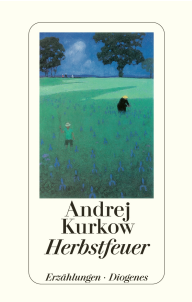
Jimi Hendrix Live in Lviv
416 pages
2014
Award winner



The Gardener of Ochakov
352 pages
2012
Award winner



The Milkman in the Night
544 pages
2009



Bonfire
240 pages
2007



The President's Last Love
704 pages
2005

Awards (cont'd)

2022 ›The Halldór Laxness International Literature Prize‹
2021 ›Fulbright Visiting Scholar-Stipendium‹ in San Diego, Kalifornien, USA
2014 Ernennung zum ›Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur‹ durch den französischen Präsidenten François Hollande
2012 ›Prix des lecteurs‹, Frankreich, für *Der Gärtner von Otschakow*
2012 ›Premio Gogol‹, Rom
2009 Jurymitglied für den ›Man Booker International Prize 2009‹
2008 Writer in Residence in Innsbruck
2005 Nach Einschätzung der Zeitschrift *Lire* ist Andrej Kurkow einer der 50 wichtigsten Schriftsteller der Welt.
2002 Preis ›Schriftsteller des Jahres 2001‹, den Buchhändler anlässlich der Buchmesse in der Ukraine vergeben haben
2001 In der Ukraine als Künstler des Jahres 2001 mit dem Preis ›Mann des Jahres‹ ausgezeichnet
1997 Sein Drehbuch *Ein Freund des Verblichenen* wird für den ›Felix‹-Preis in der Kategorie ›Bester Europäischer Drehbuchautor des Jahres‹ nominiert.
1996 Das Drehbuch, basierend auf Kurkows Erzählung *Ein Freund des Verblichenen*, erhielt ein Stipendium vom französischen Kultusministerium, wodurch der Film teilfinanziert werden konnte. *Priyatel pokoynika* wurde 1997 eim Filmfestival in Cannes gezeigt.
1994 Stipendium der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung für seine Erzählung *Liebeslied eines Kosmopoliten*
1994 Nominierung des Romans *Bikfordov mir* für den Russischen Booker Prize

Praise

Grey Bees

»Like Norbert Scheuer's *Winter Bees,* this is far more than just another book about bees – and it is Kurkow's strongest work yet.« – Mathias Schnitzler / Berliner Zeitung

»At the same time poetic and poignant.« – Gala, Hamburg

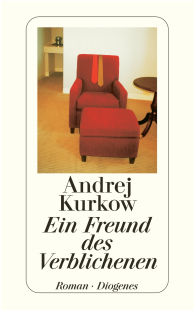
»With the novel *Grey Bees*, the author Andrej Kurkow has once again achieved a resounding success.« – Peter Budig / Nürnberger Nachrichten

»Andrej Kurkow's novel illustrates the life of a civil society that lives in a war without being at war themselves.« – Simona Pinwinkler / Salzburger Nachrichten

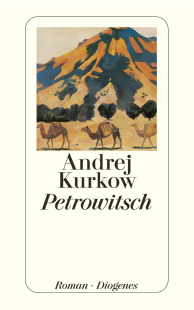
»Kurkow tells Sergej's story in a predominantly light and humorous tone, but frequently interweaves grotesque scenes of destruction.« – Gisela Erbslöh / SWR2, Baden-Baden



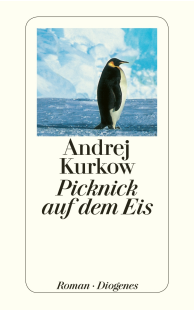
Penguin Lost
544 pages
2003



A Matter of Death and Life
144 pages
2001
Award winner



The Good Angel of Death
448 pages
2000



Death and the Penguin
288 pages
1999

Praise (cont'd)

»With *Grey Bees*, Andrej Kurkow has produced a sharply-drawn picture of the festering conflict in the Ukraine, one from which the rest of Europe has long since averted its gaze.« – Sigrid Löffler / Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Cologne

»It is highly impressive how Andrej Kurkow manages to create a melancholic mood in his tale of the happiness seeker Sergej without descending into pathos.« – Terrance Albrecht / WDR 5, Cologne

»Kurkow tells the oppressive story of the everyday of war in Eastern Ukraine with a quiet and poetic language.« – Céline Graf / Der Bund, Berne

»This time, the Ukrainian author of *Death and the Penguin,* known for his brilliantly dark humour, has written a modern-day odyssey, with a return that is ambiguously hopeful.« – India Lewis / The Arts Desk, London

»In spare prose, Ukraine's most famous novelist unsparingly examines the inhuman confusions of our modern times and the longing of the warm-hearted everyman that is Sergeyich for the rationality of the natural world.« – John Thornhill / Financial Times, London

»*Grey Bees* is as timely as the author's *Ukraine Diaries* were in 2014, but treats the unfolding crisis in a more imaginative way, with a pinch of Kurkov's signature humour.« – fantasticfiction.com

»Kurkow distils a happy desperation, a form of surreal pantheism that places him geographically, like his country, between Russian romanticism and Scandinavian fatalism, between Chekhov and Paasilinna, Gogol and Hamsun.« – Frederic Beigbeder / Le Figaro, Paris

»In his book, the writer paints the ›grey zone‹ on the frontline with great humanity.« – Isabelle Mandraud / Le Monde, Paris

»This book lingers in the details, and every detail bears significant power.« – Kalani Pickhart / Electric Literature, New York

»And this one is actually kind of a sweet simple story, but in a way that's deceptively so. You watch someone's sweetness be pushed to its limits.« – Jennifer Wilson / New York Times Book Review, New York

»May more novels follow.« – Anna Reid / The Independent, Dublin

»Grey Bees is a gentle, sometimes ambivalent book about a conflict that had its share of moral complexity.« – The New Yorker, New York

»And this one is actually kind of a sweet simple story, but in a way that's deceptively so. You watch someone's sweetness be pushed to its limits.« – The New York Times Book Review, New York

Praise (cont'd)

»The Ukrainian writer depicts with unsettling simplicity the day-to-day life of isolated pensioners in their deserted villages, in the heart of a ›grey zone‹ which divides the pro-Russian separatists from the rest of the Ukrainians on the front line.« – Isabelle Mandraud / Le Monde, Paris

»The novel doesn't provide an answer. But it reminds us not to forget the poetry, courage and imagination of a country that is much more than the battlefield it is today.« – Flavie Philipon / Elle, Paris

»Somewhere between realism and dream, Andrei Kurkov has penned a great, absurd and philosophical novel about the chaos of the world, and about the brotherhood between a simple man and his bees.« – Sophie Joubert / L'Humanité, Saint-Denis

»The novel *Grey Bees* is essential reading in this time of war. Literature as an antidote to barbarism and hopelessness.« – Philippe Chevilley / Les Echos, Paris

»Somewhere between political fable and sparks of bucolic philosophy, this is a wonderful book that says so much about how high the stakes are where war is concerned.« – Jacques Lindecker / L'Alsace, Mulhouse

»*Grey Bees* makes the reader laugh, with tears in their eyes.« – Cécile Dutheil de la Rochère / AOC, Nîmes

Andrej Kurkow

»Andrey Kurkov is a master of grotesque humour.« – Brigitte, Hamburg

»With Kurkov, one is guaranteed entertainment of the highest order.« – Wiener Zeitung

»Andrej Kurkows knows how to make a story entertaining and amusing.« – Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

»Kurkov writes short, sly, page-turners that specialize in what we might call absurdist noir.« – John Powers / NPR's Fresh Air, Washington D.C.

»Armed with the hilarious animal metaphors that populate his books, Kurkow depicts a humorous and scathing satire of the post-Soviet world, and of a Ukrainian society rediscovering itself, independent and riven by mafia, chaos and corruption.« – Laurent Rigoulet / La Chronique, Brussels

»Kurkov's style is spare and effective, drawing us with deception ease into a dense, complex world full of wonderful characters.« – Michael Palin / (author)

»A latter-day Bulgakov [. . .] A Ukrainian Murakami.« – Phoebe Taplin / The Guardian, London

»A post-Soviet Kafka.« – Colin Freeman / The Daily Telegraph, London

»A kind of Ukrainian Kurt Vonnegut.« – Ian Sansom / The Spectator, London

Praise (cont'd)

»Andrey Kurkov connects the absurd with the ordinary, the comic with the sordid.« – Isabelle Mandraud / Le Monde, Paris

»He works with such imaginative power, which nothing seems to be able to quench, with a humorous and tender tone, with protagonists who don't have their fate in their hands, yet are saved by goodness and kindness.« – Alain Guillemoles / La Croix, Montrouge

»His prose marked by humour and a contagious humanity evokes magical realism and the absurd.« – Jorge Ferrer / El Mundo, Madrid

»Andrey Kurkov's writing style moves between the unexpected, the beautiful and the hilarious –– a tone that permits him to tell a tragedy without renouncing the paradox and the satire.« – Karina Sainz Borgo / ABC, Madrid

»It is no surprise that Kurkov began his literary career as a joke writer during the Soviet era. His humour is sharp and precise, but never cynical. As long as there is laughter, there is also hope, even within a rotten system.« – Tommi Melender / Helsingin Sanomat, Helsinki