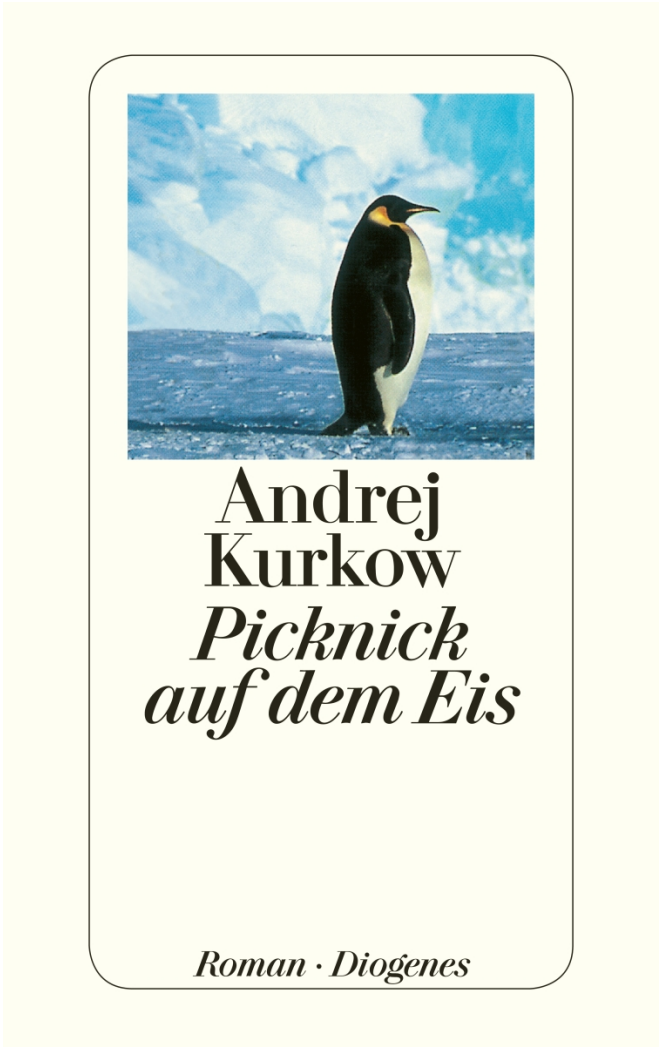
Diogenes

Book factsheet

Andrej Kurkow
Death and the Penguin

Published by Diogenes as *Picknick auf dem Eis*
Original title: *Smert' postoronnego (Death and the Penguin)*



Viktor is lonely. Abandoned by his last Muse, he lives alone except for his penguin Mischa. Viktor is desperate. Somehow, he has to earn enough to keep him in bread and Mischa in fish. But he is a daydreamer and an out-of-work short-story writer, and he has nothing to show for himself except a talent for language and a drawer full of unfinished manuscripts for a novel. He has a hard time of it in Kyiv, haunt of the nouveau riche and the Mafia, where the only things that count are money and business acumen. One day, however, the editor-in-chief of a big newspaper offers Viktor a well-paid job as a free-lance collaborator: Viktor is to write obituaries on famous personalities – who are, by the way, not yet dead. Viktor asks no questions and gets down to work. He doesn't think anything of doing a job for an acquaintance of his boss on the side, and the acquaintance, who turns out to be a small-time rogue with a heart of gold, comes along quite often with a lucrative job. One day, Viktor pours his heart out to him over a glass of vodka: like all writers, he is anxious to see his work published, but the VIPs for whom he has written brilliant obituaries cling tenaciously to life... Some days later, however, Viktor opens the paper and finds his first obituary in print.

Contemporary Literature
288 pages
11.6 × 18.4 cm
March 1999

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Dutch (Prometheus/Bert Bakker)
English/UK (BBC)
English/world (Random House)
Finnish (Otava)
French (Liana Levi)
Georgian (Intelekti)
Hungarian (Muvelt Nép)
Icelandic (Bjartur & Veröld)
Italian (Keller)
Japanese (Shinchosha)
Macedonian (Artkonekt)
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Norwegian (Cappelen Damm)
Portuguese/PT (Porto)
Romanian (Paralela 45)
Spanish/world (Blackie Books)
Swedish (Natur och Kultur)

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*
2022 ›The Halldór Laxness International Literature Prize‹
2021 ›Fulbright Visiting Scholar-Stipendium‹ in San Diego, Kalifornien, USA

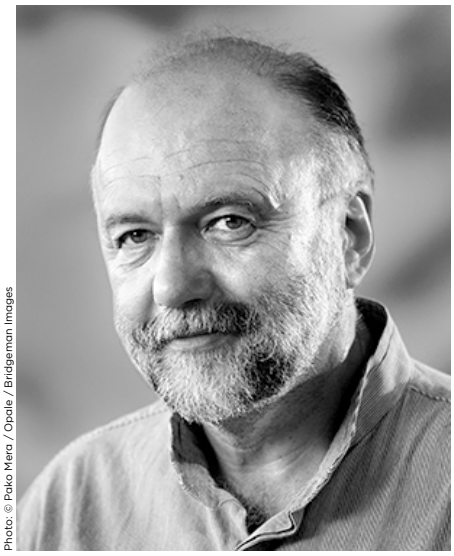
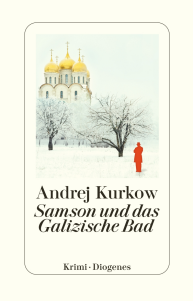
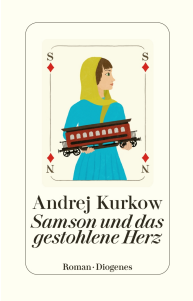


Photo: © Pako Mera / Opale / Bridgeman Images

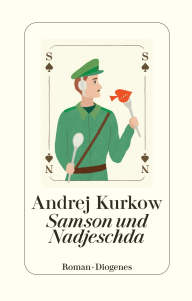
Andrej Kurkow, born in 1961 in what was then Leningrad, has lived in Kyiv since his childhood. He studied foreign languages and became a newspaper editor and screenwriter. Since his novel *Death and the Penguin*, he has been considered one of the Ukraine's most important contemporary authors. His work 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.



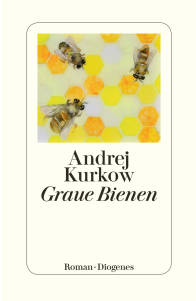
Samson and the Galician Bath
480 pages
2025



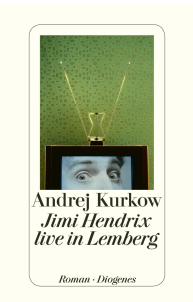
Samson and the Stolen Heart
432 pages
2023



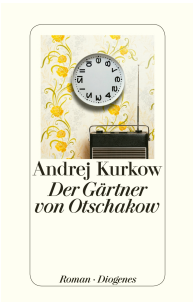
Samson and Nadezhda
368 pages
2022
Award winner
Bestseller



Grey Bees
448 pages
2019
Award winner



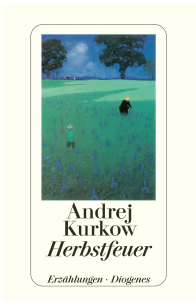
Jimi Hendrix Live in Lviv
416 pages
2014
Award winner



The Gardener of Ochakov
352 pages
2012
Award winner



The Milkman in the Night
544 pages
2009



Bonfire
240 pages
2007

Awards (cont'd)

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

Death and the Penguin

»A brilliantly deadpan satire on corruption in post-communist Ukraine.« – Christopher Tayler / The Sunday Telegraph, London

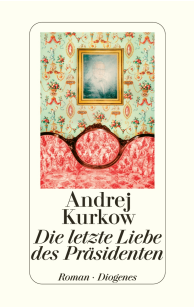
››Death and the Penguin‹ is the most professional work of literature to have been published here for years!« – Olga Busina / Kiev News

»*Death and the Penguin* comes across as an almost perfect little novel ... fast-paced and witty and on the side of the angels.« – John Powers / NPR's Fresh Air, Washington D.C.

»*Death and the Penguin* successfully balances the social awkwardness of Woody Allen, the absurd clashes of Jean-Luc Godard and the escalating paranoia of Franz Kafka.«
,
– Vikas Turakias / The Cleveland Plain Dealer

»Misha, the most memorable character of his thriller *Death and the Penguin*, left web-footed prints all over my imagination.« – NPR, Washington D.C.

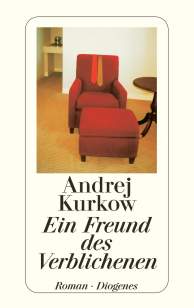
»I loved the f*ck out of it.«
, – Paul Constant / The Stranger, Seattle



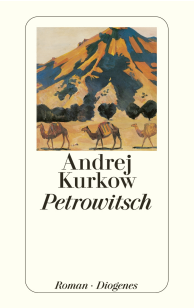
The President's Last Love
704 pages
2005



Penguin Lost
544 pages
2003



A Matter of Death and Life
144 pages
2001
Award winner



The Good Angel of Death
448 pages
2000

Praise (cont'd)

»The deadpan tone works perfectly, and it will be a hard-hearted reader who is not touched by Viktor's relationship with his unusual pet.« – The Times, London

»A striking portrait of post-Soviet isolation … In this bleak moral landscape Kurkov manages to find ample refuge for his dark humour.« – New York Times, New York

»A black comedy of rare distinction, and the penguin is an invention of genius.« – The Spectator, London

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

»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

Praise (cont'd)

»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