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It's Time: Writing on the Wall

Pavel Kostin
James Rann, translator
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“I don’t have to be happy,” realizes the hero of Pavel Kostin’s *It’s Time: Writing on the Wall*, a novel recently translated from Russian into English by James Rann. The story details the meanderings of an acutely introspective man, a youth seeking “more than this” and a little magic in his humdrum life.

As the story opens, it becomes clear that Max might be seriously troubled: he is easily frightened and often confused; he walks in his sleep; he frequently receives visitations from a sexy guardian angel (Lady F); and he sits on rooftops, prompting his mother to place him therapy. But Max isn’t crazy, or not any more than he should be, anyway. Max is simply hungry for some evidence of greatness beyond what is ordinary and therefore disappointing in the urban landscape all around him.

His quest for meaning, purpose, and freedom from both ordinariness and disappointment pervades his friendships, his free time, and his love life. He sinks into and out of the landscape about him with a poet’s ease and a philosopher’s eye: reality literally shimmers around him. Yet he has ordinary relationships and conversations, just like everyone else.

Among his many ponderings, Max wonders if he could be a great artist. His friends, graffiti artists and free spirits themselves, weigh in, warning “If you’re going to specially apply paint to concrete and still keep thinking about the artistic heights which you can hope to achieve … then, for sure, you won’t manage to paint a single thing.” The same friend goes on to theorize that success lies somewhere between one’s self control and beyond it: “Working hard means not being lazy when the time comes. And banging your head against a wall isn’t worth it.”

It is at moments like this when we wonder if it is the author addressing the reader, or the artist addressing Max. Indeed, Max’s internal tone often verges on didactic, and, occasionally, even self righteous. “I don’t know the meaning of the word “boring.” If you’re bored, you’re just not tired enough,” he says to the reader. Whenever Kostin lets such platitudes escape the lips of his main character, he reminds his reader to be active in the consumption of these ideas—to consider him or herself— as if *It’s Time* were a self-help book and not a novel.

For those who like to explore ideas of positive living, lifestyle, and philosophy—Kostin’s novel is an interesting, enjoyable, pathway. It’s journey is both intriguing and fascinating, but also instructive—aiming to be the reader’s own personal guardian angel, perhaps—albeit one slightly less sexy than Max’s mysterious “Lady F.”
LEIA MENLOVE (June 27, 2012)

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