

Title: Victor Martinovich's *Paranoia*, re: Contemporary Russophone Culture
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When asked to translate *Paranoia*, I knew nothing about the novel, its author, or the context in which the author worked. Embarrassed to acknowledge this, I don't think I'm alone. Even among Slavists "Belarusian culture" still evokes images of cross-stitched linen, folk-inspired lyric poetry, pogroms, horrifying tales of the sacrifices of Soviet partisans during World War II, and, more recently, the talking head of a dictator who makes Vladimir Putin seem like an intelligent, nice guy. Victor Martinovich's novel introduced me to a cultural and literary scene that, while conflicted and complex, is also vital, smart, and resilient.

Journalist Martinovich's first attempt at fiction, *Paranoia* is "not the novel of the century" (<http://www.textexpert.ru/node/1415>). Its sentences run unjustifiably long, the author's bizarre metaphors often ring too self-conscious, and the resemblance between the author and his very sympathetic writer-hero rings too earnest. To his credit, though, Martinovich spins a compelling love story worthy of Erich Segal, interwoven with a detective tale of corrupt officials and secret police no less diabolical than Martin Cruz Smith's, and set against an astonishingly beautiful twenty-first-century Minsk qua Dostoevsky's Petersburg, with homage to Orwell, Olesha, Borges, and Nabokov.

In my paper I hope to present an overview of the novel and to address the questions it raises, as a Belarusian novel written in Russian, about the reaches and limits of Russophone culture.