



Scotland Russia □

No. 32 Spring 2015

REVIEW

**From Crimea with love
Sir Walter Scott and Russia
Recipes for Shrove Tuesday/Maslennitsa
Doors That Russia Opened For Me
Book and film reviews**



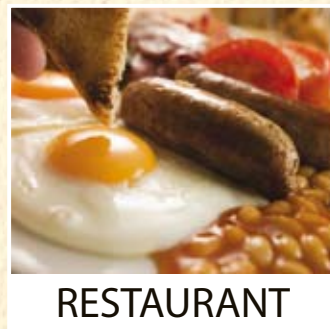
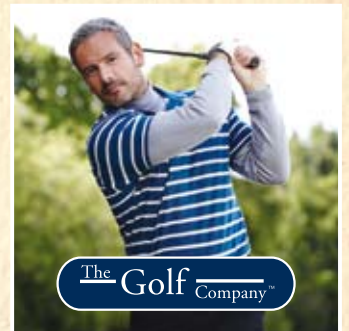


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Editorial

Plus ca change...

The visit to Scotland in December 1816 by the 20-year old Grand Duke Nicholas (later Tsar Nicholas I) of Russia inspires the thought concerning relations between our two countries: 'plus ca change...' Before he made his way north to cross the border at Berwick, Nicholas stayed a few days at Chatsworth with the then 26-year old Duke of Devonshire. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was love at first sight, and the two men remained in friendly and affectionate correspondence for the rest of their lives, the Grand Duke signing himself in letters 'The Scotchman.' The Grand Duke had had a Scottish nanny Miss Jane Lyon for the first formative 7 years of his life, and a Scottish doctor, James Wylie, who carried the five-year old Nicholas to safety in his arms following the assassination in 1801 of Nicholas's father Tsar Paul I. It can therefore reasonably be guessed that one reason Nicholas called himself 'The Scotchman' - besides affection for the country, its people and its culture - was that he may have spoken English with a Scottish accent. At the time of that first visit, the UK and Russia had just celebrated their victory as fellow members of the Triple Alliance over Napoleon. However, by the end of Nicholas's reign in 1855, our two countries were at war. I men-



tion this so that we who love Russia do not become too down-hearted at the current state of relations between our countries - we have been here before. The article by Janet Wheatcroft in this issue celebrates a positive outcome of the Crimean War: the humble snowdrop, harbinger of spring.

Varvara Bashkirova has been an innovative and exemplary editor of 'Review' - a hard act to follow. I will do my best and welcome your comments and suggestions.

Elizabeth Roberts
liz@crookedstane.com Moffat Jan 2015

Flight M17; The Sunflower's Eclipse

All the golden flowers
Wondered
What sudden eclipse
Stopped the sun
Had startled their light-ward gaze
As the great grey bird
Plummeted the eastern sky.

But it sliced
Their golden petals
Sharper
Than any claw
Spread its catch
Unexpectedly
Everywhere.

What shrill cry
Split the summer air-
Not unlike the screech
Of a wounded, broken bird.

One of the sunflower gatherers
Halted in her tracks-
A small child
Lay in stem's deep shade
Asleep beyond all waking.

The sunflowers
Bewildered
Spread their great green arms
To soften the fall

Tenderly
She made a bed
Of all her flowers.
A beautiful golden bed
Fit for a golden bird-
Flown in from the sun.

Elaine Elizabeth Wood, 2014

Chair's notes

Jenny Carr - SRF Chairperson

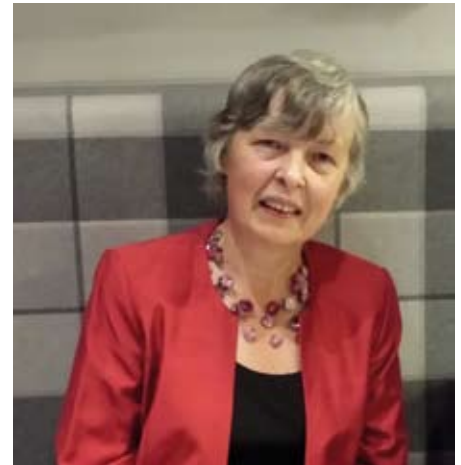
We are certainly living in interesting times. As I write the world is reeling from the Charlie Hebdo murders and there is heated discussion of what free speech means and what its limits are. The picture from Russia is confused – official support for the fight against terrorism but one prominent TV commentator (Alexei Martynov) attributes the attack to the CIA.

Interesting, and distressing, times in Russia and her neighbours too – the conflict in Ukraine continues, Russia has major economic problems to contend with, and there are a number of worrying developments on the political front too.

The SRF is entering its 13th year (not a bad omen we hope) and continues its dual mission to raise interest and inform, both from a non-partisan and independent a position as we can manage. We are starting the year with two speaker events – a discussion of the Russian economic crisis on 28 January and a talk in late February by the journalist Peter Pomerantsev.

Our mission to inform is of course not only concerned with current affairs, interesting though those are at the moment. We have been trying for some time to get Russian back onto the school curriculum in Scotland – because a subject not thought important enough for schools is likely to be dismissed as unimportant by the general population. And from that flows lack of coverage in the media, lack of discussion, and lack of understanding.

In addition to offering tasters and school clubs (with our partners RCS Haven) over the last few years we are now trying a new tack. A website offering an introduction to aspects of Russian culture which we hope will interest 9-12 year olds (approx.) will be launched in Spring 2015. We have called it "Find Out About RUSSIA" and included topics such as the Russian language, Space, History, Food and many others. I am very grateful to all our enthusiastic contributors – ranging from professional specialists to a 15 year old schoolgirl. If any readers



have children in the right age group who would like to act as testers please contact me. Full details of the website will be in our e-bulletins in due course.

I will conclude with best wishes for 2015 from the SRF committee and thanks to our members for their continuing support.

JENNY CARR
jenny@scotlandrussiaforum.org

The snowdrop festival runs every day 10am-5pm February to March at Cambo <http://www.camboestate.com> see also 'Britain's White Gold' p.8.



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How Russian Opened Doors for Me

The successive doors that learning Russian have opened for me have been profound, long-lasting and existential.

My first contact with Russia and Russians was through Joseph Vecchi and his 'Hungaria' restaurant in London's Lower Regent St where we used regularly to go for celebratory meals as a family in the early 1950's. The Hungaria's signature, non-alcoholic, sticky – sweet, pinky-orange drink, served complete with a glace cherry on a stick, was called a 'Pussyfoot'. Vecchi, was a native of Nice who had been in private service to Prince Yussouppoff in St Petersburg before the Revolution – his remarkable story is told in 'The Tavern is My Drum', published in 1948.

Later, aged 12, I was one of a small number of people invited to stand on the pavement to witness the arrival of joint Soviet Premiers Bulganin and Khrushchev ('Bulge' and 'Crush') to No 10 Downing St in April 1956. This came about because a near neighbor of ours in north Kent, Sir Tim Bligh, was PPS (Parliamentary Private Secretary) to Harold Macmillan, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, resident at No 11 Downing St. Looking back, - without being able to check with either of my parents both of whom of course now are dead -, I theorise that I was invited to play the part of a member of the general public that day because of a perceived need to recruit a plausibly democratic 'rent a crowd' – not directly related to those in power, but about whom sufficient was known not to present any threat to the VIP Russian visitors. A brief black and white newsreel clip of the occasion is available on <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/bulganin-and-khrushchev-visit-downing-street> in which my shoes and coat pocket are just visible flying by.

In 1958, I started to learn Russian as a pupil at St George's School, Clarens, Vaud in Switzerland. My teacher was Mrs Irina Findlow, nee Kaigorodtsev, the wife of the Anglican incumbent of St John's church in Territet, some way along the shores of Lac Lemman from the school, beside the statue of the beautiful Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who was assassinated on that spot in 1898. I had been removed from my English public school, Benenden, at my own request because the food there was inedible. There were two of us learning Russian. The other student was a beautiful Italian girl, Evy Capelli who picked up the strange words much faster than me. In

my second year at school, I moved in to live with the Findlows in the little wooden vicarage beside the funicular railway that took passengers up to Glion where there was a colony of so-called 'White Russians' – emigres dating from the early days of the Revolution some of whom, ancient and bearded, used to find their way to the vicarage to drink tea. Vladimir Nabokov was resident in the nearby Palace Hotel; Charlie Chaplin and Richard Burton also lived nearby. At the Findlow's, I learned about hospitality Russian style, and the traditional foods associated with Easter; we went to the Russian Orthodox church in Lausanne on Easter Sunday eve, and processed round the outside of the church with candles. I was impressed. This was a great and ancient Christian culture, embattled. It was important. I became aware that there was a 'Cold War' going on. John Findlow had been embassy chaplain in Rome before he was posted to Territet, and went on to our embassy in Athens before returning to Rome after Vatican II as the first director of the Anglican Centre in the Palazzo Doria.

After taking 'A' levels in French and English, I left my school in Switzerland and my father rented a flat for me next to the Dorchester hotel in Mayfair's Curzon Place from which I took more 'A' levels, this time in Russian and Spanish, at the Westminster Tutors, a 'crammer'. I went for Russian lessons once or twice a week, travelling laboriously by bus, to a Mrs Japolski in Highgate. Then I arranged to take my B. A. Hons degree in Russian Language and Literature as an external student of London University in Oxford, at St Clare's. All of this I organized for myself because neither of my parents, each for different reasons, thought education beyond a certain point was important for girls. It was in 1963 or 1964 that I first visited Moscow as a member of a small student delegation. I returned for a second time in 1965, having joined the Great Britain-USSR Association whose director John C Q Roberts I was to marry nearly 20 years later. I met members of the BBC Russian service on that second visit and was invited by Gordon Clough to make a broadcast in Russian about my experiences from Bush House, the old World Service building, in London's Aldwych.

By this time I had decided to become a journalist and joined Thomson Newspapers as a trainee, again with the help of Tim Bligh who gave me an introduction to Sir Denis Hamilton, editor in chief of The Times and the Sunday Times. I worked in various capacities for various newspapers – reporter, feature writer, women's editor – then married a fellow journalist, had a family, divorced and then in 1982 remarried the director of the Great Britain – USSR Association. I became what I called 'the vicar's wife', a voluntary position, travelling with him on frequent visits to Russia and the republics, and entertaining an endless stream of fascinating Russian and other visitors. It was an exhilarating and exhausting life – see John's account in his 'Speak Clearly Into the Chandelier' (the title was my suggestion).

During the twenty years of our marriage 1982-2002 I wrote many books and articles about Russia. Notably, through Ekaterina Yu. Genieva, director of the State Library for Foreign Literature (VGBIL) in Moscow, I met Fr Alexander Men' who baptized my elder daughter Abi shortly before he was murdered, and whose memory I helped to perpetuate through a play devised with Mark Rozovsky of the Moscow theatre At the Nikitsky Gates: 'Murder in the Cathedral: A Russian Rehearsal', and with the Rev Dr Ann Shukman a collection of his selected writings 'Christianity for the Twenty First Century'.

Most recently, following my arrival in 2010 to live in Moffat, Dumfries and Galloway, I founded the charity 'Moffat Book Events' SC042782. MBE has a co-operation agreement with VGBIL, under which three successful international conferences with Russian themes have been organized: 'Russia: Lessons and Legacy' in 2012; 'TRANSLation TRANSformed' 2013 and 'Lermontov 200' in 2014.

As the new editor of Scotland-Russia Forum's 'Review' I bring a deep respect and love for Russia and Russians, without whose unremittingly questioning and penetrating approach to life my own would be immeasurably the poorer.

Elizabeth Roberts, editor of the Scotland Russia Review

Art which transcends cultures: Philip Solovjov

Signe Akmenkalne met photographer **Philip Solovjov** to talk about his latest project, rediscovering his roots and the difference between Instagram generation and photography as an art form.

Philip Solovjov was born in Moscow, where he spent his childhood, until at the age of 14 he and his family moved to Narva, Estonia. There he first picked up photography, in few years time to graduate from Tartu Art College where he pursued it further. Now he lives in Edinburgh, where he works as a care worker - yet photography, while not his bread and butter, is still an important part of his life.



How did you first pick up photography?

My father has been an artist and commercial photographer at the same time. However, he never even tried to teach me photography, to create any interest. Maybe because he knew it's not the best thing to do [laughs], I mean it is a great thing to do, but it's hard in terms of making money. So I was surrounded by and grew up with photography. At one point I just picked up the camera myself and started taking photos.

Describe your style of photography?

My usual works are black and white landscapes, quite classical, simple, minimalistic compositions, calm, tranquil. It requires a lot of work to find suitable places.

Your roots and the places you grew up and lived in, how did they affect you and your work?

I first lived in Narva, which is a city on the border of Estonia and Russia. It's an interesting place, because the city's population is almost entirely Russian and only a few people speak Estonian. I speak both, as I'm from a mixed family. It's been quite a

strange place to grow up in, being of the two cultures that are quite different and are even opposed to each other. For Estonians this place is strange as well, they don't really perceive it as part of their country. Estonians don't tend to go there, if they do then it's like an exotic destination, but no one really considers going there to settle. And the people who live [in Narva], they don't really travel beyond it much, they don't have much inspiration to learn the [Estonian] language, they're more connected to Russia, they watch Russian TV, although it's not Russia at all. Even the ethnically Russian people who live there aren't really Russians, the mentality is different. A lot of photos [of his latest project] are from there, as that's where I started photography, so [Narva] is important for me and has always been a source of inspiration.

Before the Second World War, it used to be a very beautiful city. During the war, it was completely destroyed, a lot of the building were gone. What was left was not rebuilt but demolished, instead, all these blocks of flats were built. All that's left now is a castle, and that's it.

Narva has quite a military history to it, a lot of battles. The city stands on the river which separates Russia and Estonia, so on the Estonian side there's the Hermann



castle from Medieval period, and on the Russian side there's the Ivangorod Fortress in a typical Slavic tradition. It's an interesting place.

You've had few exhibitions in Scotland, in the Moffat Gallery and Alloa. Your latest project that you're working on, titled 'Summer goes on', seems to be quite different from your usual work.

First of all, it's in colour, which I usually don't use. It's more snapshot style, more personal and connected to my travels in Estonia. It's where I lived for quite a long time, so in a way it seems so routine and small to me, I feel like I have been everywhere and seen everything. When you move abroad, things change. I usually visit [Estonia] once a year, and I don't spend much time there, so the attitude changes. And that's what the series is about. Going back to places where you used to be and looking at them with different eyes, with eyes of someone who has left the country, but is coming back and still trying to see the beauty and inspiration in the same old places.

Coming back to your identity, how do you see yourself and how has it changed with

your travels?

For me it's important to travel, to change my perspective on life. Often people who don't travel have a very orthodox thinking, ideas such as 'We are the greatest'. People who travel start to think differently - they see that countries may be different, but people everywhere are alike, and that there is no point in thinking some are better or worse. I might think like this because I'm from a multi-cultural family, we always had a very open attitude towards other countries, cultures, travelling, none of that fake patriotism. For me that's very normal - not to be too focused on one country [which you're from, for example]. For example, I don't consider myself only Russian or only Estonian. To be honest, I don't really know who I am, because I was born in Russia, grew up in Estonia, my wife is from Latvia, I live in the UK, I speak three languages all the time. We were joking with my wife that we don't know what language our kids would speak because there would be four, but you have to pick one. We don't know what it will be yet.

In this age of selfies, Instagram and high tech, everyone seems to be a photographer.

At which moment should a person call themselves one?

It's a tricky question because nowadays everyone indeed is a photographer. It's kind of sad, because if I tell someone that I studied Photography, they say 'Wow, but why? You just take a camera, read a manual, watch some tutorials online and you can do photography!' Which is kind of true, as cameras are so advanced and easy to use these days that it's not that hard to take decent photos. I quite like a quote by a Russian photographer Sergei Maximishin, who once said 'There are many photographers, but there are few good photographers.'

It has to be something more than just something you put on Instagram or share on social media. You have to have some idea behind it. You can still take photographs of baked beans, for example. Everything can be photographed. But it has to be something you are interested in yourself, something that inspires you. You have to approach it as something significant - which is what makes your work meaningful. (philipsolovjov.com)

Signe Akmenkalne is a student at Napier University, Edinburgh.



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Britain's White Gold

Janet Wheatcroft writes about British snowdrops and their origins



Cambo Snowdrops Woods

As I write, there is a single bulb of a snowdrop 'E A Bowles' for auction on E-bay. It still has three days to go, but the seventeen bidders have already pushed the price up to £60. At Alpine Society plant sales the arrival of some rare snowdrop fires a Black Thursday-like frenzy in waiting snowdrop fanatics. These are the galanthophiles, legendary in the horticultural world for the prices they will pay, and the lengths to which they will go to get hold of the rarest treasures. And yet this is the most modest, the most endearing, and the most generous of all spring bulbs.

Snowdrops are not British natives, but like so many other things, they probably came with the Roman conquest. *Galanthus nivalis* is the familiar variety that lights up winter woodland and lines the paths of cottage gardens. Over the centuries foreign wars and invasions have brought many new introductions, for better or worse. The Crimean War is remembered mostly for blunders, bravery, jingoism and the emergence of nursing as a profession. But the 1850s also coincided with the start of the passion for plant collecting, and the introduction of new species. Soldiers transported to foreign parts inevitably acquire new vocabulary and adopt new habits. This war against the Russians popularised cigarette-smoking, picked up from the Turks, and new forms of knitwear – balaclavas (after the battle) and cardigans (after the leader of the Charge of the Light Brigade) – to counteract the harsh winters of the region. Less well-known, however, is the horticultural

bonus that war and invasion brings, from the crusaders' gift of Crown Imperials to the great bounty of Britain's expanding empire when plant collectors were often spies, and vice versa. The Crimean War was no exception.

The war was fought in the lands that fringed the Black Sea, an area with a rich flora, particularly of bulbs. Summers were hot and dry, but for the troops in their vast encampments, winters must have been grim. It was a world of mud, churned by horses, men and supply wagons; of diseases like cholera and typhus, and of stench from the latrines and stables. The men were ill-equipped, inadequately clothed and poorly-fed. How welcome, then, must have been the appearance of snowdrops, so redolent of home, and the first sign that winter was on the way out? Many a letter home to a sweetheart or mother enclosed a pressed snowdrop or a package of a few bulbs.

There was always a tradition of the gifted amateur in the British army, especially when it came to the natural world. The more observant noticed that this Crimean snowdrop was distinctive, fatter and more robust, with pleated bluish leaves. It is, in fact, a different species. *Galanthus plicatus*. Lord Clarina, an Irish cavalry officer noticed, and sent some bulbs home to his sister in County Kildare, a woman blessed with an eye for a good seedling. The result of this injection of vigorous new DNA was 'Straffan', one of the most desirable of the new named snowdrops. 'Warham', a plump double, was a selection brought back by Captain Adlington at the end of the war in 1856. Still in cultivation, it remains one of the best doubles. The influx of new blood produced my favourite *Galanthus 'Atkinsii'*, gloriously large and early, a marriage of *G. plicatus* and *G. nivalis*, and a snowdrop that every garden should have. The wider gene pool was also the start of all the precious hybrids and selections so beloved of the galanthophiles, and (mostly) so indistinguishable to everyone else. Some require an acute visual memory and a magnifying glass to discern any individuality.

There are six species of snowdrops in this far south-eastern area of Russia. One, the newly discovered *G. panjutinonii*, has had one of its scant five locations wiped out by the construction of the Sochi Winter Olympics. As it requires singular and hard-

to-replicate growing conditions it has been placed on the Endangered Species list. It may endure in botanical gardens, but this is no substitute for a wild colony.

In Russia, snowdrops feature in the fairy tale play *Twelve Months*. A capricious queen fancies snowdrops in the dead of winter and promises a basket of gold to anyone who can provide them. A greedy stepmother sends her unloved ward into the forest to find the flowers. Of course, the task is impossible and she resigns herself, tearfully, to freezing to death. Suddenly, twelve characters – the twelve months – appear sitting round a bonfire. The girl warms herself and tells them of her fruitless quest. The winter months are hard-hearted and unsympathetic, but April intercedes and conjures a temporary spring, carpeted with snowdrops. The girl has lived a kind and compassionate life, and this is her reward. A cruel and selfish stepsister tries the same trick and meets a grisly end. The play, by Samuil Marshak, has been made into a film on several occasions, including a famous animated film. It is interesting to observe that, for us, snowdrops are 'February Fair Maids'. They evidently flower later in Russia.

Like most non-alpine gardeners, I prefer my snowdrops lighting up wintry woodland and spilling down banks in their thousands. Pampered frail pets in alpine houses are not my thing. There is one named variety that I would not be without, however, and I am not alone: it came top in a poll to choose the best ever snowdrop. Sam Arnott (born 1852) was a Dumfries baker who moved to the village of Carsethorn on the Solway Firth. He was passionate about snowdrops and raised the wonderful variety that bears his name. Prosperous, easy to grow and almond-scented, 'Sam Arnott' is unsurpassed, prolific, tough, and perfectly happy in the open garden. Surely it must get its hybrid vigour and size from the Russian blood in its veins. It would be an apt symbol for the links between Scotland and Russia that go back far beyond the war, 150 years ago, in which we fought on opposite sides.

Janet Wheatcroft is a garden writer and plant collector living in Dumfries and Galloway. Picture courtesy of the Cambo Estate, camboestate.com

Sir Walter Scott and Russia

2014 saw the bicentenary of the birth of the great Russian poet Lermontov, a bicentenary that was celebrated widely in Scotland, the land of his distant Scottish ancestors. An equally important bicentenary did not receive the attention it merited; it concerned the publication in 1814 of the first novel written by Walter Scott, a historical novel with the name of *Waverley*, and one that fired the imagination of readers not only in Britain but also on the Continent and in Russia. Because of his famous collection of *Border ballads*, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*, and such narrative poems as *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*, Scott was already well known on the pre-1814 literary scene as a poet and historian. What had intrigued his readers was his fascination with the past and his portrayal of it.

An awareness that he was being overtaken in popularity as a poet by Lord Byron was one of the reasons for inducing Scott to espouse the novel as the medium for his creative activity. For this he wished to conceal his identity as the author of *Waverley* and subsequent novels, a secret he kept until 1827. His wish, however, was ignored by his French publishers, and his books on the Continent and in Russia appeared in French, the lingua franca of cultured Europe, under his name.

In the late 19th century the polymath Mikhail Lomonosov borrowed from Church Slavonic to enrich the Russian language and enable it to cope with the needs of literature and philosophy. Alexander Pushkin was to use and develop this language to become Russia's greatest poet. In a home where French was the language of the table and salon, Pushkin used the stories related to him by a devoted Russian nanny to begin the acquisition of his profound knowledge of the folklore of his country.

Although quickly recognised as a gifted poet, Pushkin suffered for his avant-garde views on religion and politics. His early postings to the south of Russia and eventual exile at his mother's estate near Pskov were engineered by the governing authorities to keep the difficult young man well away from St Petersburg and Moscow. For intellectual stimulation

during his northern exile he depended on letters from cultured friends and a supply of Europe's best books, and especially those by Scott.

The works of Scott were also popular with female readers, who admired the heroines in the novels such as Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, Diana Vernon in *Rob Roy* and the fiery Flora MacIvor in *Waverley*. Scott also had his appeal in the sphere of fashion. Paris fashions, popular in Russia in the 1820s, included tartans à la White Lady (a character in *The Monastery*), hats à la Walter Scott, Quentin Durward coats and Rebecca caps. In 1826 on a visit to Paris Scott was invited to a soirée by a Princess Galatzina, where he was met by a covey of Russian princesses arrayed in tartan to a background of music and singing.

The influence of Scott on Pushkin only became apparent when the Russian poet entered the field of prose with *The Captain's Daughter* and *Tales of Belkin*. The former, set during the Pugachev rebellion of 1773 -75, borrowed themes from Scott's *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of Midlothian*. In *Tales of Belkin* Pushkin used a literary device devised by Scott in placing a fictitious narrator between himself and the reader to conceal his identity until the success of the tales had been assured.

Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy all lauded the works of Scott for their plots and high moral tone. As the century wore on Scott's appeal diminished owing to the popularity of the works of these great Russian authors and the immense success of Tolstoy's magnificent historical novel, *War and Peace*. It may be a coincidence that *War and Peace* and *Waverley* were written about sixty years after the



Portrait of Sir Walter Scott by Henry Raeburn

events described in them - Russia during the Napoleonic wars and Scotland during the 1745 Uprising. Despite the overwhelming attraction of Tolstoy's work, Scott's books found a new lease of life and a different forum for their readership. The Russian schoolroom had taken over from the private library in ensuring that the young were exposed to the benign influence of Scott at an early stage.

Scott's semi Gothic residence at Abbotsford added to his influence in Russia. A Prince Mikhail Vorontsov, who had been brought up in the Russian embassy in London and become viceroy for the Caucasus, had a summer palace built at Alupka in the Crimea in Scottish Baronial and Moorish styles. The Baronial façade bears a remarkable resemblance to the frontage of Abbotsford, a house that was to become a place of pilgrimage for Scott enthusiasts from Russia. In the Russian mind Scott and Abbotsford had become inseparable in a legacy of stone and word.

Dairmid Gunn, Hon. Vice-President of the Scotland-Russia Forum

Little Britain Goes East:

Nasha Russia, Intercultural Dialogue and the Subversion of Ethnic Prejudice in Russian Television Comedy

Stephen Hutchings's lecture treated what might at first glance seem a rather marginal instance of British-Russian cultural dialogue. For it took as its subject the Russian television channel TNT's scandalous *Nasha Russia* comedy sketch series, examining it in light of its relationship with the BBC series, *Little Britain*, which peaked in the mid 2000's, and which provided *Nasha Russia*'s inspiration (though TNT did not obtain a legal license from the British broadcaster). The lecture aimed, however, to locate *Nasha Russia* and the issues it raises in the much broader and more important contexts of a Russian television history very different from its British counterpart, and of the state of inter-ethnic relations and public discourse in Putin's Russia.

Like its source (which was the target of much controversy in the UK), *Nasha Russia* engages in a deeply ambivalent brand of ethnic, gender and other social stereotyping for comic effect. Hutchings demonstrated how the show, of which 5 series were made, and which is still broadcast in repeat on TNT, at once embraces familiar stereotypes and distances itself from them. Focusing in particular on *Nasha Russia*'s portrayal of the Central Asian 'guest worker' (*gastarbeiter*) – a prime target for contemporary Russian nationalist xenophobia – Hutchings argued that the distancing effect is linked to the connections the stars of *Nasha Russia* have with the subversive Soviet satirical show, *KVN* (*Klub Veselykh i Nakhodchivyykh*, or *Club of the Merry and Resourceful*), banned for a while under Brezhnev. Adapting an approach familiar to *KVN* viewers, they deliberately exaggerate their enactment of the *gastarbeiter* stereotype and thereby succeed in deflating the very ethno-centric Russian nationalism from which that stereotype derives. Hutchings further suggested that *Nasha Russia* exploits its position at the peripheries of the official Russian media landscape (TNT is a specialist youth channel) by importing into its comedic strategy elements of the multicultural 'community-

building' ethos that characterized *KVN*. The Soviet show's cult status derived not only from its biting satirical irreverence, but also from the fact that it represents a collaboration between all the republics (and many of the different nationalities) of the former Soviet Union, and therefore projected a positive image of inter-ethnic relations at odds with current Russian nationalism.

Despite the strength of these influences, Hutchings argued, however, that *Nasha Russia* ultimately fails to close off the ambivalent spaces for nationalist bigotry, and for anti-xenophobic indignation, that its complex, double-edged sketches open up. (Misunderstood on all sides, the show was attacked vociferously both for mocking Russian nationalism, and for belittling ethnic minorities.) The comic mode it imports from the UK is intended for a society that has lived through, learned the lessons from, and moved beyond, the 'minority rights' move-

ments of the late 20th century and the culture of 'political correctness' (PC) that it bred. Although ultimately more liberally subversive in intent than *Little Britain*, *Nasha Russia* was thrust into conditions in which 'political correctness' had yet to arrive. It therefore ran a far greater risk of mobilising rather than undermining prejudice. In so doing, Hutchings concluded, it exposed the full extent of the political battle surrounding questions of ethnicity in Putin's Russia.

Professor Stephen Hutchings, Professor of Russian Studies at the University of Manchester, gave an illustrated talk about the Russian satirical TV show 'Nasha Russia' at the international conference 'Giving Voice to Cultures' organised by the Dashkova Centre, Edinburgh University 12-13 Dec 2014.



Russian Shrove Tuesday

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SYRNIKI (Farmers Cheese Pancakes)



INGREDIENTS:

- 500 gr. curd or soft cottage cheese
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 6 tbsp plain flour, plus more for dusting
- Handful of raisins (optional)
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp baking soda
- Oil for frying

METHOD

- 1 Mix together the eggs and cheese until well combined. (A fork or wooden spoon is best)
- 2 In a separate large mixing bowl, mix together sifted flour, sugar, salt, and baking soda until well mixed.
- 3 Add the flour mixture to the egg mixture and mix well until everything is incorporated. Add raisins if using. The dough will be sticky and slightly lumpy.
- 4 Transfer the dough onto a well floured surface. Sprinkle some flour on top and shape into a sausage shape with your hands, about 2 inches wide (not length).
- 5 Cut this into about 3/4 inch sections vertically with a knife. Dip sides of each in flour then using your fingers, make into a circle and pat down to flatten.
- 6 Heat a non stick frying pan or griddle on medium high heat. Drizzle in a few tablespoons of oil, or generously grease a griddle pan. Shake off excess flour and fry the syrniki about 2-3 minutes on both sides.
- 7 Place fried syrniki on paper towel to soak up any excess oil
- 8 These can be served dusted with sugar and served with soured cream, or of course they are good with jam or syrup.

BLINI (Russian Pancakes)



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 eggs
- 500 ml. milk
- 200 g. plain flour
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- salt to taste
- vegetable oil

METHOD

- 1 Mix the dry ingredients. Add milk and eggs and mix thoroughly, removing any lumps. Keep adding milk until the batter becomes runny.
- 2 Heat a frying pan on the stove. Oil or butter the pan and pour in just enough of the pancake mixture to coat the bottom of the pan. When the mixture begins to bubble, turn the pancake over and cook lightly on the other side. Take it out and repeat until all the mixture is gone.
- 3 Serve in a pile, with sour cream, jam, butter or honey. Caviar is optional.



Books

Rasskaz-sensatsia & Rasskaz-provokatsia

by: Ignaty Dyakov
CreateSpace, 2013



Russian is not the most popular foreign language. Russia is not considered the most popular in the world. Thus, there are fewer resources available to teach and learn it. Ignaty Dyakov's *Rasskaz-sensatsia* and *Rasskaz-provokatsia*, two stories written in simplified Russian for the levels A2-B1 are aimed to fill this void. Let me first say a few words about the sto-

ryline. The stories are written with simple, yet genuine-sounding everyday Russian. The plot, however, is way too descriptive to engage a reader (especially a beginner, who might not understand everything very well). Particularly in *Rasskaz-sensatsia*, the sensational events promised in the title only start in the second half of the book. In *Rasskaz-provokatsia* the story does start with a big event, but immediately after that the momentum is lost. The rest of the book consist of dry descriptions of George's attitudes to the situations he finds himself in.

The second problem is the setting of the stories. Guadeloupe must be a lovely island, yet it has next-to-none cultural ties with Russia. George's ties with Russia are also unclear (yet, for some reason, he is acquainted with Russian fashion and cuisine and even quotes lines from Russian songs). The few mentions of Russian reality are false: it is depicted as a corruption-free land where everyone wears Prada. I spent the whole of last year there and I know that it is simply not the case. It is possible that these statements were supposed to be ironic, yet it is difficult to convey irony using language adapted to the A2-level speaker.

Are those texts a useful resource for language learning? Only to a limited extent. The exercises following each chapter are not demanding and stimulating enough. They consist of a few open questions check-

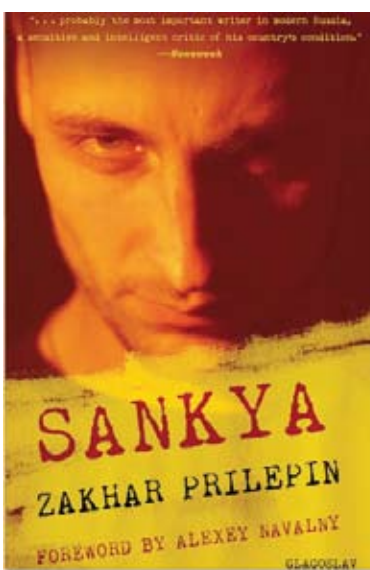
ing understanding and a fragment of a text (copied literally) with the noun endings erased. This is not enough for classroom use, the teachers would need to prepare more exercises themselves. There is no answer key to the open questions, so individual learners would not be able to verify their level of understanding. The grammar exercises are not only literally copied from the main text, they also put emphasis only on noun declension, with no mention of other problematic topics in Russian grammar (perfective and imperfective verbs, verbs of motion, etc.). Idiomatic expressions, used quite frequently in the text, are not translated nor even singled out in the text, which might cause a lot of confusion, especially among the beginners at whom the text is addressed.

All in all, I believe that Dyakov's books (particularly *Rasskaz-provokatsia*) may be a useful additional material to acquaint to students with ordinary, everyday Russian adjusted to their level of understanding. It is not, however, a useful resource for individual learners wanting to enhance their language abilities outside the classroom.

Reviewed by Marta Wiejak, student of Russian at the University of Edinburgh

Sankya

by: Zakhar Prilepin
London: Glasgoslav Publications, 2014.



Close to a decade since its first publication, Zakhar Prilepin's award-winning cult novel appears now in English via Glasgoslav Publications. It portrays contem-

porary Russia, or rather the country in the early 2000s, and the struggle of a fictional extremist party against a barely fictional regime. If *Sankya* was intended as a realistic portrait of the politics of that era, it is hard to imagine the picture much altered today. In this way, the novel still claims currency. The eponymous Sasha Tishin is a twenty-something member of the radical "Founders Fathers". He enjoys clashes with riot police and seeks ever greater opportunities to sacrifice himself to the cause. Readers uninitiated in Russian affairs could not be blamed for wondering what that cause really is, as it is not clearly elaborated. We know the Founders detest liberals and foreigners almost as much as they hate the corrupt government. They defend a patriotic ideal and debate the country's destiny, but speak mostly in grand metaphors of the motherland. Observing Sasha and his friends we are invited to weigh the value of those rough ideals against what they are willing to do to achieve them. Perhaps seeking to fill the empty space at the heart of his politics, Sasha finds sex, violence and vodka in ample supply. His moments of introspection are lively and lyrical, especially

when distanced from the fight. Returning to the village of his boyhood we find almost another novel entirely, one in which a grandfather outlives all his sons and Sasha must drag his father's coffin through miles of snow. An old man of the village calculates: 'Russia's history is seventeen old men... all seventeen of us could fit in this house – end of story.'

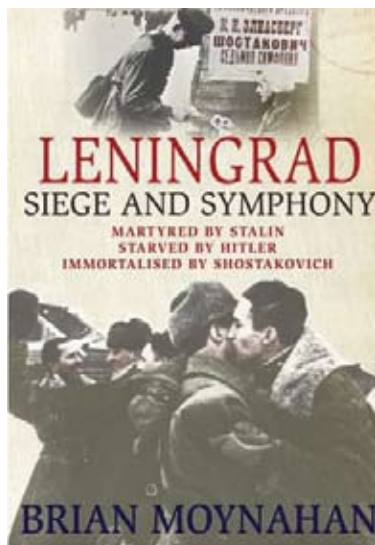
The novel comes to parody a thriller as the revolutionaries plunge towards a vain uprising. There is a touch of absurdity in their actions (while willing to commit assassinations, their great challenge to the president is to throw food at him). It is hard to tell whether *Sankya* is a homage to the angry young men whose anomie drives them to extremes, or a novelist nodding toward his ideology. Prilepin himself is a prominent member of the National Bolshevik Party (banned in 2007). If the Founding Fathers are a fictionalised NBP, we can only hope the Founders' violence, racism, misogyny and de-facto-fascism are part of the fiction.

Reviewed by Robin Davis, a bookseller who holds an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow

Leningrad: Siege and Symphony

by: Brian Moynahan

London: Quercus, 2014



One of St. Petersburg's lesser-visited tourist attractions is the Museum of the Defence and Blockade of Leningrad, situated in an unremarkable building off the Fontanka canal. The original collection boasted thousands of objects donated by survivors, and even a handful of German tanks. Stalin's 1948 purge of the Leningrad

Party, however, saw most of the holdings destroyed and the curator shot; the remaining contents are now housed in a single corridor, reduced to a series of text-heavy displays and fragments.

That Stalin's reign of terror continued in earnest throughout the Blockade is often glossed over in accounts of the period. Brian Moynahan's book attempts to redress the balance, chronicling the state's on-going purges of the intelligentsia while the Nazis encircled the city. He reveals some of the more ludicrous elements of the relentless purges and heightening paranoia of the Soviet state, for instance, recounting that the authorities cracked down on any suggestion of starvation, referring instead to cases of 'nutritional dystrophy.' Moynahan's highly emotive description of the 900-day siege blends three separate narratives, shifting from Dmitri Shostakovich's writing process for his seventh symphony, to depictions of civilian life in a starving city, and scenes of utter devastation on the surrounding battlefields.

Relying primarily on eyewitness accounts, Moynahan has constructed a grim, visceral retelling of the Blockade. His writing is perhaps strongest in his evocations of the abject miseries of everyday existence; he

cites one composer's recollection that, "after breakfast of terrible left-over skins from a handbag maker, there was a rehearsal," and references another Leningrader's diary, stating that, "today we ate a jelly made of carpenter's glue for the first time. Mama soaked the glue in water for two days, cooked it for four hours and cooled it. Not bad with vinegar and mustard."

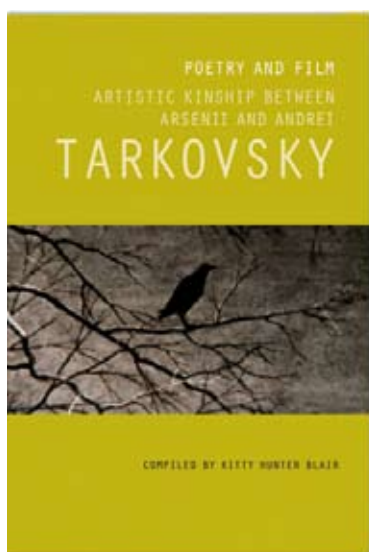
Moynahan writes in a highly emotional, at times hyperbolic style. His book is an engrossing and at times difficult read, but its primary issue is a sense of inconsistency. The three narratives often overlap to confusing effect, and, having dominated the opening chapters, Shostakovich gradually recedes from Moynahan's narrative for lengthy sections, re-emerging with the symphony's premiere. At heart, however, *Siege and Symphony* is a hymn to Leningrad/St. Petersburg, a testament to the strength of its inhabitants and a damning indictment of the suffering inflicted by the twin forces of Hitler and Stalin. For its occasionally confused narrative, Moynahan's is a powerful eulogy to those who did not survive, and a stark reminder of the indomitability of the human spirit.

Reviewed by Lucy Weir, a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh

Poetry and Film: Artistic Kinship between Arsenii and Andrei Tarkovsky

Compiled by Kitty Hunter Blair

London: Tate Publishing, 2014



The poet Arsenii Tarkovsky is primarily known in the West as the father of his famous son Andrei. If English-speaking readers have encountered his verse, it is usually through the haunting passages spoken by the poet himself and included in Andrei's film *Mirror*, that fascinating

exploration of family and memory. Even in Russia Arsenii was for a long time known as a translator of Oriental poetry; his own work only began to be published in 1962, more than halfway through his writing career. And yet he is one of the great poets of twentieth-century Russia.

The neglect of his work in the English-speaking world has begun to lessen in recent years. A *Selected Poems* in translation by Virginia Rounding appeared in 2007, and there are a few excellent translations, mainly by Robert Chandler, in the new Penguin Book of Russian Poetry. As its title suggests, Kitty Hunter Blair's book approaches the father by way of the son, following on from her translations of a number of Andrei's writings, notably his reflections on cinema, *Sculpting with Time*. Of the two introductory essays, one discusses thematic parallels between films and poems, whether it be the fluid borders between dream and reality, the central place of memory or the vision of the artist as culture hero. The second is devoted to an illuminating analysis of the actual presence of Arsenii's poetry in his son's films, *Stalker*, *Nostalgia*, and above all *Mirror*, where a number of poems are heard, spoken from an unnamed place, in the voice of the father.

Most of the book is given over to a representative selection of nearly 150 of Arsenii

Tarkovsky's poems in English translation - those used in the films and many more, enough to give a sense of some of the special qualities of this poet, his reworking of personal memory, his vision of poetry, the tension between joyful acceptance and tragic loss. There are some lengthy and very helpful notes, explaining allusions and relating the poems to the films. The translations are clear, accurate and sometimes strikingly phrased. The most difficult task, of course, is to convey something of the sonorous beauty of the originals. In a brief appendix, the translator lets us into her workshop, expressing a rueful awareness of the role of metre and rhyme in Russian. Her translations largely abandon rhyme; the rhythms, more irregular than in the original, often have a supple force, as for instance in the beginning of *First Meetings*, a poem central to *Mirror*:

Every moment that we were together
Was an epiphany, a celebration,
We two were alone in all the world.
You were bolder, lighter than a bird's wing,
Like vertigo you used to run downstairs,
Two steps at a time, and lead me
Through damp lilac into your domain
On the other side, beyond the mirror.

Reviewed by Peter France, Edinburgh

Leviathan

Director: *Andrey Zvyagintsev*
Russia, 2014



Andrey Zvyagintsev's latest cinematic venture is a mammoth project of biblical proportions, which serves both as an allegorical tale of love and loss, and a thinly-veiled critique of church and government in Putin's Russia. The storyline is simple in itself: Kolia is a middle-aged car mechanic whose birthright, the land on which his house is built, is threatened by a mayor who wants to build a hideous apartment building on it. With nowhere else to go, he turns to his army friend Dmitri, only to find himself facing a disintegrating marriage and friendship in addition to a government that threatens to ruin him. The meaning of the film's title exists on two levels. Firstly, it alludes to the beast from the Book of Job, the bones of which are presumably seen lying on the beach in the beginning

and the end, and whose detailed description of constant, seemingly meaningless, suffering mirrors that of Kolia. Secondly, and perhaps more ironically, it is the name of Hobbes's famous political tract, which argues in favour of surrendering individual rights to Leviathan in order to maintain a well-governed and ordered society. Yet as the film shows within the first 20 minutes, this very Leviathan not only fails to maintain order and fairness, it perpetuates and maintains a system of abuses from the highest of ranks.

The movie itself is scattered with bits of dark humour, the kind that is only possible in the bleakest of situations, when all one can do is laugh at the senselessness of it all. Notably, a very drunk Kolia takes a trip with his friends to shoot at images of old political leaders including Lenin and Stalin and when asked why more recent heads of state haven't been added, his friend simply retorts that because it is too soon and these very same men are still in power. It's a funny scene no doubt, but it's the kind of humour that doesn't attempt to hide the collective suffering of the poor. The film's central question is a basic one: what is a man to do when

everything he has been told to have faith in - a church, which only seeks to justify its own abuses, a government, which harms the very individuals it's meant to protect, and personal relationships, which threaten to strand him - lets him down time and time again? The answer is fatalistic: nothing, for as one of his friends during the shooting trip says, "humans are cruel animals", and they impose unspeakable suffering upon one another. Perhaps the film's major flaw then is that it is too obvious in its symbols and criticisms of the three main pillars of society - government, religion, and relationships. It offers no clear solution as to how to fix any of these broken systems, only a detailed list of the sufferings borne by everyday people, leaving room for personal interpretation. Yet it is the film's DP, Mikhail Krichman, that really makes the film stand out by elegantly conveying the massive questions at the film's core. Every point of human suffering is juxtaposed with incredible widescreen shots of natural beauty that threaten to swallow up the human subjects. The answer to the central riddle of where one must turn when everything you know is systematically destroyed then is, at least in my view, this: there is no possible answer in the human world that does not bring about more pain. All that we can do is turn to the all-enveloping nature, and in doing so come to terms with the inevitable smallness of our individual suffering.

Reviewed by Natalia Baizán, student of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh



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