



# The FORUM

The Scotland-Russia Forum magazine. No. 38, Winter 2018

[www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/archive.html#magazine](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/archive.html#magazine)



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Back page: poster “3 Plays from Moscow Theatres” (Edinburgh Cameo, March 2018)

## From the Editors

This issue of *The FORUM* has been jointly edited by Jenny Carr and Sheila Sim, both SRF trustees.

The issue includes contributions showing the variety of involvement and interest in Russia and her neighbours of our members and supporters: **Sheila Sim**, a professional garden photographer and regular visitor to Russia, reports on some recent developments in Russian park and garden design. **Natasha Perova**, longtime publisher and promoter of interesting contemporary Russian literature in English translation, writes about the *non/fiction Book Fair* in Moscow, an annual event for twenty years whose future is now uncertain. For more of Natasha's reports from Moscow on the Russian literary scene keep an eye on the *New Russian Writing* page on the SRF website ([www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/writers.html](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/writers.html)) where she contributes a monthly blog. **George Milne**, Hon. President of the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum Project at Loch Ewe, updates us on its mission and activities. And **Mike Titterton**, a healthcare specialist with experience of projects in many countries of the FSU, writes about his recent work in Kaliningrad.

Book reviews in this issue show an equal variety, with topics including Russian politics and a significant Georgian anniversary as well as poetry and literature. We are very grateful to all our reviewers: **Martin Dewhurst**, former Lecturer at Glasgow University and regular contributor to our magazine, writes about Anton Shekhovtsov's important and influential *Russia and the Western Far Right*; **Elisso Tarassachvili**, a Parisian doctor with a strong family link to her subject matter, writes about *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution 1918-21*; *Moscow Calling* by journalist Angus Roxburgh (SRF members may have heard him discuss his book in Edinburgh and Glasgow recently) is reviewed by journalist and recent Edinburgh University graduate **Jen Stout**; **Angus Roxburgh** himself reviews Viv Groskop's humorous *The Anna Karenina Fix: Life Lessons from Russian Literature*; the latest work by another Edinburgh writer, translator and academic Peter France, *Writings from the Golden Age of Russian Poetry*, is reviewed by **Anne Gutt**, a poet and translator currently translating the work of Russian poet Nina Iskrenko (1951-1995); and **Andrew Macmillen**, who is researching Dostoevsky and infrastructure for a PhD at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at UCL, reviews *The Russian Soul. Selections from 'A Writer's Diary'*.

And finally—we are always glad to receive suggestions for the content of future issues, as well as comments on this one. So please let us know what you think!

Very best wishes for 2018,

Jenny Carr and Sheila Sim  
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## The FORUM

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*The aim of the **Scotland-Russia Forum** is to promote interest in Russia and its neighbours in order to improve understanding of those countries in Scotland.*

[www.scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org)

# SRF News

More information on the SRF: [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org)

## Events and Activities since September 2017

**15 Sept:** *Look East*, a [workshop for schools](#) interested in including Russian and other East European languages and cultures in their teaching. Jointly organised with Glasgow University. Attended by teachers from 12 schools in the Glasgow area, secondary and primary, and many plans for clubs and Languages for Life and Work beginner classes were hatched.

**16 Sept:** Jenny Carr, SRF chair, addressed the Glasgow University Russian Centenary Conference on [The Current State of Play – Russian in Scotland](#).

**1 October:** [One Hundred Years of Russian: but what next?](#), article by Jenny Carr in Cable Magazine.

**12 October:** Russian taster presentation at Liberton High School, Edinburgh

**4 November:** Presentation of the *Early Start Russian course* for primary schools at the annual SALT conference for Scottish language teachers

**8 November:** *Russia: Past and Future*. Former BBC and 'Sunday Times' Moscow correspondent Angus Roxburgh talked about his new book *Moscow Calling*, a memoir of 45 years' studying and working in Russia. In conversation with *Sunday Herald* Foreign Editor David Pratt. Jointly organised with the NLS and Cable Dialogues.

**21-21 November:** support for *Russian Film Week* in Edinburgh

## Forthcoming Events and Activities

See “Dates for your Diary” opposite for a list of all SRF events in the near future. Everyone welcome at any of these events though some need booking in advance.

**Chai n Chat:** social group meeting at 11am on the first Thursday of the month  
**SRF AGM:** 28 February. Your opportunity to question the SRF trustees about the activities and aims of the SRF.

### Talks:

22 February - *Prospects for British business in Russia and the development of people to people links in today's economic and political climate*. A talk by Ian Proud, Counsellor, Economic, Trade and Energy at the British Embassy Moscow.

8 March – *From Monastery to Metropolis: A History of Russian Gardens*. An illustrated talk by Sheila Sim

**Moscow theatre on screen:** 14, 21, 28 March - screenings of recent performances at the Vakhtangov and Satyricon Theatres in Moscow: *Anna Karenina*, *Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*. These screenings will only go ahead if at least 26 people book and there may be competition from other screenings so it is essential you [book as soon as possible](#) if you are interested in order to secure the event. *Anna Karenina* (14 March) has strong competition for example. In the event of a screening not going ahead you will pay nothing.

**Schools:** The SRF will be promoting study of Russian and careers with Russian at several SCILT *Business Brunch* events for secondary schools all over Scotland in January and February. We also continue to receive invitations to visit individual schools and are planning another schools workshop (see 15 Sept above), this time in Edinburgh, perhaps early summer.

**The magazine:** As regular readers will know *The FORUM* is a biannual magazine published online and in print by the SRF. It covers issues of interest to members, as well as brief information on the SRF's activities. If any readers would like to know more about the SRF please do not hesitate to get in touch. Contact details are at the foot the previous page.

**English Language Assts Programme:** we continue to recruit recent graduates to teach English in Russian universities. Contact us for details.

**How can you help?** Financially (by joining us, donating, or fundraising); organisationally (with ideas and, best of all, practical help); and morally (by supporting our events and giving us feedback). Or all three?

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Details of all events:

[www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/whatson.html](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/whatson.html)

**Thurs 1 Feb**

Chai n Chat conversation group

**Thurs 22 Feb**

Talk: Prospects for Business with Russia

**Wed 28 Feb**

SRF AGM

**Thurs 1 March**

Chai n Chat conversation group

**Thurs 8 March**

Talk: From Monastery to Metropolis: A History of Russian Gardens

**Wed 14 March**

Theatre screening: Anna Karenina

**Wed 21 March**

Theatre screening: Seagull

**Wed 28 March**

Theatre screening: Uncle Vanya

**Thurs 5 April**

Chai n Chat conversation group

# Parks and Gardens in Russia—What's New?

Sheila Sim



Zaryadye Park. Under construction, summer 2017.

Long-time visitors to Moscow will doubtless recall the Rossiya Hotel, the much-reviled concrete block that occupied a 12-hectare site adjacent to Red Square. It was demolished in 2006, and after lengthy political and financial machinations the huge territory that it covered has been replaced by Putin's new gift to the city: Zaryadye Park.

This ambitious new greenspace, launched with great fanfare in September last year, is the first public park to open in Moscow in 50 years. It is planted with 760 trees, 860,000 perennials and sloping expanses of lawn, all framing a number of new buildings including restaurants, exhibition spaces, a new philharmonic hall

and a viewing bridge that juts out over the Moscow River. Designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the architects of the much-admired High Line in New York, Zaryadye is divided into four zones representing the specific geography of Russia: wetland, forest, steppe and tundra. It is widely regarded as a triumph, providing wonderful new views of key landmarks and making the heart of Moscow more accessible.

Zaryadye is not the only modern new greenspace in Moscow. The famous Gorky Park, on the other side of the river, has also benefited from significant investment in recent years; once a grey and shabby place, it has been revitalised with new planting, restaurants and street food outlets,

games areas and even wi-fi, to the extent that it is now regarded as a paradise for hipsters and families alike. Other parks around the city are receiving similar treatment.

Of course, there are politics behind the development of these large public greenspaces. Cynics may say that these new Moscow parks are a sop to its citizens, a peace offering from the city mayor (and his boss in the Kremlin) to make up for stressful living conditions caused by the city's ever-increasing construction, traffic and pollution problems. But let's leave politics and cynicism behind for a moment, and consider the wider context of park and garden design in Russia.

Until quite recently, most of what we knew of Russian garden culture was confined to two opposite ends of a spectrum: at one end, the magnificent parks of the royal palaces around Moscow and St Petersburg (Tsarskoye Selo, Pavlovsk and Peterhof, amongst others); at the other end, dachas - the small plots of land where people retreated during the summer months to grow their fruit and vegetables. There was very little in between: most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century country estates, which formed the middle ground of our spectrum, were destroyed by war or neglect during Soviet times. The lack of a middle class, and the fact that most people lived in apartments, meant that during the Soviet period there was no such thing as a culture of gardens and gardening in Russia.



Old-style dacha.



Private garden outside Moscow.



A dacha garden transformed by its garden-loving owners.



Example of new planting scheme at Krymsky Val in Moscow.

But things have been changing. Andrei Lysikov, a former forestry professional who turned his hand to garden design, says, “We set up the first landscaping service [in Moscow] in 1991. The people who could afford it back then were mostly from a very specific background – people with money that hadn’t necessarily been come by in entirely legal ways – the New Russians. Mostly they just asked us to ‘make it look nice’. The first thing they wanted was to put up a dense, high hedge all the way around the perimeter. Sometimes they were blunt about it, saying they needed to be safe from sniper fire.” Sadly, issues around security mean that these wealthy owners do not welcome photographers into their gardens.

Lately, however, it’s not just the new rich who are creating gardens. The emerging middle class have been busy transforming their modest Soviet-era dachas into serious houses, and many former vegetable plots have become lovely ornamental gardens. The last few decades have seen a boom in garden design journals, filled largely with photographs and ideas from European gardens; these have inspired many ordinary Russians to take up gardening as a hobby. The Chelsea Flower Show has become a major fixation for Russian garden lovers, who now flood into the show-ground every year.

As a garden photographer and regular visitor to Russia, I have had the privilege of visiting a number of new ‘middle class’ gardens in the suburbs. Without exception their owners are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about gardens and plants, but design ideas are generally still in their infancy.

Many of them remind me of British suburban gardens from the 1970s and ‘80s, with their dwarf conifers and crazy paving. Russia’s obsession with ‘English’ gardens is nothing new, of course; it was Catherine the Great who started the trend, albeit on a larger scale. Are there any signs that Russia is starting to forge its own path when it comes to park and garden design?

Alphabet City is a young landscape design practice founded in Moscow by Anna Andreyeva. Anna says that since childhood she has been inspired by perennial plants; her aim as a landscape architect has been to overcome the Russian tendency to plant public spaces with formal bedding schemes, and replace those blocks of pansies, begonias and lobelias with a new style of planting. Anna and her team have pioneered the Dutch ‘New Perennial’ style planting in Moscow – based on grasses, such as stipa and molinia, combined with meadow and steppe plants including salvias, geraniums, cirsium and others. Her work can be seen in public areas such as the Muzeon Park, Crimea Embankment and Triumphalnaya Square. It’s a much more modern look than those densely-packed beds of pansies – but has it been successful? And is it just another idea taken from the west, or is there something particularly Russian in the direction she is taking?

Anna says that the new style is popular with city residents, but is threatened by poor maintenance: “we realised we needed to develop a new, Moscow-specific plant palette. This year we started new research into local plant communities outside the city that we can recreate – meadow com-

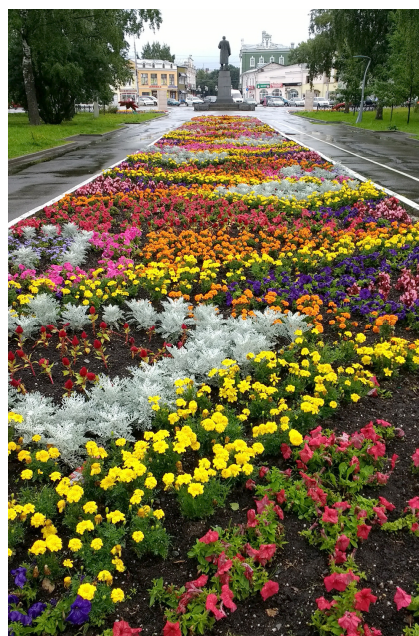
munities that would be stable and require little weeding and watering”. (See [alphabetcity.ru](http://alphabetcity.ru))

Anna’s work is exciting. She may have been inspired by the Dutch ‘new wave’ movement, but her research is leading her into planting schemes based exclusively on Russian plants for Russian conditions.

Russians have always been closely connected to nature. With money and leisure time now available to many, it will be interesting to observe how or whether all of this translates into a particularly Russian style of planting and gardens. In the meantime, a visit to Zaryadye Park is a must.

*Photographs by Sheila Sim.*

*Sheila is a translator and photographer. She also leads garden tours of Scotland for Russian visitors, and offers tours of Russian gardens for British enthusiasts. Find out more at [www.sheilasim.com](http://www.sheilasim.com)*



Example of old-style planting in a public square in Vologda.

# The “non/fictionN” Book Fair Turns 20

Natasha Perova

fictionN  
non/

This year our special book fair for “intellectual literature”, which is rather misleadingly called “non/fictionN”, is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Such longevity is a real achievement for a post-perestroika cultural project. So many worthy ventures were launched in the 1990s, but despite their good intentions and lots of drive they were short-lived, they flashed brightly but failed to survive. “Non/fictionN” is one of those institutions which our liberal intelligentsia believe to be a “national asset”, belonging in the same category as the Kultura TV channel, Radio Orpheus for classical music, *Moscow Echo* for social critique and analysis, *Novaya Gazeta* weekly for journalistic investigations, to name just a few of the still existing “islands of sanity” in our neurotic society.

“Non/fictionN” was launched in 1999 and held annually in the Central House of Artists at the end of November. By then there was an urgent need “to separate the wheat from the chaff”. The turbulent 1990s were a time of great hopes and emerging freedoms, but also of appalling vulgarity and a wild market economy which could not care less about culture. Bookshops and street stalls were packed with abominable trash, most of it translated thrillers and Russian imitations of them. Only literary magazines and newly founded small presses published works for serious readers, but their efforts remained almost invisible. It is for them that the “non/fictionN” book fair was organised. It was an instant success among educated thinking readers providing a much needed source of information and a meeting place for them. However the most interesting and valuable part of this book fair has always been its programme of events attracting all the

top authors of nonfiction and literary fiction alike and offering public discussions on the issues of the day.

The post-perestroika decades were marked by a great variety and intensity of intellectual debates and ideological oppositions, to say nothing of all the contradictory information pouring from the mass media. When analytical books by our best thinkers started coming out they helped people to sort out not only current affairs but mainly Russian history which was being radically reviewed at the time, and the “non/fictionN” book fair is where you see such books and their authors. Contrary to what most people think, not only nonfiction but literary fiction as well contain abundant linguistic-anthropological information and illustrate vividly the scholars’ ideas and viewpoints. The “non/fictionN” book

to exclude publishers of trash and nationalistically-minded radicals. Good publishers are eager to participate because everybody who is anybody will be there. Big commercial publishers are allowed to exhibit only with their books that are intended for educated, serious readers. Last year 300 large and small publishers, booksellers, and cultural institutions from 23 countries took part. Compared to the Frankfurt Book Fair, the largest today, it does not look serious. But it is. The educational value of the “non/fictionN” book fair can hardly be overestimated. If you spend several days at “non/fictionN” and attend as many events as you can you will collect abundant information and ideas on the current trends in literature, humanities, and the state of Russia’s society in general.



Non-Fiction 2016. Photo Pavel Poboruev  
[www.flickr.com/photos/britishcouncilrus/31291225492](http://www.flickr.com/photos/britishcouncilrus/31291225492)

fair is a singular event where all such books come together to guide people through the ocean of publications.

There is a collective stand of small publishers who are members of the “Alliance of Independent Publishers and Booksellers”, which includes publishers from around Russia and the CIS. This collective stand is financially supported by the book fair itself to encourage the presence of small publishers at the fair.

This book fair is not for profit and not really large by international standards. Not all companies and all speakers are admitted: there is an expert committee which has the right of veto

SRF readers may wonder why they should know about this book fair, particularly if they can’t speak Russian. First, I’ve noticed that many people interested in Russia usually do speak Russian or at least have some elementary Russian. And second, if you want to see the real Russian intelligentsia, the kind you read about in Chekhov and Turgenyev, this book fair is the place to visit. Normally you hardly see such people in the city crowds. But here they come (some 40 to 50 thousand visitors

in five days) to stock up on books they don’t find in big bookshops and listen to authors they won’t meet face to face anywhere else. It’s a joy to see so many intelligent faces in one place.

Recently there were rumours that the book fair will be evicted from the Central House of Artists where it has been held for twenty years (see my blog on this on the SRF website: [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/writers.html#nonfiction2017](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/writers.html#nonfiction2017)). Luckily a number of other venues have already invited “non/fictionN” to use their premises in such an event, but in 2018 the fair remains in its usual loca-

tion, and all are welcome.

If I have failed to convince you that attending this book fair is worthwhile even if you don't speak Russian, it's worth noting that there are English-language sources on contemporary Russia which may clarify many things for those who want to figure it out. One of them is the Glas series of new Russian writing in English translation ([www.glas.msk.su](http://www.glas.msk.su)). Although we are no longer able to publish new titles

we have accumulated an extensive collection of contemporary literary fiction – mostly reflecting the literary scene of the 1990s and early 2000s but all perfectly relevant today. In my opinion good literature tells you much, and more truthfully than the media, about the state of people's minds and what makes them tick, so that many strange things become clearer.

*The 2018 non/fictioN fair will be held 28 November - 2 December. The website is [www.moscowbookfair.ru/eng/about.html](http://www.moscowbookfair.ru/eng/about.html).*

*Natasha Perova writes a regular monthly blog on literary matters on the "New Russian Writing" page of the SRF website: [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/writers.html](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/writers.html). Her January 2018 piece was about the brilliant and neglected writer Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskiy for example.*

## The Russian Arctic Convoy Museum Project

George Milne



The Project has staged major events each year, the most recent being 'LOCH EWE 75' in May 2017. Echoing 'DERVISH 75' in Arkhangelsk in August 2016 (commemorating the first Arctic Convoy to arrive from Liverpool via Scapa Flow and Hvalfjard), we mounted a WWII Festival marking the 75th anniversary of the first convoys to leave Loch Ewe in 1942 for Arkhan-

gelsk and Murmansk. International veterans and families attended, including several from Russia and the marine cadet training ship *Yunyi Baltiys* from St. Petersburg.

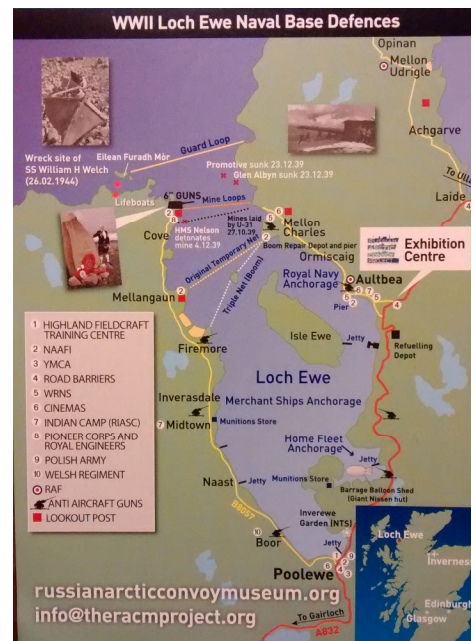
From 1941 to 1945, more than half of the 78 convoys gathered in Loch Ewe to use the Arctic Sea route to the USSR. Convoy sizes ranged from 7 - 50 merchant ships with up to 70 accompanying warships in relays. These included armed trawlers, frigates, corvettes, destroyers, cruisers, battleships, aircraft carriers, and oilers, rescue/hospital ships and personnel/survivor carriers on return trips. At its peak, several thousand military personnel were stationed here; the infrastructure required to defend the loch was immense. Local communi-

ties were effectively living in a security zone with barriers and ID passes for the whole of WWII. Their recollections are featured in our Exhibition Centre in Aultbea. The village became the base HMS Helicon for the duration of hostilities.

More than 80% of the ships on the Arctic convoys got through, despite heavy attacks from U-boats, the Luftwaffe, surface ships and the sub-zero temperatures in wild seas. Over 100 merchant ships and 20 warships were lost along with some 3000 lives and thousands of tonnes of tanks, aircraft, trucks, armaments, raw materials, foodstuffs and clothing. We have many accounts and photographs of conditions and events, a research library of books, journals and personal memoirs, DVDs (including the Royal Navy at War series and famous fea-

gelsk and Murmansk. International veterans and families attended, including several from Russia and the marine cadet training ship *Yunyi Baltiys* from St. Petersburg.

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arriving unscathed ten days later, his ship was bombed in the Kola Inlet. [See our website for details.] David has laid a Merchant Navy wreath every year since the Russian Convoy Club memorial stone was installed by UK veterans in 1999 at the mouth of Loch Ewe. He has donated his uniform to Murmansk Museum and skypes Russian friends regularly.

We moved our collection from Inverasdale to an empty building in Aultbea in November 2016. It needed an internal transformation to house all our exhibits, a new gift shop and a plot clearance for a car park and memorial garden.

Our Exhibition Centre

ture films) and several Russian artefacts donated to us by veterans of both countries. At least twelve allied countries were involved in supplying ships or personnel, including Russia, Canada and other British Commonwealth countries, Poland and crews from many more. As the war progressed, President Roosevelt's lend-lease agreement supplied hundreds of new merchant ships carrying millions of tonnes of essential supplies to Europe, the cities of Leningrad, Moscow and the USSR army on the eastern front.

We also have recordings of veterans' stories. One such is from Radio Officer David Craig on the SS Dover Hill. His ship was moored in Loch Ewe exactly 75 years ago waiting for the signal to leave for Murmansk. On

was 'officially opened' on 7 May 2017 when the RF and UK Consuls General (Edinburgh and St. Petersburg) jointly cut the ribbon.

While our volunteer group pays a hefty rent, we hope that we can raise funds soon to buy the property. Our target is £200,000 to purchase the half acre site and install internal insulation, heating, new wiring, and an extension to view the loch. Our plans include the creation of a Wartime Trail around the loch visiting many of the remaining gun sites and buildings.

Please help us to secure a permanent home to honour all who served on the Arctic Convoys.

*George Milne is Hon. President, RACMP (Scottish Charity no. SC047909) [www.russianarcticconvoymuseum.org/](http://www.russianarcticconvoymuseum.org/)*



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[www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/srfclasses.html](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/srfclasses.html)





# Russia's Local Heroes for Health

Mike Titterton

Russia today faces many formidable challenges of an economic, social and political nature to make even the stoutest heart blanch. Lost in the welter of headlines over Ukraine, sanctions, election protests, oligarchs, doping scandals and the World Cup, has been the issue of public health. The truly shocking record of the 1990s, when a million younger men died prematurely, was rightly termed a 'health holocaust'. While the public health record is not as dramatically awful as it was, there remain numerous hair-raising difficulties to overcome. Principal among these are blood-borne virus infections, such as HIV, driven by the epidemic of illegal drug use, as well as sexual diseases and TB.

However it is all too easy - and perhaps understandably Russian - to be pessimistic and gloomy about the prospects of change. This would be a great shame, as it would ignore the heroic and unheralded efforts of those who give of their time and effort on the ground to change things and improve matters. There are many 'local heroes' to be found among the Ministry staff, local administrations, healthcare institutions, local schools, prisons, community groups and NGOs throughout Russia. These unsung champions deserve publicity and praise, and indeed funding, in sharp contrast to the actions of the self-enriching elite currently running the country.

This author feels both inspired and privileged to have come across such champions of health and social care throughout the Russian Federation. In places as diverse as Moscow, St Petersburg, Tver, Pskov, Krasnograd and Kaliningrad, local people have been seeking to make a genuine difference on the ground. This includes difficult issues such as HIV, TB, STDs, narcotic use, mental health and physical disability, and promoting sexual health in schools and at street-level. The author has worked alongside people from all levels, from Min-

istries of Health Care through to those who have survived the psychiatric system, and even commercial sex workers and their pimps. This includes self-help mental health groups in Moscow, where people of different ages and from all walks of life, come together to support each other. It is also refreshing to come across such committed staff working at senior levels, such as prison governors, school headmasters, Ministry staff and senior staff in allied institutes.

For example, in Kaliningrad, the author and a colleague undertook an international project on behalf of *Health and Life for Everyone*, jointly with the Norwegian Government and the Russian Ministry of Health Care. Kaliningrad had become a byword for the collapse of local health services and exponential growth of 'socially significant diseases'. The aim of the project was to improve health in prisons and the community, particularly with respect to TB/HIV prevention, rehabilitation and health care, along with visits to women's prisons and community facilities. Local authorities had managed to rebuild service provision and have achieved a notable and highly creditable reduction in local infection rates. Local NGOs such as YLA and Caritas and an NGO-run rehabilitation centre proved very helpful and demonstrated great willingness to cooperate with statutory authorities.

Thus the move by the Putin administration to brand some NGOs as 'foreign agents' is an unhelpful and unjustified obstacle to such cooperation. A more positive development, however has been women with HIV and TB joining self-help groups such as 'Status Plus', assisted by YLA and Caritas, and showing enthusiasm to

being involved, including in respect of creating opportunities for employment. Such examples provide both inspiration and much food for thought as to how to make a difference.

With the attention of the world turning to Russia in this year of the World Cup, it would a shame if such issues, and illustrations of how best to respond, are simply swept aside. Ironically, Kaliningrad is one of the venues of the forthcoming soccer event. This is an ideal opportunity to raise publicity and to focus the world's attention on what can be achieved and what remains to be done. Good things are being done on sums that are minuscule in relation to those to be expended on sport and the obscenely rich world of soccer. If only a tiny amount of this money and attention could be diverted to these causes, just consider how much good could be achieved across the Russian Federation.

*Dr Mike Titterton works as an international expert and undertook projects in Russia as director of Health & Life for Everyone, an international charity working with children and adults at risk. He is an honorary Knowledge Exchange Fellow with the University of Edinburgh.*



Visit to a Kaliningrad drug addicts rehab centre



## *Russia and the Western Far Right* by Anton Shekhovtsov

A review - article by Martin Dewhurst

It has sometimes been claimed that many of those who support what are conventionally known as the Far Right and the Far Left are remarkably similar to one another, at least psychologically: dogmatic, narrow-minded, inflexible, opinionated, dreadfully earnest and, in many but not in all cases, lacking a healthy sense of humour. Some of the key words used by people on the Far Right and the Far Left are different, but the all-important *style* can be remarkably similar. If this *is* the case, then President Putin has changed only slightly since he stopped being an ardent communist secret policeman and quickly, once the USSR imploded, became an active wheeler-dealer and strong supporter of primitive, obscurantist, pre-modern, rather than contemporary, tolerant and humanistic values - all this without showing any signs of guilt, embarrassment or repentance for his murky activities in the past. Those who organised and ran the GULag, the terror and the purges should, he now says, be forgiven, but should this generosity also apply to the Nazis as well? Ukraine is currently accused of promoting fascism, yet the Russian authorities are themselves happily collaborating with extreme right-wingers when this appears to be a way of weakening the West and strengthening the messianic and neo-Eurasian imperialistic aspirations of the regime centred on the Kremlin and Old Square (the HQ of the Presidential Administration).

Many people, not least some of those surprised by the result of the referendum on Brexit and the election of President Trump, have the feeling that a 'paradigm shift' is taking place, for better or for worse, in political developments around the world.

Is it stoppable and reversible? Are 'Western values' under serious threat from what some observers consider to be outdated and harmful rather than traditional and acceptable attitudes and opinions? With Putin, health permitting, likely to be the President of the Russian Federation for another six years, this is just the time to read Shekhovtsov's pioneering monograph and decide whether or not he is exaggerating the likelihood that the Far Right could have a lasting and decisive impact on the future of the West. For most readers, the names of the majority of the numerous European and American Far Right activists about whom he writes will be unknown. Our very own Nigel Farage is absent from the Index, but one can assume that for most of the present-day Far Right activists named in the book he is a genuine hero on whom they should model themselves.

The Introduction takes us back to the inter-war years when the Italian Fascists conceived the nation in *ethnic* terms, whereas the German National Socialists were articulating their idea of the nation in *racial* terms (p.xxii, italics added). A distinction is made between *radical* right-wing movements and *extreme* right-wing movements: the former reject violence, the latter 'tolerate or even embrace it' (p.xxiv). Distinctions are also made between present-day European Far Right parties: they may be 'committed', 'open' or 'hostile' to the Putin regime (p.xxvi). Chapter 1 Discusses the links between Germany and the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s – not surprising, one might add, as both Hitler and Stalin were socialists, and by the mid-1930s the latter had become much more of an honorary Russian nationalist. Chapter 2 discusses the role in the 1980s and 1990s of Russian nationalists such as Aleksandr Dugin, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Sergey Glazyev, building – I also add – on the foundations of Soviet Russian nationalists associated with,

i.a., the journal *Nash sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*). They are opposed to 'American-style liberalism, globalisation and the "New World Order"' (p.43). The desire for both 'national justice' and 'social justice' makes cooperation with some Far Left movements possible.

Chapter 3, on contemporary Russia as an 'authoritarian kleptocracy with a twist', gets to grips with the fundamental pillars of the regime fronted by Putin. Shekhovtsov is convinced that its 'ultimate aim is not the revival of Russia, restoration of the Russian empire, or the well-being of the Russian nation, but rather the preservation of the existing patrimonial regime at any cost' (p.71). 'The Kremlin's violent crackdown on the political opposition at home and [its] aggressive foreign policy' are the result of 'Moscow's increasing inability to secure socio-economically based legitimacy and preserve the regime by any other means, either through soft power, diplomacy or even soft coercion' (p.71). Hence, reinstating control over the major mass media 'was the cornerstone of Putin's rise to authoritarian power' (p.72). His regime has 'globalised its self-preservation drive' by 'assuming the role of a leader of the international movement struggling for a multipolar world, but intrinsically – against the United States' (p.81).

Chapter 4 is about the utilisation of unscrupulous far-right election observers to claim that the results of elections deemed not free and fair by the relevant established Western organisations are, in fact, completely valid. Pro-Putin *left-wing* 'political forces that support the allegedly anti-globalist (in effect, anti-American) agenda of the Kremlin' sometimes help out the radical right-wing movements and parties (p.124). Chapter 5 sheds light on some adherents of the Far Right, 'fringe activists' and others who are happy to contribute to the Russian mass media's attempts to

persuade more foreigners to 'question more', trust propaganda, not journalistic, outlets like RT and Sputnik, and cast doubt on the veracity, reliability and objectivity of most of the news outlets of their own countries. How successful this application of soft (but not very smart) power may prove to be is the subject of much debate in Scotland, as elsewhere. The author concludes that these media are now aiming 'not so much at justifying the Kremlin's domestic and foreign policies, but rather at undermining the confidence of international audiences in the legitimacy of their own governments and, in more general terms, of the liberal-democratic consensus' (p.154).

Chapter 6 discusses a variety of Far-Right organisations working in Europe, especially those in Austria (where a party of this nature became a member of the governing coalition on the day this review was being written), Italy and France, and including a number of official Moscow-based institutions. *Rassotrudnichestvo*, for instance, targets people from the former USSR who reside abroad as well as any and all others, whereas *Rusky Mir* focuses mainly on foreigners and aims "to promote values that challenge Western traditions", especially

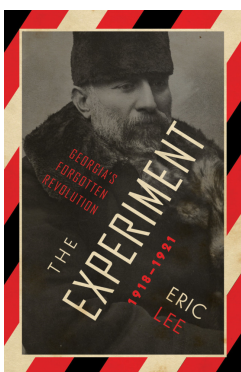
in the countries that were Soviet republics before 1991' (p.178). Chapter 7 provides information on present and former members of the European Parliament and other institutions who are or were acting as 'wreckers' by trying to disrupt them from within – and not without some success, as is now clear. Many, but not all, of these people seem to resemble Western pro-Soviet fellow-travellers in the 1930s and later, with no knowledge of Russian and very little interest in what was actually going on inside Russia, but doing what they could to contribute to the ongoing 'Decline of the West' – perhaps, in some cases, even without realising it.

The Conclusion states that today certain 'far-right forces in Europe, North America and elsewhere embrace Putin's Russia as an ally in their struggle against Western liberal democracy and multiculturalism hoping that a (geo)political alliance with Moscow will help them reconstruct the mythologised and romanticised nation-state and "take our country back"' (p.247). Perhaps addressing those who think that this book is far too alarmist, its author reminds us that 'Russian Neo-Eurasianists had developed relations with, and trained, pro-Russian separatists in Eastern

Ukraine [for] almost 10 years before the latter facilitated the Russian invasion of the region in 2014' (p.253). Well, we can't say we haven't been warned! I have, however, to add one warning of my own to prospective readers who are unduly sensitive to the (mis)use of English, which is not Shekhovtsov's mother-tongue: for some reason his text has not been professionally style-edited, and although the meaning is always clear, some people will find it painful to read. I have made scores of suggestions in my review copy, in the hope that there will be a second, amended and, perhaps, expanded edition of this very valuable and timely monograph.

*Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* by Anton Shekhovtsov. Published by Routledge in the book series "Studies in Fascism and the Far Right". London and New York, 2017. Paperback £21.99, 262 pages. ISBN 9781138658646. Also published in hardback and as an ebook.

*Ed: There is a copy of "Russia and the Western Far Right" in the SRF Library, available on loan to members.*



## ***The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution 1918-1921* by Eric Lee**

Reviewed by Elisso Tarassachvili

Eric Lee, a highly committed man in his native United States of America, began to wonder: has democratic socialism ever worked even once, somewhere? He discovered that Georgia had experimented with a multi-party state that had a social democratic majority.

Georgia is one of the three Caucasian countries, that in 1918 became an independent democratic republic which promised to be exemplary in its progressiveness; it lasted three years.

Eric Lee helps us to discover a country forcibly annexed by Russia from the end of the eighteenth century. This annexation would bring great frustrations but at the same time a security which would allow intellectual and economic development to parallel that of Russia.

A large number of historians have studied the First Republic of Georgia. Inspired by these, Eric Lee explains how Georgia created a social-democratic republic which had the support of the whole population. There are many references to Dr Stephen Jones's book *Socialism in Georgian colors. The European Road to Social De-*

*mocracy, 1883-1917.*

How this small, poor country, essentially rural and dependent on the Russian autocracy would, after the Revolution of February 1917, overcome internal difficulties, organize an innovative, inventive state and implement the reflections and theories developed since the 1880s—all this is the focus of Lee's work. The construction of the new state would take place in a context of great economic, geopolitical, regional and international difficulties. This state would eventually be crushed by the invasion of Bolshevik armies of the Red Army in 1921.

Earlier, Eric Lee takes us through the different stages of what was the "Revolution of 1917" before and after the 'coup d'état' of Lenin in November 1917, and how Georgian Social Democratic leaders emancipated themselves from the Russian Empire and declared the Independence of Georgia in 1918, followed by the other two Republics: Armenia and Azerbaijan.

He presents Noé Jordania, the "founding father" of the Georgian independent state who, after his meeting with Kautsky, discovered Marx in Poland and became the theorist of Georgian social democratic thought. With all the political parties, the population would be trained in the process of the construction of this state. It should be remembered that in the middle of the 19th century many young people went to study in Europe because of the restrictions on the number of ethnic students admitted to universities, or because of being exiled. In Europe they met the "revolutionaries" and theorists of Europe, including the writings of Marx.

Lee highlights the theoretical and practical differences between Jordania and Lenin. These divergences would lead to a split in the party between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in 1903 and subsequently to the fundamental

opposition between those two currents of Marxism.

The 1905 Revolution that spread throughout the Empire was the subject of violent repression. The Tsar accepted the foundation of the first Duma where Georgians would be among the leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Party; they would thus gain parliamentary experience. In a chapter called "dress rehearsal," Lee relates how a region of Georgia was the self-proclaimed, self-governing "Independent Republic of Guria" from 1902 to 1905. It lasted until the central power of St Petersburg ended this experiment and the Revolution of 1905.

This "dress rehearsal" explains the speed of the implementation of the reforms after Georgia's Declaration of Independence in 1918 and the drafting of a progressive constitution that no European democracy had yet envisaged:

- the right for all to vote, regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, and especially women's right to vote and their eligibility to become politicians; there would be 5 women deputies to the Constituent Assembly of 1919.
- agrarian reform (a chapter is devoted to this set of reforms, which remain a model of creativity and reflection).

- the abolition of the death penalty.
- freedom of association.
- the strengthening of private agricultural and industrial property which constituted essential steps to build confidence and create conditions for democratic socialism.

For this small and young country, the difficulties consisted in maintaining national cohesion as external forces pushed to disrupt the country. The borders were attacked in the north-west by separatist strains among the Abkhaz, then by the Turks wanting to conquer Batumi in the south-west, then to the north by the Ossetians who supported the Russian Bolsheviks. This situation still persists to this day! Lee shows how, at the end of the First World War, the European powers intervened in Georgia, Germany and then Great Britain, but quickly left the country to its fate—to the troops of the Red Army.

The last chapter describes what this ideal social democracy could have been. It makes a heartrending read.

*The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution 1918-1921* by Eric Lee  
Published by Zed Books, 2017.  
Paperback £10.99, 288 pages. ISBN 9781786990921  
Also published in hardback and as an ebook.

*Dr Elisso Tarassachvili's grandfather Vassili Tsouladzé was first secretary of the Georgian Social-Democratic Party.*

*She writes:*

*"Vassili Tsouladzé was one of the younger members of the party, born in 1889 in Ozurgeti in the Guria region of Georgia.*

*He joined the Social Democratic Party quite young when he was working at the printers which produced the Party journal – I'm not sure what year that was. He progressed rapidly within the Party, first as Treasurer then as General Secretary. He was also editor of the Party journal. And then a member of parliament.*

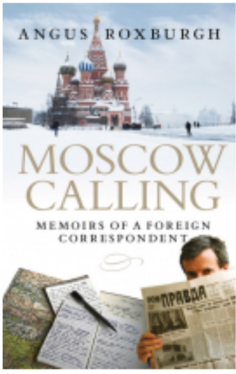
*In 1921 he emigrated with the government but stayed in post while in Constantinople because he was responsible for welcoming people fleeing Bolshevik Georgia and sorting out their papers for their departure for France. He worked on this with Simon Mdivani, the Georgian Ambassador in Constantinople, who negotiated with the French Embassy on work contracts which allowed Georgians to receive entry visas to France. After the losses of the First World War France, like the UK, had need of manpower.*

*He also completed missions outside Turkey as we know from the various passports which we still have. I think that all this was done under the aegis of the League of Nations, which had been created at the end of the War.*

*He stayed in Turkey until 1928, when the USSR demanded that the Turks should expel immigrants from former Soviet territories.*

*After his arrival in France he continued to work for the Party with other political colleagues.*

*My father was Serge Tarassachvili, the student leader of the 1924 insurrection. After the insurrection he was forced to hide and then escape from Georgia".*



## **Moscow Calling** by Angus Roxburgh

Reviewed by Jen Stout

The sheer volume of Russia-related news stories at the moment is matched only by the scale of conspiracies, speculation and ill-informed nonsense also floating about. Self-proclaimed Russia experts seem to appear in ever greater numbers, and as the stereotypes become entrenched, the antagonistic language ramps up.

The antidote is mutual understanding and diplomacy. So in part, the antidote is good journalism. But with the number of Russian speakers continuing to dwindle - not helped by the Scottish Government's idiotic decision to drop the language from the curriculum - examples of such understanding can seem few and far between. It means that Angus Roxburgh's memoir is such a reassuring, and required, breath of fresh air.

In part the book is a fascinating account of a journalism career in radio, print and television. There are no heroics here, or self-aggrandisement - if anything, Roxburgh downplays his work, and describes each new job with a tone of complete surprise. There's plenty of humour with the self-deprecation. Days after he starts

on the BBC's Russian Service, Chernobyl's reactor exploded and he must interview a professor about isotopes; this sees him "dropping headphones, aimlessly shouting 'one-two-one-two', and stabbing at buttons, while miles of quarter-inch tape whizzed out of the reels".

Along with the infectious enthusiasm for news are some deep misgivings about certain aspects of it - particularly television. In inflation-stricken Moscow, 1992, ordinary Russians are selling possessions on the street, old women are begging in underpasses and others resorting to dosshouses: "and of course we were there, sticking our lenses in the faces of desperate old people dribbling food down their chins. There was nothing we wouldn't do to jerk a few tears back home."

Then two years later Roxburgh reports on the war in Chechnya. Endless human tragedy had to be condensed into sixteen-second chunks. "It was what you needed in order to tell this horrific story and bring its horror into people's living rooms," Roxburgh writes, describing the practice of finding a suitably bereaved woman to interview in front of her shelled home and filming her tears. "But I wasn't proud of it, even if the

stories were often very powerful."

But *Moscow Calling* is only in part a journalist's memoir. Having first moved to Russia in the 1970s, living as an ordinary Muscovite and experiencing all the frustrations, deprivations and joys that involved, Roxburgh can really claim to know the country. His love of the place is palpable: from the first childhood encounter with this exotic language on the radio waves, to the kitchen table discussions among writers and artists.

All the depictions, and criticisms, of life in Russia are written with such care and attention to detail - but there is one that must stand out. In the earliest days of the new parliament, when "no topic was avoided" and every debate was broadcast to expectant citizens, Roxburgh was there - though on the verge of being expelled, much to his misery. Remember these heady days, he insists, when someone is trotting out the old claim that Russians are 'not ready' for democracy or that they prefer autocratic rule. His message bears repeating.

*Moscow Calling* by Angus Roxburgh

Published by Birlinn. Edinburgh 2017. Hardback £17.99, 368 pages, 16pp colour plates. ISBN 9781780274928 Also published as an ebook.



## **Writings from the Golden Age of Russian Poetry** by Konstantin Batyushkov. Presented and translated by Peter France

Reviewed by Anne Gutt

"What a life I have led for poetry! Three wars, all the time on horseback and on the highways of

the world."

*Letter from Batyushkov to Zhukovsky, 1817*

In lucid prose, Peter France follows the course of Konstantin

Batyushkov's life through his poetry, essays and letters, explicating the historical and literary context along the way with the light touch of an expert. Born in 1787, Batyushkov was a poet, translator and essayist, a soldier in the Napoleonic wars, a diplomat and civil servant. The publication of his "Essays in Verse and Prose" in 1817 established his reputation as one of the outstanding poets of his age. From 1822 until his death in 1855, he suffered incurable mental illness and

wrote virtually nothing. The tragedy of his last thirty three years is covered in 13 pages.

Batyushkov emerges from this book as a living presence, a lively, humorous young man, quixotic, engaging, melancholy, devoted to poetry and desirous of fame, for whom friendship was a great gift. His work contributed significantly to the establishment of the elegy as the central poetic form of the Golden Age, and to the development of a flexible, melodious

poetic language.

Translation was at the heart of his work, at a time when the nascent Russian poetic tradition was particularly open to influence. Batyushkov translated from French, Italian, German, English, Latin and Greek. He aimed to bring to Russian poetry “the musical sonorities” of Italian, disparaging the crudeness of Russian with its “whiff of the Tatar”. In his collection, free translations which he regarded as new works are interspersed with his “original” poems. Batyushkov’s fusion of neo-classicism and sentimentalism and expansion of the elegiac form as a vehicle for the expression of personal feelings, created a form which surpassed the freedom and wildness of the ode and moved away from formal, archaic styles. “In the lighter kind of poetry, the reader demands all possible perfection, purity of expression, elegance of style, supple and flowing verse; he demands truth of feeling and the strictest propriety in every respect...Beauty of style is essential here and nothing can take its place...poetry of the lighter kind is a difficult art that demands a person’s whole life and mental exertions.” (*Essays*, 11-12)

The book contains in whole or part, over half of Batyushkov’s poetic output, elegantly translated by France. His translations are close and careful, aiming to reproduce as far as possible the rhythms of the originals, and to preserve the rhyming principle. Here for example is France’s fine, mellifluous version of Batyushkov’s “Waking”:

*Zephyr scatters the last shreds of sleep  
From eyes sealed fast by dreams.  
But I am not wakened to happiness  
By Zephyr’s quiet wings.  
Neither the rosy light’s sweet rays  
Apollo’s morning heralds,  
Nor the soft blue of heaven’s face,  
Nor scents borne from the fields,  
Nor the swift flight of my brave horse  
On the sloping velvet lawns,  
The bounds’ call and the song of horns  
Around the desolate shore –  
Nothing can bring cheer to my soul,  
My soul alarmed by dreams;  
Proud reason cannot still the voice  
Of love with its cold speech.*

For me the delight of the book was Batyushkov’s prose “Essays” and letters, which display the lightness, fluency and wit of his language, his self-awareness and charm. “His face is as good-natured as his heart, but also as changeable. He is thin and dry, and pale as a sheet. He has lived through three wars; in camp he was full of health but on leave – a dying man! On the march he was never downcast, always willing to sacrifice his life in a miraculously carefree way which even he was surprised by; in society he finds everything wearisome and the smallest obligation of any kind is a lead weight to him”. (*Essays*, 424-27) It’s difficult to stop quoting this piece. It continues: “He served in the army and in the civil service; very assiduously and unsuccessfully in the former, in the latter successfully and not at all assiduously. Both types of service he found wearisome, because in reality he is no lover of ranks and

medals. Yet he wept when he was passed over and not given a medal.” And there is more to come. This is his self-portrait aged thirty.

It is hard for English-speaking readers to get the full measure of Batyushkov’s significance for Russian poetry. But we have the affirmations of his contemporaries and of later generations of poets. Mandelstam in particular, had “a personal cult of Batyushkov”<sup>1</sup>. He celebrates Batyushkov in one of the last poems to be published in his lifetime:

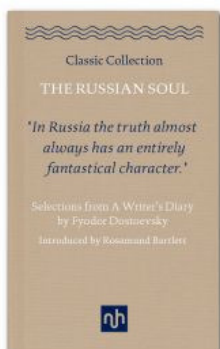
*Like a flâneur with a magic cane,  
tender Batyushkov lives at my place -  
wanders down Zamostie lanes,  
sniffs a rose, sings Zafna’s praise.  
Not for a moment believing that we  
could be separated, I bowed to him:  
I shake his brightly gloved cold hand  
in an envious delirium.*

What more could Batyushkov desire than the “envious delirium” of one of the twentieth century’s greatest Russian poets?

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<sup>1</sup>Wachtel, Michael (2004). *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Poetry* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Writings from the Golden Age of Russian Poetry* by Konstantin Batyushkov. Presented and translated by Peter France Published by Columbia University Press 2017 (UK 2018). Paperback £14.95, 256 pages. ISBN 9780231185417 Also available in hardback and as an ebook.



## ***The Russian Soul. Selections from A Writer’s Diary* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Introduced by Rosamund Bartlett**

Reviewed by Andrew Macmillen

*In Russia the truth almost always has an entirely fantastical character.’*

This beautifully presented book published by Notting Hill Editions features a small

selection of twelve short essays by the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky written between 1873 and 1880 and originally published in *A Writer’s Diary*, one of Dostoevsky’s least well-known and most confusing works. In it he deployed a jumbled array of genres – short stories, polemical political

articles, obituaries, literary reviews, commentaries on news items and social developments in Russia chronicling the turbulent years leading up to the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

Cultural historian Rosamund Bartlett had the unenviable task of making

a tiny selection from a work that runs to some 1300 pages. Despite omitting Dostoevsky's excessively xenophobic diatribes, some of the selections are not for the faint-hearted. Many of the familiar themes from his fiction – child poverty and cruelty, suicide, wife-beating, alcoholism – are well-represented in *A Writer's Diary*, and as such will give a reader unfamiliar with his novels a flavour of the riches in store in *Demons*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and his other works.

Many of the themes that Dostoevsky was writing about in imperial Russia of 140 years ago can seem extraordinarily contemporary. In *My Paradox* he tackles Russia's place in the world and her relations with Europe and Turkey and even the problem of deforestation. Dostoevsky shines a light

on the almost ritualistic abuse of women and his style of engaging in dialogue with his readers is almost akin to that of today's bloggers.

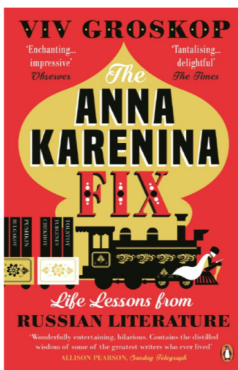
In *The Russian Soul*, this well-read and most literary of writers gives his thoughts on the death of George Sand, heaps praise upon Pushkin and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and comments on Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* just after the final instalment was published. In *Environment*, he comments on the new system of trial by jury and observes the tendency of former serfs to acquit defendants, irrespective of their crimes.

This collection also includes well-worked short stories such as *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* with its echoes of *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from Underground* and *The Boy at Christ's*

*Christmas Party*, a moving tale reminiscent of Dickens.

As well as choosing the pieces to go into this book, Rosamund Bartlett has written a splendid introduction which gives just the right amount of background to Dostoevsky and *A Writer's Diary* in particular.

*The Russian Soul. Selections from A Writer's Diary* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Introduced by Rosamund Bartlett. Published by Notting Hill Editions, 2017. Hardback £14.99



## **The Anna Karenina Fix: Life Lessons from Russian Literature**

by Viv Groskop

Reviewed by Angus Roxburgh

Viv Groskop is a comedian, agony aunt, and Russian scholar, and in *The Anna Karenina Fix* she brilliantly brings together all three talents. On one level the book serves as an entertaining and accessible introduction to eleven classics of Russian literature, which, while aimed at enticing new readers who might feel daunted by the sheer weight and “earnestness” of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, is also a delightful read for those already familiar with them.

The chapters are linked by Groskop's amusing story of her own obsession with learning Russian – to the extent that she tried to “become” Russian, believing it was her destiny. Through her own life story, she draws “life lessons” from each of the eleven works, showing how Russian writers really can help you understand and overcome psychological and social problems.

In her chapter on *Doctor Zhivago*, she meditates on the pointlessness of try-

ing to oppose fate. As Yuri and Lara discover, life throws good and bad at you, so how do you cope? “You just keep going, even if it means sometimes being an inadequate person, betraying people you love or running away from responsibility.”

Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*, Groskop writes, teaches us to remain optimistic even when faced with tragedy and despair. Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* is a lesson in how to survive unrequited love. Pushkin's Eugene Onegin (which I shall henceforth never be able to pronounce without thinking “one gin, or two?”) is a warning against hubris, while Chekhov's *Three Sisters* reminds us that the grass isn't always greener “там, где нас нет”, as Russians say – “where we are not”. You can pine your life away wishing for what you do not have, but it's better to seek happiness in the here and now.

Looking at Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Groskop muses on Isaiah Berlin's famous essay about the hedgehog and the fox – the former being a person who defines the world through a single idea, whereas the fox “accepts that

life has many confusing aspects and many pluralities”. Tolstoy, she says, was by nature a fox, but ended up a hedgehog. In Groskop's view, life as a fox is infinitely preferable.

The book contains wonderful cameos from Russian life, and just enough biography of each writer and historical context to tempt new readers to dive in – which hopefully they will. There is just one uncharacteristic error – and I would not mention it were this not a review for lovers of Russian. *Samogon* does not mean “the fire itself”, because it does not have a soft sign at the end. The root is not ОГОНЬ (fire) but ГОИ, from ГНАТЬ (to distil), and the word therefore means “self-distilled”, in other words, moonshine.

*Angus Roxburgh is the author of “Moscow Calling”, reviewed elsewhere in this issue of FORUM.*

*The Anna Karenina Fix: Life Lessons from Russian Literature* by Viv Groskop. Published by Fig Tree, 2017. Hardback £14.99, 224 pages. Also published as an ebook, audio download and in paperback 2018.



## *Screenings at the Cameo Cinema 14, 21, 28 March*

NB These are OURSCREEN events and will not go ahead unless tickets sell fast. All tickets £12.



14 March, 6pm

ANNA KARENINA  
from the Vakhtangov Theatre, Moscow

Book:  
[https://www.ourscreen.com/  
screening/45531](https://www.ourscreen.com/screening/45531)



21 March, 6pm

Chekhov's THE SEAGULL  
from the Satyricon Theatre, Moscow

Book:  
[https://www.ourscreen.com/  
screening/45532](https://www.ourscreen.com/screening/45532)



28 March, 6pm

Chekhov's UNCLE VANYA  
from the Vakhtangov Theatre, Moscow

Book:  
[https://www.ourscreen.com/  
screening/45533](https://www.ourscreen.com/screening/45533)



*Join us for a drink after Uncle Vanya and tell us what you thought of the plays!*  
28 March, 9pm, Cameo Cinema bar.  
£3 for a glass of wine/juice payable to SRF.  
Let us know in advance if you plan to be there!  
[info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org) / tel. 0131 560 1486