



The Scotland-Russia Forum

Review



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Dear Readers,

As I write this on a red double-decker bus in London, I'm thinking about how on earth this edition of the Review is actually going to reach you. Wipe the steamy windows and I see clear black roads, here and there in the odd shady patch perhaps a bit of frost. For many of you, wipe the windows and there's whiteness, so let's hope the postman makes it, not just for this Review, but for your cards and presents, too.

Our front cover is graced by pictures from three films shown at the Academic Rossica film festival in November. The top picture is of Alexei Popogrebsky's award-winning *How I Ended the Summer*; below that is Mitya Vorobiev from Yuri Shiller's film *Vorobei*; next to him stand Vika and Sadyk from Yusup Razykov's *Gastarbeiter*. All three films have a sensitivity to the past and an attempt to try to understand how it both infects and enriches Russia's present.

This attempt at trying to understand Russia is carried into our reviews section. We have two reviews of meaty books: the first is analysis and commentary of Russia; the second is a collection of Russian texts in translation. Of course, to really get to know the place you gotta speak the lingo, and we review the latest 'street Russian' offering.

Recently, I discovered a wonderful website, farfrommoscow.com, a wealth of new Russian music graciously quality-sifted by a Professor David MacFadyen in Los Angeles. You may have seen it mentioned in one of Jenny's newsletters. Here Professor MacFadyen tells us about the link between the pop scenes in Russia and Scotland.

We look at conflict on Russia's borders: the 2008 Georgia-Russia War as interpreted by Ronald D. Asmus; and this summer's events in Kyrgyzstan, as told by Kanykey Jailobaeva, who is from the south of country.

We also review Mary Woloschin's autobiography, Rachel Polonsky's travelogue of Russia, Ben Hellman and Andrei Rogachevskii's study of a film version of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and Peter Aleshkovsky's story of domestic violence.

Thank you to our contributors, a fine set of Russia enthusiasts, without whose time and care this Review would not exist. And welcome to our new Reviews editor, Samantha Sherry.

That's the naughties pretty much done and dusted and although I've no idea what 'what-ties' we're now heading into, I wish you all the very best of fortune and happiness for them.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Chris Delaney
 editor

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What has 2010 meant for the Scotland-Russia Forum?

Report from SRF chair, Jenny Carr

THE AIM of the SRF is to promote interest in Russia and her neighbours – and we are delighted by the evidence of rising interest in both our own activities and the activities of other Russian organisations in Scotland: the Russian supplementary schools are all growing fast and student numbers at all three university Russian departments are strong.

However there is considerable work to be done in convincing society as a whole that trying to understand Russia is both fascinating and necessary – the problem is exemplified by the Scottish Qualifications Authority's view that 'there is no demand for Russian' and their catastrophic decision to abandon school exams in the subject.

We will continue to provide them with evidence not only of demand (which is strong when allowed to show itself) but of the necessity to encourage demand and hope to persuade them to reverse that decision.

We have had a busy six months at the SRF since the last Review, with some very interesting and popular

exhibitions and talks, as well as encouraging signs of the possibility of sponsorship (not enough to secure our future – yet – but encouraging all the same).

Growth continues apace – membership is rising all the time, and we have recently recruited a major new corporate member: the Civil Engineering University of Moscow.

Two relatively new activities, language classes and the lending library, became well established in 2010, showing large increases in use since they began the year before.

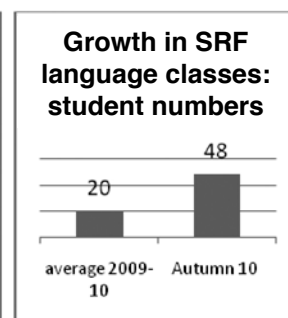
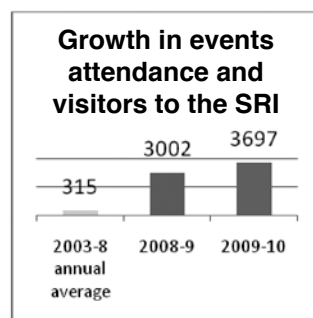
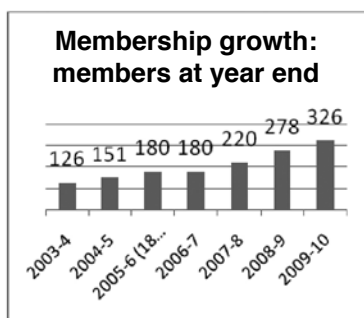
Visitor numbers to the Scotland-Russia Institute are also rising as we become better known – our exhibitions programme is an important but not the only attraction.

The variety of events and services we now offer (exhibitions, talks, 'chai 'n' chat', student activities, psychology, the shop, the library, language classes and more) means that the Scotland Russia Institute is becoming a hive of activity with both visitors and volunteers.

Manning is always a problem but we are continuing to attract good numbers of volunteers and,

thanks to a very generous offer of sponsorship from a member, hope to be employing a part-time administrative assistant soon. This is a very useful start towards the necessary professionalisation of the Forum. We are expected by our members and others to provide a professional service, and hope that we do so in many respects – but it just is not always possible with a volunteer workforce.

WHAT of the future? The committee has reviewed the viability of prolonging our lease at South College Street for another two years from June 2011 (when our initial funding from S&N comes to an end) and decided that we can afford to carry on so long as we continue to bring in funding on the same scale as we have been doing – from a combination of sponsorship, sales and earnings. We will recommend this to the AGM on December 16 and, if members agree, we hope we can rely on your support as we go into the next stage of our life at the Scotland-Russia Institute.



From within Kyrgyzstan



Kyrgyzstan is tentatively trying to form a stable coalition government following June's violence. Kanykey Jailobaeva, a Kyrgyz from the south of the country, gives her interpretation of the reason behind April's violence and looks to the future of former Soviet republic.

2010 HAS been politically and socially volatile for Kyrgyzstan. In April, there was social unrest which claimed the lives of over eighty people and resulted in the overthrow of the Bakiev's government. The creation of the interim government, led by former opposition members, did not stabilise the situation.

In June, a conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz broke out in southern Kyrgyzstan with devastating consequences. Officially, more than 371 died and over 2320 were wounded. Unofficially, reports suggest these numbers could be much higher. The infrastructure of Osh and Jalalabad, the two central cities in southern Kyrgyzstan, has been significantly damaged.

Social and political factors should be taken into account to understand this turmoil. Kyrgyzstan's economy has been slow to develop in comparison with economies of other Central Asian countries.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state in Kyrgyzstan has been weak with a high level of

corruption and a lack of infrastructure to support quality services. Most importantly, the government has failed to provide people with employment and proper social services. Therefore, people have been socially and economically frustrated. In particular, this has been the case in southern Kyrgyzstan which, as part of Fergana valley, is densely populated and relatively poorer, with tensions over resources.

IN APRIL, some of the population protested against the government of Bakiev because of extreme deterioration in the standard of living and state suppression of vital attributes of democracy and freedom such as a right to assemble and protest.

After the March revolution in 2005, the Bakiev's government failed to improve the lives of people. Within five years, Kyrgyzstan encountered increased corruption, a hydro-energy crisis, and organised crime.

In June 2010, according to the current government, 'ethnic awareness' between Uzbeks and

Kyrgyz in the south was exploited for political purposes. There was a wide public discussion of events such as the recording of telephone conversations between family members of Bakiev, which pointed to their involvement in the instigation of violence in Bishkek to undermine a referendum introducing amendments to the constitution. Despite previous ethnically-motivated violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, namely in 1990 when hundreds were killed, this year's conflict in the south cannot, in my opinion, be portrayed as being incited by ethnic tension.

I was in Edinburgh, studying Kyrgyzstan civil society at the University of Edinburgh, when these dramatic events unfolded in Kyrgyzstan. Coming originally from southern Kyrgyzstan, I was emotionally conflicted, and during my visit to Kyrgyzstan in July, I sought to explore as far as I could the situation, particularly the conflict in the south.

I had a number of informal conversations with Kyrgyz and Uzbek people of various socio-economic backgrounds in different areas.

DURING my trip, I learned that mixed communities where Uzbeks and Kyrgyz live together had a better chance of surviving because of mixed relations and joint activities (marriages, friendships, business, weddings, funerals, traditions, and others) that have taken place there. These people are too interconnected and committed geographically, morally, and emotionally to fight each other. Moreover, people from mixed communities had an impact beyond their communities. For instance, a Kyrgyz fireman in Osh phoned his Uzbek friend to make sure that he was fine. His Uzbek friend jokingly asked if he was burning houses of Uzbeks or putting off the fire. The Kyrgyz fireman replied, 'No, my friend, I am helping them [Uzbeks]. Do not think like this.'

The post-conflict situation requires sensitive handling. There is a need for a strong government and sound state policies.

Kyrgyzstan urgently needs to define its nation building strategy: strong state, robust policies and accountability are words familiar

to everybody since independence. However, the question is how to achieve these in a country where the people feel that everything has failed.

In June 2010, there was a referendum where people voted for a new constitution which stipulated that governance in Kyrgyzstan would be based on parliamentary democracy. In October 2010, there were elections for a new party-based parliament. Five political parties with diverse agendas won the elections.

Currently, they are in the process of building a coalition. It is a time for Kyrgyzstan to show its commitment to building democracy. The way forward is by coming together, cooperating, promoting peace, and withstanding political manipulation jointly as did mixed communities in southern Kyrgyzstan during the conflict.

Kanykey Jailobaeva is a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh.

Kyrgyzstan timeline

10th-13th Centuries Kyrgyz people migrate southwards from central Siberia, eventually settling in what is now Kyrgyzstan.

1876 Russian forces conquer the khanate of Kokand and incorporate present-day Kyrgyzstan into the Russian empire.

1921 Area of present-day Kyrgyzstan becomes part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

1990 Several hundred people are killed in inter-ethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz over access to land and housing around the town of Osh.

1991 Kyrgyzstan declares independence. Askar Akayev wins another term in office.

2001 US air base opens at Manas.

2003 Russian air base opens at Kant.

2005 Parliamentary elections spark wave of protests as opposition candidates are barred from standing. Akayev flees for Russia. Kurmanbek Bakiyev appointed president.

2010 April Opposition protests spread from northern Kyrgyzstan to capital Bishkek. President Kurmanbek Bakiyev flees the country and later resigns. Former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva becomes interim president.

2010 June Hundreds are killed in what UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, describes as ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad.

2010 November Exiled former President Kurmanbek Bakiyev goes on trial in absentia for shooting of protesters during his ouster in April, along with 27 other officials.

SOURCE: BBC



Top and left: Kyrgyz, Tadjik and Uzbek celebrate a wedding in Ala-Buka village, Jalalabad region, in July. Previous page: a burned-down house in Osh.

It's all in the past



Parallel themes in three films shown at the 4th Russian Film Festival in London, by Chris Delaney

I SAW three films at this year's *Academica Rossica* Russian Film Festival: *How I Ended the Summer* by Alexei Popogrebsky, *Gastarbeiter* by Yusup Razykov and *Sparrow* by Yuri Shiller. Popogrebsky's arctic drama I chose because it had – surprisingly, according to some – won the best film prize at the London Film Festival the previous week. The other two – Razykov's story of immigrants in Moscow and Shiller's portrayal of modern life in a Russian village – I chose arbitrarily: their showing times suited me best. Funny, then, how the three shared common themes of Russia's relationship to its past.

How I Ended the Summer is set in a meteorological station on a remote island above the Arctic Circle. We meet two characters: Sergei, the station's veteran technician, and Pavel, who is spending his summer there helping to record radioactivity levels. It starts off as a classic story between town and country, between the traditional and the newcomer (pictured above: Sergei, left, and Pavel).

The opening scene shows Pavel taking radiation readings with a Geiger counter from an unexploded shell that sticks out of the ground like a fat man stuck upside-down in a manhole. While Sergei (pictured on front cover) is away fishing, Pavel calls the mainland and learns that something terrible has happened to Sergei's family. For motives that are never made entirely clear, Pavel doesn't tell Sergei and the secret, the mere act of not being honest, poisons the developing father-son relationship, just as the silent radioactive shell, a metaphor for Russia's ruthless scientific progress, poisons the land.

In *Sparrow* by Yuri Shiller, panning shots of a herd of horses, moving in unison like a flock of starlings, introduce us to the village of *Vasilievka*. The villagers venerate the herd, claiming that it appeared centuries ago of its own will. But after a failed harvest and without money to pay wages, the village factor decides to sell for the horses for slaughter. The film's main character, Mitya Vorobiev (pictured on front cover), takes extreme measures to try to save the herd.

The horses represent the village's link with its past, before the arrival of capitalist market forces. They also represent something more intangible: we never find out really why they are so revered, but that doesn't matter – important is the process of revering that which can't be counted, weighed and sold, something mystical.

Gastarbeiter looks at the flow of migrants to Moscow from former Soviet countries – described by the director

as 'abandoned' (many might say freed). It follows Sadyk, an elderly Uzbek who goes to Moscow to find his missing grandson. Sadyk is returning to the capital after 50 years, when he left the Red Army. He tries to sell his war medals to raise money for the stay, but the metallic symbols of his past sacrifices raise barely enough for a night in a hotel. During his search, he is helped by Vika (pictured on front cover with Sadyk), a young Bulgarian prostitute with a golden heart (a hackneyed idea, but the film gets away with it). One of the film's most powerful scenes sees Sadyk turning to a former acquaintance, who we learn imprisoned Sadyk years previously. The man sits on his porch, protecting himself against fictional intruders with a shot-gun and against suppressed memories with vodka. Sadyk's appearance brings forth former sins and in a moment of sobriety, he sees the clarity of his sins (we can only guess what they were) and puts the shot-gun to his mouth.

I N EACH film the past is an infectious, creeping, encroaching entity; it can be heard in the buzzing of the radioactive shell in the arctic, in the longing songs of the Uzbek migrants in Moscow, in the rumble of horses' hooves in *Vasilievka*. In *How I Ended the Summer*, Pavel is driven from the meteorological station into the bitterly cold late-summer night and, in a delirious shiver, he approaches the shell, and bathes his face and hands in its warm, radioactive outpour. This unnatural product of the Soviet past provides instant relief from the cold, while slowly infecting him.

The landowner of *Vasilievka* needs to pay his debts. Killing the horses will give him enough money, but possibly at the risk of destroying the only thing that binds together the dying village.

And in *Gastarbeiter*, Uzbek migrants in Moscow sing folk songs that comfort and prick in equal measure their souls which ache for home. In these films the past is something that keeps the present alive, but possibly at the expense of the future.

Anne Applebaum recounts in her book *Gulag* a trip to the Solovki, among the most notorious gulags, now restored as a monastery-come-tourist day-trip. She asks a Russian tourist about the gulag and is sharply rebutted for bringing up the shames of the past. These films clearly don't represent a shift in Russia's infantile I'm-not-looking-so-you-aren't-there approach to its own history, but they signal a mature, reflective consideration of unpleasant events ... at least among three filmmakers. It's a start.

Heather-flecked Slav-rock

Far From Moscow (www.farfrommoscow.com) is an online catalogue of new music from Russia and its neighbours. It is run by Professor David MacFadyen, of the Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of California, Los Angeles. He tells us here of how Scottish romanticism keeps alive the dream of fame in a bleak Russian music market.



DUE TO both piracy and the economic downturn in Moscow, much of the entertainment industry finds itself online – legally or otherwise. All across Russia and neighbouring nations, unknown amateurs and major stars find their work scattered over countless sites.

When it comes to the younger end of that generational and financial spectrum – the newcomers – attracting attention can be impossible. A lack of proper aggregator sites and local scenes leaves performers drowning in an ocean of blogs, webzines, and other nameless locations. Since cooperation in the real world is unlikely (nobody can afford to tour or hire venues), what common passions might bring people together online? What sense of joint purpose, say, might a young performer in Petrozavodsk find with a colleague in Khabarovsk, thousands of miles away?

Clearly such people, driven to make music for no money, are incorrigible romantics. Endless effort is invested in an activity with little chance of social renown and zero chance of profit. In several instances, that same romance is tied to Scotland.

The link between Russian and Scottish romanticism, born in the nineteenth century, became a fixed element of the Soviet school curriculum. Those same classroom

habits have rolled into the present day – and the charm of heather-flecked hilltops is strong even now. One need only, for example, look at how whisky is marketed in Slavic climes. Everybody recognizes – and likes – the same metaphors.

And so, in the realm of online, happily amateur songwriting, a few Scottish reference points also endure. They help to bring a sense of unity to far-flung individuals. Three of these are worth pointing out as a quick introduction: one from the past, a second from a few years ago, and a third that is only now coming to light.

THE OLDEST – and arguably most significant – influence would be The Cocteau Twins from Grangemouth. Throughout the 1980s, vocalist Elizabeth Fraser developed a lyrical form of expression that belonged to no particular language. Snippets of English would vanish in waves of mellifluous improvisation.

Nowadays, given the major complications caused by the Russian language for any westward-looking artist, The Cocteau Twins are often quoted as a hopeful example. If a form of sung Esperanto could reach the dizzy heights of critical acclaim within the notoriously pernicky UK scene, then maybe Slavic singers could do the same... So goes the argument. And even if our starry-

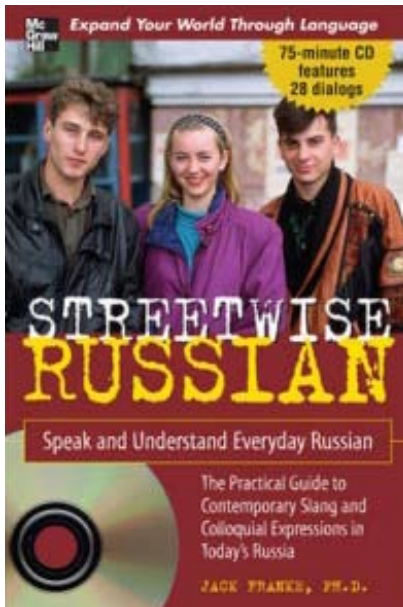
eyed singers fail, the style of 'dream pop' that resulted from The Cocteau Twins' discography forms a consoling soundtrack for unappreciated soundsmiths.

Closer to the present, we can find constant words of praise for Glasgow's Franz Ferdinand, who helped to bring the angular chords and chiselled cheekbones of UK art-school pop to a new generation of Russians. Simple structures, liberal helpings of irony, and narrow trousers all look appealing to faraway bands on a small budget. Fashionable clothes need not come with deep pockets. And, just as importantly, we should not forget that Franz Ferdinand, by their own admission, are deeply indebted to the earlier Glasgow traditions of Postcard Records.

Many of today's musicians, of course, have put aside guitars in favour of plugs, keyboards, and laptop wizardry. Currently modish in several Russian cities is the complex dance music known as 'wonky,' due to its tricky time signatures. This disorienting, jazzy style is yet another product of Glaswegian bedrooms – as many Russian youngsters know. And so the influence of Scottish pop continues to this day, helping to give men and women divided by multiple time zones a sense of common purpose. Downloading a pirated copy of 'Trainspotting' doesn't hurt, either.

Street Russian: nicknames, obscenities and superstitions

Jack Franke tries to tell us when to wish someone good luck and when to tell them to break a leg? Natasha Samoilova assesses whether he's got the message across.



Streetwise Russian by Jack Franke

McGraw Hill, 2010, pp. 224, £11.99

AMONG books for students of Russian as a foreign language, this is an unusual encounter. It is not a conventional textbook. It's a practical guide to slang and colloquial expressions in today's Russia

It provides not only a glimpse into everyday language as spoken in various walks of life, but also contains numerous exercises and audio recordings to help the reader to learn the colloquialisms and slang expressions.

Streetwise Russian contains 20 dialogues that present interactions between young people on such topics as 'At the club', 'Military Service', 'Guy talk', 'Girl talk', etc. Each dialogue is accompanied by a translation into English and a vocabulary list. The latter shows both English equivalents and synonymous expressions in neutral register. For example: забрить 'to draft' (literally 'to have your head shaved'), syn. призвать в армию.

BEING a practical guide, the book contains exercises, many of which are crosswords, that will help the reader remember new vocabulary and all of the dialogues and vocabulary can be found on the accompanying disc. At the same time, the English-Russian and Russian-English indexes at the back allow students to use Streetwise Russian also as a slang dictionary.

What one finds missing from a practical guide is a clear indication in the vocabulary lists of what is a colloquialism and what is slang in order to know when to use it ... if to use it at all.

We come across such colloquial words and expressions as идёт 'Okay', без разницы 'don't care' or ну, ты

даёшь! 'you are kidding' next to ништяк 'Okay', не фартит 'unlucky' or гоблин 'doorman'. In this situation you have to rely solely on translation and trust that a colloquialism in Russian corresponds to a colloquialism in English, and slang corresponds to slang. Some equivalents however, including the translation of гоблин, raise doubts.

A fascinating feature of the book is cultural notes on various aspects of the Russian life and culture that include Nicknames, Obscenities, Superstitions, Hazing in the Russian army, Drinking vodka. For instance, among superstitions we come across the following: 'When you want to wish Russians good luck, you should use the expression 'Ни пуха, ни пера!'. The response to this wish is 'К чёрту!' (To the devil!). The equivalent in English is 'Break a leg'.

Streetwise Russian is undoubtedly a very useful book for those who want to get clued up on colloquialisms and slang currently used by Russian speakers. Moreover, due to translations of the dialogues and vocabulary lists it can be equally interesting for Russian students studying English.

Dr Natasha Samoilova (PhD St Andrews) has taught Russian at all levels and is currently course organiser of Russian language at the Scotland-Russia Institute.

The SRF Institute hosts its very own Russian lessons. Courses cater for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels, as well as classes for individual needs. You'll have access to the library, materials via email should you miss a class ... and free tea and coffee.

Courses are led by Natasha Samoilova. For further information on all Russian courses email: russiangcourses@scotlandrussiaforum.org

Solzhenitsyn and suffering for art

Filming the Unfilmable is a labour-of-love that fills a hole in Solzhenitsyn studies, while leaving room for research, writes Claire Knight

SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET POLITICS AND SOCIETY
Edited by Dr. Andreas Umland

Ben Hellman, Andrei Rogachevskii

Filming the Unfilmable

Casper Wrede's 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich'



ibidem

Filming the Unfilmable: Casper Wrede's One Day in the Life of Denisovich by Ben Hellman and Andrei Rogachevskii

ibidem, 2010, pp. 250, €34.10

THIS study of the 1970 film adaptation of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (dir. Casper Wrede) is a labour of love for Russian literature scholars Ben Hellman and Andrei Rogachevskii. Chock-full of fascinating and often witty footnotes, the main text is well researched and provides a thorough account of the film's production.

Following opening remarks on the novel and the director who was to bring it to the big screen, the authors illuminate the film's development from its financing, to set-design and costumes (beautifully illustrated), to the wintertime filming in the mining town of Røros, Norway's Hollywood.

Hellman and Rogachevskii show a sound respect for the lengths to which British-trained Finnish director Casper Wrede and lead actor and producer Tom Courtenay went to create as faithful an adaptation as they could.

As Ivan Denisovich, Courtenay not only shed half a

stone from his already slender form, but also removed the caps on his front teeth. He then abstained from eating for a day prior to shooting a scene, wherein the ravenous gulag inmate partakes of a scanty meal. He also refused a body double, opting instead to suffer the sub-zero conditions of open-air filming for days on end in order to heighten the authenticity of his performance.

THE STRENGTHS and weaknesses of this study come to light most clearly in the final two chapters. The first provides a meticulous comparison between the two preserved versions of the script and the final film, with occasional reference to the novel, noting where the order of scenes was reshuffled and dialogue cut. The final chapter surveys the critical reception of the film in Sweden, Norway, America, and Britain, with a spotlight on Solzhenitsyn's personal reaction to the work. Both chapters are painstakingly researched, bringing to bear hitherto unconsidered archival sources and delighting in tracking down the details, and referencing a wide range of press sources in the final chapter. Yet both chapters remain somewhat unfinished: nowhere is there a systematic analysis of the film itself as an independent, cinematic work.

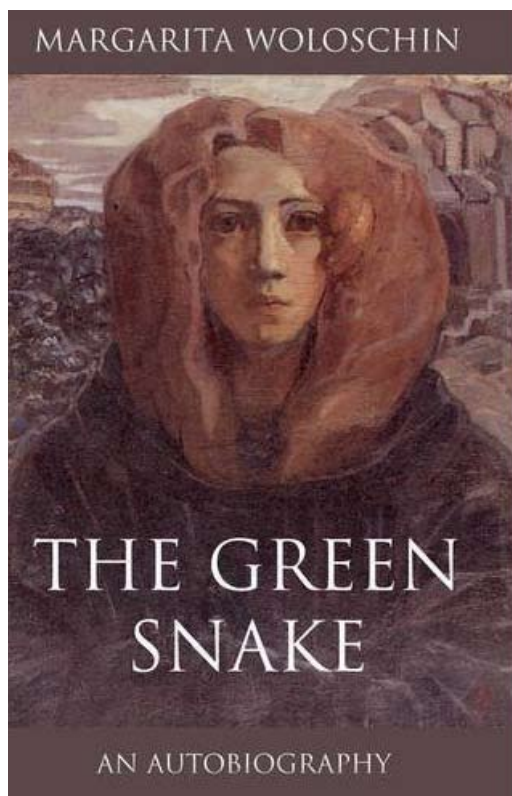
Hellman and Rogachevskii's study provokes a number of intriguing analytical questions, but does not address them head on. For instance, instead of exploring what renders a cinematic adaptation successful – thus acknowledging its distinct nature as a film as opposed to a literary work – the authors present Wrede's *One Day* as a success due simply to its fidelity to the literary source, dismissing negative critical responses to the film. Nor do they deal with the failure of the film to connect emotionally with numerous critics, or the tendency for viewers to 'misinterpret' the film.

Likewise, the documentary-like feel of the film is mentioned, but without any exploration of the significance, origin, or even intent of this effect. With this book, Hellman and Rogachevskii set out to fill a gap in Solzhenitsyn studies; this they do, while yet leaving enough room for further analysis of the film in its own right, as a cinematic product and not merely an adaptation.

Claire Knight is a postgraduate student at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. She is studying post-war Stalin era cinema.

In search of the 'folk-soul'

Margarita Woloschin's memoirs are a remarkable account of a richly lived life and, as writes Lucy Weir, they are a tale as diverse in language as in events.



The Green Snake: An Autobiography
by Margarita Woloschin

Floris Books, 2010, pp. 432, £20.00

IN THIS memoir, translated for the first time into English, Margarita Woloschin recalls her life from privileged beginning in turn-of-the-century Russia to the development of her artistic career and her involvement with the anthroposophical movement led by Rudolf Steiner. This account of her life is fascinating: she details her relationships with figures such as Tolstoy and Repin.

Woloschin writes with an artist's eye for aesthetic detail, but in places this tendency lends a rather impersonal edge to her writing. For example, descriptive passages, such as those chapters describing the building of the Goetheanum, are long in parts, and lyrical accounts of the beauty of the frozen Neva tend to have more personality than conversations with iconic intellectual figures such as Steiner or Tolstoy.

The Green Snake is littered with deeply spiritual musings, indicating a devout aspect to Woloschin's

character and a genuine reverence for spirituality. She brings to life mystical elements of the Orthodox faith, but cannot treat pivotal figures in her own development with the same empathy.

This spiritual element begins to overshadow the biographical nature of the book, which at times becomes rather tiresome. Similarly, the theme runs throughout of a quest for the 'Russian folk-soul', something with which Woloschin and Steiner seem to have been equally fascinated, but their loosely defined search assumes a slightly patronising air. She never quite explains the nature of this 'folk soul' and, indeed, having spent a great deal of her life amongst the upper echelons of society, one comes to wonder how deep was her engagement with Russian 'folk' or, perhaps more appropriately, peasant reality.

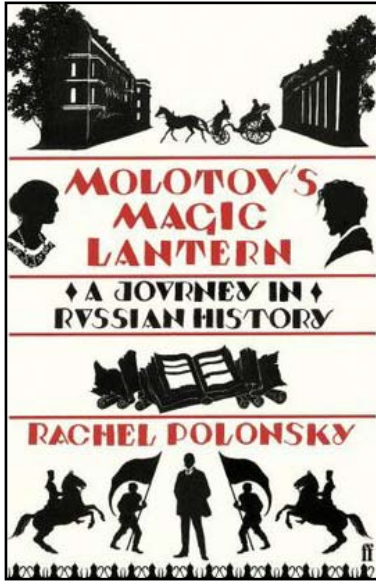
FOR THE majority of this sizeable memoir, Woloschin uses otherworldly language in explaining the importance of anthroposophy, but for the lay reader, it is difficult to determine what the term means in practice.

Woloschin's writing picks up a new sense of pathos towards the end of her memoir, where she gives in emotive language a personal account of the beginnings of the Russian Revolution. Her description of widespread illness and suffering, including her own hospitalisation during a typhus outbreak, lends a more humane, less abstract quality to her writing, as well as a more palpable sense of the extraordinary difficulties of everyday existence in revolutionary Russia.

It is really the last section of her work, detailing her time in Moscow and St Petersburg (which she refuses to call Leningrad) that a more personal quality pervades the writing, including accounts of Bolshevik trials and the terrible famines which occurred across early twentieth century Russia.

Woloschin's life spanned some of the most exciting artistic developments and traumatic events of Russian history, and clearly her social status brought her into contact with Russia and Germany's intellectual elite. It is a shame that her rendition of such events has a slightly meandering tone at times, lessening the emotional impact of her truly remarkable life.

Lucy Weir is a postgraduate student at the university of Glasgow. She researches avant-garde dance and performance.



Molotov's Magic Lantern: A Journey in Russian History by Rachel Polonsky

Faber and Faber, 2010, pp. 416, £20

Putin, Molotov, and mystical kingdoms

Rachel Polonsky's journey across Russia is steeped in charm and little-known historical details, writes Ann Shukman

FOR A number of years Rachel Polonsky, her husband and children, lived at a prestigious address in central Moscow No 3 Romanov Pereulok, formerly home to many of the Soviet nomenklatura. Polonsky begins her

Gumilev, Akhmatova's son, has become a cult figure, where Vladimir Putin hopes to find the entrance to the mystical kingdom of Shambala – and much more. In this exploration of Russian reality certain voices recur: Molotov himself, of course, but also the historian Dmitri Likhachev, writers such as Chekhov and Shalamov, and the poets Mandelstam and Akhmatova. These last-named are for Polonsky the torch-bearers of sanity through the Soviet darkness, just as the exiled Decembrists, evoked in the far eastern chapters, are witnesses of human courage and decency in an earlier age. This is a rich, insightful book to be mined for profit and pleasure.

voyage of exploration in the apartment above, which once belonged to Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin's brutal foreign minister.

She discovers his library, ponders his books with their annotations and underlinings. She finds his magic lantern and turning the handle gives her the idea for this book. Each of the book's fourteen chapters, like a magic lantern, conjures up the landscape and the history of a particular place: its inhabitants past and present, their ideals and hopes, and their tragic or notorious destinies.

Polonsky starts in Moscow (including a hilarious visit to the Sandunovsky bathhouse), then towards Zvenigorod and the dacha areas of Lutsino and Mozhinka, beloved of Chekhov and Levitan. Next Novgorod, Staraya Russa, one-time home to Dostoevsky, prophet of what was to come in Russia, then down south to Rostov on Don and Taganrog, up north to Vologda, Archangel and Murmansk, out east to Irkutsk, Ulan Ude and Kyakhta.

The result is a unique journey through Russian time and space. Polonsky has a gift for catching the immediacy of a place in snippets of conversation, glimpses of passers-by, in the scenes of post-Soviet dereliction, in the vulgarity of the new, and the enduring beauty of the landscape.

Polonsky is steeped in Russian history and culture but her learning is carried lightly: she is drawn to the quirks, oddities and coincidences of history as well as the brutal facts. Read this book if you want to find out how many death warrants Molotov actually signed, how St Savva's relics were kept safe through Soviet years, what Shelley's sister in law was doing in Zvenigorod in the 1820s, what the British spy Sidney Reilly was really up to with his troupe of pretty actresses, why Lev

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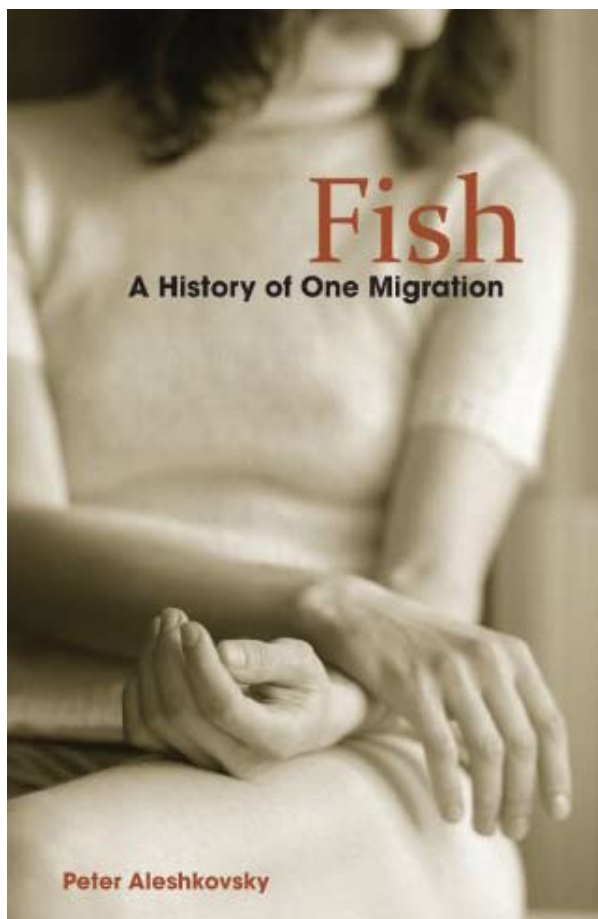
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Flesh-and-blood gambling chips

Peter Aleshkovsky's portrayal of violence towards women is vivid and emotive but his first-person narration of suffering left Wendy Muzlanova with a bad taste in her mouth.



Fish: A History of One Migration by Peter Aleshkovsky, translated by Nina Shevchuk-Murray

Russian Information Services, 2010, pp. 232, \$16.00

IT HAS to be said that Peter Aleshkovsky signed up for a challenging task when he decided to write 'Fish' from a first-person female point-of-view.

This, he does remarkably well – for the most part.

His descriptive writing is, in some places, quite outstanding. Vera's childhood is portrayed using vivid imagery, 'I would bite into the cold, sugary watermelon flesh ... and ecstatically slap my watermelon-stuffed belly with my sticky hand.'

His prose borders upon the lyrical, 'the moon that peeked in the window was flushed, coy and generous, like the face of the old Tajik I bought milk from when I was little.'

Vera's husband is verbally and physically abusive towards her. When he hurls the nickname 'Fish' at her (in an accusation of frigidity) she begins to cry. 'I had

never cried before. The tears made Gennady irate. He hit me once, but so hard that he split my eyebrow and blood instantly covered my face.'

According to Amnesty International, each day 36,000 women in the Russian Federation are beaten by their husbands or partners.

Aleshkovsky handles the drugging and rape of the central character with apparent authenticity, 'The Uzbek now materialized as a horrendous giant, whose massive shoulders had blocked out all the light ... and I obeyed, because if I hadn't done what he wanted at that moment, he would have simply torn me apart the way a starved man tears up a flat bread.'

THE effect of the stigma upon the victim is insightfully written, as Vera begins to have suicidal thoughts and ends up being admitted to a psychiatric ward, 'I remembered the neighbours' faces, with their mixed expressions of sympathy and disgust.'

Another character, Ninka, is wagered by her boyfriend in an ill-fated card game which ends in gang rape. It is to Aleshkovsky's credit that he highlights the idea of women as property, as flesh-and-blood gambling chips, but there is too much of a sense of suffering as moral pornography here for my liking.

In a strange kind of sub-plot, Vera has the mystical gift of being able to bring comfort to those in pain, by means of some kind of florally-described Russian Reiki. She is unable, however, to help herself. It would appear that Vera's destiny is to endure all manner of suffering whilst still being a force for good. Surprise, surprise...

It's true that Aleshkovsky's 'Fish' has had praise heaped upon it and the work was short-listed for the Russian Booker Prize – but I am going to risk an alternative opinion and say that I found the general feel of the book irritating in the extreme.

The pushing of a new heroine-cum-martyr role model on to Russian women by a male writer pretending a female voice – now, why might I find this distasteful? Just look back at those statistics...

Wendy Muzlanova is coordinator of the Perth Russian Conversation Group and a member of the Soutar House Writers' Group in Perth. Her first collection of poems is 'The Night You Come The Day We Kiss'.

The real Russia Today

Michael L. Bressler's collection is lucid, concise, and illuminating, if only for an American readership, writes Lewis White

SINCE the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, many popular Western conceptions of Russia and the Russians were abruptly rendered obsolete. No longer the ominous communist monolith lurking at the periphery of West-Central Europe, long since a Great Power of the Old European order, Russia is now something of an unknown to many in the West trying to understand the relevance of a once mighty empire in an increasingly globalised world. It is this vacuum in understanding that Michael L. Bressler et al seek to fill in this volume.

The book is simply structured, with each chapter dedicated to a specific sphere of contemporary Russian life. This interdisciplinary approach allows contributors to present assessments of areas as diverse as the history and geography of this huge land, through the politics and economics of the modern Russian Federation, to environmental and gender issues and modern film and literature.

As Bressler himself states in his introduction, this volume is aimed at providing a general thematic introduction to contemporary Russia, and the style and structure remain geared to this throughout. Accessible in language and tone, and neatly subdivided into chronologically or thematically ordered segments, each chapter is also supplemented by a useful bibliography for further reading. Most sections provide historical overviews to set their subject in context, and are occasionally accompanied by reasonably clear statistical data charts or the odd black and white photograph.

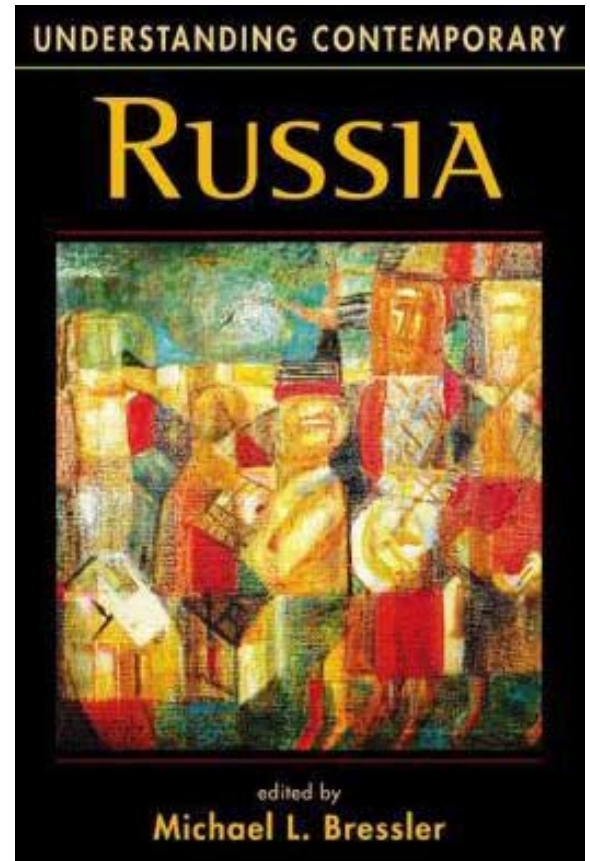
Steven G. Marks's Historical Context, the longest chapter in the book, offers a necessarily whistle-stop introduction to over one thousand years of Russian history in around sixty pages, but the narrative

remains strong enough to show in relief the prevalent motifs defining Russia's relationship to her people and to the rest of the world. Marks's assessment of Russia's tumultuous relationship with the West is particularly incisive, and the section is supplemented by a useful chronology.

Current themes such as the ongoing conflict in Chechnya are also introduced in other sections, while Bressler lucidly charts Vladimir Putin's rise and the subsequent strengthening of the presidency at the expense of democracy in his section on politics in Russia.

JAMES R. Millar's chapter on the Russian economy and Russia's reliance on oil and gas revenues ties neatly into Allen C. Lynch's examination of current international relations, particularly when considering Russia's recent attempts to use gas supply as a foreign policy tool.

The contributors are primarily US-based academics, and it is clear that the book is targeted at a US readership. Certain points of reference may not be as relevant to a UK audience (in the Geographical Preface, for instance, we are told that fourteenth century Muscovy was 'about the size of Massachusetts'), and readers from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales may be surprised to learn that the military alliance formed to counteract German sabre-rattling in the lead-up to the First World War



Understanding Contemporary Russia
edited by Michael L. Bressler

Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2008, pp. 423, £14.95

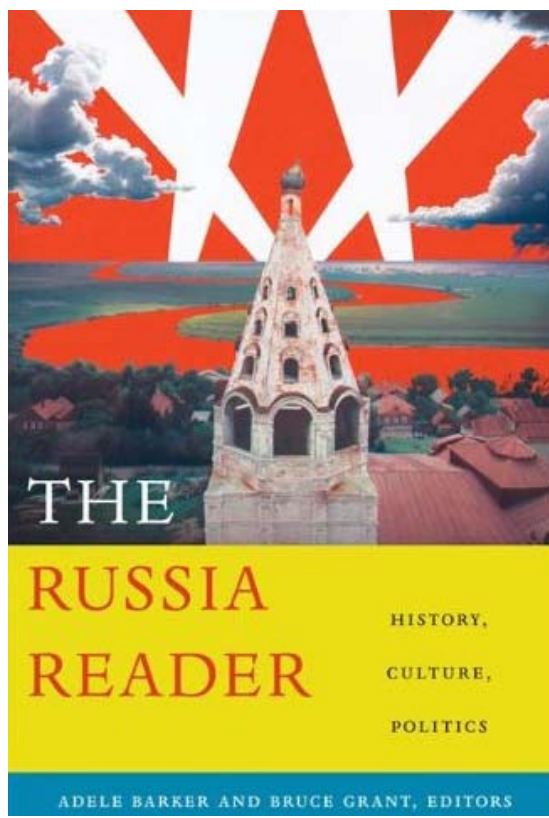
was between 'France, Russia and England'.

Nonetheless, these are minor foibles in what is otherwise an extremely useful introduction to an immensely complex and enduringly fascinating country. While there may be little for the experienced scholar to discover in this volume, this remains an excellent primer for any *novichok* in Russian Studies.

Lewis White graduated from the University of Glasgow with a degree in Russian.

Unravelling the enigma

A rich and diverse collection of Russian texts, many published in English for the first time, brings Russia to life, writes Mary Bailes



The Russia Reader: History, Culture, Politics
edited by Adele Barker and Bruce Grant

Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 784, £20.99

THE Russia Reader is a captivating and wide-ranging new collection of texts on the theme of Russia and Russianness. Designed as a broad introduction to the country's history, culture and politics, the volume presents in English translation a wealth of authentic Russian voices and scholarly commentaries on diverse aspects of Russian life.

Selections are drawn from poetry, song, short stories and novels, the latter ranging from War and Peace to the 2005 lives-of-the-nouveaux-riches thriller Casual, as well as political speeches and trial transcripts, private letters, snippets from autobiographical accounts and personal diaries.

The texts, thirty of which are

published here in English for the first time, are arranged in sixteen sections running chronologically from 10th Century Kyivan Rus' through to the post-communist decades, or according to regional themes. Sections on Siberia and, in particular, the Caucasus convey the complexities of Russia's shifting boundaries and ethnically diverse population.

The book's emphasis on eye-witness accounts brings a sense of immediacy to tumultuous historical events. Voices of peasants, workers and soldiers appear alongside those of political elites, academics and artists, offering a whole spectrum of personal experience and an alternative to grand narratives of traditional history. Between an extract from E. H. Carr's

essay on the background of revolution and Lenin's The Withering Away of the State, for example, we find Viktor Shklovsky's riveting first-person account of disorder, privation and anticipation in the capital during the final months of Tsarist rule, and excerpts from letters written by exhausted soldiers at the front to the Petrograd Assembly, 'All of these millions who are in the trenches can say only one thing: let there be peace as soon as possible. Only that can make us happy, and only then will we feel the freedom and liberation that our fallen brothers gave us.'

Informative introductions provide context for each section and text, but the editors keep comment and analysis to a minimum. Sections

on Stalin and the Great Patriotic War are sensitively handled and sensationalism is avoided, leaving the texts and, chillingly, the numbers, to speak for themselves.

Anna Akhmatova's Requiem is reproduced here, as is a newly translated diary of the Blockade of Leningrad, a quietly spoken account of unimaginable conditions, made all the more poignant by the fact that its author, a geography teacher, was sentenced to death by firing squad in 1943.

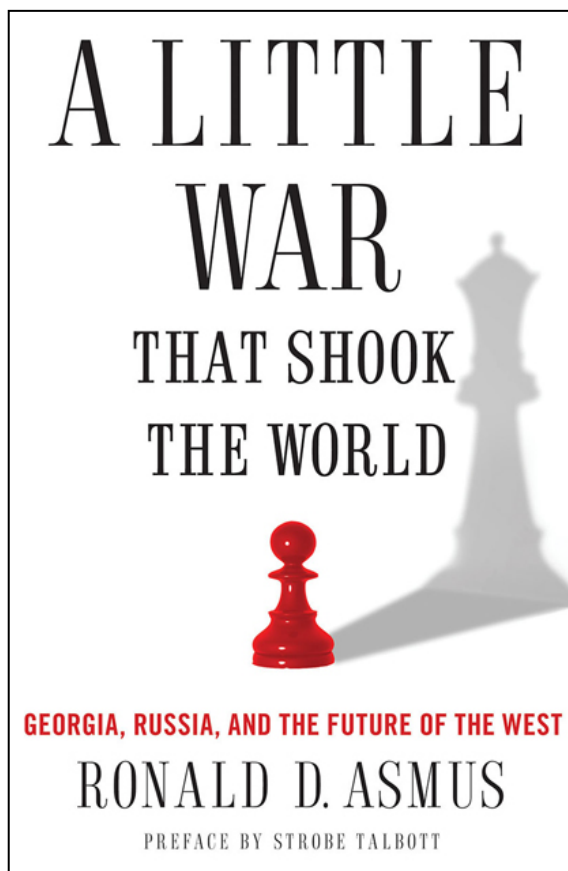
TRAGEDY, conflict and drama inevitably feature significantly throughout the book, yet Barker and Grant take care also to present a sense of *byt*, of domestic and everyday life, such as rituals of food preparation or the banya. Vivid details like the constantly replenished bag of *pelmeni*, sitting permanently frozen and 'hard as pebbles' on a Siberian balcony in Ol'ga Marchuk's memoir of Akademgorodok, are at once mundane and almost iconic motifs of Russian life. Zoshchenko's The Bathhouse, on the other hand, provides comic relief, despite the fact that humour is notoriously tricky in translation. Indeed, the only selections which fell slightly flat for me were the somewhat stilted jokes in later sections.

Overall, The Russia Reader is excellent. It is a tremendous introduction for the newcomer to Russian history and culture, and even the well-versed reader should find fascinating new material amongst the rich variety collected here.

Mary Bailes is a postgraduate student at the University of Glasgow. She is researching the history of science in Tsarist Russia.

Conflicting pressures and the role of states in war

The catchy, simple of title of Ronald D. Asmus's book about the 2008 Georgia-Russia war belies an account that needs to be approached with care, writes Liam O'Shea



A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia and the Future of the West by Ronald D. Asmus

Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 272, £20.00

searching questions of Russia's role in international relations and the response of Western states and institutions.

The book is divided into an introduction and eight chapters. The first chapter chronicles the Georgian decision to go to war. The second seeks to frame the conflict as part of a larger geopolitical struggle and describes how the various parties' interests developed prior to the conflict. In chapters three and four, Asmus describes how these interests came to collide following a souring of relations between Russia and the West after Kosovo's declaration of independence and efforts to secure NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. The book ends with a description of the diplomatic failings leading up to the conflict, the conflict itself, the diplomatic manoeuvrings that took place after fighting began, and the impact the conflict has had, and is likely to have, on future East-West relations.

ASMUS'S theoretical approach is heavily influenced by what is known in political science theory as realism, which, whilst not necessarily flawed, can result in parsimonious analyses. Consequently, Asmus stresses the importance of states' interests, often pitted against each other, in a zero-sum game, but he does not explain the structural complexity of the conflict. For example, he argues that war broke out largely as a result of Russian manipulations rather than the complex history of the region.

Whilst there is evidence to suggest a degree of Russian manipulation, the importance of structural historical causes could have been analysed in greater detail. The actor-centred approach can also make it seem that the conflict can be explained by the behaviour of a few, monolithic actors. Yet states rarely behave as united entities and although much of what happened can be explained by what leaders planned and executed in capital cities, it is also important to acknowledge how leaders were influenced by, and reacted to, pressures from below.

Asmus supports his arguments largely with evidence garnered from interviews with elite policy makers and diplomats and with articles from the media/think tanks. He sources a few academic books but very few articles from academic journals.

... continued on back page

THE SUBJECT of Ronald D. Asmus's book, the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008, is as contested as it is complicated. Asmus, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs during President Clinton's second term in office, provides a useful account of the high-level Western and Georgian diplomacy which occurred during the conflict.

The book, however, does not provide incontrovertible evidence to support the author's claims that the reasons for the war were Russia's determination to undermine Georgia's desire to align itself with the West, and that the war was aimed not only against Georgia but at the West more generally. Despite this, Asmus does ask some

Whilst the gathered evidence is useful, these sources are limited and do not provide enough evidence to convincingly support his claims, and to counter alternative explanations, regarding the causes of the war.

Asmus's sources are almost all either Western or Georgian although, as he writes, it proved impossible to interview Russian officials – a common issue, sadly, facing contemporary scholars of Russia.

UNFORTUNATELY, this limitation reinforces Asmus's pro-Georgian slant. The accounts of Georgian officials are often taken at face value, and the reader is left with the feeling that the Georgian leadership may have been hot-headed and mistaken, but it was well meaning against a planned, concerted plot originating in Moscow.

A report on the war, sponsored by the EU, is, however, far more critical of the Georgian decision to go to war and Georgia's claim of a large-scale Russian incursion into South Ossetia before the start of the conflict.

Asmus, nevertheless, does pose some very pertinent questions regarding Russia's role in the Caucasus and, more generally, international relations.

As he points out, Russia unilaterally changed the borders of a sovereign European state by force. His

account supplements academic accounts of the erratic and unpredictable nature of Russian diplomacy. Asmus also questions whether Western diplomatic institutions and strategies are adequate in the face of such unpredictability. On the whole, as a history of Western diplomacy during the conflict, the book is useful. Asmus's explanations of Russian behaviour and the causes of the conflict, however, require more supporting evidence.

To understand the complexity of the region, its peoples and their quarrels, the reader is better off starting with the Charles King's historical account, *The Ghost Freedom* or Svante Cornell's *Small Nations and Great Powers*. Yet, as King points out, this is a region of contested identities and histories, and thus, no single account of the 2008 war is likely to be comprehensive.

Liam O'Shea is a postgraduate student at the University of St Andrews. He is researching issues relating to crime in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

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