



The Scotland-Russia Forum

# Review

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КОСМИЧЕСКАЯ  
ОДИССЕЯ

12-17.06.2011

  
A. Artsebarskiy

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Dear Readers,

Fifty years ago, Yuri Gagarin became the first man to go into space. To commemorate this important event, the Scotland-Russia Forum organised a visit for cosmonaut Anatoly Artsebarsky, who spent five months onboard the Mir Space Station in 1991. Our front cover shows Anatoly before his trip to Mir. You may also notice that it has been signed by Anatoly himself, and more pictures of the visit are in the Review.

The exchange of people and ideas is revisited throughout this edition. Russian Irn-Bru (yes, it exists) was the star attraction at a multi-culturalism fair at St Augustine's School in Edinburgh. Two students at Glasgow University share their experience of living in Russia as part of the SRF Language Assistant Programme. And we have an exclusive travel offer for SRF members who want to venture to Russia and beyond.

The theme of travel and exchange is carried on in our reviews section. We look at a book about Nicholas I's Scottish doctor, who served the Tsar for over thirty years. We look at the story of English governesses in Russia before and after the Revolution. And we review a book about the history of Soviet Studies, or how the West tried to peer behind the thick, heavy Iron Curtain to understand what was going in the Soviet Union.

Also in our reviews section we look at a refreshing study of Shostakovich, a collection of stories from the Gulag camps, as well as two works of fiction: Vladimir Sorokin's Day of the Oprichnik, a modern tale of state oppression, and a new translation The Three Fat Men by Yuri Olesha.

Finally, we tell the remarkable story of Kostya, a young Ukrainian sailor. He is asking for your help, dear readers, to track down his long-lost friends, whom he hasn't seen for nearly 70 years.

I am very grateful to all our contributors, who graciously take the time to write for the Review. Without them the Review would not exist. Welcome and thanks to Flippanta Kulakiewicz, the SRF's new administrative assistant.

I wish you all a happy and fruitful summer.

Chris Delaney  
editor

Editor: Chris Delaney  
Reviews editor: Samantha Sherry

The Scotland-Russia Forum,  
9 South College Street,  
Edinburgh, EH8 9AA  
Tel: +44 (0)131 668 3635  
info@scotlandrussiaforum.org  
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# Scotland Russia Forum in 2011

Report from SRF chair, Jenny Carr

**A**T our December AGM the SRF committee bravely recommended to members that we should prolong the lease on our South College Street premises when the initial term, funded by Scottish & Newcastle, expires in June 2011. This month! We now have tenure until June 2013 and hope to continue to host interesting events and people, as well as to develop more secure funding in the next two years. We've made a good start. The highlights of the year were:

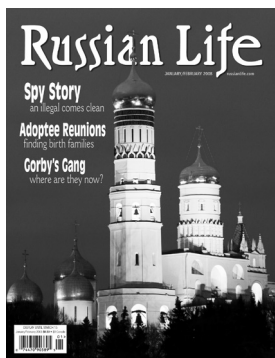
- **Our first staff member** – We now employ an administrative assistant two days a week. Flippanta Kulakiewicz started work one day a week in March, adding a second day in April, and making a huge difference to the efficiency of our organisation.
- **Sponsorship** – We have received two substantial grants: a very generous donation from one of our members, Dr Ruth Schroek, to fund the above post for one day a week; and a substantial grant from the Russkiy Mir Foundation for our exhibitions programme April-December 2011. This covers all the costs of exhibitions as well as making a very welcome contribution to our overheads (rent) and paying for help with the not inconsiderable administration needed. We remain very grateful also to supporters who regularly give us smaller, but not small, amounts.
- **Programme** – After a very interesting Armenian exhibition in February/March, we started the series of Russian exhibitions funded by Russkiy Mir with solo exhibitions from the artists Olga Yukhtina and Janet Treloar. The latter was opened by Richard

Demarco in the presence of representatives from the Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian and Italian consulates. Lecture topics this year have included Armenian manuscripts, Russian business, a trenchant analysis of the current political situation, teaching in the Urals, the poetry of Anna Akhmatova and the war in Belarus. We have worked with the British Council, the Filmhouse (packing out a showing of the documentary 'My Perestroika'), Rossotrudnichestvo, Blackwells bookshop, Edinburgh University Business School, the Presidential Academy and other organisations. Our programme is included with this magazine.

• **Russian language** – Not such good news. As I write the fate of Slavonic languages at Glasgow University is still to be decided but the SQA will definitely be scrapping school exams in Russian from 2015. However we continue to battle on – making our presence felt at meetings with the other cultural organisations and the Scottish education authorities, taking part in a school events and addressing the annual Eurolog conference of Russian schools on the need for more Russian support for Russian as a foreign language.

Have a wonderful summer. If you're in Edinburgh in August, don't forget to visit our Petrovich exhibition (accepted for the Art Festival and sponsored by Russkiy Mir) and check our website for other Festival activities. We have a full programme in June – an exhibition about Sakharov with talks and films, as well as a real live cosmonaut here for the week! – but will be closed 10-31 July.

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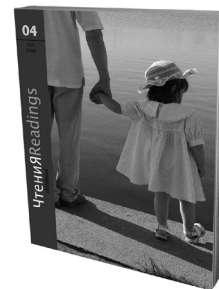
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### Chtenia

Readings from Russia

*Chtenia* is the Russian word for "readings." And it is **the only regularly published journal of Russian fiction in English translation.** But *Chtenia* is much more than fiction – it also includes non-fiction, poetry, and black and white photography, all in a comfortable **paperback book format.** Each issue of *Chtenia* has a theme, and its 128 pages of readings touch on that theme, using it as a looking glass into aspects of Russian culture, history and life.



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# Kostya and Nancy

*In 1944, a young Ukrainian sailor called Kostya arrived in Rosyth with the Soviet Navy. There, he met a local girl called Nancy. Here, he talks to **Chris Delaney** about what happened and why he wants to find her after nearly 70 years.*

**A**FTER the lend-lease agreement between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, the Soviet Navy was left with HMS Royal Sovereign, eight destroyers, and half a dozen submarines. They were to be used to protect the convoys as they travelled along the Karelian Front.

On May 8, 1944, we sailed into Greenock port on the HMS Royal Sovereign. I was part of the battleship's command, and as soon as we arrived we took the train to Rosyth military base. We were told that a crowd might be there to greet us but never expected such a heartfelt welcome. All along the route to Rosyth the locals waved and clapped and flashed their handkerchiefs, girls even blew kisses at us. Everyone was at their window. The atmosphere at the train station was euphoric, it felt like there was solidarity between the two nations. When the war finished and the so-called 'Cold War' began, it was a bitter disappointment for me.

The next day, May 9, we left the base at Rosyth and headed for Dunfermline. We were on foot, and everyone we met gave us such a warm welcome. Passing drivers even offered to give us a lift.

As we were walking, we met two girls. They were a little startled by the sight of Soviet

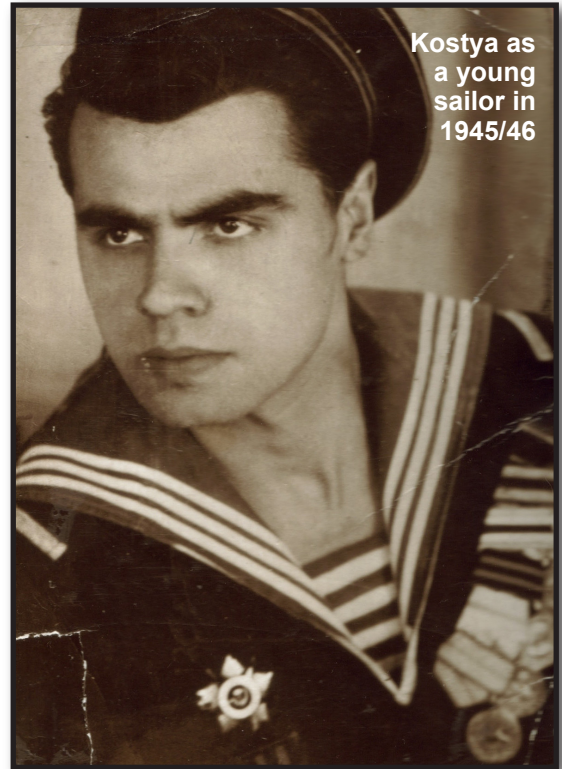
sailors walking down the road in Scotland. But they stopped. The youngest of the pair in particular was caught off guard and her eyes were wide with surprise. I later discovered that this was Nancy.

We introduced ourselves. And we began to 'talk' – in a wonderful mix of pigeon English, gestures and facial expressions. Nancy was with her friend Janet. Between Nancy and me there was, how do I put it, a meeting of minds, a connection. We parted warmly, and they headed to the military base, where they worked.

**A**ND so began my, purely platonic, relationship with Nancy. We were dear friends. I saw her again and she asked for a present. I gave her what I could. But what could a poor sailor straight out of school, dumped in the middle of a war, possibly have to give? In the end, I gave her something that she and her family treasured dearly.

Nancy later came to visit me. The duty officer called me up to the top deck and nodded to somewhere below. At the end of the gangway stood Nancy. When I went to meet her she pointed to her lapel, to which she had pinned my present. Her father had made a special pin. She had cleaned it up so nicely and it shone in the sun. We didn't see each other much as I wasn't often allowed to leave the ship. But every meeting was full of emotion. She left a deep impression on me.

We were in Rosyth for two and half months. When we left for Scapa Flow, we were waved off by huge crowds that

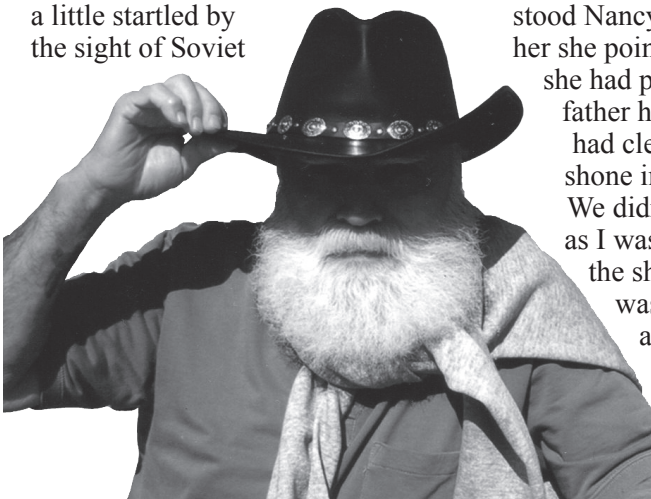


Kostya as a young sailor in 1945/46

had gathered right along either side of the Forth. The standard procedure when embarking for sea was to do it at night and as quietly as possible. But this time the powers-that-be were trying to demonstrate our military might and, as far as we could understand, the solidarity of the UK and the USSR. Thousands of locals, right along the Forth came to see us off. They shouted and wished us well, waved their hands and some even took their shirts off and waved them. Orchestras and bands played. We stood on the roadstead near the base, where mostly Dunfermliners had gathered. I saw Nancy and Janet in the crowd, but they couldn't see me. It was, sadly, the last time I saw her.

I have some hope that either Nancy or Janet, or their children, grandchildren or friends, will read this. I don't think many girls in Dunfermline were wearing a present from a Soviet sailor. I want to thank them for their warmth in those hard times, to tell them that I'm alive, that I didn't disappear in the depths of war, and that for all this time I haven't forgotten them.

*If you can help, please contact Chris at [editor@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:editor@scotlandrussiaforum.org) or email the 'Kostya Seeking Nancy Facebook Group' at [kostyaseekingnancy@groups.facebook.com](mailto:kostyaseekingnancy@groups.facebook.com), where you can also listen to an interview Kostya gave to the BBC Russian Service*



Kostya, as he looks today

# SRF teams up with InTourist

**S**INCE the SRF was founded in 2003, it has been working to promote interest and understanding of Russia and its neighbours, and from 1938 IntouristUK has been working with essentially the same aim, promoting travel to Russia & Beyond, giving insight into the vast range of cultures and experiences on offer.

Our two organisations have now decided to work more closely together, by offering SRF members a 5 per cent discount on all IntouristUK holidays. This includes package tours and tailor-made journeys, group trips and independent travel.

While Moscow and St Petersburg remain our best selling city-break destinations, with choices for the price conscious and the luxury traveller alike, the rise of the river cruise has been impressive. We offer a wide range of cruises along the Volga, mostly from

Moscow to St Petersburg, but also from Moscow to Astrakhan, taking in hidden gems such as Kazan, Samara and Volgograd, to mention just a few. Those looking to explore further can cruise across to Perm, or even on the Lena River all the way to Yakutsk in the Russia's Far East!

Our Trans-Siberian journey is very much alive with intrigue and mysticism, and we are keen for visitors to take advantage of this unique and enchanting experience, with as much help and support as suits them.

In a similar vein, since the collapse of Communism, we have chosen not to limit our portfolio just to Russia, but to promote the fascinating characteristics of each independent post Soviet republic.

Of course, these 'big sellers' are just the tip of the mid-winter Siberian iceberg. We are always keen to tell people that Russia has so much more

to offer than just the main attractions. The largest country in the world has a countless number of 'nooks and crannies' for us Scots (and Russians!) to uncover and explore, and we are here to help you find them! With fifty offices over the length and breadth of the country, and multiple contacts in even more remote areas, we stand by our claim: Russia ... we've got it covered.

So whether you are a regular traveller to Russia & Beyond, or an enthusiast with a dream to take that trip of a lifetime; if you simply need a visa to Russia or her neighbours, or are planning a fully tailored trans-Siberian journey; just collect or order a brochure from the Scotland-Russia Institute and book with the Russian Travel Specialists for 5 per cent less than anyone else!

*Kristi Heeps*  
Intourist sales & marketing manager

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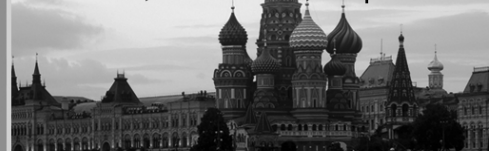
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# Commemorating 50 years of manned space flight

**A**PRIL 12, 1961 – Yuri Gagarin becomes the first man to go into space. To commemorate this important date, the Scotland-Russia Forum organised a visit for cosmonaut Anatoly Artsebarsky. This year is also important for Anatoly as he is marking the twentieth anniversary of his five-month stay aboard Mir Space Station, where he was accompanied by Britain's first astronaut Helen Sharman.

The visit was sponsored by Rosstrudnichestvo as part of their Space Odyssey 2011 programme. Anatoly spent a day at the Strathclyde University's Scottish Space School, visited schools in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and also travelled to Orkney to the Gagarin stone at Skara Brae.



*Pictures clockwise from top:*

- At the Scottish Space School – from left, Gordon McVie (Scottish Space School), Amber Gell (NASA spacecraft systems engineer), Alvin Drew (NASA astronaut), Anatoly Artsebarsky, Mikhail Vodopyanov (interpreter)
- Bob Miller and Anatoly at the Gagarin stone, part of Skara Brae's Time Line on Orkney
- At the Glasgow Science Centre - from left, Mikhail, Jenny Carr, Tara Gibson (Science Centre), Anatoly, Sergei Gorbunov (Roskosmos), and Anton Chesnokov (Rosstrudnichestvo)
- Anatoly with George Watson's pupil Arseny Morgunov.

# Multi-culturism at school

*St Augustine's School in Edinburgh held in March its second annual Unity and Diversity Week to celebrate its multi-cultural community.*

*Varvara Bashkirova, who is originally from St Petersburg and now studies at Edinburgh University, helped man the SRF stand at the event.*

**В**О-ПЕРВЫХ, ярмарка была возможность поговорить о России, что мне всегда приятно. Во-вторых, заинтересовала меня возможность узнать, что же о России знают обычные дети живущие в Шотландии. Знания взрослых всегда будут обусловлены политикой и опытом общения с русскими людьми, однако представление детей дают реальное представление об образе России существующем в Шотландии.

Ярмарка была полна

представителями разнообразных стран: Германии, Зимбабве, Израиля, и в том числе – Шотландии. На нашем русском столе красовалась шапка-ушанка, лапти, матрешки, русские платки и баранки. Однако самым популярным экспонатом была банка русского Im Bru. За ней я следила как за зеницей ока: слишком уж много было желающих проверить, отличается ли напиток от их родного, шотландского. Но мы не позволили публике уйти ни с чем: каждый желающий получил стикер с его именем на русском языке. Загадочная кириллица вызывала смешанные чувства. Одна из девочек с восторгом заявила, что это самая интересная вещь на ярмарке, в то время как ее соученик выразил подозрение что я выдумываю эти странные знаки на ходу! В рамках нашей скромной миссии - заинтересовать детей русской культурой - мы

также раздавали викторины: одна проверяла общие знания, другая была о футболе. Победители получили призы – книгу о России и сумку с эмблемой футбольного клуба Спартака. Такую же книгу мы также преподнесли школьной библиотеке. Под конец ярмарки было видно, что наш стол явно был одним из самых популярных, и многие дети выразили вполне серьезные намерения изучать русский язык в будущем.

Наша поездка в школу показала, что русская культура и язык могут быть очень популярными, если приложить усилия чтобы заинтересовать в них публику. Очень важно учитывать необходимость персонального подхода к разным людям. В данном случае, например, мы пытались привлечь детей необычными экспонатами и играми, и результатом был высокий интерес к России.

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# Student exchange programme

*The SRF Language Assistant Programme gives students and graduates of Scottish universities the chance to spend a year teaching English in Russia. Here two students of Glasgow University share their experience of 2010/2011.*

## Neil Martin, St Petersburg

I HAVE spent the last nine months in the Bonch-Bruevich St Petersburg State University of Telecommunications – usually referred to by staff and students simply as ‘Bonch’. As the only native speaker, my teaching duties concerned conversational English, as it is assumed that grammar and vocabulary can be mastered without the help of a native speaker.

I was also asked to give the occasional lecture, on different subjects varying from a presentation about Glasgow University to a lecture on the UK response to the economic crisis. I was rather relieved to discover that, although Bonch is a technical university, it also has a humanities faculty. I am technically illiterate and would not have relished spending a year trying to explain technical terms to future telecoms engineers.

On top of teaching, I also did a lot of translation – from correspondence with foreign consulates to EU funding applications. Bonch celebrated its 80th birthday in October with a huge, vodka-soaked gala at the Hotel Moskva, and in exchange for translating the commemorative programme into English I was invited to this, along with 700 other members of staff, renowned graduates, and foreign guests.

Bonch has an active social life, major anniversaries excluded. I was invited to various events, including an international cooking competition (as a taster not a participant, fortunately for all concerned) and, most recently, a talent competition to find ‘Mr and Miss Bonch 2011’. A theatre was hired and the competitors performed music, ballet and theatre in front of a jury consisting of members of the university hierarchy and guest judges from St Petersburg artistic circles. The event was very well done in general, and some of the students were very talented and not really what might be expected from a technical university.

My accommodation (halls of residence for visiting teachers and post-graduates) was very conveniently situated near the Marinsky Theatre. There is a strict midnight curfew and the babushkas administering the halls do not look favourably upon anyone returning after 12pm, although thankfully I was never refused entry. The street itself is called Anglisky Prospect, which prompted many comments about how it must be ‘great for an Englishman to live on English Avenue’. After the first couple of times, I decided it was easier to just agree with this.

Overall, I found the experience to be very rewarding – in large part due to how much I enjoyed St Petersburg as a city and also due to how friendly everyone at Bonch was – and I hope that it was mutually beneficial.

## Niamh Gorry, Rostov-on-Don

BEFORE moving to Russia, I was both extremely excited and nervous. Russia has a reputation as an intimidating place. I knew little about Rostov-on-Don apart from its ‘twin city’ connection with Glasgow, my adopted hometown, which made me determined to experience the southern capital.

Russia is at times highly enjoyable and at times deeply inconvenient. Due to a combination of unforeseen circumstances, human error and bureaucracy, I did not receive my salary for the first three months. If this happened in Scotland, I would be in a panic. In Russia, however, the locals simply shrug their shoulders and utter ‘Бывает’ (‘It happens’).

As always in Russia, there are ways and means of coping. I began to feel more like a local when I took a second job to supplement my income (at the moment of writing I have three jobs). With a monthly salary of £40 common, having a second job is the norm for most teachers in Russia, and they rush from one job to the next, with a few weekend private lessons thrown in.

Don State Technical University is an enjoyable place to work. There are regular events such as student festivals and international languages week. In the classroom, I was fortunately given the strongest students and as the year went on and their ease in speaking English freely improved, we discussed a wide range of topics from politics to graffiti.

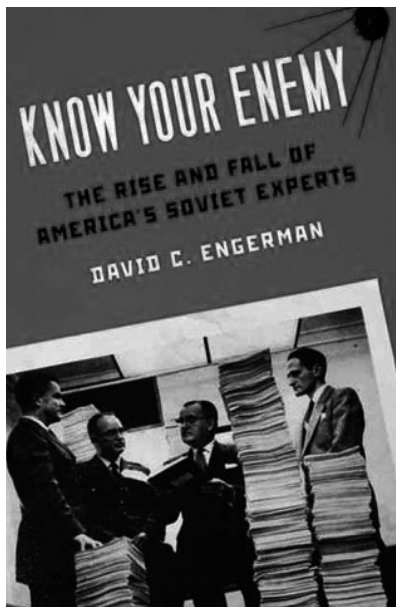
One of the most unexpected delights of the university was the подготовительный факультет (preparation faculty). Students from all over the world begin their Russian language studies so they can attend degree courses in Russia. The diverse podfak community has been one of my favourite parts of Rostov as it has given me an insight into a vast range of cultures.

My experience in southern Russia has mostly been positive. People have made me feel at home and have been proud to show me parts of the country that many Westerners are not lucky enough to see. On Christmas day one colleague was so worried I would be depressed that we went to a restaurant that was having a festive programme. Included were New Year poems, competitions and even some festive stripping, which certainly made for a memorable Christmas. After New Year, I was invited on a trip to the Caucasus. The students perhaps sensed that this was a more lonely time for me, and we went on mountain walks, played parlour games and, might I add, had our fair share of cognac. As my time in Rostov is rapidly approaching its end, Russia has begun to feel a lot more homely and a lot less intimidating.



# Behind the walls of Kremlinology

*How much did experts ever know about the Soviet Union? Ariane Galy finds out.*



Know Your Enemy by David C. Engerman

OUP USA, 2010, pp. 480, £22.50

**A**T ONCE a historiographical survey and a historical account of Soviet studies in the USA against the backdrop of Soviet-American relations, *Know Your Enemy* is a densely packed account of the field during the second half of the 20th Century. Beginning with an account of Soviet studies in the pre-Second World War years, Engerman charts its evolution from unimpressive beginnings as a field populated by just a few individuals dispersed

between institutions – ‘freaks and nuts’, in their own words – to its advisory role to the US government at the height of the Cold War, and finally to its collapse from the late 1980s.

**T**HE book operates on two principal levels. In the first instance, it is a detailed historical account of the way in which academic institutions, their Soviet specialists and the US government interacted and relied on each other. Engerman’s extensive research provides fascinating insights into this relationship, its complexity and, at times, vital importance. Engerman recounts, for example, the extraordinary collaborations between the government-funded research projects such as the Russian Research Centre at Harvard and military and state organisations such as the US Air Force and the CIA. As *Know Your Enemy* is set out chronologically, the evolution of these relationships is followed through the Cold War towards the era of detente, providing the reader with a clear concept of the changing climates in which they existed.

*Know Your Enemy* also provides a comprehensive historiographical survey of the works of a large number of important scholars in Soviet studies. Engerman examines the role of the study of social sciences, politics, history and literature, and the part each discipline played in the development of Soviet Studies. We are introduced to the lives and works of social scientist Alexis Inkeles and literature specialist Ernest Simmons, alongside more familiar names such as Richard Pipes, Robert Conquest, Moshe Lewin and Sheila Fitzpatrick. Perhaps most striking in this survey is the biographical and contextual detail which accompanies the astonishingly large number

of academics Engerman manages to include in his work.

Part of what makes this book so impressive is the volume of source material Engerman uses. He draws richly on hundreds of primary sources taken from US and Russian state archives, institutional archives, press articles, personal archives and oral histories. It is a credit to the author that he has woven this vast amount of information into a clear and readable narrative. Yet the density of this information suggests that to truly benefit from this book, it would be helpful to be familiar with some of the personalities, issues and institutions mentioned. The number of acronyms used – over 30 – is overwhelming. Nonetheless, *Know Your Enemy* is an impressive feat of research and narration. It is a well written and rich history of Soviet studies and fulfils its promise to offer ‘unique insight into the politics, institutions, ideas, and personalities that made America’s Cold War’.

*Ariane Galy is a PhD candidate at Edinburgh University. She specialises in the Western historiography of Stalinism.*

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# The rise and fall of the English governess in Russia

*Harvey Pitcher's 1977 book about young English women in Russia has stereotypes of plucky stoicism with tragic heroism, writes Lewis White*

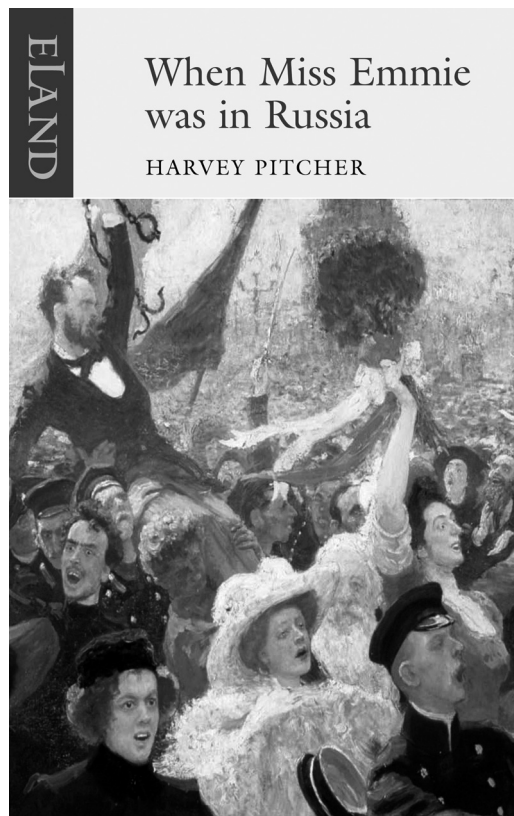
**M**AD dogs and English governesses', Noel Coward might have said... This Eland reprint of Harvey Pitcher's 1977 account of the experiences of English-speaking governesses in pre-Revolutionary Russia is a record of lost worlds, both Russian and British. Weaving personal testimonies, written accounts and historical background, Pitcher evokes the world of the higher echelons of late Tsarist Russia through the prism of that most quintessential figures of Russian aristocracy: the English governess.

From the outset it is clear that this book has no pretensions to dense, academic social history. Over the first couple of chapters I thought I had accidentally happened upon a report from the One Show, my natural narrative voice unconsciously usurped by a faintly simpering Giles Brandreth celebrating Middle English tales of pluck and derring-do: 'this peculiarly British spirit of self-help and self-reliance'; 'rosy-cheeked Miss Kerby, a typically healthy outdoor English girl'.

The book is peppered with similarly abstract and archaic ideas of Britishness, giving the prose a pervading whiff of moth-eaten nostalgia.

**H**OWEVER, to write it off as a sepia requiem for (and I quote) "standing on one's own feet" English behaviour' would be to do this book a great injustice. The fact is that Pitcher knows a ripping yarn when he hears one, and his sources are full of them. The Miss Emmie (Dashwood) of the book's title arrived in Russia among a wave of thousands of young women, starved of opportunity in their native land, who left the British Isles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to seek positions as governesses to the children of wealthy Russian families. Many bore witness to the massive social traumas of the early twentieth century, when war, famine and revolution precipitated the end of this ancien régime. The testimonies that Pitcher has collected from some of these women provide a captivating view of the twilight of an Empire.

The opening chapters describe the trepidation, familiar



When Miss Emmie Was in Russia: English Governesses Before, During and After the October Revolution by Harvey Pitcher

Eland, 2011 (reprint), pp. 256, £12.99

even to the modern-day visitor, of newly-arrived governesses as they adapt to the culture shock of Russia, before we are treated to a genuinely charming array of classical Russian scenes: winter sleigh rides, incense-heavy Orthodox Easters, summer fruit-picking at the country estate, all supplemented with a stellar set of cameos (Rasputin, Khrushchev, and Rachmaninoff all make personal appearances, to name a few).

These postcard views are tempered by later accounts of the violence and anarchy of the Revolution, and it is suddenly clear where Pitcher's obvious affection and respect for his sources stem from. These were women of great courage, fortitude and loyalty – while their nationality alone was

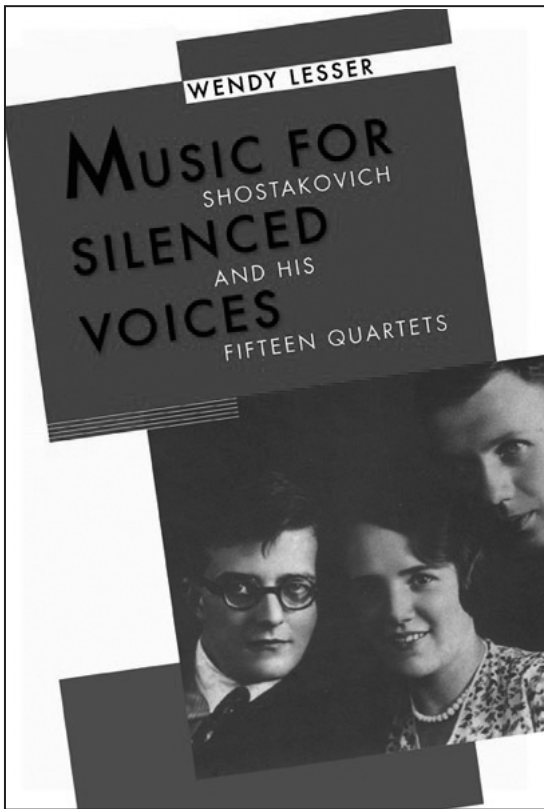
often enough to secure safe passage out of the chaos of revolutionary Russia, many chose to stay, at great risk to themselves, loyal to the Russian families who had accepted them as their own. Harrowing tales of stifling trains overcrowded with refugees, Bolshevik searches, arbitrary executions and starvation are offset by the stoicism and determination of our heroines.

Whatever the reader may feel about his style, it is precisely Pitcher's enthusiasm for his subjects that has made the recording of their stories possible. Their testimony proves an extraordinary portal to a Russia (and, perhaps, a Britain) long lost to a twenty-first century readership.

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

# Shostakovich: the music behind the man

*Music for Silenced Voices is a sensitive, fresh approach to a composer whose life has already been examined in minute detail, writes Lucy Weir*



Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and His Fifteen Quartets by Wendy Lesser

Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 368, £18.99

**W**RITING a new evaluation of the life of Dmitri Shostakovich, when both he and his work have been thoroughly dissected by academic and popular literature, is an intimidating task. It is no less daunting to follow in the footsteps of Laurel Fay and Elizabeth Wilson's canonical biographies, or Solomon Volkov's somewhat more controversial assessments of the composer and his relationship with the Soviet state.

Yet, in *Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and His Fifteen Quartets*, Wendy Lesser has produced a lyrical, deeply personal work following the life of the composer through the lesser-worn path of his string quartets, using them as benchmarks for her analysis. As the dustjacket indicates, this is among the few full-length studies of Shostakovich not aimed at an academic audience, but Lesser neither patronises her reader nor assumes musical ignorance on their part.

Lesser has skilfully circumvented many of the potential pitfalls associated with writing a poetic history of such a

prominent figure. She avoids putting her own thoughts or words into the mouth of her subject, and the extent of her research becomes clear in the number of separate (and often differing) accounts of events cited, thus acknowledging the fragile nature of placing too much confidence in human recollection.

**T**HE book's main shortcoming is that, without hearing the works discussed, some of the depth of Lesser's analysis is lost. However, the strength of her writing lies in careful treatment of her source material, never adhering too closely to personal interpretation. As an example, her analysis of the renowned Quartet no. 8 provides an excellent counterpoint to the somewhat histrionic fascination of many other writers. Lesser manages to debunk some of the mythic narratives surrounding this piece, including Lev Lebedinsky's assertion that he smuggled sleeping pills, intended for suicide, out of Shostakovich's pocket (a tale fervently denied, as Lesser states, by the composer's son, Maxim).

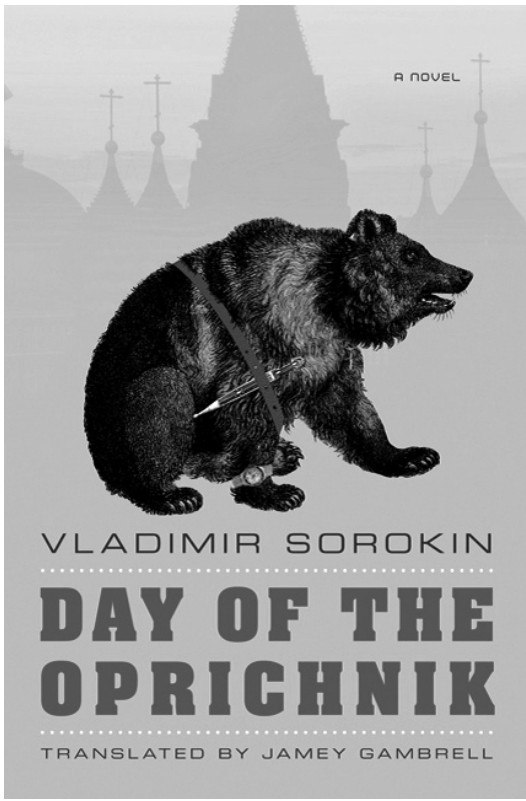
Perhaps the major success of Lesser's work is that she manages to make musical analysis accessible to a wider audience. Shostakovich scholars may be well-versed in the narrative of his complex life story, but by interweaving biography with artistic output, Lesser finds new life in the already scrutinised story of this great but troubled individual. It is equally impressive that a writer coming from a literary background would rise to this musicological challenge. Lesser herself states that she prefers to use the language of literary studies and art history, and as a result, her manuscript takes on new characteristics that open up what could otherwise be a rather closed subject. It is a facility that could only be inspired by a profound understanding of a man she rightly describes as inherently contradictory in character.

This is certainly a book to read with a recording on standby, to appreciate the full emotional impact of Shostakovich's quartets, and thanks to Lesser's sensitive handling, of his life as well.

*Lucy Weir is PhD student at Glasgow University. She researches avant-garde dance and performance.*

# A modern tale of Ivan the Terrible

Vladimir Sorokin finds fantastic parallels between Putin's untouchable 'siloviki' and Ivan Grozny's oprichniki, writes **Alexandra Smith**



Day of the Oprichnik by Vladimir Sorokin, translated by Jamey Gambrell

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011, pp. 208, £14.20

**D**AY of the Oprichnik might be seen as a response to Tatyana Tolstaya's 2000 dystopian novel *The Slynx*, which portrays the life of the survivors of a tragic explosion – the Blast. While mimicking the mythopoetic and satirical overtones of Tolstaya's novel written in the style of magic realist narratives, Sorokin describes events taking place in 2028. The novel refers to a neo-Tsarist revolution that gave rise to a repressive state in Russia. The protagonist of Sorokin's novel, Andrei Komiaga, is known as an Oprichnik: he works for the secret police comparable to Ivan the Terrible's army of helpers. Although the novel might be read as a fantasy tale, it focuses on the psychology of the people eager to commit violence against others and fight against the enemies of the Tsar.

The reader could easily read Sorokin's novel as an allegorical depiction of life in today's Russia. In this respect, Sorokin develops many satirical devices found in Liudmilla Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. The ritual male bonding of Komiaga and other Oprichniks through drugs, sex, and violence invokes similar scenes from Victor Pelevin's novels. Yet Sorokin's humour is much darker. *Day of the Oprichnik* includes scenes mocking

the Tsar's son-in-law's fetishistic desire to have sex with women in burning buildings. It also describes in a brutal and naturalistic manner the Oprichniks' gang-rape of a woman. The language used in the book reflects the atmosphere of violence. The novel contains examples of non-standard speech and obscene expressions that became part of everyday life in Russia.

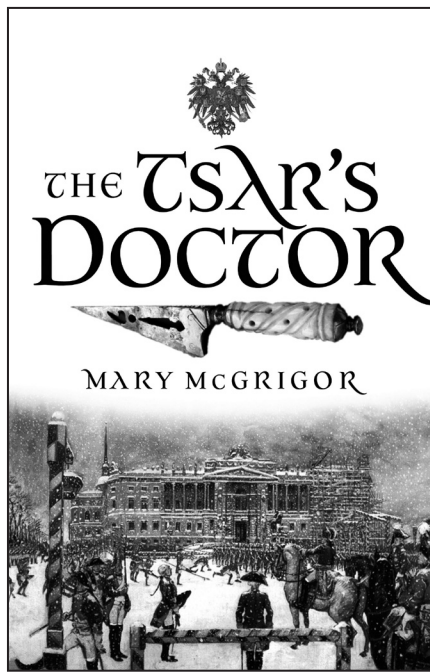
It's clear that the use of the fantastic in the novel enables Sorokin to voice ordinary Russians' many concerns about the future of their country and its assets. Thus, one of the ministers described in the novel suggests to divide Russia and sell it, so the new elite could become even richer, 'We sell the east to the Japanese; Siberia goes to the Chinese; the Krasnodarsk region – to the Ukies; Altai – to the Kazakhs; Pskov Oblast – to the Estonians; Novgorod Oblast – to the Belorussians. But we'll have the centre for ourselves.'

**I**N his interview published in *Spiegel* in February 2007, Sorokin defines his novel as a satirical depiction of the authoritarian trends found in Putin's Russia – the rise of censorship, the lack of opposition to the government and the waning of freedom of speech. In Sorokin's view, these tendencies were shaped by Ivan the Terrible's vision of governance and continue to alienate many ordinary people from their own government. 'In our country,' says Sorokin, 'there are special people who are permitted to do anything. They are the sacrificial priests of power. Anyone who is not a member of this group has no clout with the state. One can be as pure as can be – just as magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky was – and still lose everything in a flash and end up in prison. The Khodorkovsky case is typical of the "oprichnina" – the system of oppression I describe.'

Sorokin describes his desire to write about the revival of the 'oprichnina' in Russia as part of his civic duty. In the Solzhenitsyn-like manner, Sorokin suggests to see his fantasy as a warning: 'I just imagined what would happen to Russia if it isolated itself completely from the Western world – that is, if it erected a new Iron Curtain. There is much talk about Russia being a fortress. Orthodox churches, autocracy and national traditions are supposed to form a new national ideology. This would mean that Russia would be overtaken by its past, and our past would be our future.'

*Dr Alexandra Smith is Reader in Russian at Edinburgh University*

# Under the surgeon's knife



The Tsar's Doctor: The Life and Times of Sir James Wylie by Mary McGrigor

Birlinn, 2010, pp. 220, £9.99

**B**ORN in 1768 in the port of Kincardine on the Firth of Forth, James Wylie ran away to sea from an apprenticeship to the local doctor. But, after his mother snatched him back, he was reconciled to a medical training at Edinburgh University before setting off via the Baltic to St Petersburg, where he passed an examination to become surgeon to an infantry regiment in 1790.

James soon came to the attention of patrons in high places, and was appointed court surgeon in 1798. In 1801, the Emperor Paul was murdered with the connivance of his son and successor, Alexander I, and Wylie put the new tsar in his debt by falsifying the death certificate. The Scotsman's remarkable medical and surgical skills combined with a great capacity for hard work and efficient administration keep him at the top until his death in 1855, when he was mourned by Alexander I's brother

*Mary McGrigor's account of Nicholas I's Scottish doctor is well written, if a little lax with facts and figures, writes Paul Dukes*

Nicholas I. He never married and left few personal records, concentrating for the most part on his professional activities and researches.

If Wylie falsified Paul's death certificate, he was punctilious in his record of Alexander's death in 1825, thus making it difficult to believe in the rumours of the tsar's survival as a holy man in Siberia. Wylie survived to serve Nicholas for nearly thirty years, a period which the book covers more summarily. He was laden with Russian honours and made a baronet by the Prince Regent during a visit to England after the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815. However, although his mother and other relations came to see him in St Petersburg and he invested money back home with a view to buying a holiday retreat, he never returned to Scotland.

Mary McGrigor has produced a fine study of the man and his times, concentrating on his relations with Alexander I in war and peace. She writes well, and keeps the personal story moving, placing it firmly in its historical setting. The book is well worth its modest price.

However, its author is no geographer. The map on pp. xii-xiii seriously misspells half a dozen place names and includes Tilsit in two different locations: in the text, Klaipeda and Novgorod are misidentified. An Aberdeen University loyalist has to complain about Henry Farquharson, the founder of the school of navigation in Moscow, being identified as 'Ferghasen'. And, although

there is some justification in McGrigor's claim that Wylie is all but forgotten in his native land, she could have said more about the efforts to keep his name alive in Russia, not least by the indefatigable Caledonian Club of Moscow.

*Paul Dukes is Emeritus Professor of Russian History at Aberdeen University*



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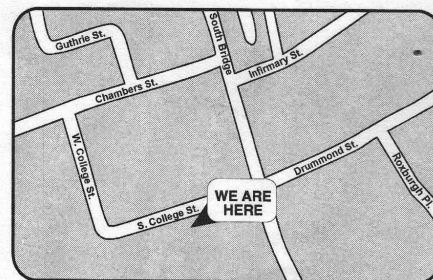
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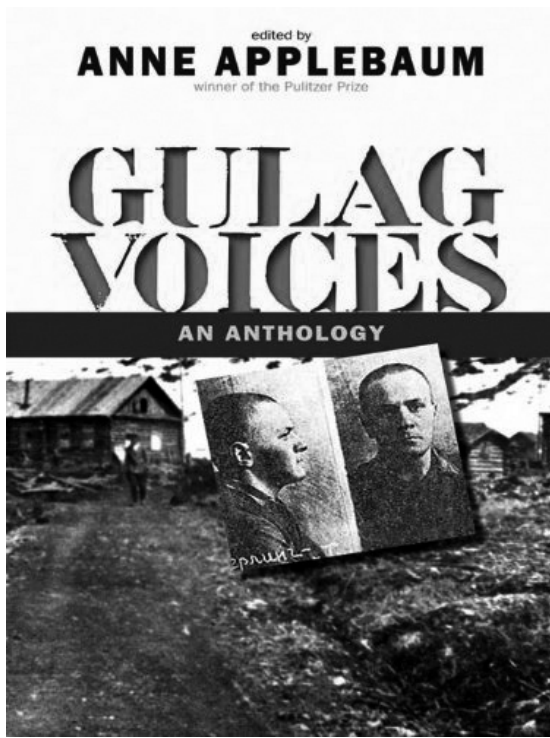
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# Memories of camp survivors

*Jonathan Waterlow questions whether a collection of stories about life in the Gulag can really represent the horrors of the camp system*



Gulag Voices: An Anthology  
edited by Anne Applebaum

Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 195, £17.99

**A**NNE APPLEBAUM'S 'Gulag' was one of the first major investigations into the history of the prison camp network, founded under Lenin, which grew under Stalin and persisted well into the Brezhnev era. Since then, Applebaum has written forewords to a large number of related studies of the Gulag and has now turned her hand to presenting a series of memoirs written by survivors of the camp experience.

These 'Gulag voices' will, the dustjacket claims, 'inform, interest, and inspire, offering a source for reflection on human nature itself'. Certainly there is much shocking and thought-provoking content in the short sketches from the memoirs which are represented in extracted form here.

However, this volume is ultimately

too problematic and poorly conceived to live up to its grand ambitions.

The book begins with the admission that 'The writers in this volume have one thing in common: all of them were arrested for political crimes in the Soviet Union, and all of them spent years [...] in the [...] Gulag. There, however, their similarities end'.

**Y**ET despite recognising this lack of common ground between the writers featured here, *Gulag Voices* is constructed in a misleading chronological sequence, with one writer's description of arrest being followed by another's recollection of interrogation, moving on to the journey to the Gulag and so forth.

A series of fragments is thereby assembled into an artificial and ahistorical whole, tacitly proposing that these episodes were typical and unchanging across the years. The chapter on arrest focuses on 1928; the interrogation described occurs in 1948 – just 20 years separation, but light years apart in terms of the political, social and cultural contexts (not to mention the differing rationales for arrest) in which they occurred. Furthermore, these are almost all memoirs by individuals who were extremely atypical: to suggest that an American or a member of St Petersburg's pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia are representative 'Gulag voices' is again misleading.

Given that Applebaum seems keen for the reader to wring her hands and break down in tears while reading these tales, if an emotional response is the aim here, this book actually

does a disservice to the majority of Gulag victims who have simply been ignored.

Each memoir extract is extremely short and, given that the majority of sources from which they are drawn have already been translated into English, these tidbits are not only unsatisfying, but their appearance in this cut-down form entirely unnecessary. There is also minimal criticism or discussion of the sources which might have helped to balance these issues. At best, this is because the book is aimed at a general readership. At worst, it is actively specious. For example, Stepan Bandera is described by Applebaum in a short footnote as simply 'a Ukrainian nationalist leader who led a powerful anti-Soviet partisan movement during World War II', no mention of the fact that he was an anti-Semite, Nazi sympathiser and murderer of civilians during the Second World War.

The editorial input is likewise unnuanced throughout, resorting to generalisation and a simplistic anti-communism which harks back to Western publishing during the Cold War.

It is a shame that this book emerges as part of the excellent 'Annals of Communism' series, adding as it does so very little to this portfolio. It should in reality be a free sampler from which readers could choose which memoirs they would like to purchase in full, without, one hopes, a foreword from Applebaum.

*Jonathan Waterlow is DPhil student at Merton College, Oxford*

# Cavalcade of colourful characters

*A new translation of Yuri Olesha's work of magic realism is a welcoming start to his fictional works, writes Margaret Tejerizo*



The Three Fat Men by Yuri Olesha translated by Hugh Aplin

Hesperus Press, 2011, pp. 176, £7.99

**Y**URI OLESHA (1899-1960) is very much the voice

of the season. *Зависть* was book of the month in Madrid's elegant 'La Buena Vida' book shop, while *Три толстяка* (The Three Fat Men), first published in Russia in 1928, now boasts an elegant new English translation by Hugh Aplin.

For any reader coming to Olesha for the first time this beautifully presented volume has a sparkling foreword by Graeme Garden, who places this text 'comfortably

in the realm of magic realism', having first of all defined it as 'a funny book, both "ha-ha" and "peculiar"'. This 'fairy-tale' (although there are no fairies or other supernatural creatures in evidence) is, in Garden's view, 'a satirical allegory, in which a cavalcade of colourful characters become embroiled in upheavals'.

After this insightful and lively foreword, which has already whetted the reader's appetite, we hear from the translator himself, who provides factual information about Olesha (there is also a short biographical note at the end of the translation) and sets the work in a broader context not only of Olesha's oeuvre but of the times of its writing. The book itself is contained, so to speak, between the two hands of a ballet dancer on the front and back covers respectively. These are large and clumsy hands, compared to the delicacy of the dress that is seen and will surely remind readers who do know Olesha's work of his 'first love' – the seemingly fragile and waif-like circus dancer who, in reality was a coarse-looking youth 'whose flowing locks were, consequently, a wig'. In *Three Fat Men* the circus, too, has a key role to play, 'the book itself (having) the feel of a narrative circus act'.

Aplin observes that 'the requirements of Socialist Realism could not ... accommodate Olesha's talents ... and he found himself forced into Babel's genre' (ie silence). His talents are all too

obvious in this text of 'crystal-clear prose', as Mandelstam noted. This new version does justice to the original, with its strange sounds and names, such as Suok and Onetwothreesir The Dancing Master. If we do not learn, as Aplin remarks 'why or how the Three Fat Men ... are cruel and oppressive', we are told at the end of the story that, 'They crushed the poor people. They forced us to work until we sweated blood, and they took everything away from us. See how fat they have become ...'

This work comes highly recommended both for the reader who has yet to enter the 'magic casements' of Olesha's fictional world and for those who have already been there. Aplin and Garden are to be congratulated for the high quality of their work in bringing 'that rare thing, an intelligent and funny children's book that will appeal to children as well as adults' to English-speaking readers.

*Margaret Tejerizo is Senior Lecturer of Slavonic Studies at Glasgow University*

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