

# THE FORUM

The Scotland-Russia Forum magazine, No. 42, Winter 2019-20

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



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(c) Sheila Sim

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# From the Editor

Dear Readers

С НОВЫМ ГОДОМ! Happy new year!

We hope you enjoyed the festive season.

In this winter issue we bring you a fascinating article by SRF member Vin Arthey about the so-called 'Edinburgh Conversations' that took place in the 1980s. Vin sheds new light on this dialogue between Scotland and the USSR, which I confess I knew little about.

Next, Elena Reid gives a lively account of two recent family trips to Russia. A combination of Lermontov and football (but mainly Lermontov) were the inspiration behind these visits.

One of our vice presidents, Dairmid Gunn, received the Pushkin Medal last summer. We didn't cover this in our last issue since we were already going to print when the ceremony took place, so it's only right that we make up for it now. Our much loved and irrepressible member Natasha Black was the inspiration for the title of our article.

Following a quick review of some of the Russia-related cultural events that have been taking place in recent months, Christine Bird tells us about the new translation forum she has set up at the University of Glasgow.

Finally, we give you the story of Kolomna Pastila. If you've never been to Kolomna, do try and visit next time you're in Russia; it's an easy day trip from Moscow by train, and it's well worth making the effort. Pastila is an apple-based sweet that has completely revitalised a lovely old town.

We have three book reviews: one novel, one literary biography and one about religion—all interesting in their own way. Many thanks indeed to our reviewers.

As usual, if you would like to suggest future topics for us to cover in *The FORUM*, or indeed if you would like to write an article yourself, do please contact me via the SRF or directly at [sheilasim2@gmail.com](mailto:sheilasim2@gmail.com). I'd be happy to hear from you.

Very best wishes,

*Sheila Sim*

Editor, *The FORUM*

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January 2020

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

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## The FORUM

January 2020. Published on behalf of the Scotland-Russia Forum. Available online and in print.

All opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and don't necessarily coincide with those of the trustees or the editors.

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# SRF News

## Events in the pipeline

We're planning a series of talks throughout the year. This series will be launched by Dr Margarita Vaysman and Professor Peter France in early February 2020 - all details to be announced very soon.

Members may recall that Dr Stuart Campbell, who with his wife Svetlana Zvereva was musical director of Scotland's Russian Choir *Russkaya Cappella*, passed away in 2018. Svetlana advises us that the Memorial Vespers dedicated to her late husband will be celebrated at Glasgow University Memorial Chapel on Thursday 30th January, 7pm. (Chapel Corridor (South), West Quadrangle, Glasgow G12 8QQ). A new documentary film about Stuart's life, produced by Lin Li, will be shown after the service.

Looking ahead, 2020 is a special anniversary year of the Scottish poet Edwin Morgan, who translated the work of many Russian poets into Scots. If any SRF member has any personal memories of Morgan and his work we would be delighted to hear from you at the usual email address: [info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org). There will be a major Edwin Morgan Conference held in Glasgow in April 2020. Watch our website for more details.

Do please contact us with any suggestions for other events or activities, and let us know if you're willing to help getting them up and running. We look forward to hearing from you!

## SRF trip to Russia?

As you may have read in our recent bulletin, the SRF committee has been asked to gauge interest amongst our members for a possible trip to Russia. Neither dates nor itinerary are fixed; it's up to you. The trip would be organised on our behalf by a travel agent, with the itinerary to be determined by the group. Would you be interested? If so, let us know where you'd like to go—just Moscow and/or St Petersburg? Or the Golden Ring? Or further afield? Contact us if you think you might like to take part, and let us know where you'd like to go.

## Annual General Meeting—we're looking for caterers!

We will be holding our AGM in Edinburgh on 19th March, probably at Summerhall. (Please keep an eye on your inbox for details; we'd love to see you there.) At previous AGMS we have usually provided drinks and a Russian (or Eastern European) themed cold buffet, but the caterers we used last time don't seem to be in business. If you know any potential caterers, please let us know their name so we can contact them. Or would you be interested in helping out yourself? If so, drop us a line. Numbers at the meeting are likely to be around 25-30, which should help you prepare a quote.

## Getting in touch

Just another quick reminder that we are no longer located in Summerhall. Our new postal address is c/o CEES (Centre for East European Studies), 8 Lilybank Gardens, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ. We do not have an actual office space at CEES but we hope that this affiliation will be an important and a fruitful one for the SRF. We are very grateful to Professor Richard Berry for allowing SRF to be linked to CEES in this way. To contact us please use the CEES postal address or email us in the usual way: [info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org). Emails are checked on an almost daily basis so we will reply to you as soon as possible.

*Sheila Sim,  
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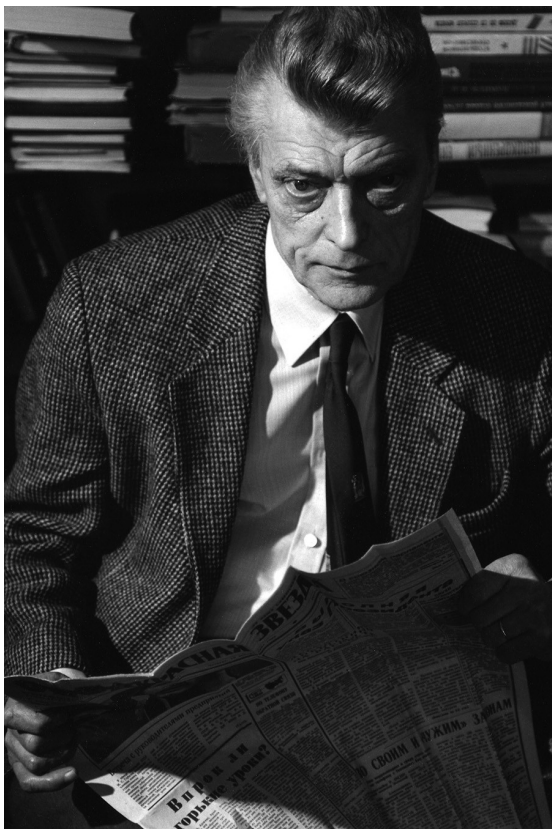
**As always, more information can be found at [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org)**

# The Edinburgh Conversations 1980-89

By Vin Arthey

**F***acing the Bear\**, the important new book by Trevor Royle, shows the key role that Scotland played in NATO's forward defence during the Cold War, with its naval and air force bases, a significant US presence and top secret satellite command and control stations. But the book also draws attention to the role Scotland played in ending the Cold War, beginning in 1980 when a small delegation of Scotland-USSR Society members visited Moscow. Just before the delegation returned, their leader, Society Chairman Lord Ritchie Calder, was invited for a short formal meeting over coffee with a Soviet Deputy Minister; but the meeting turned into a vigorous debate over many subjects, including nuclear weapons and disarmament.

To Lord Ritchie's surprise, on his return to Scotland he received a message from the Minister asking if he would return to Moscow, bringing with him a group of 'similarly forthright' Scots. Among the ten who went to Moscow later that year was the Professor of Defence Studies at Edinburgh University, John Erickson, a man well known in Moscow and respected by officers in the highest echelons of the Soviet military establishment.



*Professor John Erickson [Tricia Malley and Ross Gillespie, reproduced with permission of the University of Edinburgh]*

It was John Erickson's exchanges with the Vadim Zagladin, Deputy Chairman of the CPSU's Foreign Affairs Committee and a man we now know to have been a key reformer from the very beginning, that led to three Soviet officials coming to Edinburgh University early in 1981 and then to the series of meetings that became known as the Edinburgh Conversations. The Conversations took place every year until 1989, each meeting getting considerable press coverage in Scotland and in the Soviet Union. Although there have been media and academic references since then, general awareness of them has ebbed.

Thirty years on it becomes possible to assess the historical importance of the Conversations and to take new perspectives. Looking through John Erickson's papers in the National Library of Scotland, it is clear that he and University Principal John Burnett (who hosted the first gathering) did everything to ensure that these really were conversations, not conferences or seminars; certainly not negotiations. The participants were chosen for who they were; they were not delegates, and their conversations were focused on options for survival in a nuclear age, not solutions. It was a senior member of the University secretariat, Michael Westcott, who ensured the required atmosphere. The Conversationalists met in the lounge at Carberry Tower in Musselburgh, sitting in easy chairs round coffee tables, often changing places after adjournments if interesting lines of discussion had opened up between individuals. This approach continued at the following year's meeting in Moscow. However, on arrival in the Soviet Union, Michael Westcott was concerned to discover that their hosts had plans to formalise the programme and the seating; he saw to it that after the first meeting easy chairs were brought in. In his account of the Conversations, Westcott noted, "This, it later appeared, was an entirely new concept to most of the Russian participants but one of them [said] at the end that he had never attended such a seemingly disorganised set of exchanges but which had achieved more."

The first two Conversations ranged across the likely aftermath of a nuclear war, nuclear physics and military strategies, with this as the key sentence in the communique after the first gathering :

"In order to ensure a favourable climate of confidence between states, it is essential to adopt a declaration which categorically condemns any first use of nuclear weapons by

any nation – whatever the pretext or whatever the circumstances.”

Not only was this the bedrock on which Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev were to build their understanding and the agreements which brought the Cold War to an end, but there is evidence that practical ideas used at their Geneva Summit in 1985 had been mooted first during the Edinburgh Conversations earlier that year, and in previous years.



*Carberry Tower near Musselburgh, venue for the Edinburgh Conversations*

Mention of Mikhail Gorbachev is a reminder that the decade the Conversations spanned began when Leonid Brezhnev was General Secretary and included his successors Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko before Gorbachev took power, just eight months before that Geneva Summit. Scanning the lists of participants in the Conversations themselves and in the preparatory meetings, we can see the pace of change during this period and, in the eyes of governments in London and Moscow, how important the Conversations were. Although senior retired General Staff officers were always present, from 1983 noteworthy political figures (although not, it must be noted, government representatives) were invited to the preliminary meetings, which took place six months before each Conversation proper. Nicholas Soames MP was there in 1984, and in the following two years Scottish Members of the Shadow Cabinet John Smith and Bruce Millan were scheduled to be present. Soviet representatives at these meetings included not only the reformer Georgi Arbatov but also Gennady Yan-naev, the man who was to lead the coup attempt in 1989. The Soviets became keen to have a United States presence introduced, so as well as the Scottish team becoming more British, American observers from Prof Erickson’s Department (USAF officers on academic sabbaticals) became full participants.

Despite the crises that erupted during the decade – Oleg Gordievsky’s defection, the expulsions and counter-expulsions of diplomats and the shooting down of the Korean airliner in Soviet airspace in 1983 – the Conversations continued and also played a vital role in interpreting perestroika and glasnost for Western ears. Not only was Professor Erickson’s Russian fluent, but he understood Russian culture and manners: he knew when to listen, when to make his points, and when to stand his ground. Moreover, he was adamant that the Soviet practice of writing the communique before a meeting had taken place would not happen. In the summer of 1989, changes in UK higher education policy and research assessment meant that Professor Erickson was required to withdraw. As all those involved felt that the Conversations could not continue without him, they came to an end. But then, a few months later the Berlin Wall came down and within two years the Cold War itself was over.

The full history of the Edinburgh Conversations and their contribution to nuclear disarmament and the end of the Cold War remains to be written. Beyond that, their model – not a talking shop but a small group of the best informed and respected individuals sharing perspectives and options on seemingly intractable and terrifying problems – is one that could be revived to examine the crises that trouble the world today.



**FACING THE BEAR**  
**SCOTLAND AND THE COLD WAR**  
**TREVOR ROYLE**

*\*Trevor Royle, Facing the Bear: Scotland and the Cold War, Birlinn Limited, Edinburgh, 2019.*

*Vin Arthey is a biographer and researcher who reviews espionage and Cold War books for The Scotsman. He is the author of Abel: The True Story of the Spy They Traded for Gary Powers.*

# Celebrating Lermontov

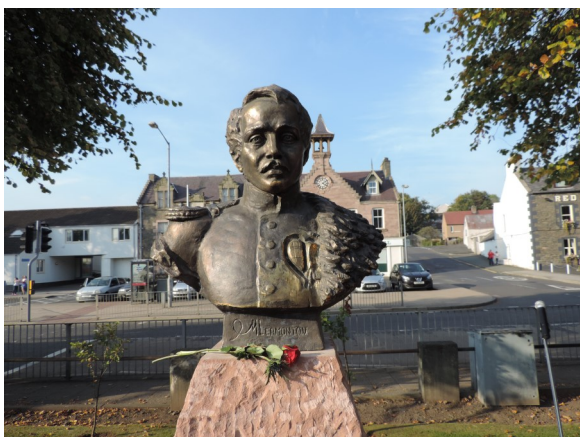
by Elena Reid

*Five years ago a number of events took place celebrating the bicentenary of poet and writer Mikhail Lermontov, including an SRF event in the Scottish Parliament and the unveiling of a bronze bust of Lermontov in Earlston. As a result of performing at these events, Elena Reid's family were invited by Mikhail Lermontov and Mairi Koroleva, two of the poet's descendants living in Moscow, to attend the International Festival in Pyatigorsk. Mairi is also the only Russian who speaks fluent Scottish Gaelic and studied at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Skye 20 years ago. Elena describes their trips to Pyatigorsk and also to Moscow at the end of last year.*



*At the unveiling of the Lermontov bust in Earlston, 2015*

Mikhail Lermontov, one of the most famous Russian poets, had Scottish ancestry dating back to the 13th-century poet and prophet Thomas the Rhymer, also known as Thomas of Learmont, from Earlston in the Scottish Borders. Gwen Hardie, also from Earlston, is a descendant of Thomas the Rhymer and a writer herself, accompanied by her husband George and associates from "The Friends of Thomas the Rhymer Group". It was Mairi Koroleva along with Gwen and "The Friends of Thomas the Rhymer" who made the unveiling of the Lermontov bust in Earlston in 2015 possible.



In July ten of us from Scotland went to the International Lermontov Festival "Sail of Destiny" in Pyatigorsk in the Caucasus region of Russia. Pyatigorsk is famous for its mineral waters and baths, and not only Lermontov was inspired there but also Pushkin and Tolstoy. The group comprised my family of four from Nairn, five people from Earlston in the Scottish borders and Highlander Tommy Beavitt, who now works and lives in Ekaterinburg.

The festival included very interesting and well-planned excursions, conferences, concerts, and a banquet. A delegation from China also arrived and recited some of Lermontov's poems in Chinese!

The contribution of our daughters, Elizabeth and Anna, to the festival in promoting Scottish culture was very much appreciated by those who attended. Elizabeth played the bagpipes and Anna did Highland dancing in the Lermontov museum in Pyatigorsk and also featured in a Russian news programme along with other Russian performers.



*Elizabeth and Anna Reid performing in the Lermontov Museum, Pyatigorsk*

Some materials promoting Scotland were presented by me to the Lermontov museum and were much appreciated.



*At Pyatigorsk*



*Scottish dancing at Pyatigorsk*

In October last year we returned to Russia, where we went to the Russia v Scotland football game in Moscow, along with over 1,200 other Scottish supporters, at the impressive Luzhniki stadium.



*Russia and Scotland supporters*

We met some of the STV sports crew and many other Scottish supporters, all proudly wearing kilts and enjoying their trip to the city. Mairi Koroleva went with us to the match too; it was her first time at a football game.



During our stay we also visited the Moscow Lermontov Museum with Mairi Koroleva. The Museum's director Gulynara Pivovarova took us around the museum, proudly showing us all its unique exhibits. Lermontov lived in the mansion on Malaya Molchanovka Street from 1829 to 1832, during his studies at the University's boarding school



*Elena Reid with her family and with Mikhail Lermontov and his wife Elena (wearing scarves in the Lermontov tartan)*

and at Moscow University, and it is here that he started to write verses and decided to pursue a literary career.

Finally, I'd like to draw your attention to the wonderful Serednikovo Estate near Moscow, home of Lermontov's descendant Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov and his wife Elena. In 1825, the estate of Serednikovo was purchased by Major General Dmitry Stolypin, brother of Mikhail Lermontov's grandmother, Elizaveta Arsenyeva. Lermontov stayed here every summer between 1829 and 1831, where his poetic gift blossomed and he wrote two dramas and around 100 poems.

Mikhail Lermontov not only lives at Serednikovo, he also manages the estate; indeed it was Mikhail who restored Serednikovo from a very run-down establishment into such a beautiful place with 16 historical buildings and three ponds. We visited Serednikovo in 2015 and our two girls performed there. It's a beautiful place just outside Moscow and open to the public every day, offering a programme of events for all the family throughout the year. You can even stay there, and the food is absolutely delicious. It's a must-see attraction if you are ever in the area, so you can find out more information at <https://serednikovo.su/the-estate-serednikovo>.

*Elena Reid is a member of the Scotland-Russia Forum. All images are hers.*

## “Pushkin in his heart!” A tribute to Dairmid Gunn

Longstanding members of the Scotland-Russia Forum will be familiar with Dairmid Gunn, one of our two vice presidents. Many will also be aware that last summer he received the Pushkin Medal. The medal is a state decoration granted by the Russian government, which recognises contributions to Russia in the arts and culture, education, humanities and literature, and is named in honour of the Russian author and poet Alexander Pushkin.

Rather belatedly (since the award ceremony took place after our last issue went to print), we feel it’s only right to give this event a bit of attention!



For those of you who may not be familiar with Dairmid’s background, in 1949 he entered the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, as an executive officer cadet; after graduating he spent over 20 years in the Navy, seeing active service in Korea and the Mediterranean. He studied Russian for two years at London University and in Paris, and in the 1960s he served as a naval attaché in the British embassies in Moscow and Helsinki. After leaving the Navy in 1973 Dairmid turned to improving the commercial lot of Scottish farmers in the UK and the European Union. For this work, in 1989 he was awarded the OBE.

In 1980 he became chairman of the Scottish branch of the GB-USSR Association, and following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 chairman of the Scottish branch of Britain Russia Centre and later a vice president of the Scotland-Russia Forum. In association with the parent organisation in London and the Moscow House of Friendship, between 1985 and 1992 he organised and participated in many cultural visits to the USSR and Russia and helped to arrange welcome receptions for Russian visitors coming to Scotland. In 2017 he co-authored a book on the Russian

convoys (“Cold Seas and Warm Friendships”), working closely in this with the Russian Consulate in Edinburgh. As a result of his work over many years in improving understanding between Russia and the UK, in 2018 he was awarded the Pushkin medal by the Russian government.

Dairmid himself enjoyed what he describes as a warm, friendly and intimate ceremony. “I was deeply moved by the Russian Consul General’s remarks about me. They brought back a host of memories of my associations with Russia. I opened my first Russian grammar in 1949 and stepped on to Russian soil in 1960; from then on Russia became a part of me and a very important and rich ingredient in my understanding of life. It has not been all about Russians and their magnificent traditions of literature and music; it has also been about the privilege given me of working with people of both nationalities for a common and worthy purpose. I am indebted to them.”

Natasha Black, a long-time member and champion of the SRF, vouches for Dairmid’s encyclopaedic knowledge of Russian culture, and recounts many anecdotes about him. She particularly recalls one of his talks about the Ballets Russes: “his expertise in the peculiarities of the Russian ballet was so great that one might think that he was himself a distinguished choreographer. But no, Dairmid is not a choreographer; rather, he is the captain of a great ship of friendship and understanding between our two countries which he guides in the right direction in any weather – storms or sunshine – with Pushkin in his heart!”

The Scotland-Russia Forum is enormously grateful to Dairmid for everything he has done to support our work and to promote understanding of Russia in Scotland. We raise a glass to him.



Images © Toby Long of PHOTOExpress



## Cultural round-up

The second half of 2019 saw an enjoyable variety of Russia-related cultural events. SRF went along to some of them.

### *The Diaries of General Patrick Gordon*

In September Dr Dmitry Fedosov gave a talk at Edinburgh University's Dashkova Centre about Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries, one of the greatest and most influential representatives of the Scottish diaspora ever.



*Dr Dmitry Fedosov—academic, co-founder and chairman of the Moscow Caledonian Club*

A native of Aberdeenshire, Patrick Gordon had a distinguished military career for three major European powers - Sweden, Poland-Lithuania and Russia - and spent the last 38 years of his life in the service of the tsars, reaching the ranks of full general and rear admiral. He became the most high-ranking and respected foreigner in Russia, helped to reform her armed forces, and twice made decisive contributions to secure the throne for the young Tsar Peter.

Importantly, Patrick Gordon left us a unique 6-volume diary, covering his life, career and travels over half of Europe in half a century. Dr Fedosov has spent more than 20 years translating a full scholarly edition of this work, both in the original and Russian translation - a task which is now complete (published by Aberdeen University Press).



*Hamid Ismailov with Caroline Eden at the Golden Hare bookshop in Edinburgh*

### *Hamid Ismailov—book launch*

The Uzbek author-in-exile Hamid Ismailov was in Edinburgh in December, at an event at the Golden Hare Bookshop in Stockbridge. The evening was hosted by writer Caroline Eden.

Hamid was introducing the new English translation of his novel 'Of Strangers and Bees' (trans. Shelley Fairweather-Vega). This is not the most recent book he has written, but as he explained, English translations of his works are not commissioned chronologically; the publisher, not Hamid, decides which of his novels the public should read next. Does this bother him, I wondered? He seemed fairly relaxed about it, having learned to 'let go' of his books once they're written.

He's a lovely man, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of world literature. If you have the chance to hear him speak elsewhere, don't miss it.

### *Russian Film Week*

Russian Film Week is an annual film festival held in the UK featuring the best films produced in the preceding 18 months in Russia (or Russia-themed films produced elsewhere in the world). The organisers sent two films to Edinburgh, screened at Edinburgh University: "High Above" (dir. Oksana Karas) and "Great Poetry" (dir. Alexander Lungin, who was present to do a Q&A session). Good quality films this year, we thought!

# 'Starling': a new translation forum

By Christine Bird



Starling is a forum based at the University of Glasgow for translators working with Central and East European languages. Why the name? Because like starlings, people and languages migrate across borders.

The idea for this group was born after I finished my MSc in Translation Studies at Glasgow in 2018, when I returned to work as a nursery teacher. I was keen to continue developing practical and theoretical understandings of translation in collaboration with others, particularly in my own language pairing of English and Russian. When I spoke with colleagues about starting a group on campus, the idea was met with enthusiasm.

We decided to start small and see how Starling would evolve as we found our feet. Our first year went well. We settled into a pattern of meeting on campus approximately monthly / six-weekly, fitting around the academic year. Discussions are thematic, and reflect the unique language specialisms on offer at Glasgow - Czech and Polish alongside Russian, with a smattering of Finnish, Italian and Hungarian too!

Our most popular event was jointly hosted with the Scotland Russia Forum. Elena Sannikova, human rights activist and translator spoke about contemporary political repression in Russia, and the role of foreign solidarity. She drew attention to the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are classified as members of an extremist organisation and subject to prison sentences, as well as to a raft of anti-protest laws. Sannikova was warmly received, attracting a number of politics post-graduates in addition to the usual Starling participants. This made for a lively and thoughtful discussion.

Burns' Night occasioned a fascinating look at translations

of 'My luvie is like a red, red rose', with participants discussing versions of the poem in their own language specialisms. Seasonal variation made a surprise appearance. In warmer Ukrainian climes, the rose sprung newly 'in Spring'. Meanwhile in Finland, the narrator's famous declaration of rock-melting, infinite love translates to 'till the mountain ice melts'. Who knew?

Elsewhere through the year, we considered an eclectic mix of topics. The Translating Film session covered a variety of our favourite / worst subtitling moments, and ended with an impromptu q&a with our in-house film translation specialist Tiina Tuominen. The year ended in delicious fashion, with Translating Food and Humour. National delicacies were prepared and shared, recipe and menu translations digested and each participant was required to serve their own joke translation. Thankfully, there were no 'Chicken giblets in jelly with mashrooms', 'cod liverice' or 'Rack of Lamb served in a roll of thin pastry under the stamp' on *our* menu. (You'll need to go to Moscow to partake of such delights).

Over the course of last year, Starling emerged as a welcoming space for knowledge exchange and cross-pollination of translation research and practice. If you come, expect tea and biscuits, and the opportunity to share ideas and learn among a friendly and knowledgeable wee crowd of academics and translators.



Christine Bird

For more information, find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2178856785503768/>

Or email: [birdtranslations1@gmail.com](mailto:birdtranslations1@gmail.com)

# Kolomna Pastila

By Sheila Sim

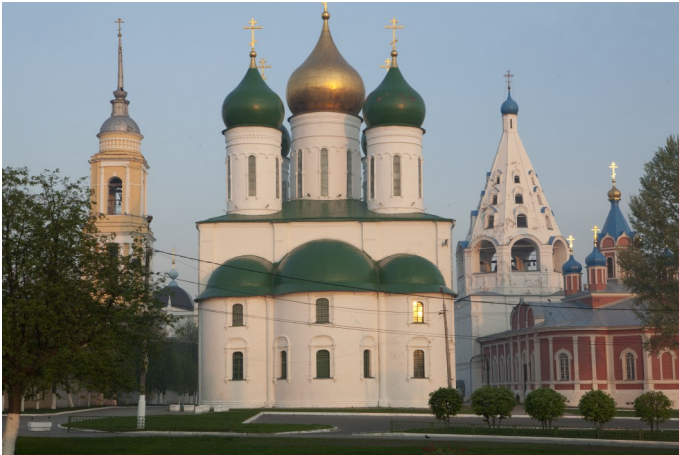
The medieval town of Kolomna lies within easy reach of Moscow, and makes for the perfect day trip. If you visit today you'll find it a delightful town, buzzing with

ing their goods - pottery, armour, glass and copperware, icons and clothing, as well as food, wax, and salt – it now lay abandoned and decaying. So what brought about its transformation into the charming place we see today?

The story of the town's revival goes back to 2008, when Kolomna hosted the European Speed Skating Championships at its brand new Kometa Ice Rink. Natasha Nikitina, a pianist turned cultural project manager, was asked by the town council to create a souvenir gift for visitors and competitors. Not one to take such responsibilities lightly, she set about researching the town's history in order to come up with a gift specific to Kolomna.

For inspiration Natasha turned to the 18th century novels of Ivan Lazhechnikov, son of a rich Kolomna merchant, who was one of the originators of the Russian historical novel. Reading his novel *The Ice Palace*, set in 1740 at the court of the Empress Anna, Natasha was intrigued to find a reference to a sweet treat called pastila. Together with her friend, Lena Dimitrieva, she started to research it.

The two women found that pastila (pronounced with the stress on the final 'a') was a famous, apple-based delicacy that was hugely popular across Russia from the middle



Kolomna, early morning

activity and full of places to eat and drink in between sight-seeing. Yet barely a dozen years ago Kolomna lay neglected and unloved. It was not included in the tour itineraries of the so-called 'Golden Ring' around Moscow, and tourism barely touched it, despite its pretty riverside setting, historical architecture and ancient kremlin walls. Where once Kolomna's ancient 'posad', or trading quarter, had rung with the sounds of merchants and craftsmen produc-



ages onwards. Originally developed as a means of preserving the apple harvest and providing treats throughout the winter months, pastila became particularly closely associated with Kolomna. It was here that the finest, fluffiest version is said to have been made (“they have turned apples into clouds!”). From 1863, when the town became connected to Moscow via a railway link, the reputation of Kolomna pastila spread across Russia. It continued to be manufactured in the town until 1914, when a combination of war and Bolshevism put paid to the industry. From that year on, pastila became a forgotten taste.

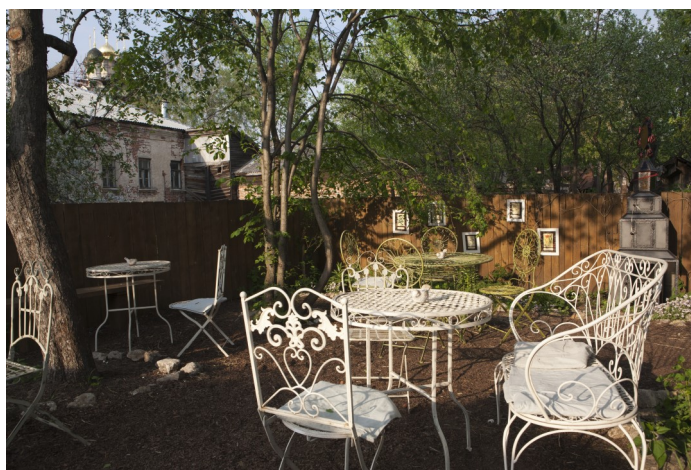
Natasha and Lena had no thoughts about the town’s economic development. They simply knew that they had found the perfect idea for their souvenir gift. All that remained was find out how to make pastila. Where to begin?

The two women and their researcher headed for the central library in Moscow, where they scoured the archives for notebooks, correspondence and any other documents they could find that might teach them how to make pastila. They found several recipes, all of them involving oven-dried apples, beaten egg whites and sugar. But not a single recipe thought to mention quantities or proportions, and none of them described how long the apples should be cooked. One example came from the notebooks of Tolstoy’s wife Sofia, who wrote: “Put the apples in a cooling oven after baking bread” – but for how long, and at what temperature?

Natasha and Lena realised there was no option but to attempt their own experiments. With peals of laughter, they described to me their early efforts to produce pastila (“it kept exploding – it took us hours to clean it from the ceiling!”). But with patience and much experimentation, they finally came up with the right formula. Slightly sour apples make the best pastila (our own Bramley apple is a good example).

Having successfully created their product, the women needed to find a suitable manufacturer. They approached seven local firms, but none was able or willing to help them. Undeafed, they simply set up their own factory, commissioning specially-designed equipment based on archive sketches of old machinery.

Further research led to the discovery of some original



*Pastila museum, garden and café*



*A few varieties of pastila*

packaging and labels, and the women were given permission to use these as templates for their own packaging. Armed with the business experience they had gained to date, they sourced their own materials and set up a packaging production line. Soon they could barely keep up with demand.

Natasha, whose creative vision drove the enterprise, understood that pastila as a standalone product would not be a sustainable business. She sensed that people wanted to taste not just the product, but the story behind it. Each recipe that she unearthed from the archives seemed to have its own history, and Natasha realised that this is what she had to build on. Soon she uncovered anecdotes and diary entries associating pastila with Catherine the Great, with Pushkin and Doestoevsky, and other famous people and events. She found references to different varieties of pastila, and set about recreating them and developing new ones: the traditional fluffy 'white-foam' type; a denser version like jellied marmalade; pretty layer-cake with pink icing; pastila flavoured with apricot, raspberry, cherry or plum... the possibilities were endless.

She and Lena set up a café decorated in 19th century style, with waitresses in period costume who not only served

pastila with drinks but also narrated tales associated with each variety. The café soon spilled out into the garden. Orders started coming in from far and wide, and an online shop was established. Suddenly Kolomna found itself back on the map, and tourist numbers started to swell exponentially. Spin-off projects include a bakery, several museums, a food & book festival, and now an orchard project so that heritage apples can be grown locally and used to make pastila. Hundreds of new jobs have been created, and Kolomna is flourishing again.

Sales of pastila support these new developments, but finding finance is always a problem. Natasha and Lena had to compete for grants from private foundations, find investors, and negotiate with the city administration to lease space. "It wasn't easy," says Natasha, "but we didn't take one ruble of government money and we remain a private organisation. Everything we earn, we reinvest."

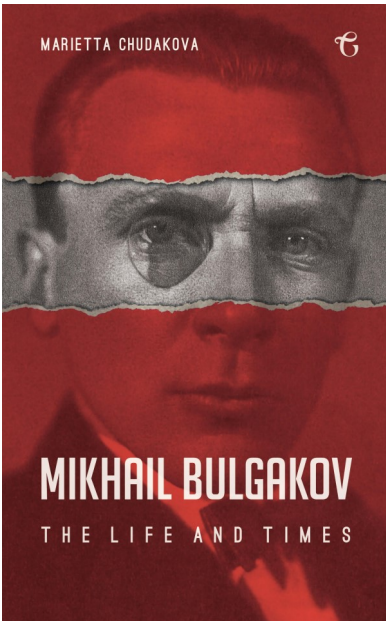
As a result of two women's pluck and imagination, what started as the creation of a simple souvenir has led to the transformation of an entire town. It's an inspiring story.

*Sheila Sim is a photographer, writer and translator. She is also the Editor of The Forum. All images © Sheila Sim.*



Find out more at [www.kolomnapastila.ru](http://www.kolomnapastila.ru)

# BOOK REVIEWS



## *Mikhail Bulgakov. The Life and Times* by Marietta Chudakova

Reviewed by Andrew Macmillen

First published in 1988, this extraordinary work is the product of decades of painstaking research by distinguished academic Marietta Chudakova, matched by a colossal feat of translation by Huw Davies.

Throughout over 600 dense pages Chudakova reconstructs the life of Bulgakov, blending an intriguing mixture of ingredients, combining

anecdotes and reminiscences from friends and family, letters, diaries, extracts from Bulgakov's completed works and their early drafts as well as material the author gained from having access to his personal archive.

She hints at how various elements of his early life, from schoolboy memories to the chaos of violence and revolution in Civil War Kiev, overcoming addiction to morphine, the suicide of a close friend and escaping death by jumping out of window, all found their way into plays such as *Days of the Turbins*, *Flight*, and his novel *The White Guard*, and eventually into the masterpiece for which he is best known – the novel *Master and Margarita*.

After the war Bulgakov moved to Moscow to try his hand as a writer and work in the theatre while hiding his previous profession as a doctor serving in the White Army. It is hard today to appreciate the fragile nature of publishing in 1920s USSR and the writer's dependency on the powerful Writers Union and the censor's approval. We see glimpses of his relationships with such figures as Stanislavsky, Akh-

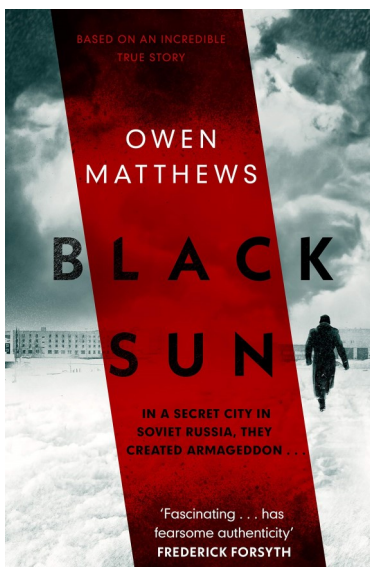
matova, Gorky, Mandelstam, Shostakovich and Mayakovsky, the emotional toil of three marriages, and feel with Bulgakov as he experiences the constant thaws that quickly freeze over, the countless rejections, the desperate requests to leave the USSR and even a telephone call from Stalin himself.

Chudakova tenderly brings to life Bulgakov's later years, exhausted from the constant requests to make changes to his plays or outright refusals to stage them. She gives us glimpses of his routine of late-night readings to friends, balls at the US embassy and nocturnal walks through the deserted streets of Moscow as he maintained a number of jobs in the theatre. Although his health and eyesight were failing he continued working on *Master and Margarita* up to the end knowing that it would not be published. He died at the age of just 48.

Perhaps too dense and rich for the casual reader, this is a book for the enthusiast, with a wealth of rich detail that some might find at times superfluous but which the Bulgakov fan will devour. Chapter headings and more footnotes might have helped as well as better editing to avoid the few spelling mistakes. The addition of some photographs would also have enhanced the book, however these minor quibbles do not detract from what is a monumental tribute to one of the twentieth century's most underrated writers.

*Andrew Macmillen is researching Dostoevsky and infrastructure for a PhD at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at UCL*

*Mikhail Bulgakov. The Life and Times* By Marietta Chudakova. Published in Hardcover by Glagoslav Publications, November 2019  
\$34.95 | Hardcover | 352 pages |  
ISBN13: 9780195395488332 4



## *Black Sun* by Owen Matthews

Reviewed by Nicholas Hardwick

In 1961, Soviet scientists designed, built and tested the RDS-220 thermonuclear bomb. It remains the most powerful weapon ever detonated - roughly three thousand times larger than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Yet the yield could have been far greater still - and in *Black*

*Sun*, Owen Matthews builds on this story to create an intriguing, if occasionally flawed, thriller.

*Black Sun* is a Soviet thriller set in a distinctly non-Soviet environment - a gilded cage for scientists, freed from restrictions on thoughts, words and deeds, with building the bomb more important than loyalty to the state, discipline or ideology. Into that cage comes Vasin, a Major in the KGB, to investigate the death one of the scientists. Is it a particularly unpleasant suicide, as the authorities would prefer, or something more sinister? And with the test of the weapon just days away, will he be allowed to find out?

In Vasin, Matthews has created a character familiar in detective fiction - a loyal servant of the state who is beginning to see through the facade. Vasin struggles to reconcile his former self with his new-found willingness to break both rules and convention to get the right result. He seeks reconciliation with a disillusioned wife whilst falling for a prime suspect. It's a path that has been well-worn by others, but the unusual setting and the examination of the moral ambiguities of the RDS-220 project make for a pleasingly different read.

However, for a story which depends on physics for several of its plot devices, it's frustrating that Matthews didn't put more into getting it right. Light may have momentum, but it doesn't have mass. Thallium 201 is not an emitter of alpha radiation, and Matthews has possibly confused it with thallium salts that were once used in rat poisons. Nor is radioactivity 'atoms spitting out neutrons' - as one of the

scientists describes it to Vasin. Whilst these - and other - oddities aren't significant to the overall story, they jar in a book that is otherwise well-researched.

*Black Sun* is the first instalment of a trilogy, Matthews, as revealed in the strangely affecting author's note, has all the incentive he needs to complete what should be a rewarding series.

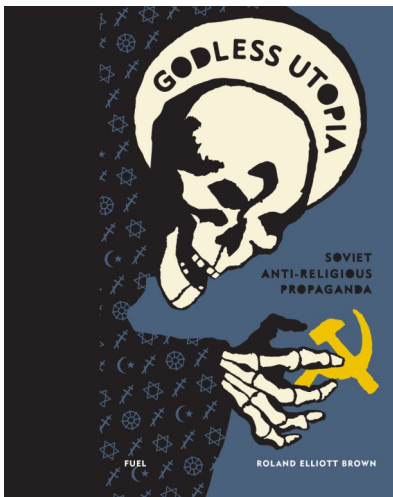
*Nicholas Hardwick teaches Physics in Edinburgh. He enjoys thrillers set in the former USSR.*

*Black Sun* by Owen Matthews.

Published by Penguin / Bantam Press, October 2019

ISBN: 9781787631823

RRP: £16.99



## **Godless Utopia: Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda** by Roland Elliott Brown

Reviewed by Martin Dewhirst

In the nineteenth century in the UK there was a rather influential movement known as 'Christian Socialism', represented by such eminent thinkers as John Ruskin and Charles Kingsley. To oversimplify, they considered that socialism was closer to Christianity than was capitalism. In the very different circumstances of Russia, socialists there tended to think that science was a better guide to a more just future than was religion, and a 'progressive' Russian intellectual (or intelligent) was more likely to be an atheist, or at least an agnostic, than to be guided by religious faith. This began to change in the early twentieth century, but the unexpected coming to power of Lenin in late 1917 put an end to that. He was a fervent, almost manic, atheist, in some ways a caricature of the underground revolutionaries who had been depicted by Dostoevsky in his novel *The Demons* in the 1870s.

Godless Utopia is (with no disrespect intended) a potted history (with 314 references for those who wish to study the subject more deeply) of religion(s) in Russia during the failed 'Soviet' experiment to construct an atheist society. Stalin, who had studied in a seminary, was less dogmatic (or more unprincipled) in this area than Lenin had been, though perhaps only for reasons of expediency (the Nazis had made a point of reopening churches in the areas of the USSR that they occupied in 1941-42, something warmly welcomed by many of the locals). Beginning in 1959, during the 'Thaw', Khrushchev closed down thousands of churches (p128), perhaps (I would add) in part by overre-

acting to Pasternak's religious novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. At that time a new monthly periodical, *Science and Religion*, appeared, attempting to 'prove' that the two are incompatible. Much was happening 'underground' during the Brezhnev period of apparent stagnation, and Gorbachev realised that he could gain popular support by commemorating the millennium of the baptism in Kiev (Kyiv) – there was no Russia at that time – one year early (according to some experts), in 1988 (p166). Soon thereafter it became politically correct to (claim to) be profoundly religious, as is demonstrated by a complete homo sovieticus such as Vladimir Putin.

Brown's compact text is complemented by dozens of well-reproduced anti-religious magazine illustrations and posters, ranging from 1922 (p71) to 1985 (p.167). Their crudity is almost unbelievable, whether you are a religious believer or not. And now, when Jehovah's Witnesses are being arrested in Russia as dangerous extremists and given long sentences behind bars, the depiction of their predecessors in 1962 (pp114-5 and 136-7) and 1977 (p155) makes one wonder how much has really changed in 'the Kremlin's' attitude to religion. After all, Lenin's corpse is still lying on Red Square, and Stalin's body is interred by the Kremlin wall, just a few metres away.

*Martin Dewhirst is a former Lecturer in Russian at the University of Glasgow*

*Godless Utopia: Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda* by Roland Elliott Brown

Published by Fuel, London, 2019. £24.95. 192 pages.

ISBN 978-0-9957455-7-5.



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