

THEFORUM

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MOSCOW CouP '91

PLUS:

- Aleksandr Griboyedov
- From Kazakhstan to Scotland
- A Tatar Village in Mordovia



Front cover: Moira Dalgetty stands in front of a statue of Lenin.
Photo: Tim Williams



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FEATURES

- 2** **Aleksandr Griboyedov and his Legacy**
- 4** **A Note of Gratitude to Dr Jim Forsyth**
- 10** **Moscow Coup '91**
- 13** **The Oxford Perm Link**
- 14** **A Tatar Village in Mordovia**
- 16** **From Kazakhstan to Scotland**
- 18** **The Cinema of Sergei Eisenstein**
- 20** **Review:**
Ukraine, by Jenny Robertson

Aleksandr Griboyedov and his Legacy

Sasha Smith



poet and playwright. In 1815-17 Griboyedov collaborated with his friends on two plays, but they were not as successful as his later works. In 1818, together with A Shakhovskoi and N Khmel'nitskii he wrote a verse comedy *All in the Family* (*Svoia sem'ia*). This neoclassical comedy was extremely popular in its own time, and it was revived in 1896. It was also staged during the Second World War—directed by a famous émigré, the Russian modernist director and playwright Nikolai Evreinov.

Griboyedov's masterpiece play *Woe from Wit* is the last serious play written in Russian in verse. It reminds its readers of the popularity of this form in 18th century Russia and France. Traditionally, the characters were expected to talk to the audience rather than to other characters. The play uses free iambic lines and features several characters with funny names such as Molchalin (who prefers to stay quiet and obey his superiors); Famusov (his name could be translated as "Mr Famous"), and Skalozub ("Mr Grinning"). The plot showcases a young Russian nobleman Chatsky who returns to Moscow after three years of travels. He is infatuated with the young girl Sof'ia (Famusov's daughter) who rejects him. Owing to his strong criticism of Russian high society and corruption, Chatsky is seen by the members of Russian aristocracy as a revolutionary and a madman.

The play was not staged during Griboyedov's life time due to censorship. Although a censored version of the play was staged in St Petersburg by Bolshoi Theatre, an uncensored version of the play was published only in 1864. In the Soviet period the play was included in

the school curriculum and was often performed across Russia. Owing to its sharp and laconic language, it is the most quoted work of Russian literature of all time. According to Anthony Briggs, "Griboyedov's impact on the modern idiom of his compatriots can only be compared, on a smaller scale, to that of Shakespeare on modern English". [2]

In 1928 the Russian avant-garde director Vsevolod Meyerhold had produced his own version of Griboyedov's play. As Jennifer Wilson points out: "He recast the story in a contemporary setting, replacing Griboyedov's 19th-century aristocracy with 'NEP-men,' the new Soviet aristocracy." She also states that: "the biggest change, however, is Meyerhold's reconfiguration of the 'obscene' sexual mores of Muscovite society". [3]

In 1977 the play's production for Malvi Theatre by Mikhail Tsarev was turned into a film version. It features many famous Soviet actors, and it remains highly popular with YouTube audiences. Another popular film version of the play was produced in 2007. It was directed by Yuri Liubimov, the legendary director of the Taganka Theatre in Moscow. It has an eclectic style and features music composed by Griboyedov, Chopin and Stravinsky. The title was changed into a more philosophical one. It says: *Woe from Wit – Woe for Wit – Wit's Woe* (*Gore ot uma – Gore umu – Gore uma*).

The play continues to be popular in the post-Soviet period. There are many productions of the play being performed in the Russian provinces, not just in Moscow. Chatsky's motto – "Service, not servility" ("sluzhit' by rad, prisluzhivat'sia toshno") – continues its appeal to contemporary Russians. Yet the 2024 production of Griboyedov's play in Orel by Aleksey Doronin for the Theatre of Free Space has turned the title into the question: *Woe from Wit?* The play was sponsored by a grant from the political party United Russia. Its advertising materials online suggest that people like Chatsky are not needed in Russia today and they should leave the right to make strategic decision about leading Russia to prosperity to more suitable and pragmatically minded people. [4] In the eyes of the production team, people like Chatsky are doomed to be displaced and superfluous. •

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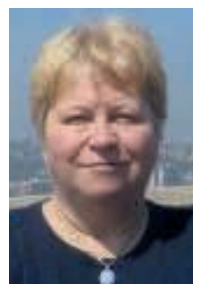
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[3] Wilson, Jennifer Louise. "Griboedov in Bed: Meyerhold's Woe to Wit and the Staging of Sexual Mores in the NEP Era," *Pushkin Review*, vol. 15, 2012, p. 143-160, p.143.

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Left: Aleksandr Griboyedov, portrait.
Public domain image.

Sasha Smith



A Note of Gratitude to Dr Jim Forsyth

Donald Lamont

I retired from the Diplomatic Service in 2017. Although a Russian-speaker, I was never engaged in developing UK policy towards the Soviet Union or Russia. At key points in my career, however, I was able to engage effectively with diplomats representing Moscow. My ability to do so owed a great deal to Jim Forsyth and his colleagues at Aberdeen University. I am grateful for this opportunity to pay tribute.

Aberdeen Grammar School

My acquaintance with the Russian language began at Aberdeen Grammar School in 1963. For a couple of years, Russian had been available as a sixth-form option. Our Rector, John Skinner, was a linguist. Seeing a certain level of linguistic ability in the cohort approaching fifth year, he persuaded a talented teacher of French and German, Graeme Munro, who had acquired his knowledge of Russian during his period of National Service in the RAF, to offer us Russian as an alternative to History or Geography.

The view at the time was that Russia under Khrushchëv was a country that would become more open to business and more willing to engage politically. There would therefore be opportunities for - indeed a demand for - people with competence in the Russian language. While many are attracted to Russian by its literature, the attraction for me lay in the language and in the politics. While any healthy Scottish lad of the time would imagine himself scoring Scotland's winning goal at the World Cup, my own fantasy - not widely divulged to my peers - was to imagine myself as Dag Hammarskjöld, UN Secretary-General, solving the world's problems at the dining room table in Aberdeen.

Graeme Munro was a good teacher with a group of around six well-motivated pupils. In the initial absence of text books, he relied on his National Service vocabulary in our first lessons. "Enemy tank - fire!" and "machine gun" were not, as I recall, part of my introduction to French or German at school, but "Танк противника - огонь!" and "пулемёт" indeed formed part of my basic Russian vocabulary.

Aberdeen University

Two years in the capable hands of Graeme Munro got me to Higher level - not perhaps to the standard reached after six years of French or four of German, but good enough to be accepted by the Department of Russian Studies recently established by Jim Forsyth at Aberdeen University. A group of about ten embarked on the course.

The content of the course that Jim Forsyth had shaped for his Department was well suited to my

interests. Literature was obviously part of it: I recall excited phone calls with a friend to exchange thoughts on *Crime and Punishment* and another lecturer, Richard Hallett, successfully conveyed his enthusiasm for *Babel*! But the course seemed to me to have a breadth, modernity and freshness that I did not see in longer-established Departments in the Arts Faculty.

Apart from developing our competence in the language, the course included Comparative Slavonic Philology, Old Church Slavonic, Soviet economy, Soviet institutions, History of Marxism. An innovative feature was that Russian History or Geography were delivered by the Geography Department or by Dr Paul Dukes in the History Department alongside Honours students in those subjects.

Exposure to modern spoken Russian was problematic in that era. We could go down to the harbour and chat to sailors on Soviet ships that docked there from time to time. And Jim Forsyth persuaded an émigrée living in nearby Culter to give us conversation classes. Her vocabulary might have remained frozen in 1917, but her couthy manner persuaded even the most taciturn of Scottish students to converse.

I dropped French after a year and continued Russian and German in my second year. Then came the crunch. Prof. Witte offered me a year in Zürich before entering on a Single Honours German course. That was a pretty attractive proposition, but I declined and opted for Single Honours in Russian Studies.

The best available alternative to a year in Zürich was a British Council studentship in the Soviet Union. I applied. During the application process, however, it emerged that I would have to fund most of that studentship myself. The Scottish Education Department decided that since the University regulations required only three weeks to be spent in Russia, that would be the period for which they would give a grant. The problem was avoided - for good or ill - as my application to the British Council was unsuccessful.

The following year I tried again. In the meantime, Jim Forsyth had been at work. He persuaded the University powers-that-be to amend the regulations. They now required a full year in the Soviet Union for Single Honours, but with the qualification that as long as this remained difficult, a minimum of three weeks would be acceptable. This time, my application to the British Council was successful; I was awarded a four-month studentship, with the Scottish Education Department supporting me with a grant for the whole period.

Moscow State University, 1968-1969

This is not the place for an account of what in the end was a full academic year in Moscow. The upmarket conditions we enjoyed at Moscow State University - I had an en suite shower - rather insulated us from the realities of Russian life and making genuine friendships was not easy, given Russian students' caution about dealing with students from NATO countries. But we had considerable flexibility about the courses of lectures we followed, and were able to travel - beyond Moscow and its environs we went to Leningrad, Samarkand, Bukhara, Tbilisi and Yerevan.

Before our group left Britain we had a briefing on two-way mirrors, microphones in walls and attempts to engineer compromising situations for later blackmail efforts. It remains a puzzle to me that although no member of our group could be considered pro-Marxist or pro-Soviet, we all dismissed these tales as coming from an earlier phase of the Cold War. Our naïveté is all the more puzzling when the Soviet Union had so recently

sent the tanks into Czechoslovakia to suppress the reforms being pursued by Alexander Dubček in the so-called Prague Spring. As part of the UK response to that action, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and British Council debated whether to cancel student exchanges but decided not to disrupt our lives by such a last-minute change of plan. In any event, it came as a shock to us to discover on arrival in Moscow that some of the warning tales came from the experiences of our immediate predecessors.

No British student fell victim to being compromised that year. I was, however, the target of unsuccessful attempts. That added interest to my interviews for the Diplomatic Service a few years later. It was certainly a sobering and maturing experience for me, coming from a wholly supportive, comfortable and loving background, to reflect that there were people actively working to do me harm.

I returned from Moscow into my final Honours year. I had gained in self-confidence, maturity and knowledge of Russia and Russian. But I had not taken it for granted that I would achieve a First Class Honours degree and I was delighted when I did. I remain grateful to Jim Forsyth in particular for the way he had constructed a degree course so consistent with my interest and motivation and for the way he and his colleagues taught it, showing genuine empathy for the abilities, weaknesses and ambitions of their students.

British Leyland? Really?

It must have bemused the Department as much as it did my family and friends that I immediately appeared to set aside any interest or qualification in Russian by joining British Leyland as a trainee systems analyst. Four years later, in 1974, I sat in an office at the company's HQ in Berkeley Square, leafing through the Appointments pages of the Financial Times in search for an escape from the wave of job losses that I saw as inevitable. Sight of



Left: May Day in Moscow 1969

an advertisement for the Supplementary Recruitment Scheme for the Diplomatic Service prompted a recognition that my future did not lie in the motor industry. If I was to maintain the chip on my shoulder that told me I would not gain entry to the Diplomatic Service because I had attended neither a public school nor Oxbridge, I might as well put it to the test.

Law of the Sea and Vienna

Brushing the remains of the chip from my shoulder, I turned up to work at the FCO in August 1974. My first two jobs were in multilateral diplomacy. The first was to do with the UN Law of the Sea Conference and the second, my first overseas posting, was in Vienna, dealing in particular with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN International Development Organisation. In those fora we had decent working relationships with the Soviet Union, and my Russian was of some use, but my level of seniority did not give scope for any significant interaction.

There was, however, one amusing episode in Vienna - then as now a focal point of interest for intelligence agencies. In 1979 Presidents Carter and Brezhnev came to Vienna to sign the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) Treaty. A Rolls-Royce engineer visiting



Left: The author in the USSR in 1969

Switzerland saw on television Brezhnev's three favourite cars being unloaded at Vienna Airport - among them a Rolls-Royce. Excitedly he rang the Embassy to say that the car had not been serviced for some time; could we ask the Russians if they would like him to pop up to Vienna to carry out a service? As the only Russian speaker around at the time, it fell to me to call the Soviet Embassy and enquire politely and with a straight face whether we could have access to the Presidential Rolls. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they declined the offer.

Moscow 1980-1982

As my posting in Vienna was coming to an end, I applied for the post of First Secretary (Commercial) in Moscow. The post was one of the more sought-after: the stagnation in the bilateral political relationship meant that many posts in the Moscow Embassy - from the Ambassador down - gave little scope for creativity or variety. The staff of the Commercial Department, however, could hope to pursue practical results. That appealed to me and I reckoned that my background in industry and competence in the language gave me a good chance of getting the job. I was right. My next posting would be to Moscow.

The snag was that between my applying for the post and the FCO approving my bid, the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan and the West had imposed trade and other sanctions. As a consequence, while Moscow may have had its merits as a posting - on my first day I met the young woman who became my wife! - it was a low point professionally.

One episode does perhaps testify to the adequacy of my command of the language. Sir Peter Scott, naturalist and son of the Antarctic explorer, came to Moscow to talk to the Russians about whaling. In a gesture designed to compensate for the lack of commercial work, the Ambassador had given me scientific cooperation as an additional responsibility. A kind gesture, but science too was subject to sanctions. So zero plus zero did not get me much above zero. Still, being Peter Scott's driver and interpreter was to be enjoyed.

As I drove Sir Peter to his meeting, it occurred to me to mention that only a few months earlier, Sir Edward Shackleton, son of another Antarctic hero, had visited

Moscow in his capacity as champion of trade with Eastern Europe. "Our dads never did get on," was Sir Peter's verdict on one of the great rivalries of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration.

Berlin 1988-1991

Lynda and I returned from Moscow to London in 1982. Dealing initially with Argentina/Falklands after the Conflict and then with the social and economic aspects of the UN did not play much to my linguistic skills. Towards the end of six years in London, I made a bid for the post of Political Adviser at the British Military Government (BMG) in Berlin. The city remained subject to the Four Power agreements initially established at the end of the Second World War. I had German to support my dealings with the Berlin administration and living in Germany, French for my dealings with our French

Allies, and Russian for my dealings with the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin. The FCO seemed strangely reluctant to recognise the strength of my credentials - "Just how good is your German?" - but eventually succumbed.

Relationships between the three Western Allies - the US, France and ourselves - were very close. The relationship with the Soviet representatives was naturally very different, the Soviet Union having withdrawn from the four-power Allied Kommandatura in 1948. Our interactions with the Soviet Embassy were often to hold them to account, in accordance with our view of their continuing responsibilities for Berlin,

or to manage issues that impacted those responsibilities. Our contact was often a consequence of an incident at the Wall (or Wire) that surrounded West Berlin, cutting it off from East Berlin and the GDR.

In 1988 the Western media rarely reported such incidents. It was a surprise to discover, on arrival in post, that they were a weekly experience. If no shots were fired and there was no apparent injury to the escapees, the Western Allies would limit our response to making a formal protest to the Soviet Embassy, who would bat it away as a matter for the GDR authorities. If the incident occurred at a point where the Soviet sector and British sector were contiguous, it would fall to BMG - and normally me - to contact my Soviet counterpart. One incident stands out for its timing.

Martin Notev

In late 1988 three young East Germans decided they could get to the West by crossing the River Spree, which formed the border between the Soviet and British sectors at the point in question. They first had to climb over the Wall on the Soviet side of the river, avoiding the barbed wire one its top. Then they had to swim the fifty or so metres of the river. On the other side, they had to pull themselves up out of the water and onto the river bank. With no way of knowing exactly where the Western sectors began, two of them ran up the bank until they were greeted by a group of West Berliners, who could assure them that they were now safe. All this took place with GDR frontier guards in hot pursuit.

While two of the East Germans made it to safety, the third, lacking the strength to pull himself out of the water, clung to the bank and was picked up by the border guards on board a patrol boat. Fortunately for him, a

passing tourist saw him being hauled off the river bank, took a photograph and passed it to the local press. His photo was published on the front page under the bold headline, "Gekidnappt!". His name was Martin Notev.

When we learned of the incident I had to make a decision. I could limit our response to making a robust protest. The alternative was to argue that Martin Notev's legitimate aim was to travel to the British Sector, that he had partly achieved this but been forcibly removed, and we now wanted him back.

The downside of the second option were that only Martin's finger tips had been indisputably in our sector. Demanding his "return" on that basis risked setting ourselves up to fail. However, Mikhail Gorbachëv had recently visited the GDR. His distaste for the leadership's resistance to reform had been obvious and he had warned that those who did not learn from history would be punished by it. So I reckoned the political environment had changed and I opted for "We want him back".

The first step was to contact the Soviet Embassy to make our displeasure known and to ask to call. Perhaps it was on this occasion that at the end of the call, I realised the Minister's PA was hovering in my doorway: "I love it when you're speaking to the Russians; you're so aggressive." I would prefer "robust". Having made the Russians aware of our concern, I later set off for the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin. At the Embassy we engaged with two diplomats - as their security rules required - whom we knew well.

I had brought with me a copy of the photograph of Martin Notev clinging to the river bank, with the GDR patrol boat almost on top of him, about to carry him off to prison. I pushed this across the table to Grinin, my Soviet counterpart. He declined to look at the photo and pushed it back to me. While contesting his assertion that this was a matter for the GDR authorities, I slid it again towards him. He slid it back. I don't know how often we did this. We ended the meeting without the Russians accepting the photo. But I could not leave with it still in my possession. In the hallway on the way out I left it on a table. Grinin saw this, but made no attempt to make me retrieve it. So he had not accepted it, but I was not leaving with it undelivered. That's diplomacy.

Following our démarche, the Foreign Office proved robust in following up. Martin Notev figured in the briefing of any British Minister meeting a Soviet counterpart. This went as high as the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, who raised the issue with Shevardnadze, Gorbachëv's Foreign Minister. Then my boss, the Minister and Deputy Commandant, decided we should hold a press conference in Berlin to let the public know what we had done to defend the rights of this young man, in fulfilment of our role as one of the "Protecting Powers" ("Schutzmächte") as the three Western Allies had become known.

Soon after that press conference, William Waldegrave, a Foreign Office Minister, visited Berlin. At his call on the Governing Mayor (Walter Momper) and his team, Momper made clear his disapproval of our actions. By going public we had condemned Martin Notev to ten more years in a GDR prison. These matters should be resolved behind closed doors and on payment of a sum of money. Our Minister could be forgiven for doubting whether his Berlin team had got it right.

As the Minister was on his morning flight back to London, I arrived in my office to find the phone ringing. It was a call from the centre in West Berlin that handled East German citizens who had been given permission to leave the GDR or East Berlin; they were taken to the

The stagnation in the bilateral political relationship meant that many posts in the Moscow Embassy gave little scope for creativity or variety.

Below: The author's family in front of Brandenburg Gate and Berlin Wall.



Above: A destroyed watch tower after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

I took some pleasure in phoning the FCO and asking them to tell the Minister that the young man we had condemned to ten years in prison was now a free man.

Fall of the Wall

Our relationship with the Soviet Embassy was particularly important following the historic evening of Thursday 9 November 1989. As is now well documented, a mistake by a member of the GDR Government at a press conference that day meant that huge crowds of East Berliners amassed at the crossing points, having heard the announcement that they were now free to cross to the West. Unable to establish whether their orders had changed, the GDR border guards faced the choice of killing scores of their compatriots in accordance with those orders or yielding to their weight of numbers and lifting the barriers.

If our dealings with the Soviet Embassy tended to the robust, the circumstances had now changed radically. No far from the Brandenburg Gate there is a Soviet war memorial. In the Seventies, one of the Soviet sentries had been shot dead. As the memorial was in the British Sector, we had a responsibility for its security. The Commandant ordered that British guards be deployed to protect the memorial and its Soviet sentries and went personally to the memorial to reassure the Russians of

Below: The fall of the Berlin Wall.





Above: Donald Lamont in Bosnia.

our concern to ensure their safety. At the same time, I got in touch with Grinin to convey the same message of reassurance.

On the Saturday morning, crowds had gathered on the Western side of the Wall with hammers, chisels and JCBs. The Russians were understandably nervous about what might ensue. So my messages continued to be to keep them abreast of what we were doing to control the crowds and keep their emotions in check. I had indeed exceeded my authority by allowing the West Berlin Police, in order not to surrender control to the crowds, to go beyond the limits of the British Sector into the "Unterbaugbiet", a strip of a metre or two between the Wall and the line marking the border between the British and Soviet Sectors. My judgement was vindicated by a decision taken by the Allied Kommandatura of the three Western Allies in a meeting that morning, unaware that I had jumped the gun.

The months following 9 November saw a process of negotiation leading to German Unification. The British Military Government had been renamed "British Mission Berlin" before the Wall fell, and then became the "British Embassy Berlin Office". So my post became redundant, as did many others, both of UK-based staff and Locally Engaged. When I told Grinin I would be leaving, he immediately invited me to lunch. Bearing in mind the rules both of us were subject to, requiring us to be accompanied by a colleague, I do not recall which of us said, "Just you and me?" and which replied, "Why not?".

Our lunch was symptomatic in other ways too of how much had changed since I arrived in Berlin in 1988. I was driven straight there - no Wall barred our way and Checkpoint Charlie had been removed months earlier. Grinin paid in Western Deutsch Marks. But we also had a conversation of a kind neither of us would have felt able to have before, Grinin musing that his future might lie in a Russian Foreign Service rather than a Soviet one.

The Foreign Office had not foreseen that I would be looking for a new posting quite as soon. In 1988 they had agonised about whether my French, German and Russian

were up to the demands of a post requiring French, German and Russian. But in late 1990 they decide that my French, German and Russian made me the ideal candidate for a posting in a Spanish-speaking country. I was stunned to be told that I was to be sent to Uruguay as Ambassador. So, I suspect, were several of my older Spanish-speaking colleagues! (Luckily, SRF's own Margaret Tejerizo was recruited to teach me Spanish – in three months.)

Sarajevo 1997-1999

After three years in Uruguay and three back in London dealing with Ireland, I volunteered in 1997 for a secondment to the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The position of High Representative was created in the Dayton Peace Accords that brought an end to the war in ex-Yugoslavia. Its function was to coordinate the work of the civilian agencies engaged in peace-building and reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was envisaged that the High Representative would have a Chief of Staff and that was the position that I was invited to volunteer for.

The staff of organisations in the UN system undertake neither to seek nor accept instructions from governments; their loyalty is to the head of the organisation. To limit costs and avoid the impression of permanence, however, the OHR was intended to rely largely on staff lent by supportive governments, who would bear their costs. I fell into that category. However, I was given very clear and helpful instructions by the Political Director at the Foreign Office, Sir Jeremy Greenstock. "It is not your job to persuade the High Representative of the merits of British positions. That is the job of the Ambassador. Your job is to provide loyal and effective support to the High Representative. That is your duty to the Crown."

Among the other secondees was a member of the Russian Foreign Service. Call him Sergei. We developed a good professional relationship. My knowledge of Russia and Russian helped, even if we often spoke in English.

There was also a bit of a fellow feeling: we both came from well-structured Foreign Ministries, governed by rules and regulations, and found ourselves rather out of sympathy with the anarchic culture of the OHR.

From time to time, Sergei would have to arrange visits by senior members of the Russian Armed Forces. Although he would naturally seek a meeting with the High Representative - Carlos Westendorp, a former Foreign Minister of Spain - he reckoned my ability to talk to his Generals in Russian had value. So, as they always seemed to visit in groups, the Generals would pile into my office, their enormous military headgear and greatcoats filling disproportionate amounts of space, and I would answer their questions in a way that I hoped would bring some credit to Sergei for organising a productive meeting.

But there was more substance to our dealings. That lay in taking advantage of the strong relationship between Russia and the Bosnian Serbs. One example will suffice.

My responsibilities as Chief of Staff were organisational rather than political, formally at least. One day a member of our human rights team - a Canadian, Lori Galway - came to my office in a bit of a panic. A group representing the Women of Srebrenica had arrived unexpectedly. Neither the High Representative nor his US and German deputies was around: would I please come and hold the meeting? In the two minutes between my office and the room where the Women of Srebrenica were waiting, Lori gave me two key points. The Women of Srebrenica - the widows, mothers, sisters, daughters of the 8372 Muslim men and boys massacred by the Serbs in July 1995 - had been unable to visit their town since they had been deported after the Massacre. On two occasions, attempts to return had been blocked by stone-throwing Serbs. They would ask me to commit to a further attempt. And Lori warned me that any slight shortcoming in my response would result in a tearful and understandably emotional reaction.

Given the circumstances of the Massacre and its scale, I was very limited in the diplomatic language I could use. No "You may count on the international community" or "We understand your suffering". And I had to strike a balance between avoiding any commitment I might be unable to fulfil and appearing indifferent to their reasonable aim. However, I got through the meeting without provoking an emotional response and set to working out how to arrange for a visit by the Women to their town.

I created a committee. I convened representatives of the relevant international agencies - the UN, International Police Task Force, High Commission for Refugees, OSCE, European Commission, human rights experts from different organisations - together with SFOR, the NATO-based international military force. This series of organisations may seem to threaten bureaucratic conflict and rivalries, but it worked remarkably well. Everyone recognised the merits of the stated objective and wanted to play their part in making it happen. So we set to working out a plan.

The OHR convened regular meetings with the Ambassadors of Western countries who were engaged in the Dayton process. I occasionally chaired those and enjoyed the feeling of being gamekeeper turned poacher.

Given the circumstances of the Massacre and its scale, I was very limited in the diplomatic language I could use.

I kept them informed of our efforts to make a visit to Srebrenica possible. One important action had been to arrange a demining operation to clear access to the area the Women would expect to visit. I acknowledged to the Ambassadors that this did not make the visit risk-free: there was the possibility that the emotion of the day might cause a visitor to breach the tape marking the limits of the demind area. The US Ambassador smiled supportively: "Your call, Donald"!

I did not make an issue of including Sergei in meetings of my committee, but he was free to attend and often did so. Apart from mines, one of the obstacles to success was the risk of Bosnian Serbs disrupting the convoy, as they had done previously. So I asked Sergei if he would talk to the Bosnian Serb leadership in Pale, outside Sarajevo, to say that we wanted this visit to take place without disruption. Sergei commented on the particular character of our exchange: "You are the representative of your Queen. I am the representative of the President of the Russian Federation. But you ask me to do something and I shall do it." Obviously politics at a higher level would prevail. But at our level, our planning was completely transparent to the representative of Russia. If he "leaked" to the Serbs, that would be no bad thing: Sergei could give me warning if he picked up any signs that the Serbs would cause trouble.

The visit took place without problem. The Serbs caused no difficulty and no-one stepped on a mine. We had arranged that if all went well on Day One, the buses could return the following day. Nonetheless we were surprised that - almost without our noticing - the buses were still running two or three weeks later.

Venezuela 2003-2006

Although I did speak Russian on a couple of occasions while I was Governor of the Falkland Islands, it was more of an asset in my last posting - Hugo Chavez' Venezuela. The Russian Ambassador enjoyed the ability to talk Russian with someone

outside his own Embassy. He certainly divulged no secrets, but the political relationship between Russia and Venezuela meant that he would glean information and insights that I could not capture. I recall him coming up to me at a reception and, looking around conspiratorially, whispering, "It is good if we speak Russian!" Of course, my Russian had not improved over the years, given only sporadic use, and Spanish was more to the front of the brain, as the language I was using daily and had learned more recently. So one evening after dinner at the Russian Ambassador's Residence, as he and I overindulged in whisky (yes, whisky), I reached the point of admitting, "Yuri, at the moment I'm not sure if I am speaking to you in Spanish or Russian: it is time for me to go home." I do, however, recall saying, "Пора идти домой". So my Russian had not been completely swamped.

Conclusion

Jim Forsyth did not set out to design a university course for diplomats. But I am grateful to him and his colleagues for giving me a combination of skills and cultural understanding that were important in my interactions with my Russian counterparts. I hope my account demonstrates how that was so, not in actions that changed the world, but actions that had positive outcomes for the people affected. •

Moscow Coup '91

Moira Dalgetty

A Scottish journalist witness to world defining events.

I've had some odd phone calls in my life, but it was on a warm August morning in 1991 that I answered a call that was to turn not only my own world, but the real world, upside down and change the course of history.

The ringing of the phone had been drilling into my hungover brain until I couldn't ignore it any longer. Whoever was calling had obviously no intention of giving up.

I could tell by the light filtering through the curtains that it was some ungodly hour. We'd got home from the party at around 3am, and now some lunatic was calling at stupid o'clock. Annoyed, head thumping from far too much vodka, I picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

I recognised Katerina's voice immediately.

"Wake up, for God's sake, wake up—there's been a military coup! There are tanks everywhere, all around Red Square!"

Oh, for God's sake. I knew a wind-up when I heard one. I could see it: a group huddled around the phone suppressing drunken giggles while Katerina called, waiting for me to take the bait, then there would be an eruption of mocking laughter. Parties often went on all night long in Moscow, so drunk people making mad phone calls in the morning was par for the course.

At the party the previous night, the conversation had turned to Prague. No, we told them, there hadn't been the slightest indication that anything wild was going to happen. Yes, it had been an insane whirlwind and no, there was no way anyone could've foreseen the chain of events that led to the Velvet Revolution.

After we'd left, the rest had obviously stayed on and made a night of it.

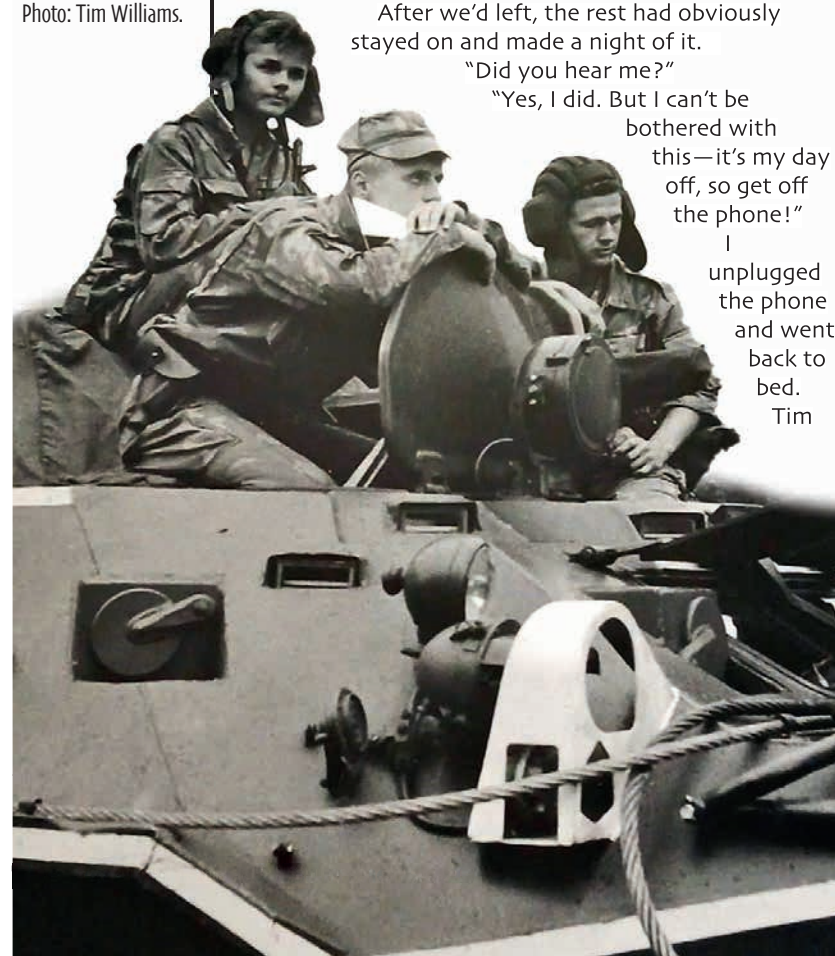
"Did you hear me?"

"Yes, I did. But I can't be bothered with this—it's my day off, so get off the phone!"

I unplugged the phone and went back to bed.

Tim

Below: Troops on the streets of Moscow.
Photo: Tim Williams.



snored on, oblivious.

It was late afternoon before we got to the city centre, resurrected and fortified by tea and cigarettes.

We saw it as soon as we got to the bottom of Gorky Street. It was exactly what Katerina had been trying to tell me.

An Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) sat right on the corner like a huge metal insect, closing off the route into Red Square, while more were moving along the road behind.

People hurried along the pavements, keeping their heads down while sneaking glances at the passing APCs, anxious to get as far away as possible from whatever was happening.

A little knot of the braver and more curious stood watching on the street corner in silence. As we approached, they shrank away. They could tell immediately, as all Russians could – from our clothes, general un-Soviet demeanour or a mixture of both – that we were foreigners, and the combination of us possibly asking questions and APCs on the street was not anything that could possibly augur well.

A young soldier sat in the open turret of the APC. Tim waved to catch his attention.

"Excuse me, have you any idea what's going on? Why are all these tanks here?"

The soldier's gaze was fixed on the packet of Winston sticking out of the top pocket of Tim's shirt.

He took the cigarette Tim offered, lit it and shrugged.

"No idea. We were told to be here and we are. That's what we do. What we're told."

His eyes were back on the packet again. Tim threw it up to him. The soldier caught it mid-flight, smiled and nodded, deciding as a reward to be a little more forthcoming.

"Whatever it is, it better get sorted out fast. I've only got two more weeks of my national service to go and I can't wait to get home."

Alerted by the aroma of Western cigarettes, two other soldiers climbed out of the belly of the APC. Soon, all three were sitting around the turret smoking happily in the sunshine. The little tableau looked like a contemporary martial version of the painting by Viktor Vaznetsov of the Bogatyrs, the three legendary giants who guard Russia's borders.

Tim took photographs of the soldiers and the military convoy to develop at home in our darkroom cupboard, just as we'd done in Prague.

We headed for the Visnews bureau. Now owned by Reuters, Visnews was a news agency providing pictures to a foreign clientele and our friend Marie worked there, whom we'd met in Prague. Like us, she'd upped sticks to Moscow after the revolution. She'd be able to enlighten us as to what, exactly, was going on.

"Bureau" was a grand name for what was a cramped, dingy converted flat at the end of an alley on the ground floor of a grey apartment block. Visnews shared it with NBC and the BBC.

We walked into chaos, people milling around and talking all at once while phones rang off the hook. The

noise was nerve-jangling.

Unnerved by the level of activity, with no experience of what was involved in coverage of big news stories, how could I have guessed that what was happening in the bureau was just the palest shadow of the madness to come?

And that was before the correspondents and camera crews had arrived from all over the world to use Visnews' facilities to feed their material to their own people in Barcelona, Rome, Athens—wherever.

Their number increased exponentially over the coming weeks and bureau space seemed to increase in proportion to the amount of folk cramming into it, as if operating according to its own law of physics. It was like some constantly-changing, weird scene of Babel as imagined by Breughel inside a Tardis, for those familiar with *Doctor Who*.

Marie grinned as soon as soon as we walked in the door.

"I've been trying to call you all morning!"

"I unplugged the phone because Katerina woke me up at the crack of dawn to tell me—"

"That there's been a military coup and you went back to sleep, I bet! *Déjà vu* or what?"

"We just came from the square—there are tanks everywhere. What's happening?"

She gave us a rundown of the day's events.

Apparently, Gorbachev had been put under house arrest in his dacha and so far that was all anybody knew. There were rumours, but nothing concrete.

"We need all hands on deck here—can you get out of going to work tomorrow?"

I worked at TASS – the Soviet state news agency – but this was too exciting an opportunity to miss.

"I'll go in first thing and see what Sasha says."

Sasha was the brilliant, popular chief editor of TASS, a good boss and well-liked.

The week before he'd forgiven my colleague Nahil and me for disappearing early to do something entirely un-Soviet, then compounding it by returning to the office the worse for wear.

What an unexpected, surreal joy of a day that had been! Change was in the air, but little did we realise just how much and of what sort.

When I arrived in the newsroom that morning, Nahil called me over to the window. He was pointing to a corner of the square, laughing.

"What on earth is that guy doing?"

Peering down, I saw a figure struggling to open a huge umbrella.

"Oh, come on! We've got to investigate!"

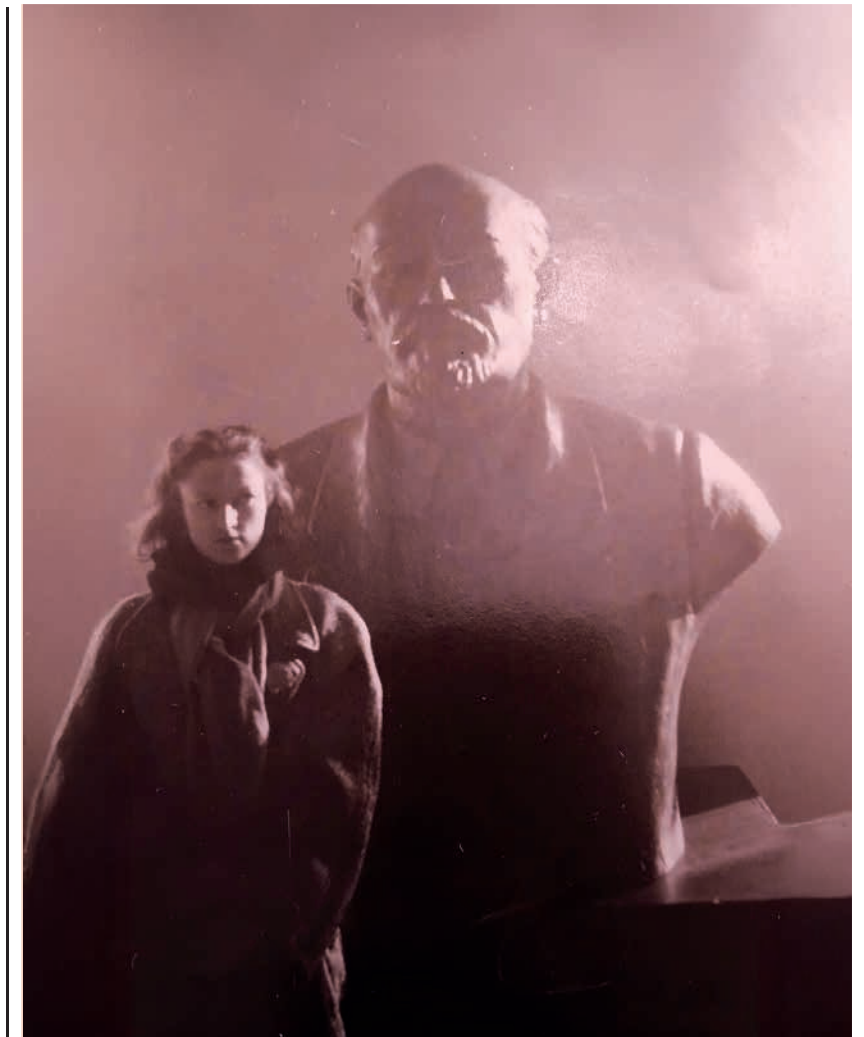
Nahil explained the situation to Sasha, who sighed then smiled.

"Off you go, but don't be long."

We arrived to find the umbrella already fixed in place by a young man who greeted us with a huge smile and a bow.

Before we had time to ask, he launched into his sales pitch—what he was doing was, in fact, following presidential orders. It was in the spirit of glasnost and increasing liberalism, he explained, that he was setting up a café starring his aunt's beach umbrella, which she'd brought to Moscow years ago all the way from Yalta after a summer holiday. While its multi-coloured panels were moth-eaten and faded it was precious, and he'd taken great care to jam it safely upright between two lumps of concrete that he'd brought specially.

With two formica tables and four chairs that had all seen better days neatly arranged around the umbrella, his café was open for business. The metal box next to



the umbrella was a small fridge, though how it worked – if it even did – without an obvious power supply was a mystery. Inside it, nestling among ice cubes, were three bottles of Soviet champagne.

Astonished and impressed by this young entrepreneur's public-spirited effort, we – his first customers – proceeded to spend a couple of hours getting wonderfully drunk in the sunshine, waving like royalty at thunderstruck drivers in passing Ladas.

The police drove by several times, staring in shocked disbelief at this bizarre version of decadent Western café culture erupting on the streets of their city but totally unsure of what to do about it. Eventually, a patrol car stopped and our host was questioned. Explaining that he was simply following the President's advice to the letter, the police officers, nonplussed, retreated to their car and drove off. That was the last we saw of them.

And now, not even a week later, there were tanks in the street. No more champagne al fresco, at least not for the foreseeable.

When I arrived at the TASS office next morning, it was clear that everyone had heard the rumours and wild theories. You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. The tension in the newsroom was palpable, the polar opposite of the Visnews bureau in terms of noise. All the phones were silent. The atmosphere was funereal, my colleagues at their desks with their heads down, barely looking up to nod when I came in.

Sasha, as always, was inscrutable and circumspect. He told me he had no idea what was going on except that it was obviously some sort of serious turmoil to warrant the appearance of the military on

Above: Moira Dalgetty stands in front of a statue of Lenin.
Photo: Tim Williams.

the streets of the city.

"In the absence of any instructions to the contrary," he said, "we must simply carry on as normal."

I explained that I'd been asked to help out at Visnews.

"Very well," he said, "Go, of course, but call me in the afternoon in case I need you here. Be very careful and stay out of trouble."

I quickly finished my workload for the day then made a beeline for the Visnews office.

The bureau chief was a wiry Australian called Ralph who had what the Americans would call an in-your-face attitude. A seasoned professional, he expected no less of anyone working for him. Unfortunately, I didn't quite meet minimum requirements.

"What do you mean you don't know how to use a computer? I was told you were a journalist!"

He frightened the daylight out of me. Red as a beetroot, I had to tell the embarrassing truth.

"I work for TASS and we don't use them. I do my editing with a pencil and an eraser..."

I could see him visualising me as a Neanderthal using sticks to create pictures in the dust.

"You've got to be kidding? No wonder this country's screwed!"

He shook his head then pointed to a computer terminal.

"Anya will show you what to do. You'd better learn fast or you're out—we're far too busy to babysit you through something you damn well ought to know anyway."

An hour later, just when I had begun to grasp the basics of PC skills for dummies, he called me into his office.

"You speak Russian, right?"

I nodded, terrified. Now what?

"The driver will take you and the cameraman around the centre. See what's occurring. If nothing's doing, get some beauty shots then get back here pronto."

Oh God. What were beauty shots? I asked Marie on my way out and she laughed.

"Nice pictures of nice bits of Moscow!"

Off the three of us went—the driver Gennady, barrel-chested Misha the cameraman, and me. The streets were eerily quiet so we headed back to the bureau after half an hour with beauty shots of a virtually empty city centre.

Tim and I watched the news that night to see if there would be any information from the government to explain the current situation.

We didn't have to wait long. A committee of generals led the evening news broadcast with an announcement that was to change everything: they solemnly informed the nation that they had formed an interim government until the "situation was under control". Gorbachev was under house arrest in his dacha. It was not a reassuring announcement on any level—one of the generals looked drunk while another's hands were shaking like leaves in a gale.

A real, live military coup was happening. What none of us knew then was that the "situation", as the generals called it, would never, ever be under control again—at least not in the way they would have liked.

The days passed in a blur of increasingly surreal events and very little sleep, the bureau in its usual chaotic state when Ralph called a meeting. He held up a tape that he'd been given that afternoon and told us what the pictures showed. Potential dynamite.

The choice now was whether or not to risk feeding such inflammatory material from the bureau to the



telecommunications tower, Ostankino, for uplink to a satellite and onwards into London for international broadcast.

The risk was enormous because as soon as they saw what we were transmitting, the staff at Ostankino would have been within their rights to cut it immediately. The very act of permitting it to be uplinked would amount to collusion in the eyes of the authorities.

Every person who was part of the decision-making process from the moment the material left the bureau until the correct switch was pushed – if, indeed, it were to be – by Ostankino, would be held responsible.

"Right," he said, "we're in the middle of a coup and, if we do this, we'll be in serious trouble if it all goes wrong. Everybody needs to be aware of that. I'll give you thirty seconds to think about it. Just bear in mind we've got Russian staff here."

Thirty seconds later, our Russian colleagues had no hesitation in leading the unanimous aye.

Ralph slid the tape into the machine, pressed the button and off the pictures went to Ostankino tower for onward transmission. The atmosphere was electric while we waited to see whether they would come back to us on the communications link asking what the hell we thought we were doing, before cutting the feed.

But they didn't. Ostankino simply uplinked the material onto the satellite and proceeded to transmit it without comment. They were obviously watching as it was fed to London, so whoever at the tower had given permission for it to go ahead was well aware of what the possible consequences might be, and had made the judgement call that it was a risk they were prepared to take.

Downlinked immediately in London, the pictures appeared later that night on news bulletins across the globe—Boris Yeltsin standing on a tank outside the White House, telling us about the new world order we were right in the middle of. •

The Oxford Perm Link

Karen Hewitt

A Bridge of Understanding

The relationship between Oxford and Perm is a story of evolving connections, built on a foundation of civic engagement and personal friendships. From its initial academic beginnings to its current status as a friendly association, the Oxford-Perm link has spanned diverse activities and overcome significant challenges.

The story begins in 1989 with initial contacts between the universities of Oxford and Perm. This academic connection was soon followed in 1991 by links between the voluntary sectors in both cities. Over the subsequent years, these connections broadened to include a wide array of cultural exchanges and cooperative activities. Key participants on the Oxford side included Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford University, Sobell House Hospice, and the Oxford Perm Association. On the Perm side, key participants were the Perm City administration, Perm State University, Perm Hospice, and the Perm-Oxford Organisation.

At the heart of this relationship lies the Oxford Perm Association, a friendly link between the people of Oxford and Perm.

This association, valuing personal contacts above all else, echoes the sentiment expressed by friends in Perm: that for over 25 years, they have been "building a bridge of understanding, learning, and mutual support". This emphasis on people-to-people connections has been a defining characteristic of the Oxford-Perm link.

The development of these links was a gradual process, driven by a desire for genuine civic engagement. As one individual involved in the early stages put it, the people in Oxford initiated the process by reaching out to their contacts in Perm, asking: "The crucial thing is that we want to set up a link, a civic link—so what civic organisations have you got?"

The response from Perm was enthusiastic and diverse. "We've got a disabled people's society, we have a Deaf society, we have a Pensioners' society, we have now a religious society which is concerned with helping homeless people," came the reply. The Oxford contingent responded with equal enthusiasm, proposing to organise visits for members of these Perm societies to come to Oxford.

Following these initial exchanges, an Oxford party travelled to Perm, leading to the establishment of a parallel organisation in Oxford. This organisation, the Oxford Committee for Voluntary Action, served as an umbrella group for various societies in Oxford and Oxfordshire. A "very vivid and dynamic woman" at the helm of this committee decided that Perm should become a sort of associate member. This innovative approach facilitated a wide range of exchanges. For example, the Deaf Society of Perm established numerous connections with the Deaf Society in Oxford, and similar exchanges took place between disabled people's organisations.

The success of these early collaborations paved the



way for a more formal relationship. The idea of town twinning emerged, but not without some debate. When officials of the City of Oxford proposed a suburb of Moscow as a potential twin, those who had already experienced Perm advocated strongly against it. "The obvious place is Perm", they argued. Despite some initial unfamiliarity with Perm ("Everybody else said, where's Perm?"), the advocates persisted and, in 1995, Oxford and Perm officially became twin cities.

This official twinning marked a significant milestone. By this time, awareness and interest in Perm were growing in Oxford. Reciprocal visits became more frequent, with individuals from Oxford spending time living with families in Perm. These visits facilitated cultural exchange and strengthened personal ties. Younger and younger teachers from Perm University began coming to Oxford for three-week courses. These exchanges encompassed a wide range of activities, including social initiatives, university collaborations, and town twinning programmes.

The desire to consolidate these diverse links led to the formation of the Oxford Perm Association in 1997. While the initial impetus came from others, the current chair has been a member since its inception. The association aimed to provide a platform for all those in Oxford who had connections with Perm, whether through formal programs or informal friendships. It facilitated social gatherings, parties, and ongoing communication between friends in the two cities.

Perm, itself, at the very edge of European Russia, is a

Above: Oxford and Perm representatives dancing in Perm. The leader of the Oxford Council for Voluntary Action, described as having "really fallen in love with Perm", is seen (in blue) dancing in a ring with Permians and the leader of Oxford City Council is wearing a tie.

Below: Perm Central Library, as featured in *Doctor Zhivago*.





Above: The East Oxford United Football Club in Perm during an international youth football competition.

Karen Hewitt.



city of notable culture. Its Art Gallery contains a UNESCO-protected collection of religious wooden sculptures, and avant-garde theatre flourishes. But best loved is the Opera and Ballet Theatre which was founded by the Kirov Ballet, evacuated to Perm during the Second World War. Perm Ballet includes an International Ballet School at which at least one Oxfordian was accepted as a student. Pasternak set much of *Dr Zhivago* in Perm (Yuryatin). The Perm Central Library is where Lara and Yura met in the novel. (Rather different from the American film!)

One particularly notable example of the Oxford-Perm link in action occurred in 2017. Perm suggested that youth football clubs from Oxford be sent to Perm to participate in an international competition. While some football clubs in Oxford were hesitant due to the expense and perceived difficulties of travelling to Perm, the East Oxford United Football Club, from one of the most deprived areas of Oxford City, eagerly accepted the challenge. Their British-Somalian leader asked, "Why shouldn't we go to Perm? Why shouldn't we have the opportunity?"

The project required raising £12,000 to send a team of 14-year-olds and four adults to the special stadium

and living quarters outside Perm. The Oxford community rallied to support the initiative. Every city councillor in the areas where the boys lived contributed funds, and the boys themselves raised money by packing bags in Tesco. The Oxford Bus Company provided free transportation to Heathrow Airport.

The boys' experience in Perm was transformative. All of them were British-born, but their mostly immigrant parents came from across the Middle East and Africa. They were welcomed with warmth and enthusiasm, without racial prejudice, which, said their manager, was very different from his experiences elsewhere in Europe. The teenagers found themselves not only playing football, but in good Russian fashion taking part in dancing, singing and acting. Embarrassment disappeared.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought a sudden halt to these exchanges. For two years, travel between Oxford and Perm was impossible. As plans were being made to resume visits in February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine.

The initial response from the Oxford City Council was seen as admirable. The council leader expressed opposition to the invasion but emphasized the importance of maintaining civic links with Perm, whose residents were deemed no more responsible for the war than the residents of Oxford. However, less than a week later, the council's position shifted dramatically. They announced the suspension of the twinning link, the removal of Perm-related signs, and the intention to ultimately sever the connection. This decision was met with heartbreak in both cities. The only vigorous and active organisation left was the Oxford Perm Association (currently 135 paid-up members). The Association uses its newsletter, published three times a year, to include regular reports on the city, and special contributions from friends in Perm and in exile. Unlike the British media, the Perm Newsletter is careful to include diverse points of view on a very complicated issue.

The Oxford Perm Association continues to be active and energetic, maintaining contact with a wide range of people in Perm. While formal exchanges and visits are currently impossible, the association remains committed to preserving the connections built over decades, hoping for a future when the "bridge of understanding" can be fully restored. •

A Tatar Village in Mordovia

Shamil Khairov

I was born in a Russian city and grew up bilingual in a Tatar-speaking family. Though I cannot call it my native village, it is my parents' and ancestors' native place. I spent many months of my childhood there, staying with my grandparents in their small wooden house at the very end of the street during school vacations. Now, living far away – both in time and distance – I often return in my memories to those modest people who lived in a tiny Tatar enclave within the vast ocean of the Soviet Empire.

There are about six million Tatars worldwide, with roughly half residing in Tatarstan, a national autonomy in Russia's Volga region. My Tatars, however, do not live in Tatarstan but close by – just a dozen miles from Saransk, the capital of the Mordovian Autonomous Republic. In Saransk, the Mordvins make up 40% of the population, Russians 53%, and Tatars 5.2%.

Tatars appeared in the territory of Mordovia in the 14th to 16th centuries. The first settlements were

associated with the Golden Horde and the Kazan Khanate. After the conquest of Kazan by Ivan the Terrible in 1552, more Tatars migrated to Mordovia. The Tatar population grew steadily throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, as the Russian government actively recruited Tatars to guard the empire's borders. Among them were murzas and princes whose lands were exempt from taxes. According to archival records, our village was founded in 1642 and, since then, its history has become intertwined with Russia's – typical of many national minorities within the Russian Empire.

Separated from Russians by religion and language, the village remained monoethnic (Sunni Muslim) and monolingual until the 1980s. While the villagers could communicate in Russian, true bilingualism was rare. My father was one of the few who spoke both languages fluently. This was a result of collectivisation in Mordovia. In 1930, when villagers were forced to join a kolkhoz (collective farm), surrendering their livestock and



farming tools to the collective – essentially to the state – my grandfather, a skilled and independent peasant, refused. Instead, he took his horse and, along with his wife and their young son (my father), left for Nizhny Novgorod to work at a large industrial building site. They spent several years moving from one construction site to another but eventually had to return and join the collective farm. In 1941, both my grandfather and father went to war, returning in 1945 wounded. During the Second World War, my mother worked as a tractor driver in the village kolkhoz.

Tatar is a Turkic language. Until the late 1920s, Tatars in Russia used the Arabic alphabet, which was later replaced by the Latin and subsequently by the Cyrillic alphabet. Our family still has a letter written by one of our parents in the Latin script.

My parents married a few years after the war and, like millions of their generation across the USSR, moved to the nearest city in search of a better life. For many villagers, this transition to city life was difficult and often traumatic due to their poor Russian. They seized every opportunity to return to the countryside on weekends and holidays – only there did they truly flourish and feel a deep sense of belonging.

The post-war exodus to the cities resulted in a new generation of bilingual Tatars who spoke Tatar with their now working-class parents, and Russian at school and outside home. Tatars were not alone to experience this transformation in Mordovia. The same story was typical for Mordvins who, while being Orthodox Christians retaining a solid Pagan component, did not speak good Russian: their language belongs to the Uralic language group and shows many similarities with Finnish or Estonian. Our wooden house in Saransk, hidden in the backyard of a monumental building erected in Stalin's time, consisted of 14 flats, with no central heating or running water, but with a beautiful garden around it. It was quite multinational: our neighbours were Russians, Mordvins, and Jews. To invite neighbours to celebrate family events or state holidays was a common thing.

Up until the 1980s, Tatar was the only language spoken in the village. Tatars married only Tatars, though two of our distant female relatives married an Uzbek and a Tajik and moved to their distant republics. Until 1980, there was only one mixed Tatar-Russian marriage in the village.

However, due to mass migration from the countryside to big cities during the Soviet period, the children of working migrants grew up in Russian-speaking environments, becoming bilingual and often



losing their Tatar language – and with it, their cultural identity. City-born children of former villagers were largely non-religious and more often married non-Tatars. Their children were exposed to the Tatar language only in the village.

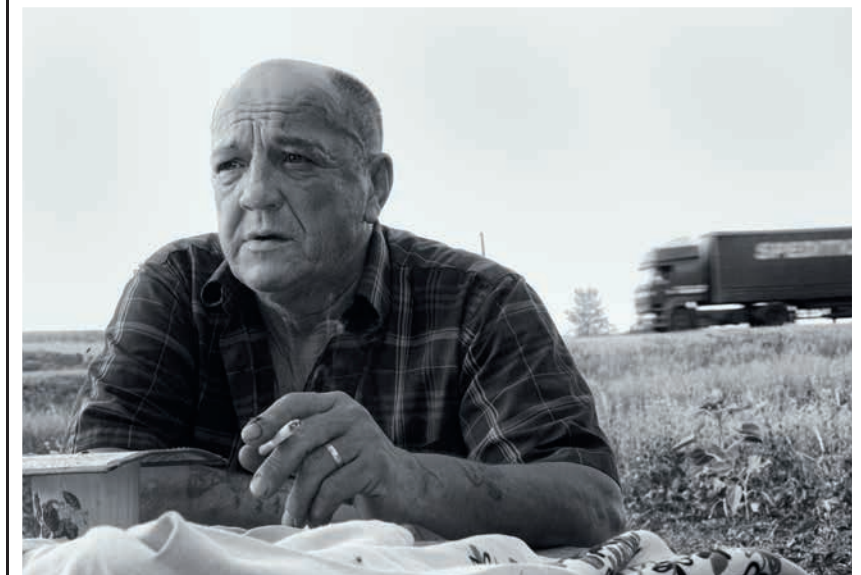
In the 1990s, and especially in the 2000s, the children of the first wave of internal migrants began resettling in the village – some permanently after retirement, others only for the summer. This, along with urban expansion, the influence of mass media, and the internet, led to the partial Russification of the village. Today, the language of instruction in the local school is Russian.

I visited the village several times in the 1990s and 2000s and managed to take pictures and record some fascinating stories from my elderly aunts about their life in the 1940s and 1950s. Only one of them is still living at the moment of writing these lines. The influence of the big city is visible. There is agricultural production in the village but a great number of the villagers now commute to work in the city. The village is squeezed between two motorways which made commuting much easier but also resulted in the loss of the natural environment. The river where I used to go fishing is now on the other side of the motorway.

Tatars value community and tradition. They show deep respect for the elderly, often hosting prayer services at home and inviting them for special meals. At the same time, the middle-aged generation does not shy away from alcohol and enjoys singing both Tatar and Russian songs – though only when the elders are not present. •

Above left: Lunch in the garden, 2010. Photo: Shamil Khairov. Above right: The new city dwellers at a wedding in their native village, in the early 1950s.

Below: The new motorway cuts off the village from the river and meadows. Photo: Shamil Khairov.



Shamil Khairov.

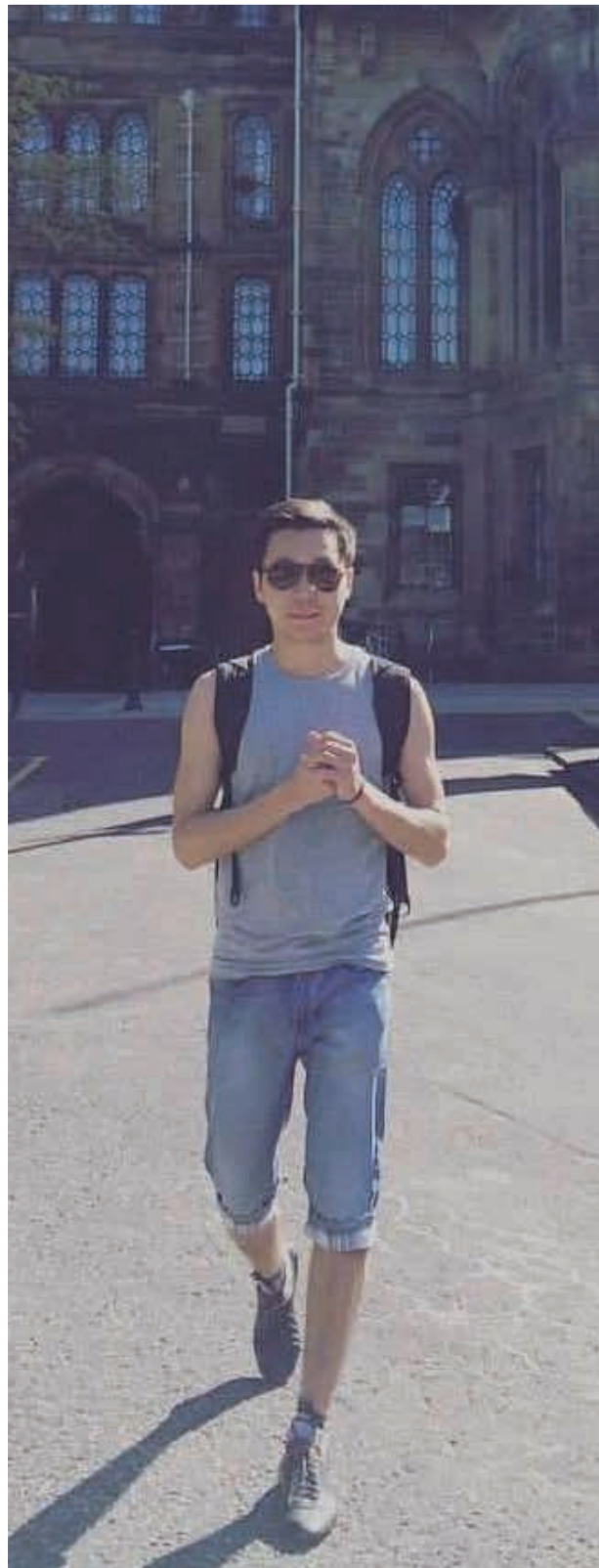


From Kazakhstan to Scotland and England

Yerkebulan Sairambay

How a Kazakh scholar lived and studied in Glasgow and Cambridge

Right: Yerkebulan Sairambay at the University of Glasgow. Photo: Author's own.



I was born in the central part of Kazakhstan, in a city called Zhezqazgan. Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic country located in Central Eurasia. It borders Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Russia. Kazakhstan as a transitional state and society has been developing its own trajectory of progress since 1991, when it became an independent country. It is home to famous people such as the boxer Triple G, poet and theologian Abai, and the musician Dimash Kudaibergen. The country is actually located between Europe and Asia, making it one of only three such countries (the other two are Türkiye and Russia). The capital city of Kazakhstan is Astana; the largest city by area is Shymkent, and the most populous city is called Almaty. While Kazakh is the state language, Russian is also used as an official language alongside Kazakh in all aspects of the country. This is an obvious legacy of Soviet and Russian influence and past.

I did my undergraduate programme in Marketing in Kazakhstan and then I studied at the University of Glasgow in the 2016-2017 academic year as part of my Erasmus Mundus double degree programme financed by the European Commission. My international master's programme was in Russian, Central and East European studies (IMRCEES) and based in the Central and East European Studies (CEES) department at the University of Glasgow.

I lived in Maclay's residence when I was studying in Glasgow. It was a nice residence with its own small community that organised various events like Halloween. My first Halloween party and make-up were in this residence. The location was close to the university, so I could walk to lectures and seminars.

I continued going to the gym in Glasgow and even started doing yoga (Flow 45), which proved very useful in my academic life. I really liked the University of Glasgow Sport Stevenson Building where I could keep being physically fit. Since I left Glasgow, I have been doing yoga regularly.

One interesting activity I found in Glasgow was participation in various research projects as a volunteer. It was very interesting to see how IT scholars, psychologists, and sociologists conduct various experiments using different equipment, including computers. I used to receive some incentives for such participation in Glasgow.

For the first time in my life, I went to a ballet in Glasgow thanks to my friends Christiana, Mideg, and Assel. I felt like I was in the cultural society of the city—people were dressed very elegantly and were drinking before the ballet.

I met so many wonderful people when I studied in Glasgow. One of them is Christiana, who I still keep in touch these days. Luckily, I met her again when I was a visiting PhD student at the University of Tartu in 2021.

There I started going to various MyFitness sports programmes together with Christiana.

One funny story about Glasgow was when I arrived in the UK, specifically at Glasgow airport, I asked the taxi driver if he could speak English. I did not know that there were so many different accents in the UK. I thought there were only British English, American English, and Indian/Pakistani English. A couple of weeks later – after visiting a lot of public places like shops and cafes – I realised I had been very rude to the taxi driver at the airport and that it was a Glaswegian accent. The Glaswegian accent was so difficult that it took me about seven months to understand the locals. However, after Glasgow, all other Scottish accents were so easy when I travelled in the spring of 2017. I travelled to the following cities, towns, and places in the UK while studying in Glasgow: Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Perth, Stirling, Inverness, Belfast, London, Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, and Liverpool.

My first Ball was the CEES Post-Graduate Ball in the Drawing Room at the Glasgow University Union in April 2016.

In 2017, I attended the Fourth Eurasian Research Forum in Cambridge, flying into Stansted Airport from Glasgow on my first Ryanair flight. It was from this time that Cambridge, its forum and its people made such an impression on me that I applied for admission to the PhD programme of this university.

After Glasgow, I went to Budapest to do my second master's degree in political sciences as part of my IMRCEES programme funded by the European Commission. After this, without any gap years, I went on to complete a PhD programme in sociology at the University of Cambridge.

I performed superbly in my PhD studies at the University of Cambridge, passing my oral examination with "no revisions" to the text, a strong signal of the strength of my research and capabilities. I have already developed a strong publication profile, not least in the publication of my book with Lexington Press, in the well-regarded Contemporary Central Asia series edited by Professor Marlene Laruelle from the George Washington University, but also in the publication of 11 peer-reviewed articles in very good, well-respected journals, not least Central Asian Survey.

I have documented experience with fieldwork and qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus groups, thematic analysis, and content analysis. I speak English, Russian, and Kazakh fluently and have some experience in conducting fieldwork in Russia and Kazakhstan: I first conducted semi-structured interviews (n=20) with young people from Nur-Sultan, Aqtau, and Shymkent in Kazakhstan in 2017. My PhD research was an original study of new media political participation. It was based on a large number of interviews (n=90) and focus groups (n=40) which I organised myself in Kazakhstan (3 cities, 3 towns, and 3 villages) and Russia (15 cities, 15 towns, and 15 villages): this in itself is a considerable achievement.

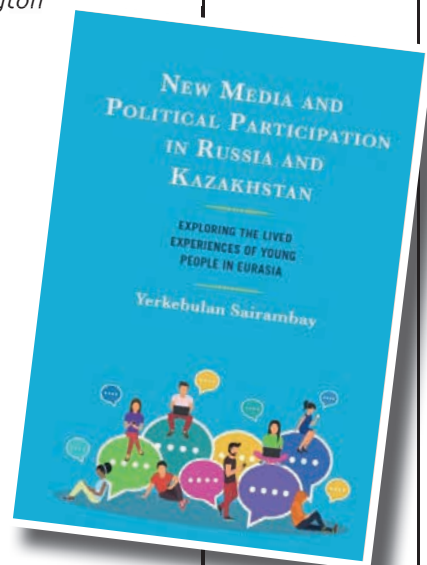
I am currently a senior research fellow and associate professor at SDU University (Kaskelen, Kazakhstan). My research interests involve, but are not limited to,



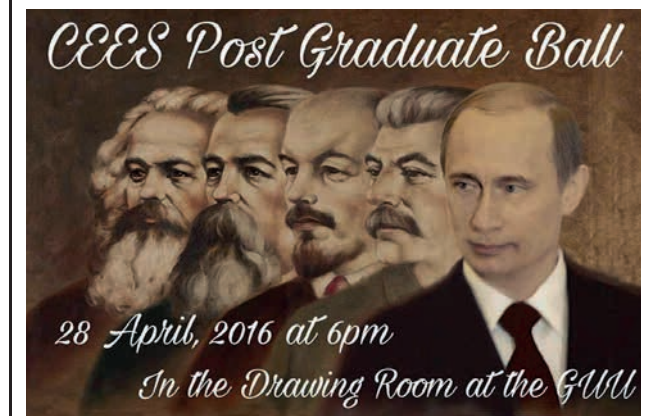
Left: "I am in a ballet banner with my friends, Christiana and Mideg." Photo: Author's own.

the following areas of expertise: political participation, new media, civil society, climate change, clan politics, democratisation, and nation- and state- building with a particular focus on the countries of postcommunist Europe and former Soviet Union. The results of my research have been published in *Human Affairs*, *Central Asian Survey*, *Slavonica*, *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences*, *Politics in Central Europe*, *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research*, *Media Asia*, and *Lexington Books* (Rowman & Littlefield). In 2023, I turned my PhD dissertation into a monograph and published in Lanham, Maryland, the USA.

In conclusion, I can say that everything that happened on my way to academia was right in its own way. Without Glasgow, I would not have been able to get to know British academia and would not have applied for a PhD programme at Cambridge, because I found out that I could also study well, do research and become a doctor of philosophy. Although there were some nuances at the University of Glasgow, such as different treatments of students of the same master's programme, I overcame the unfair attitude of some staff and got to Cambridge. The University of Cambridge not only gave me invaluable experience, but also taught me how to conduct research, write articles and publish in world-class scientific journals. •



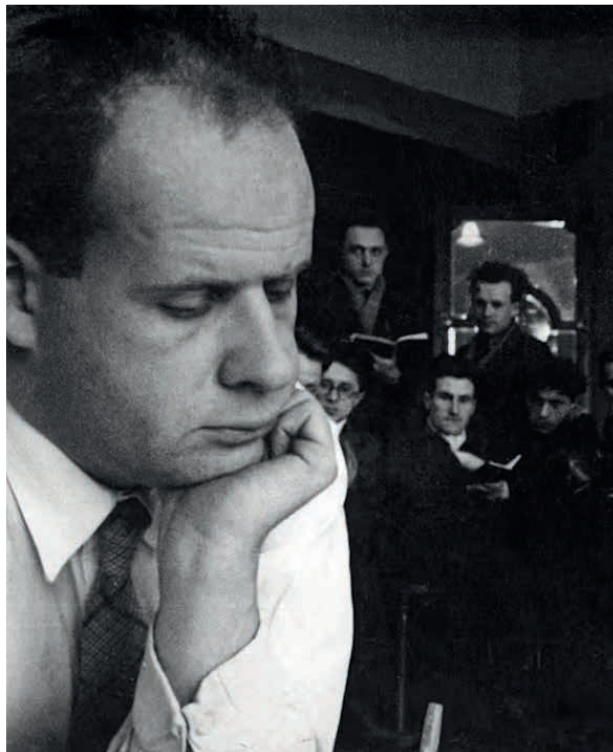
Above: Front cover of a monograph by Yerkebulan Sairambay, published by Lexington Books / Rowman & Littlefield). Left: Poster of CEES Post-Graduate Ball. Photo: CEES, University of Glasgow.



The Cinema of Sergei Eisenstein

Ricardo Parra

Right: Sergei Eisenstein at VGIK.



Sergei Eisenstein's cinematic journey, deeply intertwined with the socio-political transformations of early Soviet Russia, stands as a testament to the power of film as a vehicle for ideological expression and artistic innovation. His works, spanning from the revolutionary fervour of the 1920s to the tightening grip of Stalinism, reflect the evolving landscape of Soviet culture.

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein was born in Riga, Latvia, on 22 January 1898 (10 of January according to the pre-Revolutionary calendar). His father, Mikhail Osipovich Eisenstein, was an assimilated German Jew who worked as an architect and civil engineer. His mother, Yulia Ivanovna Konetskaya, came from a wealthy merchant family.

His life was always connected to the theatre and performing arts. In his childhood he travelled to Paris, where he saw his first film, and learned French, English and German. David Bordwell, one of Eisenstein's great biographers, talks about him drawing caricatures, reading avidly and displaying interest in the theatre from his earliest childhood. He presented shows in his family's backyard. In 1909, his mother left the household, moving to St Petersburg. Three years later, his parents divorced. Eisenstein stayed with his father.

Following his father's footsteps, Eisenstein, in 1915, was admitted at the Institute of Civil Engineering in St. Petersburg. But his studies were interrupted by the 1917 revolutions. In February he was drafted for military

service and sent to the front. He eventually returned in October, after the Bolsheviks seized power. But with the Civil War intensifying in 1918, he joined the Red Army. His father joined the White Forces, the opposite side. In the time he served in the Red Army he became involved with a lot of theatre shows in cities where he was stationed.

In 1920 he was demobilised and returned to Moscow. He began studying Japanese in the General Staff Academy. He eventually left the Academy and joined the *Proletkult*, created in 1917 by Alexander Bogdanov. Taking up suggestions in the Marxist classics, *Proletkult* advocated the development of a distinctly proletarian art that would replace that of the declining bourgeoisie.

Eisenstein's formative years within the *Proletkult* significantly shaped his early cinematic approach. This period coincided with the New Economic Policy (NEP), which introduced a partial market economy regime, fostering a period of recovery following the Revolution and Civil War. The convergence of filmmakers in Moscow during this era contributed to the development of Soviet film theory.

The filmmaker's experience with *Proletkult* between 1920 and 1924 would shape the content and narrative treatment of his first three films. These were the years of his artistic training, but also of the practical application of the principles he had learned with Vsevolod Meyerhold (his master), first in theatre and later in cinema. In the spring of 1924, Eisenstein proposed that the Moscow *Proletkult* undertake a seven-part series of agitational films, *Toward Dictatorship* (referring to that "dictatorship of the proletariat" prophesied by Marx). Eventually Eisenstein came to direct only one of them: his first film, *Strike* (1925). In *Strike*, a group of oppressed factory workers go on strike in pre-revolutionary Russia. With *Strike*, the filmmaker presents the anatomy of a political process, the crises that this strike goes through, right up to its defeat. The proletarians are immersed in the masses, barely individualised, representatives of "heroic realism". The enemies, on the other hand, are caricatured, from the obesity of the factory director to the pomposity of the administration.

The dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed is a fundamental element of Eisenstein's cinema. And the uprising against tyranny turns out to be one of the cross-cutting themes in Eisenstein's first three films. His next film, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), deals precisely with this. Just as *Strike* would be part of a series of films entitled *Towards Dictatorship*, *The Battleship Potemkin* would be part of an anthology about the uprisings in 1905, but which never came to be. It's a story in the midst of the Russian Revolution of 1905, where the crew of the battleship Potemkin mutinies against the brutal, tyrannical regime of the vessel's officers.

If the end of *Strike* confronts the audience with the memory of tragedy, and the end of *The Battleship Potemkin* confronts them with a beacon of hope, October (1927) represents the triumph of the revolution.

Commissioned by the Party for the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution, *October* helped to cement the creation of the Soviet revolutionary myth. It tells a large-scale view on the events of 1917 in Russia, when the monarchy was overthrown. The filmmaker uses historical manipulation to favor the Soviet version of events: rewriting the past in the interests of the present. *October* did not, however, arise from Eisenstein's independent interpretation of events. The fact that the film was fully financed by the state meant that the filmmaker had to portray a version of the events, as the regime and the Party demanded. *October* can be seen as a thesis on

the class struggle, represented by the two factions: the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks.

The year 1928 marked the turning point towards a new era in Soviet cinema, a Cultural Revolution that began with the Central Committee's Conference on Cinema in March. The final thesis of this conference argued that Soviet filmmakers should focus on producing films that were "intelligible to the millions", that mirrored the main tasks of the socialist path, where experimentalism and the notion of the nameless hero, the small and ordinary man, and especially the collective, were repudiated. The Cultural Revolution would put an end to the NEP and the plurality in the cultural sphere associated with it. At the same time, political, ideological and cultural changes were gradually paving the way for Socialist Realism.

In Eisenstein, on the basis of political, ideological and cultural changes, the concentration on the mass was followed by a new understanding and a new interest in the human within the collective, and not in the abstract collective itself, as was the case with his early works. By focusing on an individual for the first time, Eisenstein drastically alters his narrative structure, presenting the story of Marfa, a peasant woman, and her efforts to unify her comrades on the road to building a cooperative. This was *The General Line* (1929) – which eventually came to be known as *Old and New* – a project in which he embodied the theses of the Party and State policies on collectivization, adopted at the 14th Communist Party Congress.

In 1929, after travelling in Europe, and in 1930, after spending time in the USA, the trio of Eisenstein, Aleksandrov and Eduard Tissé arrived in Mexico with the possibility of funding for a new film. With *Qué Viva México!* (1932), Eisenstein's aim was to transpose the revolution into Mexican reality, in an episodic work. Each chapter would pay homage to a Mexican artist, in an analogy about the permanence of past tyrannies in the present time, and about the mutation of these tyrannies in periods of revolution and liberation. The project was never completed and Eisenstein was forced to return to the

Soviet Union.

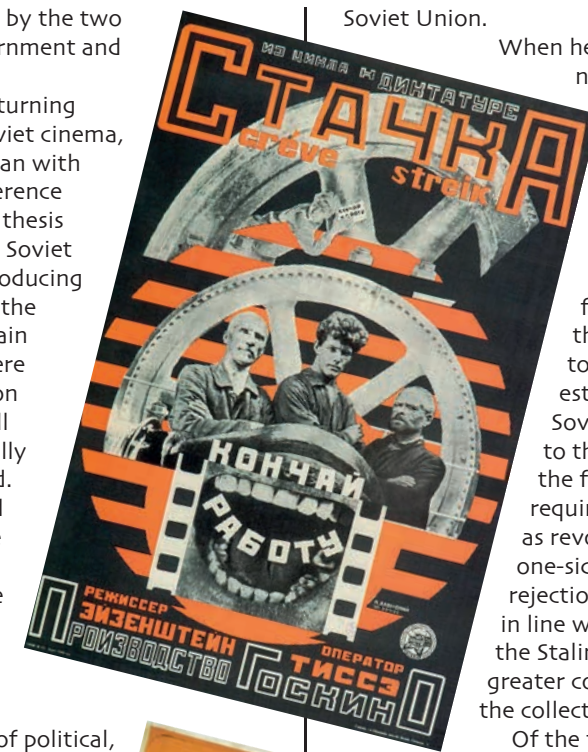
When he returned in 1933, he found a nation quite different from the one he had left in 1929. The First Five-Year Plan had come to an end in 1932, and there was now an established cult of the leader in Stalin and the state centralisation of cultural power. The USSR was forming the basic principles of the doctrine that would come to be known as Socialist Realism, established at the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 and extended to the whole of Soviet culture in the following years. Its principles required the artist to represent reality as revolutionary development. This one-sided version of actions and the rejection of ambiguity and irony were in line with an ideological parallel in the Stalinist cult of personality, with a greater concern for the individual within the collective.

Of the four projects planned by Eisenstein upon his return to his homeland – *The Happy Guys*; *MMM*; a historical narrative about Moscow; the representation of the 1802 uprising in Haiti – none came to fruition and he took over as director of the VGIK's Filmmaking Division.

Alongside these events in its cultural sphere, the Soviet Union found itself dealing with external and internal problems. As a response to the hostilities of the various nationalities within the empire and to German expansionism on the eve of the war, Stalin would reinforce a Soviet patriotism based on the glorification of the great Russian historical figures, praising the deeds of the past as a way of legitimising present and future Soviet purposes. The great succession of historical films that began shortly before the war paved the way for Eisenstein's return.

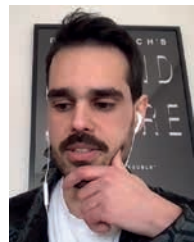
Eisenstein follows this trend in Soviet art and historiography in two final projects that reflect the lives of two Russian monarchs: *Aleksandr Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944-1946). The personalization of the individual figure and the renunciation of the experimentalism of the principles of montage mark a departure from his early work.

Aleksandr Nevsky portrays the story of the Russian national hero, Prince Aleksandr Yaroslavich of Novgorod, in his military stand against Teutonic expansionism in the land of Rus in 1242. The Russian structure presented here reflects, in a set of symbols, the reigning Soviet structure, while the invading Teutonic Knights represent the German expansionism of the 1930s. The characterisation of Nevsky as infallible is in line with the heroic



This page: Contemporary posters for *Strike*, *The Battleship Potemkin*, and *October*.

Ricardo Parra.





Above: The poster for *Ivan the Terrible*. Right: the poster for *The General Line* (AKA: *Old and New*).

of the past with Ivan, who the director defends as having fallen into infamy at the hands of the literary tradition that labelled him as a character of intolerable cruelty. In Part I, during the early part of his reign, Ivan the Terrible faces betrayal from the aristocracy and even his closest friends as he seeks to unite the Russian people. In Part II, As Ivan the Terrible attempts to consolidate his power by establishing a personal army, his political rivals, the Russian boyars, plot to assassinate their Tsar.

Part I focuses on the process of national unification, the struggle to centralise state power in the hands of a single leader, as well as on the path to Ivan's legitimisation as the undisputed leader of Russia. Part II leads Ivan to look inside himself and his kingdom, to his internal conflicts and weaknesses, to discover his true essence. Eisenstein's readings of Shakespeare helped the filmmaker construct an ambiguous, divided and tragic Ivan: a Hamlet adapted to Russian reality. Accused of being ignorant of historical

cult of personality and, in repelling the German invaders, is as a unifier of the masses.

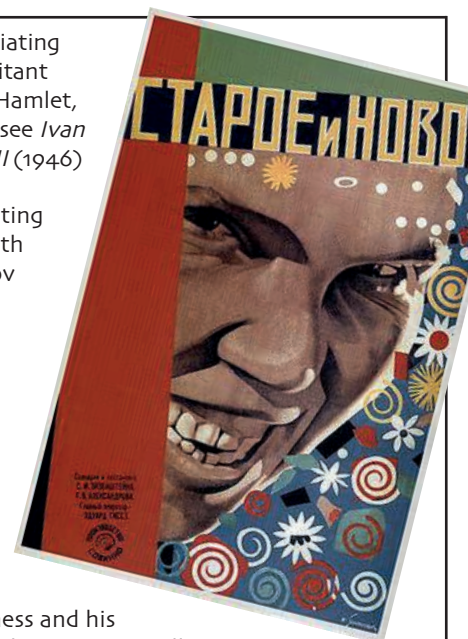
Following the success of *Aleksandr Nevsky*, Eisenstein continued his cinematographic and mythological representation of Russian historical heroes

facts and of associating Ivan with the hesitant and melancholic Hamlet, Eisenstein would see *Ivan the Terrible Part II* (1946) banned.

He had a meeting in the Kremlin with Zhdanov, Molotov and Stalin, which was documented by the filmmaker in an article in 1946, called "Stalin, Molotov and Zhdanov on *Ivan the Terrible, Part Two* (1946)".

Stalin criticized Ivan's indecisiveness and his inability to make decisions, as well as the representation of the *oprichniki*, the Tsar's personal army. Molotov had denounced the focus on the character's internal psychological contradictions and personal experiences, rather than a reflection on Moscow and its populace. Zhdanov had disapproved of aesthetic choices, such as the length of Ivan's beard and the excessive use of shadows, which distracted the viewer. In view of the criticism he had received, Eisenstein set about rewriting Parts II and III of *Ivan the Terrible*. However, his health prevented him from completing the epic.

He died of a second heart attack on the 11th of January, 1948, in Moscow. His work lived on, placed among the greatest cinematic contributions in Film History, not only in the USSR, but also worldwide. •



Ewan Paterson.



Ukraine: a Personal Exploration Before Putin's Invasion, Jenny Robertson (Hansel Press)

The book is personal collection of impressions and reminisces from Jenny's travels between 2005 and 2008. In fact, the travels were made

mostly in the west of Ukraine, and it would seem safe to assume that this area will be the least affected by the war.

Jenny gives an overview of the history of Ukraine starting from the Scythians, to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, to the Russian empire and through the Soviet Union to modern times. References to the history of Ukraine are threaded through the book when places are visited or conversations with local people are recounted.

The book seems to have been written from personal diaries and, unfortunately, it retains many of the banal recordings that one would find in a personal diary. The reader is regularly disappointed when some interesting place is being introduced, or some dialog begins, to be jolted off to the toilet or a cafe or with an observation on the appearance of some bystander.

It is disappointing there is not more analysis or any novel ideas about the history or politics of Ukraine. The reader is very much invited not to think, but just to enjoy the humdrum happenings of life in a faraway place with no

reflection on what is going on around them. Unfortunately, I don't think the average person who may be attracted to the book by the title Ukraine and the reference to the war is going to be much impressed with this style and general content.

The West of Ukraine is where Bandera massacred the Poles, and Poles massacred Ukrainians, where the people were oppressed by the Nazis and the Soviets alike, and now the Russians are the spectre haunting the populace. Perhaps the Americans will be the ones getting the blame next. It feels as though there could have been some kind of insightful analysis that brought together the threads of thought in this book, but it didn't materialise.

I think this book has a number of interesting ideas; it documents interesting travels and interactions, but these various good parts fail to coalesce into a finished piece worthy of recommendation. The book would best suit someone who plans to travel to the West of Ukraine—they could skim the book and pick out interesting places to visit.

—Ewan Paterson