



# The FORUM

The Scotland-Russia Forum magazine. No. 40, Winter 2019

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



*Pussy Riot—the Youth that Knew*

*Revisiting a Nenets Family*

*A Cold War Visit to Borodino Battlefield*

*plus book reviews and SRF News*

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## From the Editor

This issue of *The FORUM* has been edited by Jenny Carr, SRF chairperson until February 2019.

Dear readers

I hope you will like my last effort at editing the SRF magazine—to my surprise the sixth issue I've been responsible for (nos. 17, 35, 36, 38-40), though I've had the support of Sheila Sim for two recent issues. Sheila will be taking over as Editor from Summer 2019 onwards and I wish her well. I'm sure she would appreciate ideas for content and offers of contributions: contact [info@scotlandrussiaforum](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum) if you'd like to get involved.

The articles in this issue cover a wide range as usual. We begin with reflections on the role of Pussy Riot prompted by their appearance in Edinburgh this summer. We'd hoped to interview them but were turned down at the last minute as their schedule got busier with a lot of press interest. The author is Tatyana Jakovskaya who will be familiar to many of you as director of the Glasgow-based *Sbarmanka*. Thanks to Summerhall and to photographer Jacinta Oaten for the photographs accompanying this article.

The intrepid Bryan Alexander gives a fascinating verbal and photographic account of recent changes in the life of the Nenets in northern Siberia—a part of Russia few readers will have visited though many will now be interested to. Including me.

And Dairmid Gunn, prompted by Sheila Sim's recent article on the Museum of Kulikovo Field, delves into his archive and gives us a vivid description of his own visit to Borodino in 1965.

We have more book reviews than usual and I hope there is something for everyone. Very many thanks to our expert reviewers.

And, finally, I have used the back cover to remind you what the SRF is trying to do, hoping to prompt you to suggest other ways of realising our aims, or to offer help with our existing activities.

Very best wishes,

Jenny Carr  
[info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org)

January 2019

## The FORUM

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Editor: Jenny Carr

The Scotland-Russia Forum  
Summerhall  
Edinburgh EH9 1PL, UK  
Registered charity no. SC038728

T: +44 131 560 1486  
E: [info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org)  
W: [scotlandrussiaforum.org](http://scotlandrussiaforum.org)  
W: [findoutabouturussia.co.uk](http://findoutabouturussia.co.uk)  
Facebook: The Scotland-Russia Forum  
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*The aim of the **Scotland-Russia Forum** is to promote interest in Russia and its neighbours in order to improve understanding of those countries in Scotland.*

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# SRF News

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

## Events since Summer 2018

**Talks:** Quality not quantity – we’ve only organised two talks since June but both attracted more than capacity audiences and were very well received. In August we launched the late **Marjorie Farquharson’s *Moscow Diary***, a vivid description of the opening of Amnesty’s first Russian office in 1992 and life in Moscow at that time. Speakers from Amnesty International and the Quakers spoke movingly about Marjorie. We are very grateful to them and to the Edinburgh Amnesty Bookshop for hosting this event.

In December we invited financial journalist **Oliver Bullough** and academic **Elisabeth Schimpfoessl** to talk about their books *Moneyland* and *Rich Russians*. A joint event with the University of Edinburgh Business School, this attracted our largest ever audience and a lively discussion of the issues afterwards. Thanks to UEBS for their support, organisation and generous hospitality. *Moneyland* is reviewed on page 12 of this magazine.

**Social:** The **Chai n Chat** group goes from strength to strength—their meetings are very jolly, interesting and friendly with a mixture of Russian-speakers and others just interested to know what is going on. Recommended! The group meets from 11am on the first Thursday of every month (with summer and Christmas breaks) in the downstairs room at Café de la Poste, 41 South Clerk Street, Edinburgh EH8 9NZ.

**Schools:** Very little to report as I was away for much of the Autumn Term but I plan to attend the SCILT Business Brunch for schools in Aberdeen on January 31. In June I made a start on the project funded with the Future of Russia grant mentioned in our last magazine but had no time after that. The school exchange we’d hoped to spend the money on foundered on lack of interest from Scottish schools (with no Russian on the curriculum they cannot spare teacher time for Russian) so we will be working with the British Council on a “Russian language and culture” site for their SchoolsOnline pages. Both they and our sponsor are enthusiastic about the new project and very supportive.

### Other:

**GDPR and the SRF bulletin.** In view of new GDPR (Data Protection) legislation we conscientiously made all our bulletin subscribers re-subscribe expressing positive understanding of GDPR in the early summer. This had the depressing result of reducing numbers from well over 1000 to around 400. I am pleased to report that numbers have risen steadily since then (currently 510) - but I’m sure there are still some people out there wondering why they have not received any bulletins in the last 6 months. If that is you please click the link at the top of our home page (or <https://bit.ly/2rhckQT>) and re-subscribe.

**The Library.** Apart from one or two keen borrowers there has been very little interest from members in our library since we moved to Summerhall in 2013 so the committee and Librarian have reluctantly decided to dispose of the library. We hope that a well-publicised Book Sale (16 Feb 2019) will at least ensure the books go to interested readers. We have just started to publicise the Sale as I write—and our Facebook notice broke all our records with nearly 4000 views in the first two days plus lots of shares and enthusiastic comments! I am expecting queues from Summerhall to the Meadows at least.

**Options for the Future.** In December all SRF members received a discussion paper from the trustees setting out our financial options for the Future in view of falling membership donations (though actual member numbers are fairly steady) but healthy reserves. These options will be debated at the AGM on 21 February—all welcome but please let us know if you are coming so that we have enough chairs / food and drink for everyone.

## The Future

The financial situation of the SRF and its organisational consequences will be discussed at the AGM. I would just like to comment here on two personnel changes:

Jim Patterson, our excellent hardworking and conscientious Treasurer for the last two years, resigned due to ill health at the end of 2018. A huge loss and I’d like to thank him publicly for all his work and support during his term of office and indeed as a member for some time before that. We are delighted to report that Peter Harvey has stepped into the breach and will take office shortly.

I am standing down from the committee after the AGM—after 16 years in post (as Hon. Sec. then Chair) I feel it’s time for some new ideas. I will continue (and develop I hope) my work with schools on a freelance basis. We have excellent candidates for the chair—Margaret Tejerizo—and for the editorship of this magazine—Sheila Sim—so you can rest assured that the SRF is in good hands for the future. We hope other members will consider applying to serve on the committee this year—please think about it!

Jenny Carr, SRF chairperson  
[info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org). Tel. +44 1315601486

# The Youth that Knew

Tatyana Jakovskaya

*Если бы молодость знала, если бы старость могла.  
Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.*

The Pussy Riot show at the Edinburgh Fringe last summer was under threat of cancellation as the Russian authorities stopped Masha Alyokhina at the airport check-point because of her refusal to do 100 days of community service - the punishment she was sentenced to for flying paper planes as a protest against the closure of the popular network service Telegram, whose logo is an airplane.

She was flying the planes in the good company of her former sworn enemy turned her boyfriend, an orthodox activist Dmitry “Enteo”, infamous for destroying works of art which did not please him for ideological reasons.

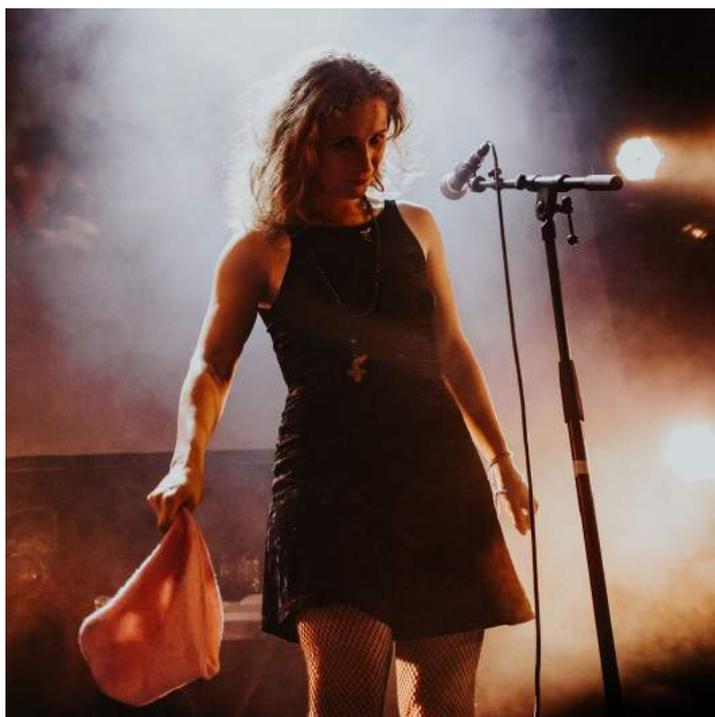
However, she duly arrived to appear on stage in Edinburgh, claiming that she had crossed the border on the back of magic pony (which probably means a long drive by back roads via Belorussia to Lithuania) - and Dmitry was at her side during the Festival.

The show *Riot Days* at Summerhall in Edinburgh was based on her book of the same name and would be unthinkable without her own presence on stage. The small fragile girl with a mane of red hair was shouting, rather than singing, her own story of three minutes act of political protest in 2012 for which she paid by two years in jail. The show included the enthusiastic Pussy Riot rock band, video footage and subtitles on two screens – but it was Masha who ignited the dense young crowd standing in front of the stage with pints of beer in hand.

She was like a rapper in battle, throwing abuse into the faces and images on the screens - Putin and the Moscow Patriarch, police, guards, snow, prison walls, snow again, Putin again....

This was not the voice of political opposition that we have heard from Boris Nemtsov or Alexey Navalny – Masha sometimes sounds like a child, cheated by cynical adults – but a system created by cheats makes a child grow into rebellious and menacing youth.

The packed hall was jolly, shouting together with Masha “No pasaran” and “Down with the police”, but there was an uncomfortable pause at the first show. When the guard led her out of prison gates and told her that she was free now, Masha readdressed the question to him – “And are you free?” – and not hearing the answer, addressed the same question to the audience at Summerhall – who were not sure what to answer. A couple of voices shouted “No!”, one added “We used to be!”. Apart from a few hotheads the audience could hardly relate Masha's experience to their own lives.



Pussy Riot's *Riot Days* concert at Summerhall, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, August 2018.

Photographed by Jacinta Oaten.

Unfortunately, this is the main limitation of political theatre: in the place where it is most relevant, the actors might finish up in prison or just get killed. And in places where the actors are safe, the show risks being seen as an exotic story about hardship in a faraway land – too comfortable an experience.

At later performances Masha did not bother the audience with this question.

The *Riot Days* show was mainly about Pussy Riot's actions at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in 2012, with the aftermath – trial and jail – quickly summarised. In the book of the same name, on which is based, the story of that action is a preface to another one – the very personal and very poignant story of Masha's experience of permanent fight against a crushing system of degradation and humiliation, of how she constantly swam against the cold and dirty stream.

She passed with flying colours, managing to bring the guards to court and even gaining a few concessions for inmates. But before she won, they were all punished for her protest as collective punishment is a classical way of oppression in Russia – in prison, in the army or at school, and even in kindergarten. People are taught from the cradle to hate those who dare to rock the boat or just happen to be different.

Russian jails always were horrible – the harsh regime of 19th century prison, described by Dostoevsky in *Notes from*

*House of Dead*, deteriorated under the CheKa and then in the Gulag Archipelago. Cut to size and slightly softened under Khrushchev and Brezhnev (the period which Joseph Brodsky called “vegetarian times”) it is now growing and hardening again. Any prisoner behind walls or barbed wire is a nobody and find himself or herself completely at the mercy of the guards.

Masha had some resources which none of her fellow prisoners had – a lawyer, the press, international attention and funds. It took all of them to get what the women in prison were entitled to – things like warm shawls for harsh winters. Most of Russian's prisons are situated at the same places as the GULAG – in the Far North, where the climate plays the role of henchman to the gaolers.

That part of Alyokhina's book is the most disturbing read, offering questions without answers. How – and if – the country can return to humanitarian society after a century of totalitarian regime? Anna Akhmatova predicted this impasse when millions of Gulag prisoners were let out by Khrushchev: “Here the most dangerous moment comes – the Russia of prisoners will come face to face with the Russia of prison guards”.

A lot in contemporary Russia might be explained by a natural fact: the guards were much more successful in spreading their genes and beliefs. Thus eventually the only Gulag museum, near Perm, has now been transformed into a museum celebrating the Gulag guards. More recently me-

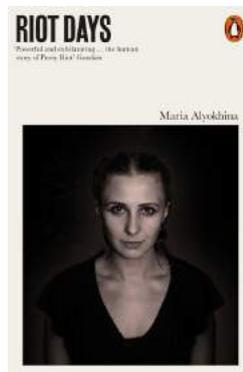
morial plaques “The last address”, placed on the houses where people were taken from during Stalin's purges, have been considered a means of illegal advertising.

The Pussy Riot rebellion might be the first time we heard the voice of the “unflogged generation” who grew up during the perestroika period.

But the screws are being tightened and flogging is back and since 2012, when the girls in colourful balaclavas jumped into fame with the anthem “Holy Virgin! Drive Putin away!”, a lot of blood has been spilt...

The girls in balaclavas could not know at that time... Or maybe they knew, and it was us, who refused to know at that time where the regime was heading.

*Tatyana Jakovskaya is director of Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre (<http://www.sharmanka.com>).*



*Riot Days* by Maria Alyokhina  
Published by Penguin, London, 2018. Paperback £8.99, 208 pages. ISBN 9780141986616. Also published as an ebook and in hardback (Allen Lane, 2017). The Russian language original was published in 2017 and a copy was available for sale after the concert.



Pussy Riot's *Riot Days* concert at Summerhall, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, August 2018.

Photographed by Jacinta Oaten.

# Revisiting a Nenets Family

Bryan Alexander

It was a picturesque winter scene. At the edge of a forest in the north of Siberia, frost covered branches sparkled in the morning sunshine, while smoke from two reindeer skin tents rose into a clear blue sky. I had just arrived at Sergey Serotetto's winter camp. He and his family are Nenets reindeer herders from the Yamal region of Northwest Siberia. I had first travelled with them in 1993. Now, almost a quarter of a century later, I had returned, to see how their lives had changed.

Back in 1993, Sergey had been the head of a group of nine reindeer herding families who worked for the local State Farm. Together, they managed a herd of 4,500 reindeer. At that time, ninety per cent of the reindeer belonged to the local State Farm, with the remaining ten per cent were privately owned. The herders spent each winter in the forests south of the River Ob, and then in the Spring, they would begin their migration to their summer pastures in north of the Yamal Peninsula, a journey of around 1000 km. They would spend the summer there, and then at the end of August, they would begin their long journey south again.

Today, Sergey and his family no longer work for the state farm. They look after their own private herd of about 2000 reindeer and migrate half the distance. "For us it's better than in 1993," Sergey explained, "there is less stress with a smaller herd." Sergey is in his early sixties, so much of the hard work involved in reindeer herding is done by his son, Leova. On my first visit Leova had been in his late teens. Now in his early forties, he is married with four children. He, his wife Raisa and their three youngest children, live with his parents in their tent.

At first glance, it didn't appear that much had changed. All the tents at the camp were reindeer skin and everyone was dressed in traditional Nenets skin clothing. However, the soft hum of a portable generator and two snowmobiles parked nearby, indicated that there had been some changes in reindeer herding.

In 1993 we only had oil hurricane lamps and candles for light, while nowadays most reindeer herding camps have portable generators. These provide light and also power for TVs and computers. The herders and their families can relax and watch a movie in the evening after work and the children can watch cartoons before bedtime.

On my first trip everyone at our camp travelled by reindeer sled. There were no snowmobiles. Nowadays, almost every reindeer herder has their own snowmobile, enabling them to travel faster and transport heavier loads.

In late August 1993, I was staying with Sergey Serotetto and his family at their summer pastures, when the school year was about to begin. One afternoon, a helicopter arrived to collect the children over the age of seven and take them to the boarding school at the village of Yar-sale. The children wouldn't see their parents again for several



months and there were sad faces and tears. Taking the children away from their families for such a long time struck me as harsh, particularly for the youngest kids, who were going to school for the first time.

During a recent visit to the Yamal, I decided to try and find some of the children that I had photographed in 1993. I wanted to hear how they had managed at boarding school and see whether their education had benefitted them. Most are now in their thirties and seem to have done well at school and in their careers. Several had followed a traditional path and returned to the tundra and become reindeer herders, others had chosen modern professions. Sasha's Serotetto's eldest daughter, Nadia, is a doctor, while his youngest, Christina, is a lawyer. Sergey's children have also done well. His daughter Olesya is a nurse, and her younger sister Neseynya has a university degree in cultural management and now works as the director of an ethnic park. Despite having modern careers they haven't lost contact with their culture. They all still own reindeer and often spend their vacations with their parents on the tundra.

The development of oil and gas in the Yamal has brought mobile phone coverage to many areas. Nenets reindeer herders have come to depend on mobile phones and will often select a location for their camp where there is the strongest signal.

Back in 1993, the development of the region's vast gas reserves was just beginning. I thought it likely that within a decade reindeer herding in the Yamal would die out, but that hasn't happened. Although some herders have lost a considerable amount of their traditional reindeer pastures, surprisingly there are now more reindeer in the Yamal than there were in 1993. Today, there are around 700,000 reindeer looked after by 3,000 families. Whether reindeer herding and the gas industry can co-exist in the long term remains to be seen.

*Bryan Alexander is a photographer and writer . He has spent many years in the Arctic and, with his wife, runs Arcticphoto.com. Bryan contributed information on the Arctic to our children's website [www.findoutaboutrussia.co.uk/northern-peoples.html](http://www.findoutaboutrussia.co.uk/northern-peoples.html).*



Albina Rocheva (2000)



Albina Rocheva - TV Presenter (2017)



Christina Serotetto (1993)



Christina Serotetto - Lawyer (2017)



Sovietskaya Street, Yar-Sale, Yamal. (1993)



Sovietskaya Street, Yar-Sale, Yamal. (2017)

# A Cold War visit to Borodino Battlefield

Dairmid Gunn

In her most interesting and informative article on the museum of Kulikovo Field in the summer number (No 39) of *The Forum* Sheila Sim was full of praise for the modern complex that offered so much to the visitor to that famous battlefield. Her mention of important battles fought on Russian soil brought back to me a vivid memory of a visit I had made to the battlefield of Borodino in 1965, at a time when, generally speaking, visitor reception centres for battlefields throughout Europe had not reached the level of sophistication offered by those of today.

In the summer of 1965 I had taken up my post as a naval attaché at the British embassy in Moscow. At that time the contacts between military attachés and the department of external affairs in the Soviet Ministry of Defence (SMOD) were confined to requests on the part of the Western diplomats to travel beyond the confines of Moscow and discussions, both formal and informal, on subjects of common interest. This state of affairs made an invitation from SMOD to all attachés and their wives to visit the Battlefield of Borodino a departure from the normal. Buses were provided by SMOD for the three hour drive from Moscow in the direction of Smolensk. This unexpected excursion was regarded in Western diplomatic circles as a 'Sunday school treat'; advice was given on several counts including what footwear to take for walking over a battlefield and what to bring in the nature of snacks in what promised to be a long and exacting day.

The date chosen for the excursion was 7<sup>th</sup> September, the anniversary of Russia's great battle against Napoleon's 'Grande Armée' in 1812. The weather was tolerably kind although a strong breeze from the north had a distinct chill within it. On disembarking at the northern side of the battlefield we were met by representatives of SMOD and the local museum collective. In a speech of welcome to the area a formidable lady from the collective gave a spirited address, in which we were told that any military incursion from the West would always be doomed to failure. With that message ringing in our ears we were handed over to members of the collective to escort us over parts of the battlefield in manageable groups. The absence of natural vantage points was an impediment to the understanding of the battle. When looking at a vast expanse of coarse grassland and at isolated copses of tall birch trees, we found it difficult to imagine that this had been the place where over 250,000 French and Russian soldiers had fought and 70,000 perished. For me the flatness of the landscape brought back a recollection of the passage of a warship in which I was serving through the Strait of Tsushima between South Korea and Japan, where a fierce naval battle had taken place during the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. There was obviously nothing to see except a vast expanse of sea, and I had had to imagine that I was passing over an extensive naval graveyard below the water. But back to Borodino. Those of my colleagues at Borodino who could make the most sense of what they were seeing were the ones who



Battle of Moscow, 7th September 1812, 1822  
by Louis-François Lejeune

had visited the panorama display of the battle in Moscow prior to the excursion. This 360 degree display of scenes of the battle painted by a Franz Roubaud, a Russian of French origin, had given them a most dramatic visual presentation of the battle. Those of us who had not seen this display had to await a visit to a very modest museum near the battlefield to view a model of the battlefield in terms of the topography of the area and the disposition of the troops on both sides.

At the museum I was fortunate enough to meet a local historian who had volunteered his services for our visit. In our friendly discussion this retired schoolteacher put forward the view that the Battle on the Ice in 1242 was the first of three battles in defence of the homeland although the victorious Alexander Nevsky was fighting for Novgorod long before the expansion of Muscovy and the emergence of the Russian state. It was a small affair but it had immense symbolical significance as it represented a victory of a Slav army over an invading force from the West. In this context he mentioned Eisenstein's famous film *Alexander Nevsky* (1931). The theme of defence of the homeland against invaders from the West was relevant to the battles of Borodino in 1812 in the Napoleonic War and that of Prokhorovka in 1943 in the Second World War. Both these wars had earned for themselves the epithet of 'Patriotic' with the latter one earning the additional epithet of 'Great'. The adjective for patriotic for both wars had been derived from the Russian noun for fatherland, *otechestvo*. My Russian interlocutor conceded that the Battle of Borodino had been a tactical victory for Napoleon but asserted most strongly that it had been the beginning of a strategic defeat for the great Frenchman. Kutuzov may have had to accept the resultant loss of Moscow to the French but he had kept his army intact to threaten and harry the French in their inevitable retreat from Russia in the winter of 1812. That war had been instrumental in fostering a feeling of nationalism within Russia and encouraging a period of cultural creativi-

ty later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the written work of Lermontov and Tolstoy and the music of Tchaikovsky.

My discussion with my Russian schoolteacher had made me unaware of an animated discussion that had been taking place round the model and sand table. This had been provoked by the head of the French military mission to Moscow, a major general, who had queried the accuracy of some of the assertions made by our hosts. One of the causes of this lively but friendly debate was a questioning of the ability of the Russian commander-in-chief, Mikhail Kutuzov. His detractors criticised his decision-making ability whilst according some praise to his subordinate commanders Prince Michael Barclay de Tolly and Prince Pyotr Bagration for their instinctive and effective responses to the aggressive tactics of the French army. Barclay de Tolly, an officer of Scottish extraction, was to become commander-in-chief of the Russian army on Kutuzov's death in 1813 and led the victorious Russian army into Paris in 1814. What was not in dispute was the decision made by Kutuzov to effect an orderly withdrawal from the battle, in what eventually turned out to be an inspired move.

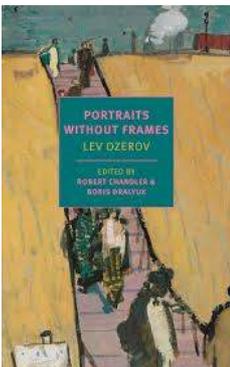
After three to four hours of walking and visiting the museum and being bombarded by facts and figures we were glad

to find ourselves being entertained by representatives of SMOD to an ample lunch in a restaurant in the neighbouring town of Mozhaysk. Zakuski, borshch and beef stroganov washed down by wine and vodka rounded off what had been an unusual but interesting day. The presence of the French general had done much to enliven the proceedings and create a more comprehensive understanding of the battle and its implications. Those of us who were seated near him in the bus on the return journey to Moscow were to hear him bemoan Napoleon's failure to use his fresh and unused, crack Imperial Guard to pursue the withdrawing Russian army to effect a defeat on it and achieve a treaty in France's favour. At that moment it had seemed appropriate to keep the atmosphere of the day alive by singing the Marseillaise. Yet in retrospect, it would have been more fitting and diplomatic if we had sung some of the verses of an old Scottish song based on the inconclusive battle between the Hanoverians and Jacobites at Sheriffmuir in 1715, of which the first two lines go like this:

*Some say that we wan and some say that they wan  
And some say that nane wan at a'man.*

*Dairmid Gunn is Vice-President of the SRF*

## Books



### **Portraits without Frames by Lev Ozerov.**

Reviewed by Peter France.

This is a most attractive book and an inspiring read. It's a collection of 50 sketches in free verse, each devoted to a man or woman personally known to the author. With the exception of one heroic soldier, the Ukrainian partisan leader Sydir Kovpak, they are all artistic

creators, poets, prose writers, film-makers, artists, musicians, dancers, actors... Almost all were born before the Revolution and lived in the Soviet Union through the Stalinist years; some found a way of living with the new order, others defied it. Most suffered under the regime (Shalamov, Pasternak and others), and not a few, such as Babel and Tabidze, came to a tragic end. Many of the subjects, like the author, were Jewish and there is a particularly moving set of portraits of the four Yiddish poets, Leyb Kvitko, Dovid Hofsteyn, Perets Markish and Shmuel Harkin, all of whom except Harkin were executed on August 12, 1952, the Night of the Murdered Poets.

A good many of these poems are laments then, and satirical or indignant depictions of an oppressive order. Thus the sketch of the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold ends starkly:

“Meyerhold has lost  
his theatre, lost  
his house,

lost  
his life. The world  
has lost  
Meyerhold.  
How simple,  
how deadly simple”.

Tragic in a different way is the writer Alexander Fadeyev, who as head of the Writers' Union was deeply compromised with the regime and finally committed suicide; here Ozerov's poem, rather than denouncing an easy target, is marked by 'pity and compassion,/ pain and respect'.

All of these poems were written towards the end of Ozerov's life, in the 1990s, in many cases several decades after the death of their protagonist, and they are reckoned to be his crowning achievement, after a life spent in literature as poet, journalist, translator and editor, giving much-needed support to other writers. The poems, written in a supple and fast-moving free verse, combining wit and emotion, are remarkable for the immediacy with which these often celebrated figures from the past spring into new life. A few pieces attempt a sort of overview of their subject's life and work, but mostly they are records of one or two meetings. The one on Zoshchenko, for instance, described as 'no portrait. Only/ a first sketch', begins with a scene where the author reads some Zoshchenko to fellow-patients in hospital ('Everyone was transformed./

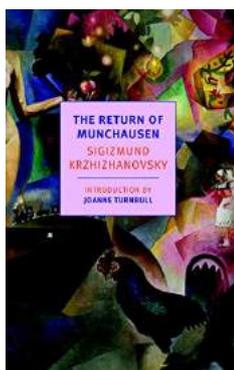
Everyone was reborn.’), then moves to Ozerov’s ‘lucky day’, when he actually meets the story-teller and attends a reading of stories. These have the audience convulsed with laughter, while the poor author ‘with a shrug of despair’ wonders why they are all laughing – ‘I’ve told them terrible things’.

This vividness, the shaping of the poems (with occasional rhymes), the shifts in tone, the humour and the emotion, all this is successfully conveyed by the four translators. True as it is to the original, the translated volume differs in two important respects. In the Russian text, the portraits follow one another in no particular order and there is no annotation (Ozerov is writing for those who share his culture), whereas in the English translation the characters are arranged into groups and each one is given a brief bio-

graphical introduction. This is a real plus for English-speaking readers. On the other hand, it is a pity that the English publishers did not (could not?) reproduce the author’s rapid ink drawings which add extra spice to the original text. But even without illustrations, these ‘portraits without frames’ are full of life.

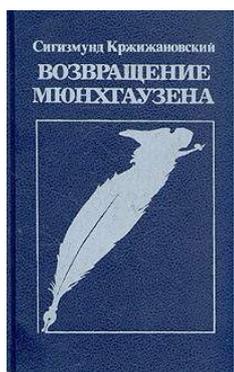
*Peter France is an Edinburgh-based writer, translator and academic. His “Writings from the Golden Age of Russian Poetry” was reviewed in the Winter 2018 issue of this magazine.*

Lev Ozerov. *Portraits without Frames*, edited by Robert Chandler and Boris Dralyuk, translated by Maria Bloshteyn, Robert Chandler, Boris Dralyuk and Irina Mashinski. London: Granta, 2019.



## ***The Return of Munchausen* by Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky.** Reviewed by Natasha Perova

Recently I needed to reread Krzhizhanovsky’s *The Return of Munchausen* in Russian and was overwhelmed anew with the wealth of his original ideas and images, his fertile imagination, exquisite metaphorical language, and his extraordinary power of observation. Luckily this book exists in a fine English translation which does justice to this outstanding author.



With his Swiftean talent, brilliant mind, and phenomenal erudition Krzhizhanovsky had no chance of winning official recognition in the new Russia ruled by “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. And yet even in his lifetime his genius was recognised in the literary circles as an equal to Hoffmann and Chamisso, Swift and Poe, Gogol

and Dostoyevsky. I could add that despite his apparent unlikeness to Andrei Platonov (both described the same post-revolutionary situation in Russia) what they have in common is a virtuoso treatment of the language, which becomes a protagonist in its own right, and an unusual view of the world around them. According to some more advanced critics of the day “any world literature would be proud to have such an author.”

Krzhizhanovsky felt like an alien in his own country and in his own age. This is what we find in his notebooks: “I live in a distant future and my own future appears to me as my past, long lived out and outdated.” He was a Gulliver captured by Lilliputians who tied him up hand and foot before he had a chance to come to.

*The Return of Munchausen* is Krzhizhanovsky’s longest narrative, almost a novel, his magnum opus you might say, surely one of them. It is the sharpest among his works and the most satirical towards the Soviet rule. This philosophical-phantasmagorical satire was written in the year of the tenth anniversary of the revolution when it became abundantly

clear which direction the Soviets had taken.

The choice of protagonist enables the author to show the whole of Russia in the throes of violent change, to take a bird’s eye view on its post-revolutionary transformation, and reflect on many things in this connection providing relevant historical references. Baron Munchhausen has always been a household name in Russia, he is almost perceived as part of Russian folklore (films and cartoons have been made about him, and there are even monuments to him in Moscow, Kaliningrad, and several other Russian cities.)

The historical Baron Munchhausen really did travel around Russia, as a soldier in the Russian army against the Turks, and after retirement wrote a number of extraordinary tales about his adventures. His stories were so incredible (but probably verging on reality, that is, the Russian reality of the time, more than people thought) that eventually his name became a synonym of a tall-tale teller. No wonder he had great appeal for Krzhizhanovsky whose favourite means of expressions were hyperbole, irony and paradox. For Krzhizhanovsky a fantastic plot was certainly not an end in itself, he needed fantasy for a perfectly realistic analysis of the surrounding reality. He made the baron travel around Soviet Russia of the 1920s, the time of radical reshuffle and severe class clashes which made redundant high culture, and Krzhizhanovsky himself.

His Baron Munchausen is a philosopher and dreamer who “fights facts with fantasies”. His business card says: “Baron HIERONYMUS von MUNCHAUSEN, Supplier of Phantasms and Sensations. In and Out of This World. *Since 1720.*” However, by resorting to the fantastic Munchausen conveys the spirit of Bolshevik Russia better than any documentary narrative.

*The Return of Munchausen* falls into three parts: before Munchausen’s trip to Soviet Russia, his travels around Russia, and return to London where he sums up his experiences. Thus the novel satirically presents not only the Russia of the 1920s but also the West in the wake of the First World War. Here are some glimpses of Russia as she appears to the baron:

"The Russian saying about letting the cat out of the bag needs correcting: the cats were all eaten long ago, and when they tried not to let the hunger problem out of the bag, it fought back, furiously rumbling from all stomachs and threatening, if not given bread, to swallow the revolution."

"The soup kitchens set up by the Soviet government could not combat the scourge of hunger: they gave out one poppy seed per person so that no one could say that no food had passed their lips; this prevented grumbling, but left stomachs empty. I suggested they enlist the help of rat charmers: they mobilized every last one. Every soup kitchen received a piper who lured the rats hiding in cellars and under floorboards: led by the melody the victuals marched themselves single-file — nose to tail, tail to nose — straight into the kitchen kettles and vats."

"As everyone knows, in that ruined country the position of the hard-working highwayman is extremely troublesome and not to be envied. By day he must hide in the forest for fear of meeting Red Army rifles, and only on moonless nights may he engage in transferring valuables, so to speak, in pocketing stray coins as an entomologist nets butterflies. By the same token, all moonlit nights are without profit."

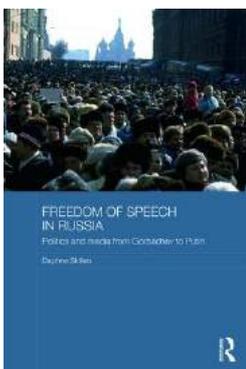
From the letters Munchausen receives from Russia he comes to realize that no matter how absurd and fantastic his inventions are about the land, they invariably come true or have even actually taken place somewhere in Russia.

As for pragmatic Europe, it has no place for his fantasies. He feels redundant everywhere, he is excluded from any time and any society. It is obvious that Krzhizhanovsky, a writer without readers, partly associates himself with the Baron; they both share the fate of all creators who fail to win recognition in the crass world of pragmatic values.

See more reviews of the book here: <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/soviet/krzhiz3.htm>

Natasha Perova's recent anthology "Slav Sisters" is reviewed on pp13-14 of this issue of the magazine.

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky. Trans. Joanne Turnbull. *The Return of Munchausen* New York, NYRB Classics 2016. Paperback and e-book. London: Profile Books, 2018. Available in hardback, paperback and e-book.



## Freedom of Speech in Russia: Politics and media from Gorbachev to Putin by Daphne Skillen. Reviewed by Martin Dewhurst.

On page 507 of her splendid biography of George Orwell, Mariya Karp suggests that he might well have been the very first person to use the term 'cold war', just a few months after the end of the Second World 'hot' War.

He was thinking mainly of a new type of warfare *between* states, but, as we know from his 1984, this would necessarily mean that in some countries there would inevitably be a Cold War against 'dissidents' as an essential part of those states' *internal* policies. By the time the novel appeared, China was about to begin its great communist experiment. The United States, as the most powerful democratic country, was outnumbered two to one, and Orwell was dying.

Daphne Skillen's impressive monograph is concerned with the Cold War within Soviet and neo-Soviet Russia during the last thirty years. Partly as a result of *glasnost*, the USSR collapsed after the coup and counter-coup in 1991, but the first two Presidents of post-communist Russia were 'former' communists and, like nearly all their compatriots, had no tried and tested programme for a transition from a huge one-Party state to a more democratic, liberal, tolerant society. Moreover, how many citizens of the Russian Federation *wanted* such a society? Perhaps they had other priorities? Was (and is) populism a serious threat to a liberal democracy? (The latter word is sometimes translated as *narodovlastiye*, the power of the people.) Skillen states that under Putin, Russia has moved from a 'managed democracy' through a 'sovereign democracy' to a 'majority democracy' (p. 262). But is the majority, in any country, always

right? The main criticism of a majority democracy is its potential for mob rule, expressed long ago by de Tocqueville as the "tyranny of the majority" (p. 320). This is not just a Russian problem, of course.

Skillen's book is divided into two parts. Part 1 discusses the theoretical and philosophical problems and limits of freedom and the links between rights and obligations. Milton's and J.S. Mill's thoughts on liberty are briefly but usefully explained, as are the problems caused by the fact that Russian has two concepts of truth (*pravda* and *istina*) and two concepts of lies (*lozh'* and *vran'yo*). Among the many valid points the author makes about most Russian journalists are that 'much of the blame for the demise of free speech must be laid at the feet of media professionals' (p. 56) and that the 'majority of journalists appear to share with the public the same political apathy, conformism and subservience to the ruling class' (p. 73). She seems to me to hit the nail on the head when she contends that the 'duality that runs through the heart of Russian culture, its European and Asian heritage, keeps it divided within itself. On the one hand, the highest European learning and culture, which looks to reason and the rule of law; on the other, the Tatar-Mongol yoke and the rule of an implacable and arbitrary autocracy' (p. 76). Her conclusion is that, as a result, 'there has been no healing process and no catharsis' (p. 102).

Part 2 presents a chronological account of what has happened to the Russian media (and thus to Russian society) under Gorbachev, during the coup and counter-coup, and under Yel'tsin and Putin, ending with the domination of 'patrimonial media' and the return of a curious sort of Russian feudalism (which was always different from Western

feudalism). This survey will be of great value both to older readers who have forgotten some or much of what has been happening since 1985 in Russia, as well as to younger readers who have become interested in Russia more recently. Tracing this history, Skillen makes many pertinent observations. 'Trust tends to focus on personalities rather than institutions in Russia' (p. 218). She notes the clash between 'liberal social values and capitalist economic ones' (p. 243), and sometimes points out the obvious, but often overlooked: 'The success of the Putin Project was predicated on controlling the media' (p. 262).

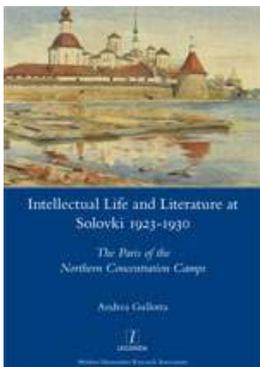
The author comes to a sad conclusion. 'Journalists and trolls who are complicit in creating the "reality" of lies have helped to restore the Soviet mentality of parallel worlds, where people live between official lies and private lives' (p. 336). 'The combination of imperial aggression

and historical amnesia makes the Putin regime delusional and dangerous, as it normalises a defensive system of lies that breeds its own logic' (p. 337). She ends with a question, which applies to the West as well as to Russia. 'Have lessons been learned about how to advance free speech when the next occasion arises, or will everything be done on the hoof, without reflection, as it was done this time?' (p. 346).

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

*Freedom of Speech in Russia: Politics and media from Gorbachev to Putin* by Daphne Skillen.

Published by Routledge, London and New York, 2017. Paperback £23.19. viii + 363 pages. ISBN 9781138743267.



### **Intellectual Life and Literature at Solovki** by Andrea Gullotta. Reviewed by Mark Vincent

It is an often-repeated sobriquet that, even in humanity's most depraved depths, it is possible for beauty and culture to thrive as prisoners look to rid themselves, or even draw strength from, the confines of their external torment.

While individual examples of this can be found from prisoners across a panoply of worldwide detention institutions, Andrea Gullotta's fascinatingly detailed exploration of the cultural force which came together at one of the most infamous locations of global penalty provides a wealth of evidence to bring this claim to life and with it open some intriguing questions about life and repression in the early Soviet state. The sprawling Solovki prison camp, initiated in 1923 by the Bolsheviks who repurposed the islands from their traditional use as a place of spiritual pilgrimage, was intended to become a showpiece penal institution which would demonstrate to the world the redemptive power of forced labour.

Not only did the camp's expansion on to the Karelian mainland and link to the enormous White Sea-Baltic Canal Project become a blueprint for the development of the Gulag but they have subsequently been immortalised by the metaphorical title of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's famous *Arkhipelag Gulaga*. As Gullotta skilfully elucidates, the contributions of Solovki inmates would ensure that Solovki would develop a reputation as the 'capital of the Russian *intelligentsia*' and the final bastion for a curious alchemy of pre-revolutionary values infused with the chaos of the years following 1917. Conflicting political views and the nuanced societal tremors were played out on the stage of the Solovki Theatre and in the pages of its newspaper publications, both cultural-educational activities that were initiated with the intention of ideologically-retraining prisoners into becoming productive Soviet citizens.

Beginning with twin complementary chapters on the camp

and its literature, Gullotta pays respectful homage to the ground-breaking work of Russian scholars to bring together an incredibly detailed analysis of the camp's historiography that goes far beyond any previously published English-language work. Combining this with his own meticulous research the author challenges much of the popular mythology about the camp. Most prominently, this includes the potential reliability of memoirists such as S. A. Mal'sagov (p.172) and the various controversies surrounding the visit of famous writer Maxim Gorky (p.140). Some of the camp's darkest moments including the execution of prisoners are covered in carefully-judged detail (p.64) alongside the torture which would often take place in the isolation block found atop the small mountain 'Sekirna' (p.70).

Given the privileged position of 'political prisoners', which was more akin to those in Late Imperial exile and hard labour, Gullotta's vignettes of the Solovki prisoners (continued in his incredibly helpful appendices) help bring this 'cultural force' to life. Positioning them alongside famous Gulag memoirists for the depths of their contributions, Gullotta highlights the experience of important figures such as Dmitri Likhachev and Boris Glubokovsky, a former actor who became an integral part of both the camp theatre and its printed publications. The writings of Sofia Okerman (p.213) are also discussed alongside a candid exploration of the experience of female prisoners, many of whom found themselves forced into prostitution.

As Gullotta shows, the birth of the camp theatre led to an 'uncontrollable dynamic' within prisoner society which was exemplified through its newspaper organs. Although overarching censorship still existed, Gullotta highlights how the security services allowed more freedom 'than in Moscow or Leningrad' (p.282) which led to prisoners discussing taboo topics using Aesopian language and *locus fidelitas*. Alongside this latitude from the security services and cultural-educational department there was a remarkable awareness to external events demonstrated in the press,

showing a strong connection to the Soviet 'mainland' that caused the authorities considerable concern (p.133).

It is in the final chapters of the book, however, where Gullotta's background as literature scholar really comes to the fore, highlighting tropes and influences amongst the prisoners stretching back to Pushkin. The author situates the powerful images evoked by Kemetskii of Vikings and muses (p.226-7) alongside leitmotifs of Sergei Esenin and Vladimir Mayakovksy (p.244) whilst Iuri Kazarnovsky, the only writer appreciated by the camp administration, also delivers a razor-sharp parody of Aleksandr Blok (p.243). Gullotta is also at pains to not only demonstrate the common links and influence of Futurism but also some of the more irreverent artistic movements of the NEP era such as the much maligned Biocosmists (p.252).

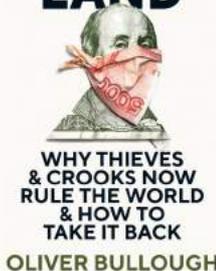
Gullotta's conclusion discusses the importance of understanding the common semiotic system among inmates (p.270), linking his work to the writing of Jochen Hellbeck and Irina Paperno (p.275). Discussing the camp as a 'literary enclave' the author's morose assessment that an

entire generation was 'doomed to die in the camps' (p.280) is particularly poignant. The paradox, he writes, lies in the peculiarity of this political and cultural ecosystem which led to the construction of a 'bourgeois intellectual citadel' the likes of which would never be repeated. Suggesting a multiplicity of ways in which his study could be extended, the strong methodological approach and volume of evidence provided in this wonderful book should ensure Gullotta's hope in the final requiem that his book should lead to further research will surely and quite rightly be realised.

Mark Vincent's "*Criminal Subculture in the Gulag: Prisoner Society in the Stalinist Labour Camps*" is due to be published by I. B. Tauris in summer 2019. More of Mark's writing can be found at [cultoftheburka.wordpress.com](http://cultoftheburka.wordpress.com)

Andrea Gullotta. *Intellectual Life and Literature at Solovki 1923-1930. The Paris of the Northern Concentration Camps*. MHRA / Legenda, Cambridge 2018. 978-1-781886-91-5 hardback £75. Paperback due for publication Sept 2019. Also available as e-book.

## MONEY LAND



### **Moneyland: Why Thieves and Crooks Now Rule the World And How To Take It Back by Oliver Bullough. Reviewed by Lindsay Mackenzie**

“The second company owned the other two, while itself being owned by the first company.

The third company was secretary of the other two, while its own secretary was the first company. The second company was director of the other two, while its own director was the

first company.”

There are parts of the head-spinningly brilliant Moneyland that demand several rereads and a strong drink. 'They did *what?*' you will find yourself asking. Sometimes because of the sheer complexity with which cash now sloshes around the global economy. Sometimes just because of the sheer lack of accountability amongst those responsible.

Written by investigative journalist Oliver Bullough, this is a smart, fast paced but devastating account of how the super-rich flout rules and responsibilities to move wealth around the world unchecked and unchallenged; often stripping one country of resources while taking advantage of a growing professional class in another to help them do it.

Moneyland, according to Bullough, is the place that makes all this possible. There are no borders, flags or anthems, or any other traditional trappings of statehood. Instead it is a virtual pick-and-mix land of privileges. Residents can take advantage of a passport from one jurisdiction and libel laws from another; a shell company from A, a trust and foundation from B and C. To gain access all you need is money and influence. Nomadic kleptocrats rarely leave.

The book starts in revolutionary Ukraine, in former President Viktor Yanukovich's garage, of all places. A Picasso vase sits along side gold-painted candlesticks while public

services in the rest of the country crumble (including cancer treatment facilities, as we find out in a later chapter). Bullough asks a Ukrainian accompanying him on a tour of an empty palace why they let their leaders away with it. The answer? They didn't know. "This land we're standing on, it's not even in Ukraine, it's in England. Look it up."

Which is exactly what Bullough does. We are then whisked away to the Caribbean, Africa, across Europe and to the United States as he sketches out the characters and conversations underpinning Moneyland. The book shines in these moments, whether it is a brutally honest discussion with a 'reputation consultant' in a London pub ("try writing about one of my clients, seriously..."), or an icy exchange with a corporate official in Nevis. The encounters are frighteningly entertaining.

To understand Moneyland's roots, one succinct chapter traces them back to the collapse of the post-WW2 system of financial regulation, Bretton Woods. Bullough tells us that while many of the drivers behind the book aren't necessarily new (money has always flowed through the channel of least resistance), the hyper-capitalism of the last 40 years has pushed them to the extremes, revealing a dark side to globalisation. Out go the fixed exchange rates and financial controls curbing worldwide speculation, in come the shell companies, the tax havens and the legal black-holes. Moneyland has "set wealth free".

This freedom allows for what Bullough calls the trilogy of steal-hide-spend. Or in other words, the ability to take from one country, stash in another, and consume in a third. The cycle is a defining feature of Moneyland as cash moves across borders that laws cannot. Far from all of it is fraudulent or nefarious. And yet, the same things that

“attract the naughty money – privacy, security, deniability – also attract the evil money”. Moneyland does not discriminate.

It would be easy to confine blame for all this to Russian oligarchs, wealthy Gulf businessmen and corrupt African politicians. But none of Moneyland would be possible without Western enablers and Bullough portions out blame with gusto. Indeed, a growing network of lawyers, accountants, PR firms and estate agents now grease Moneyland's wheels, and are particularly adept at turning the 'steal' and 'hide' into 'spend'. Whether selling property in London or passports in Malta, it is a reminder that when our governments talk of tackling global corruption and money laundering, the fight very much starts at home.

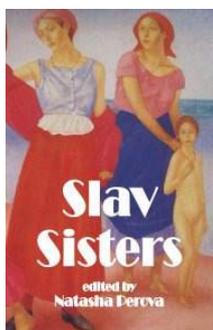
So what of the solutions to Moneyland's ills? After all, the book's subtitle is *Why Thieves and Crooks Now Rule the World and How to Take it Back*. There is only a single, final chap-

ter dedicated to this question. The answer – essentially a plea for better international regulation and cooperation – feels somewhat lacking when compared to the focused and detailed research that precedes it. Bullough remains pessimistic of such action, too, but appears to be guided more by realistic expectations than a lack of imagination. “If there is one thing we know about Moneyland, it is that it keeps mutating, it keeps expanding, and the wealthy keep finding new tunnels down into it”.

Moneyland, then, is here to stay. This book is essential to understanding it.

*Lindsay Mackenzie is a writer and editor based in Glasgow*

Oliver Bullough. *Moneyland: Why Thieves And Crooks Now Rule The World And How To Take It Back*. London: Profile Books, 2018. Available in hardback, paperback and e-book.



### ***Slav Sisters (The Dedalus Book of Russian Women's Literature)* edited by Natasha Perova. Reviewed by Margaret Tejerizo**

**S**lav Sisters is a new collection of English translations of key Russian women writers starting with Nadezhda Teffi (1872-1952) and ending with Margarita Khemlin (1960-2015); its aim, as noted on the back cover, is to “illustrate the evolution of Russian women’s writing over the 20<sup>th</sup> century”. With its striking and brightly coloured cover (the cover painting is *Women on the Volga* by Petrov Vodkin, 1915) this excellent compact volume will be a “must” for those with an interest in both the history and development of women’s writing in Russia and also for those who enjoy literature which inspires, challenges and has enormous “impact”. Natasha Perova has succeeded in providing not only a very useful short biography for each Russian writer represented in this anthology – there are eleven in total working chronologically from Nadezhda Teffi through to Margarita Khemlin - but she also gives key information about the ten first-class translators whose work appears in the text itself. Additionally, Perova provides a brief, but most insightful introduction where she notes that while in “...the present anthology the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is represented by authors of unquestionable genius: Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetayeva... (i)f not for the limits of the size of this book and the number of names I would also have included Zinaida Gippius, Nina Berberova, and Lydia Zinovyeva-Annibal”. (“Introduction”, p.21) The writers represented in this collection, in addition to those mentioned above, are Lydia Ginzburg, Galina Scherbakova, Ludmila Petrushevskaya, Olga Slavnikova, Ludmila Ulitskaya, Irina Muravyova and Svetlana Alexievich. On p.22 of the “Introduction” Perova refers to other writers, such as Nina Sadur and Tatiana Tolstaya who are not included in her volume “only for reasons of space or copyright” and stresses too the fact that “(t)he

turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gave us some young talents...who deserve attention and translation into other languages.” After the preliminary informative sections, the reader then embarks on a “journey”, starting with *Kishmish* and *Solovki* by Nadezhda Teffi, here splendidly translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, and finishing up with *The Jewess's Farewell* by Margarita Khemlin, the excellent translation being the work of Arch Tait. Along the way, so to speak, the reader will encounter translations of Tsvetaeva's *My Jobs* and Akhmatova's *Autobiographical Sketches*, the former being the work of Jamey Gambrell and the latter translated by Andrew Bromfield. (It should be pointed out at this stage that the quality of the translations throughout this volume is excellent and the reader can cross with ease into the creative world of each writer. Notes are provided, where necessary, at the bottom of pages to clarify or to explain any matters that might help the reader to gain a fuller understanding of the text.)

One of the longest pieces in the collection is the enigmatic and thought-provoking *Delusion of the Will* by Lydia Ginzburg, the most successful translation being the work of Boris Dralyuk. Ilona Chavasse then brings readers two stories by Galina Scherbakova, a notoriously demanding writer for any translator! Chavasse's versions of the humorous and whimsical *The Lady with the Dog* and *The Death of an Official* capture very well both the irony and the parody of the original texts and will serve as excellent introductions to this highly talented writer. Petrushevskaya is ably represented by Joanne Turnbull's translation of *What a Girl* and Marian Schwartz offers her excellent version of *The Stone Guest* by Olga Slavnikova. Arch Tait makes his first appearance in the collection with his clever and successful translation of Ulitskaya's marvellous story *The Gift Not Made by Human Hand* which is followed by John Dewey's version of *Philemon and Baucis* by Irina Muravyova. However, for this present reviewer, the highlight of the collection

is Joanne Turnbull's translation of Aleksievich's *Landscape of Loneliness: Three Voices*. It is as though lines from this story provide a kind of "common thread" running through this entire volume: "All of Russian culture, everything we see and hear around us, is built on the fact that our best school is the school of misfortune" (p 308) and "Russian women love to adopt unhappy souls" (p 309). As mentioned above, Arch Tait's version of *The Jewess's Farewell* ends the collection with its issues of war, race, gender and religion.

This work comes highly recommended. For readers who are already familiar with some Russian women writers there will surely be some new works and names contained in this collection. For readers who are "exploring this territory" for the first time this will be a fascinating and exhilarating venture from which they will doubtless want to return for more. It is certainly to be hoped that Perova may

produce a follow-up to this volume in which she will be able to include other writers. As she notes in her "Introduction" (p.22)

"Women's writing exists because there is a women's world which differs from the world of men whether people are aware of it or not...Female readers in the West will be surprised to find many more common issues than they expect – the setting is different but the issues and problems are essentially the same"

Margaret Tejerizo, *Affiliate Status, Russian, University of Glasgow*

*Slav Sisters. The Dedalus Book of Russian Women's Literature*, edited by Natasha Perova. Sawtry: Dedalus Books, 2018. Available in hardback, paperback and e-book.



### **СТУПЕНЬКА-1 Russian as a foreign language for kids. Pupil's book and Activity book by Natalia Gulamova. Reviewed by Marta Tomaszewski**

*Stupenka* is intended to be a four-part course of Russian as a foreign language, aimed at children between the ages of 6 and 11. There is certainly a gap in the market for suitable teaching material for a younger age group and *Stupenka 1*, which was published in 2018 in Baku, consists of a pupil's book and activity book, both of which are highly colourful and bursting with lovely cartoon images and photos of smiling schoolchildren who are of the same age as the target audience.

I was hoping that this could be a course to be used in British primary schools for a language club, or to entice younger heritage learners to learn the native language of a parent or grandparent. Unfortunately, despite the beautiful presentation, I found the methodology of the course rather old-fashioned and very heavily grammar-based. My heart sank when I saw that the first chapter covered the alphabet and the second covered letters and sounds, as these seemed to me not only to be the same thing but also hardly a 'topic' in themselves. Sure enough, without any overriding focus for vocabulary or any communication target, students are presented with a random selection of words, such as 'ear' and 'anchor', are drilled in the difference between voiced and unvoiced consonants, but have nothing meaningful that they can communicate after 50 pages and therefore no clear reason for learning the language. The activity book does, however, contain a large range of well-designed and fun exercises for mastering the Russian alphabet, such as matching lower case and capital letters contained in attractive graphics and joining the dots in alphabetical order to reveal an image.

The following four chapters, covering introductions and greetings, birthdays, family and professions, are slightly

more promising. Although I question if any six-year-old needs to know grammatical terms such as 'possessive' or that the word for beetle in Russian is masculine, there are some sentences and dialogues here that students would enjoy learning and adapting to their own situation so that they could talk about themselves and their family. It is also heartening that the section on professions contains a wide range of careers and involves no gender stereotyping. The activity book provides useful supplementary material, such as a bank of greetings to be matched to a range of images and model sentences to be copied and expanded upon in handwritten Russian.

In addition to its six chapters, the pupil's book contains an introductory section on 'interesting Russian language facts', containing extracts of poetry for children with English translation and a short history of the Russian alphabet, a section on revision material, a 'grammar bank', and a selection of supplementary material, which consists mainly of short rhymes intended to be learnt off by heart. Although this material all seems far too challenging for the intended audience, it could prove very useful for children who already speak Russian at home or for introducing Russian to an older age group.

These books are therefore useful as resources to be dipped into by teachers of Russian for students of both primary and secondary school age and, if used judiciously as supplementary material, could prove very useful for motivating a range of students.

*Marta Tomaszewski is a teacher of Russian and educational consultant. She has edited and co-authored Russian textbooks for school pupils and adults.*

Natalia Gulamova. *СТУПЕНЬКА-1 Russian as a foreign language for kids. Pupil's book and Activity book*. Baku: www.alinino.az 2018. Paperback.

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**aims and activities**

The aim of the **Scotland-Russia Forum (SRF)** is to promote interest in Russia and its neighbours in order to improve understanding of those countries in Scotland. The SRF is an independent incorporated Scottish charity (reg. no. [SC038728](#)) founded in February 2003 and run by volunteers. We publish a biannual journal, the [Forum](#) and organise a variety of events.

Главной задачей Форума Шотландия-Россия (ФШР) является пробуждение в Шотландии интереса к России и соседствующим с ней государствам с целью улучшения взаимопонимания. ФШР – это шотландская благотворительная организация (рег. номер [SC038728](#)), основанная в феврале 2003 г., и управляемая волонтерами. Дважды в год мы выпускаем свой журнал, [The Forum](#). У нас регулярно проводятся различные мероприятия.

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

## How do we try to achieve these aims?

**We promote discussion of a wide variety of aspects of Russian culture (and other cultures) principally by means of talks and magazine articles.**

**We promote awareness of Russia- (and other) related events all over Scotland and beyond, whether organised by ourselves or not.**

**We encourage the study of Russian, and Russia, in schools and in society at large. We offer adult evening classes in Russian in Edinburgh.**

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

## What else can we do? And how can you help?

Please contact us with your ideas:

Email [info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org)

Tel. 0131 560 1486 (leave a message)

Write to: Scotland-Russia Forum, Summerhall, Edinburgh EH9 1PL