# Society for Co-operation in SCISS Russian and Soviet Studies

# **Digest**

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#### **Feature**

# A New Picture Book for a New Soviet Childhood

By Frances Saddington

The October Revolution signified irreversible change in Russian culture and children's picture books were as affected by this as any other art form. The Bolsheviks envisaged a scientific new society in which even human consciousness could be moulded. The 'new Soviet man' was to be a rational, productive member of collective society and the cohort of children born straight after the revolution provided ideal modelling material for this great social engineering project.

Literacy was seen as a key tool in shaping the new world view. In December 1919 Lenin launched a campaign against illiteracy but long before this children's literature was recognised as an important battleground in the fight to build socialism. In February 1918 an article by children's author Lev Kormchy appeared the Communist Party in newspaper Pravda arguing that books "crystallize in children's souls, creating subsoil that nourishes and gives root to future convictions and beliefs".1 Attacking pre-revolutionary children's books objects of bourgeois power, Kormchv concluded that "we must seize these weapons from enemy hands".



Samuil Marshak's The Circus (SCRSS Library)

However, the publishing industry was badly affected by the economic constraints of War Communism (1918–21), preventing the development of any substantial body of new literature for children.<sup>2</sup> In 1918, 474 new titles for children were published but by 1921 the figure had dropped to thirty-three.<sup>3</sup> It was only with the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 that children's publishing received the needed boost as independent business was given the

freedom to supplement the meagre output in this area of the state publishing house Gosizdat.

early 1920s pre-revolutionary In the publishers such as GF Mirimanov continued to produce traditional brightly coloured picture books, while newcomers such as (Rainbow) pioneered Raduga approaches to text and graphic design for the very young. By the mid-1920s the production of innovative picture books was flourishing in both state and private business. Works by recognised figures such Vladimir Mayakovsky and as Osip Mandelstam could be seen on book stalls alongside the less familiar names of Lidia Popova, Georgy Echeistov and others.



Samuil Marshak's Post (SCRSS Library)

During this period a distinctive new style of picture book emerged that was heavily influenced by the minimal shapes and clean avant-garde lines of design. The Constructivist group contributed to the effort with a series of books by Nikolai Smirnov, illustrated by sisters Galina and Ol'ga Chichagova. These titles included Otkuda posuda? (Where Does Crockery Come From?)<sup>4</sup> and Detiam o gazete (Newspapers Explained for Children)<sup>5</sup>. They illustrated these real world themes with the same

distinctive red and black linear style used in Constructivist graphic design for adults. Also making an impact were the books written by Samuil Marshak and illustrated by Vladimir Lebedev. They combined humorous modern poetry with a bright stencilled illustrative style derived from Lebedev's work on posters for ROSTA (the Russian Telegraph Agency) during the Civil War. The Marshak-Lebedev titles included Tsirk (The Circus)6, in which we are presented with each act in a dazzling show, and Morozhenoe Cream)<sup>7</sup>, in which a bourgeois fat man eats so much ice cream that he turns into a snowman amidst a strawberry flavoured blizzard.

These striking publications lead to a surge in simply illustrated picture books depicting all areas of modernity and socialist society. Children could read about machinery, steam engines, factories, May Day parades and life in Young Pioneer camps. Journeys using modern transport were a constantly recurring theme and this topic encapsulated perfectly in Marshak's Pochta (Post)<sup>8</sup>, illustrated by Mikhail Tsekhanovsky. In the story a letter follows its roaming recipient as he undertakes a journey around the world.

At the same time less radical authors and artists were finding their own path for the new children's book, inspired by cultural change but informed by the mannerisms of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. Leading the charge was Kornei Chukovsky, who began writing poetry for children before the revolution, most famously with Krokodil (Crocodile)9, in which a cigar-smoking beast rampages through Petrograd devouring policeman and pet dogs. During the mid-1920s Chukovsky produced a series of imaginative tales that proved immensely popular children. His readers with encountered an insect tea party in Mukha Tsokotukha (The Chatterbox Fly)10, a cannibal pirate in Barmalei<sup>11</sup> and perhaps most successfully of all, the fierce commander of the washstands in Moidodyr (Wash 'Em Clean)<sup>12</sup>. The eponymous character, an anthropomorphic washstand, chases a dirty boy who won't wash, until the child relents and changes his ways. The

book reached sixteen editions by 1930.<sup>13</sup> Chukovsky formed fruitful partnerships with several artists who were modern in approach but certainly not avant-garde. *Wash 'Em Clean* was illustrated by Yuri Annenkov, while *The Chatterbox Fly* and many other works were graced with pictures by Vladimir Konashevich. Both artists were associated with the Mir Iskusstvo (World of Art) group, known for its richly decorative style.



Kornei Chukovsky's Wash 'Em Clean (SCRSS Library)

During the early 1930s this highly creative period drew to a close as the Soviet publishing industry was centralised. Private and smaller state publishers were either forced out of business or amalgamated into broader organisations. In 1933 all children's publishing was brought under the mantle of Detgiz (the State Children's Publishing House) which printed fewer picture books in larger editions. The Soviet Writers Congress in 1934 saw the adoption of 'socialist realism' as the official state style of art. During the proceedings Marshak gave a speech 'On a Great Literature for Little Ones', suggesting that children's literature

should adhere to the recognised approach.<sup>14</sup>

The experiments of the 1920s nonetheless left a huge legacy, and many of the visual and textual ideas that had transformed the picture book were retained, albeit in more conservative form. Chukovsky, Marshak, Lebedev and Konashevich were among those whose careers in children's publishing lasted into old age, shaping a literature that is still enjoyed by Russian families today. The early Soviet era is most often associated with its more overtly political objects of visual culture but looking at the picture books of this time offers us a joyous miniature window onto a fascinating period in history.

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Lev Kormchy, 'Zabytoe oruzhenoe (O detskoi knige)' ['The Forgotten Weapon'] in *Pravda*, 17 February 1918
- <sup>2</sup> See Jeffrey Brooks, 'The Breakdown in Production and Distribution of Printed Material, 1917–1927' in A Gleason, P Kenez & R Stites (Eds), Bolshevik Culture, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1985, pp153–4. Also Peter Kenez, The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p96
- <sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Olich, Competing Ideologies and Children's Literature in Russia, 1918–1935, Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag, 2009, p238
- <sup>4</sup> Nikolai Smirnov, Otkuda posuda? [Where Does Crockery Come From?], ill Galina Chichagova and Ol'ga Chichagova, Moscow & Leningrad, Gosizdat, 1924
- <sup>5</sup> Nikolai Smirnov, *Detiam o gazete* [*Newspapers Explained for Children*], ill Galina Chichagova and Ol'ga Chichagova, Moscow & Leningrad, Gosizdat, 1926
- <sup>6</sup> Samuil Marshak, *Tsirk* [*The Circus*], ill Vladimir Lebedev, Leningrad, Raduga, 1925
- <sup>7</sup> Samuil Marshak, *Morozhenoe* [*Ice Cream*], ill Vladimir Lebedev, Leningrad, Raduga, 1926
- Samuil Marshak, Pochta [Post], ill Mikhail Tsekhanovsky, Leningrad, Gosizdat, 1928

- <sup>9</sup> Kornei Chukovsky, *Prikliucheniia Krokodila Krokodilovicha: Poema dliia malenkikh detei* [*Crocodile*], ill Re-Mi, Petrograd, Izdatel'stvo petrogradskogo soveta rabochikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov, 1919
- <sup>10</sup> Kornei Chukovsky, *Mukha Tsokotukha* [*The Chatterbox Fly*], ill Vladimir Konashevich, Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1930
- <sup>11</sup> Kornei Chukovsky, *Barmalei*, ill Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Leningrad & Moscow, Raduga, 1927
- <sup>12</sup> Kornei Chukovsky, *Moidodyr: Kinomatograf dliia detei* [(*Wash 'Em Clean*)], ill Yuri Annenkov, Petrograd & Moscow, Raduga, 1923
- <sup>13</sup> Ivan Startsev, Detskaia literatura bibliographiia 1918–1931, Moscow, Ogiz-Molodaia gvardiia, 1933, p252
- <sup>14</sup> Ben Hellman, Fairy Tales and True Stories: The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People, BRILL, 2013, pp366–367

Frances Saddington is a PhD student in the School of History at the University of East Anglia. She is researching a thesis on the Soviet children's picture book between 1917 and 1932. She recently worked as Research Associate on the exhibition 'New Childhood: Picture Books from Soviet Russia' at House of Illustration, Kings Cross, London.

#### **SCRSS News**

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS, except where indicated.

#### **Limited Saturday Openings**

On the first Saturday of October, November and December 2016 from 11.00–16.00 we will be opening the SCRSS building for members to visit without a prior appointment (as continues to be the case for weekdays). The Loan Library and General Reference room will be open, as well as the ground floor to view our current exhibitions. A range of donated Soviet / Russian souvenirs and de-acquired books will also be on sale. If

these Saturday openings prove popular, we hope to continue them in 2017. As Honorary Secretary I would be delighted to welcome you to the premises, particularly if you haven't previously had the chance to view and use the extensive library that your membership fee allows you to access.

#### **Membership Renewal**

If your copy of the journal includes a green membership renewal form, do please respond as soon as possible. Income from members in the form of fees and donations is vital to our continued work – from events and exhibitions to the preservation of our unique collections. To save postage, we have included forms for all members and affiliates whose membership falls due from now until the beginning of 2017. But don't wait – send your cheque today, or request the SCRSS bank details and transfer the money directly!

#### **SCRSS AGM 2016**

The SCRSS held its AGM in May, followed by a fascinating lecture by Tom Sibley on the USSR and the Spanish Civil War. The Annual Report and Accounts were accepted (if you were unable to attend and would like a copy, we can send by email or post). At Council post-AGM meeting the Executive Committee (EC) was appointed among Council members). Council meets next in September November 2016, January and March 2017. Members welcome forward are to suggestions relating to the Society for consideration at Council meetings. Urgent business between Council meetings is considered by the EC. SCRSS Council and EC up to AGM 2017: Chair - Philip Mathews (EC); Vice Chair - Kate Clark and Charles Stewart (EC); Honorary Secretary -Ralph Gibson (EC); Honorary Treasurer -Jean Turner (EC); Exhibitions Officer -Christine Lindey (EC); Andrew Jameson (EC); Len Weiss (EC); Mel Bach; Christine Barnard; Michael Costello; Diana Turner; Fiona Wright.



#### **Volunteers Needed**

Do you have a couple of hours to spare to take on basic reception duties at the SCRSS? We are particularly looking for people able to commit on a regular basis (weekly or monthly) on Tuesday afternoons, and to help out during the Saturday openings (see above). If you are interested, please contact the Honorary Secretary by email on ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk or telephone on 020-7274-2282.

#### **Russian Revolution Centenary**

Members will be delighted to hear that the **SCRSS** co-operating with various is institutions planning events and exhibitions for the centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Our collections are proving invaluable to researchers and curators in the run-up to the centenary, particularly when looking at the early relationship between the USSR and the UK. The Russian Revolution Centenary Committee, co-founded by the Society and Marx Memorial Library, continues to plan for its major event on Saturday 4 November 2017, and to encourage others to co-ordinate their events via its website - www.1917.org.uk. The SCRSS itself is hoping to organise a one-day seminar featuring UK and Russian historians, working with our good friends at Petersburg Association the St International Co-operation. In addition. depending on human and resources, the SCRSS Council is looking at proposals for lectures, an exhibition and even commemorative merchandise. SCRSS members will receive further details as soon as available - by email, on our website and 2017 editions of the SCRSS Digest. If you are not already receiving our regular SCRSS e-news bulletins, please send us your current email address.

#### **SCRSS Library Update**

Over the past year I have been providing professional guidance in the SCRSS Library on a voluntary basis. The year's main

achievement has been an overhaul of the Society's cataloguing methods. invaluable assistance from staff member John Cunningham and input from our cataloguing volunteers, Council members and the former SCRSS librarian. We now record data in a much more standardised way, with changes introduced in terms of transliteration, the kinds of data subject transcribe. and headings. Volunteers Claire Weiss and Bethany Aylward adopted the new methodology quickly and have been making excellent progress this year in the Art Collection. They were joined briefly by Molly Barker, a recent Russian graduate from Bristol University. I would like to thank all our library volunteers sincerely for their time and work. I intend to use my time over the next year to focus on identifying material for withdrawal from across the SCRSS Library (to ease space pressures), applying a clear system of classification in the Art Room. producing an acquisitions policy. The last will help potential donors to understand our areas of strength and how they might help us build on them.

Mel Bach, SCRSS Council Member and Slavonic Specialist at Cambridge University Library

## London-St Petersburg: City & People Photo Exhibition



Nadezhda Anfalova, Margarita Mudrak, Diana Turner and Anton Likhomanov (left to right)

Our joint photo exhibition with the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation (SPAIC) was originally launched at the SCRSS in London in October 2014. The exhibition is the joint work of two photographers: Vaughan Melzer (UK) and Nadezhda Anfalova (Russia).



SCRSS Council member Diana Turner (fourth from left) speaks at the exhibition opening

They photographed and interviewed a range of ordinary residents from their own cities, including bus drivers, veterans, doctors, police officers and librarians, and asked each what Britain and Russia meant to them. The subjects' answers, together with their portraits, provide a fascinating insight into how our two peoples view each other.



Lena Gromova, college teacher, in front of her portrait (top right)

In Russia the exhibition has already been shown at SPAIC's office in St Petersburg, but a further three-week run opened on Friday 2 July at the lovely Betskoy Art Gallery at 9 Millionnaya Street, St Petersburg, close to the Hermitage. I was delighted to be able to represent the SCRSS and speak alongside SPAIC Chair Margarita Mudrak, Nadezhda Anfalova and

the British Deputy Consul General Derek Lavery, among others. Around fifty people attended, including four of the Russians featured in the exhibition: Anton Likhomanov (Director of the Russian National Library), Vladimir Vasilik (Russian Orthodox priest), Lena Gromova (college teacher) and Nadia Manuilenko (young mother). Due to the large number of people, we had to move out into an adjoining exhibition room for the official speeches.

Diana Turner, SCRSS Council

# Russian Language Study in St Petersburg

Association The St Petersburg for International Co-operation (SPAIC), our longstanding partner in Russia, is now offering a 'Discover Russia' programme of Russian language classes at its premises in central St Petersburg, just off Nevsky Prospect. All levels are catered for and participants can choose from individual study, study in pairs or in small groups. SPAIC's teachers are Russian language teaching professionals, mainly from St universities, Petersburg and include lecturers who have previously taught on our own SCRSS Russian Language Seminar. Tuition fees for 2016–17 are approximately £30.00 per 90-minute class. SPAIC can help with booking hotel accommodation in central St Petersburg or home stay with Russian families, including breakfast and dinner. Participants are also welcome to meet staff and attend events at SPAIC. For further information. please contact: Margarita Mudrak (Chair), Email: mmudrak@mail.ru, Tel: +7 (812) 719 7983, St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation, 60 Liteynyi Prospekt, 191025 St Petersburg, Russia.

#### **Next Events**

Saturday 1 October, 11.00-16.00 SCRSS Saturday Opening for Members

The Loan Library and General Reference room will be open. De-acquired books and a

selection of Soviet / Russian souvenirs will be on sale, and the ground floor will be open to view our current exhibitions and displays.

### Thursday 6 October to Thursday 8 December, 18.00-20.00

### **Evening Class: Russian Language for Intermediate Level (Term 1)**

Our popular evening class resumes for the autumn, limited to 12 students. The class will Ruslan 3 textbook. use the supplemented by basic grammar revision. Taught by Christine Barnard, former lecturer in Russian at Westminster University. Fee: (SCRSS members), £40 £60 (nonmembers), no concessions.

#### Friday 7 October, 19.00

### Lecture: Jonathan Steele on *Memories of* 1991: Twenty-Five Years On

Jonathan Steele was The Guardian's Bureau Chief in Moscow from 1988 to 1994. In that capacity he closely covered the collapse of the CPSU and the USSR, winning the International Reporter of the Year title in the 1991 British Press awards. He was one of the few British reporters who was not away from Russia on holiday in August 1991 when the coup against Mikhail Gorbachev was launched. He was in the Russian parliament when Yeltsin mounted a tank, and two days later became the only British reporter to travel to the Crimea and interview Gorbachev as the Soviet president was being freed from house arrest. In his talk Jonathan will recall these and other events in the Baltics, the Caucasus and Moscow from the tumultuous year of 1991.

#### Friday 21 October, 19.00

# Lecture: Professor Bill Bowring on *The European Union's Response to the Crisis in Ukraine*

Was Russia justified in 'annexing' Crimea in 2014? Was Crimea part of Russia or of Ukraine? What was the Crimean War of 1853-6 about? Did Ukraine exist before World War II? Who are the Crimean Tatars? Are they the indigenous people of Crimea? What are their rights? Why did Ukraine refuse them citizenship when they started to return in the 1980s? Why has Russia now banned their representative body, the Mejlis? Bill Bowring has been travelling to

Crimea and working with the Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and Russians since the 1990s, and will try to answer these questions. Bill Bowring, BA, Barrister, is Professor of Law in the School of Law, Birkbeck College, University of London. He has many publications on topics of international law, human rights, and the law of Russia and the Former Soviet Union.

## Saturday 5 November, 11.00-16.00 SCRSS Saturday Opening for Members Details as for 1 October above.

#### Friday 25 November, 19.00

#### Lecture: Margaret Fleming-Makarian on The Hidden Allegory of Tchaikovsky's 'The Nutcracker'

Margaret Fleming-Makarian gives an illustrated lecture on the occult symbolism of the narrative and visual elements of Tchaikovsky's hugely popular 1892 ballet The Nutcracker. This is not simply a fantastic entertainment about a young girl's Christmas dream-journey with her Nutcracker-Prince to a mysterious Far Eastern palace, but an allegory of political, economic, social and spiritual freedom. Margaret's current research centres on the Sergeev choreographic scores; she seeks to build a meaningful visual context for the original classic choreographies through their original designs and sets preserved in St Petersburg. Note: As this is our last evening event before Christmas, we'll celebrate with a free glass of prosecco and nibbles after the talk.

#### Saturday 3 December, 11.00-16.00 SCRSS Saturday Opening for Members Details as for 1 October above.

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees: films and lectures £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members); other events as indicated. Full details for all events are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm. Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

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# **Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News**

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF)

#### **Ushakov Medals**

The Russian Embassy continues its distribution of Ushakov medals to veterans of the Arctic Convoys. Apart from large-scale ceremonies, many are being individually presented at their homes. All of them are recorded on the Russian Embassy website at www.rusemb.org.uk, which also carries coverage of SMTF events at the Memorial.

#### **Dervish 75**

This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first British convoy to the Soviet Arctic, which left port only weeks after the German invasion of the USSR began on 22 June 1941. In a very symbolic gesture of support, ships carrying a quantity of RAF Hurricane fighter planes and other supplies under the codename 'Operation Dervish' arrived in Murmansk on 31 August. A small group of Navy and RAF veterans will be travelling to Murmansk to mark the anniversary, and from there on to St Petersburg for a conference on the Arctic convoys and their significance.

#### **Next Events**

### Sunday 13 November, 12.30 Event: Remembrance Sunday

An Act of Remembrance will take place at the Soviet War Memorial in the presence of the Mayor of Southwark, UK war veterans, diplomats from CIS countries, local and national organisations.

The Soviet War Memorial is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park which surrounds the Imperial War Museum in London. The Memorial was unveiled in 1999 on the initiative of the SCRSS and the Society has been supporting the work of the SMTF since its foundation. The SMTF organises three main ceremonies at the Memorial each year to mark Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January), Victory Day (9 May) and Remembrance Sunday (November).

#### **Feature**

# The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War (1936–39)

By Tom Sibley

In July 1936 the Spanish Army officer corps, with Franco in the vanguard, staged a coup against the elected government of the Second Spanish Republic, claiming that the Communists were about to take power and would destroy the Church. In the early days of the Civil War, particularly in the big towns, armed workers' militia succeeded defeating the rebels. With Franco's forces facing the possibility of defeat, Franco called on Hitler and Mussolini for help. They obliged with thousands of troops and airmen, as well as copious supplies of tanks, planes and bombs, turning the Civil War into a war of intervention against the Spanish people.

From the beginning, the Soviet leadership proclaimed its solidarity with the Republican cause. As Stalin declared in a telegram to Spanish Communist Party: "The liberation of Spain from the yoke of the fascist reactionaries is not the private concern of Spaniards alone but the common cause of all progressive humanity." Oil supplies, food and clothing financed by work-place collections all across the Soviet Union arrived during the early weeks. However, the Soviet call for international solidarity Spain's Republican with Government fell on stony ground in the ruling circles around the world. Britain and France backed a non-intervention pact that prevented the Republican Government from

buying the arms it desperately needed, while major US oil and motor companies provided Franco with substantial supplies of fuel and vehicles on heavily discounted terms.



Medical aid arriving in Spain (photo courtesy of the Marx Memorial Library)

The Soviet Union provided crucial assistance to Spain at all stages of the Civil War. This included large quantities of modern weaponry, particularly aircraft tanks and machine guns, together with food and other material aid. If offered staunch political support at the League of Nations. And, on the initiative of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Comintern organised a volunteer fighting force from almost fifty countries, numbering around 40,000 combatants and medical staff. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the formation of the International Brigade, as it became known. Without this help, Madrid would almost certainly have fallen in early 1937.

It is generally accepted that the Soviet Union gave impressive levels of support to the Republican cause. However, many historians and commentators question the Soviet Union's motives. In this article I address the main arguments raised in this ongoing debate.

#### The NKVD and the Events of May 1937

On 3 May 1937 POUM (a small Marxist group influenced by Trotskyism) and a large group of dissident anarchist activists staged an armed insurrection in Barcelona against

the Republican Government. In the ensuing fighting over 500 people were killed. The Anarchist leadership quickly condemned the insurrection. However, POUM continued to call for the overthrow of the Government and its replacement by workers' and soldiers' soviets – with delegates appointed by organisations, rather than elected by the people as a whole.

The uprising was put down within three days. Outside Barcelona there was no support for this attack on Government forces, while within Barcelona most workers accepted the advice of their political and trade union leaders and stayed at home. The POUM leadership was immediately arrested; its leader Andreu Nin was interrogated for several days and then disappeared (probably murdered). POUM was banned, its leadership put on trial and given long prison sentences.



International Brigaders with banner, 1938 (photo courtesy of the Marx Memorial Library)

It is often claimed that the NKVD (the Soviet secret police) acted as agents provocateurs to encourage this insurrection. However, the Spanish historian Ángel Viñas, a leading modern authority on the Civil War, has studied the relevant Moscow archives and concludes there Soviet that was no involvement. Furthermore, he provides conclusive evidence that the anarchists had laid careful plans for an uprising and had accumulated large quantities of arms and tanks for that purpose.

Other accounts put great emphasis on the role of the NKVD in orchestrating the

subsequent oppression of POUM. However, Boris Volodarsky, a former NKVD operative, has stated recently that there were no NKVD prisons in Spain and that the few Soviet agents on the ground were tasked with monitoring foreigners, rather than members of Spanish organisations.

Nonetheless, if there was any Soviet pressure to quash POUM, this was pushing against an open door: all sections of the Popular Front supported the ban on POUM. However, the attempts (almost certainly orchestrated by Soviet advisers) to label POUM members as fascists and part of an international Trotskyist conspiracy were both dishonest and counter-productive. Most POUM activists were committed antifascists, although their misguided actions served to weaken the Republican cause.

#### The Spanish Gold Question

Early in the Civil War Spanish ministers decided to send the country's gold reserves to the Soviet Union - out of fear that they would fall into the hands of Franco's advancing army. Their decision was taken unilaterally and without pressure from the Soviets, but it suited both sides. The Republican Government secured reserves, while freeing them up to buy arms directly from the Soviet Union and to finance purchases on the international arms market through Soviet agents. These Soviet arms saved Madrid in early 1937, and in late 1937 enabled the Popular Army to regroup and emerge as an effective fighting force.

It has been argued that the Soviet Union abused this arrangement. However, in 1936–39 the Soviet Union was neither an economic nor a military superpower, therefore the amount of aid it could provide was constrained. The existential threat to the Soviet Union posed by Hitler and his allies was also becoming clearer by the day, and the Soviet Union's first responsibility was the defence of its own people. Yet in 1936 over fifty per cent of all Soviet arms production was sent to Republican Spain. This had to be replaced quickly and Spanish payments made it possible. However, by the

second half of 1938 Spanish gold reserves had been exhausted. In the face of a massive offensive by Franco's forces, the Spanish Government asked the Soviet Union for military equipment valued at a billion pounds in today's prices. Stalin agreed to extend a credit line to cover this request, knowing full well that the Republicans were facing probable defeat and that the loan would never be repaid.

#### The 'No Score Draw' Thesis

In recent years a consensus has emerged, summed up by Paul Preston. In analysing Stalin's motives, he says: "Stalin helped the Spanish Republic not in order to hasten its victory but rather to prolong its existence sufficiently to keep Hitler bogged down." He also asserts that: "essentially [Stalin] needed to prevent the Republic being defeated but he wished to avoid an outright victory for the Spanish revolutionary left."

However, there was never a possibility of the self-proclaimed revolutionaries winning any sort of victory: the Anarchists had no strategy, POUM was tiny and the socialist left was a sectarian group wedded to reform through parliament. In order to defeat Franco and his powerful allies it was essential to build a modern army with a unified command structure. To do so, undisciplined anarchic practices and romantic revolutionary notions of democratically controlled militias, each responsible to their own organisation, had to be discarded.

Stalin did not see any possibility of hastening a Republican victory. Once German and Italian forces became involved in large numbers, the best that could be hoped for was a change in the Western democracies' policy of non-intervention and a diplomatic initiative that would result in the withdrawal of Hitler and Mussolini's forces. Yet Stalin stood by the Spanish Republic throughout the Civil War, providing arms, as well as political and diplomatic support. This continued until the very end, despite the increased threat to the Soviet Union

following the Munich Agreement of September 1938.

As Juan Negrin put it: "Whenever the USSR supported the justice of our cause she has never at any time demanded any quid pro quo. And from this disinterestedness springs our friendship and our gratitude to Russia."

To conclude, by 1936 the Soviet Union was fully aware of the threat posed by Fascist Germany and Italy. The only way to defeat Fascist aggression was to stand up to it. This was an important factor behind its support for the Popular Front government. The Spanish people, with the assistance of the Soviet Union, showed that it was possible to confront Fascism and to battle against impossible odds. Britain, however, maintained its policy of appeasement, preferring 'peace in our time' to an anti-Fascist alliance with the Soviet Union. Within a few months of Franco marching unopposed into Madrid in late March 1939, World War II broke out.

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975, p304
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War:* Reaction, Revolution and Revenge, London, 2006, p151
- <sup>3</sup> Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, Fontana Press, 1996, p107
- <sup>4</sup> From Prime Minister Juan Negrin's address to the Spanish Parliament in September 1937.

Dr Sibley is a retired trade union official. He is a trustee of the Marx Memorial Library which holds the largest archive outside Spain of materials relating to the British Battalion of the International Brigade.

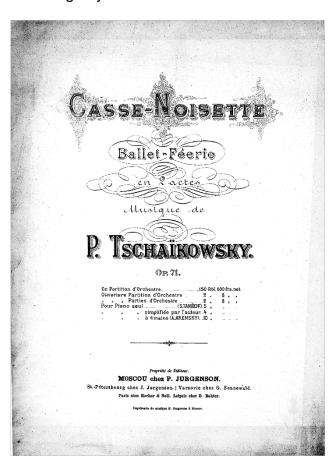
Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU, Email: admin@mml.xyz, Tel: +44 (0)20-7253-1485, Web: www.marx-memorial-library.org. Registered Charity Number: 270309.

#### **Feature**

## The Nutcracker Ballet: Sweets, Flowers and Symbolism

By Margaret Fleming-Markarian

Tchaikovsky's popular ballet *The Nutcracker* is often viewed purely as a fantastical Christmas entertainment - a young girl's handsome dream-journey with her Nutcracker-Prince to a magical kingdom of sweets. The two-act ballet is based on Alexandre Dumas' story Histoire d'un Casse-Noisette (1844, adapted from ETA Hoffman's 1816 tale). It premiered at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in 1892, choreographed by Marius Petipa with costume design by Ivan Vsevolozhsky (then director of the Mariinsky Theatre) and set design by Konstantin Ivanov.



Title page of Tchaikovsky's score for Casse-Noisette
/ The Nutcracker (SCRSS Library)

However, as my latest book, *The Original Nutcracker Ballet – A Hidden Allegory* (2014), explains, the narrative and designs

for the ballet are steeped in occult symbolism. Close inspection reveals an allegory of freedom - political, economic and social freedom, as well as spiritual freedom through transmigration of the soul (metempsychosis) to eternity. The three worldly freedoms reflect the European struggle against Napoleon in whose epoch the ballet is set. In contrast, the notion of spiritual freedom relates to Eastern religions such as Buddhism. These had spread from Northern India, through Tibet and Mongolia, into Russian Siberia. In this article, I focus on one aspect of the allegory metempsychosis.

Act II of the ballet opens in a location called Confiturembourg. Bourg in French means a market town, while Confiturem is a francisation of the German word for sweets (Konfituren). Quite plainly, this translates as 'Town of Sweets'. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sweets were more like preserved fruits, sweetmeats or sweet pastries, delicacies made with sugar and by hand. In English we have the word comfit, in Russian κομφεma. Today, sweet treats are a special delight at Christmas, and so it seems fitting that they should still feature in The Nutcracker ballet, which opens with a yuletide party.

Eleven sweetmeats appear in the original costume designs by Ivan Vsevolozhsky1: caramel, barley sugar, chocolate, petits fours, nougat, mint pastilles, dragées pistachios. almond (sugared sweets). snaps, galettes (round flat-cakes) brioches (sweet buns). All look deliciously attractive, but of particular interest is the costume for the dragées. She appears in a pinkish-red puffball skirt DRAGÉES emblazoned around the front in bold gold lettering. The skirt is drawn in at the waist with a thick golden cord, tasselled at its extremities. Her bodice is white, adorned with what look like white and deep plums. Her sleeves pinkish-red concocted of more red and white plums, as is her headdress (one large red plum on the crown of the head, surrounded by three smaller white plums). This sweetmeat stands out from the rest as she is related to

the Sugar Plum Fairy herself, whose French name is *La Feé Dragée*.

The meaning of these costumes is very enigmatic and, because the sweetmeats don't dance, they are often cut from modern productions. Α contemporary reviewer commented: "The third scene represents the 'Kingdom of the Sweets' in the original decoration of Mr Ivanov, consisting of such an abundance of fruit drops, confections, and gingerbreads that just looking at it is cloying. Strictly speaking, there is no ballet in this scene, but only an exhibition of costumes which flaunt luxury and their more or less remote likeness to caramels, sugarplums, mint cakes. and other products."2



The *Dragées* costume (drawing by Helen Turner, 2016, based on the original design by Ivan Vsevolozhsky)

Nevertheless, a great deal of thought has gone into the presence of the sweets and their costumes, and it is inconceivable that they are purely decorative. In *Histoire d'un Casse-Noisette* Alexandre Dumas mentions

that the people of Confiturembourg are believers in 'metempsychosis' - defined by Oxford The Shorter Dictionary "transmigration of the soul of a human being or animal at or after death into a new body of the same or a different species". Perhaps, then, the sweets are transmigrated souls? Another possibility exists. In his dictionary of Antoine-Joseph Pernety defines confiture as 'Elixir des Philosophes'3, referring to the philosopher's stone of alchemy. In metaphysical terms, designates the panacea that can resurrect dead souls to eternal life. However, this is European with Christian concept connotations and does not meld with the ballet's Far Eastern location, as illustrated in Konstantin Ivanov's original stage designs for Act II.

In fact, there is a sister symbol to the sweets in Act II - the golden flower. Vsevolozhsky's costume design depicts a woman and a man in similar golden tunics with slightly belled-out skirts of orange, overlaid with stamens held down at their extremities with what look like pearls. Large outer petals of gold are attached around their waists, those of the female curling upwards like petals in bloom, those of the male reaching down to the edge of the skirt. Both wear golden hats in the shape of a flower, golden petals adorn the dancers' shoulders and the man's shirt cuffs, and there are golden slippers on their feet. Together, they hold aloft a long garland of golden flowers.

The whole ensemble centres on the image of a golden flower, which symbolises the light of truth in Buddhism and Taoism. The Taoist treatise The Secret of the Golden Flower states that: "The Golden Flower is the light... You only have to make the light circulate: that is the deepest and most wonderful secret. The light is easy to move but difficult to fix. If it is made to circulate long enough, then it crystallises itself." In his analysis of The Secret of the Golden Flower Mircea Eliade<sup>5</sup> comments that: "Several images serve to suggest the crystallisation of the Light: the Golden Flower which buds and opens, the seed that matures and becomes an embryo, or a pearl ... The final

result is the attainment of the Elixir of Immortality, symbolised by the Golden Flower."



The Golden Flower costume (drawing by Helen Turner, 2016, based on the original design by Ivan Vsevolozhsky)

And so, the two symbols of the 'confiture' and the 'golden flower', although emanating from different parts of the world and from a different ethos, are essentially the same, signifying a remedy that leads to eternal life. Their very presence in Confiturembourg signals that the transmigration of a soul, once purified as a 'confiture' in terms of alchemy or 'crystallised' in terms of Buddhism, leads to heaven or Nirvana, and does not return to earth.

#### **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> The original drawings by Ivan Vsevolozhsky are held in the St Petersburg State Theatre Library, 2 Ulitsa Zodchego Rossi, St Petersburg 191023, Russia.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in RJ Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p140

<sup>3</sup> Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *Dictionnaire Mytho-Hermétique*, 1787, p86

<sup>4</sup> The Secret of the Golden Flower, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1962, pp21–22

<sup>5</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, London, Harvill, 1965, p48

Margaret Fleming-Markarian spent her professional life teaching dance. Now retired, she researches the classic ballets, drawing upon her practical experience, as well as upon early training at the Benesh Institute of Choreology, and academic education in European and Art History at the University of Edinburgh. Centring her research on the Sergeev choreographic scores in the Harvard Theatre Collection and the Royal Academy of Dance Library in London, she seeks to build a meaningful visual context for the original classic choreographies their original through designs and sets preserved in St Petersburg.

#### **Reviews**

### Sheffield Documentary Film Festival 2016

This year's DocFest included only five films from or about the Former Soviet Union (four are reviewed here), which is typical of previous years. As Anton Azarov, a Russian film-maker living in Ukraine, commented in an interview with me, Russia has no school of documentary film-making; however, a new documentary film school has now been set up in Ukraine. Most documentaries about the FSU shown at Sheffield's DocFest have been financed and directed by film-makers from outside the region.

Lobanovskiy Forever (directed by Anton Azarov, Ukraine, 2016) is a fascinating insight into the legendary manager of Dinamo Kiev during the seventies. His training methods, based on sports science, were tough, if not brutal. There was no room in his football team for improvisation by

stars: everyone was a team member and Lobanovskiy was in charge of the strategy.

The film makes good use of archive footage and interviews with former players. "In Soviet times, football was the only way you could show patriotism," one comments. For instance, Ukraine's CPSU First Secretary Vladimir Shcherbitsky apparently supported Dinamo Kiev, whereas most of the Party leadership in Moscow supported Moscow Spartak.



Kate Clark interviewing film director Anton Azarov at the Sheffield DocFest 2016 (author's photo)

In an interview, Azarov told me that Ukrainian TV channels had shown no interest in screening his film, and he feared that Russian channels would probably censor any 'anti-Soviet' comments. However, he hopes that his film may help to bridge the current divide between Russia and Ukraine, given their common history. Lobanovskiy Forever will be shown in Canada and the Netherlands.

Roman Bondarchuk's *Ukrainian Sheriffs* (Germany, Latvia, Ukraine, 2015) describes the typical work of two community workers – Viktor and Volodya – in the Ukrainian village of Stara Zburyevka. They are a bit like social workers, trying to bring harmony to people grappling with alcoholism, family problems and poverty. The village seems stuck in a time warp, with residents struggling to find fulfilment in their lives.

Born to be Free (directed by Gayane Petrosyan, UK, Russia, 2016) investigates

the international trade in wild sea mammals. Three intrepid free-diving journalists – Gaya, Tanya and Julia – film bottle-nosed dolphins and beluga whales in the Black Sea and Arctic oceans, and reveal the conditions in which captured belugas are kept before being shipped to aquaria in the US, China, UAE, Spain and Israel, among other countries.

"The State doesn't finance research now." one interviewee says, explaining why the Utrish Dolphinarium in Moscow has turned into a purely money-making operation. Anyway, research on whales is no good if they're in tanks, since it's not their natural environment. "Belugas swim in groups, hundreds of kilometres a day," another savs. lamenting their capture imprisonment in tanks far too small for them. Even the dolphin trainer interviewed says she'd like to see them set free. In 2013 half of the captured belugas died either in transit or in aquaria.

City 40 (directed by Samira Goetschel, USA, 2016) is an American documentary filmed inside one of the formerly 'closed' Soviet towns where nuclear bombs were made during the Cold War. Igor Kurchatov and the country's best nuclear physicists were brought to work here. "They used to work with plutonium using their bare hands," one resident says. The town's citizens enjoyed a privileged status, with good food and housing, education and recreational facilities. But the high risks involved in working with nuclear material have led to health problems. The film highlights the work of a young female lawyer who is trying to get compensation for inhabitants suffering from radiation poisoning. In the course of her work she comes up against harassment by the authorities, resulting in her leaving to live abroad.

Kate Clark

### Vyacheslav Zaitsev in the Hermitage

From 25 June – 25 September 2016 the Manege of the Small Hermitage in St

Petersburg was venue to a visually stunning retrospective of more than 100 outfits created over the past thirty years by the Slava Zaitsev Moscow Fashion House.

The last time I wrote about Zaitsev for the Society was back in 1984, having had the luck to get my hands on a ticket for one of his shows at the House of Fashion in Moscow. He had become artistic director in 1982, aged forty-four, and was hailed as the wunderkind of Soviet fashion – a man with boyish good looks, spiky hair and talent.



Slava Zaitsev's 'Russian' designs are influenced by traditional folk costumes (drawing by Helen Turner, 2016, from photos taken at the exhibition)

Today Zaitsev is a living legend. Founding father of the Soviet / Russian fashion industry, professor, winner of the State Prize, People's Artist of the Russian Federation, full member of the Russian Academy of Arts and a leading light in contemporary Russian fashion. He was the first Russian fashion designer to gain worldwide recognition — dubbed the 'Red Dior' in the Western press back in the 1970s, the first to open his own fashion house and to produce his own perfume.

Zaitsev was born in Ivanovo, a textile town northeast of Moscow, and learned the basics of his trade at the local college before taking up a place at the Moscow Textile Institute. In 1962, after graduation, he was appointed artistic director of a small factory in Babushkin, outside Moscow, that specialised in protective clothing and overalls. Undaunted by this inauspicious start, he produced his first collection for women agricultural workers - skirts and quilted jackets sewn together out of the famous brightly printed cottons and shawls from Pavlovsky Posad, together with felt boots painted with gouache. The factory management was outraged and rejected the collection. But it was the humble beginnings of Zaitsev's signature 'Russian' style and the collection was later picked up by a Paris-Match reporter at а fashion symposium in Moscow that Zaitsev was attending. The magazine ran a glossy feature on him, calling the as yet unknown designer the "dictator of Moscow fashion".

Within two years, Zaitsev was working at the All-Union House of Clothing Designs in Moscow, where he stayed for thirteen years. Here he worked with other leading designers to create seasonal collections for fashion houses and light industrial enterprises in the USSR and COMECON countries. As his fame grew at home and abroad, Zaitsev finally took the plunge and left in 1982 to become artistic director of the new House of Fashion on Prospect Mira in Moscow. He has been head of the institution since 1988.

This was where I caught one of Zaitsev's famous fashion shows in 1983. It was an pre-perestroika oasis in Moscow. anticipating the explosion of change to follow under Gorbachev. A modern, bright and spacious building; a salon on the ground floor with a selection of designer outfits on display; a trendy bar on the first floor with Zaitsev's models enjoying a drink after the show; and the large fashion showroom on the second floor. This was where everyone wanted to be - tiered seating, spotlights, an enormous mirror along the back wall and Western pop music booming out as the models strode up and

down the catwalk, choreographed by a member of the Bolshoi Ballet. Zaitsev presided over the event with a stream of professional patter and a winning smile.

So what is the 'Zaitsev style'? According to the Hermitage exhibition, he describes his own style as "conservative, combining modern and classic". Art historians and fashion critics talk of the waisted silhouette, precise shoulder line, narrow and straight or long and wide skirts, hats and striking costume jewellery - for women; and the immaculately cut suits and coats for men. But what sets Zaitsev apart is the use of traditional / historic Russian costume and folk motifs in his designs. The exhibition provides plenty of examples - from elegant, pre-revolutionary themed evening dresses in sumptuous silk, velvet and brocade, to brightly coloured and patterned Russian folk-style jackets and coats, topped with fur hats. Since the year 2000 he has chosen to revive - and reinvent - this Russian theme in each of his new season collections. He has returned to his 'notorious' Russian guilted jackets, skirts and coats of fifty years ago (see illustration on previous page), once again using the famous coloured scarves of Pavlovsky Posad. The results are wonderful, but Zaitsev also has another motive: to help support and develop the traditional textile industry in Pavlovsky Posad, which has struggled over the past few years.

#### **Footnote**

<sup>1</sup> Diana Turner, 'Zaitsev – Soviet Man of Fashion' in the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, Volume 44, Summer 1984, pp14–18

Diana Turner

The Chaplin Machine: Slapstick, Fordism and the Communist Avant-Garde
By Owen Hatherley (Pluto Press, 2016, ISBN: 978-07453-3601-5, Hbk, vii + 232pp, b/w illus, £16.99)

This is a book for specialists in silent cinema – as made in the USA and the Soviet Union

in the 1920s. Are you still reading? Then I'll continue. Coverage continues into the 1930s to demonstrate how Soviet cinema came of age as, on the one hand, its obsession with Hollywood ceased, while on the other it was included in government plans for the co-option of the arts into the overall campaign for industrialisation and the development of Communism.

Curiously, the frantic style with marionettelike actions of early American silent movies struck a chord with the avant-garde artists in Russia who wrote the Eccentric Manifesto, published in Petrograd in 1922. They cherished popular art forms rather than highbrow ones: the circus, the music hall and the riotous slapstick comedy churned out by the Keystone Studio. Kuleshov's feature-length The Extraordinary film Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks (1924) combines Hollywood slapstick with the rush of Soviet montage and parodies of German expressionism. The result is a delightful lampoon of the guileless American heroes (a Harold Lloyd lookalike and a cowboy), and their misapprehensions about Russia. In this relentlessly fast-paced and bizarre comedy, the American Mr West is terrified that he will fall foul of bloodthirsty Bolsheviks on a business trip to Moscow. Instead he is captured by a group of professional criminals (the Russians were revealing more then they intended there) who play on his fears until the real Bolsheviks come to his rescue and demonstrate the achievements of modern Russia. For those who can lipread Russian, this film contains some surprises! Hatherley pinpoints the 'gleeful' pleasures of this anarchic film, with underworld characters played by a cast of odd-looking 'anti-stars'.

In fact, the USSR absorbed two American imports: the cinema and the industrial theories of Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor. The Chaplin Machine traces an enjoyably idiosyncratic path back and forth between film studios and factories on opposing continents. Chaplin, and Chaplinism, would eventually fall out of favour in the USSR, with Eisenstein condemning the "method of infantilism" used in Modern Times. As

Hatherley's book reaches the sound era, it returns to the assembly line - from films made in support of the Five Year Plan as hymns to national efficiency to the birth of the Soviet musical in the mid-1930s. Hatherley describes the Hollywoodesque revue film Jolly Fellows (1934), for example, as a work that out-eccentrics the eccentrics. with its perfectly synchronised dancing girls showing a debt both to Busby Berkeley and Ford. But the taste of Amerikanshchina (Americanism) had become bitter. The animated figures of Chaplin, Keaton and appear in the film's sequence, only to be followed by the sardonic caption: "These are not the stars of this film."

Note: More details about the book, including a short video by the author, are available at www.plutobooks.com.

Andrew Jameson

Radiant Illusion? Middle-Class Recruits to Communism in the 1930s

Edited by Nicholas Deakin (Eden Valley Editions, 2015, ISBN: 978-0-9929723-2-5, Pbk, 187pp, b/w illus, £10.00 plus £2.00 P&P from eveeditions.com)

As LP Hartley says in *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country – they do things differently there." This little book is modestly and cheaply produced, but, read with sympathy, it will blow apart the evil clouds of retrospective political misunderstanding and condemnation of our forefathers and -mothers in the inter-war period.

The origins of *Radiant Illusion* lie in three seminars held at Gresham College, London, in March 2013 and May 2014, and we should be very grateful for this record of the proceedings. In addition, the presentations given at the three seminars are available online at www.gresham.ac.uk, together with a transcript of the points made during the lively discussions.

The aim of the publishers of *Radiant Illusion* is put most eloquently by the editor: "This book presents a balanced picture of the beliefs and actions [of young CPGB members], one in which they emerge as intelligent and sensitive people, well aware of the implications of the decisions that they took... Some of their judgements were wrong. But their errors should not be allowed to devalue the genuine idealism that motivated them at the time..."

Roderick Floud's introduction summarises the chaotic political situation in the 20s and 30s, neatly drawing together the forces that created the turbulence of those times. Briefly, the failure of governments to understand the economy, competing class interests, the desire for 'discipline' in society, the rejection of ideas advocating greater economic fairness - all made Fascism attractive to many people in Europe, not least some British people, in particular the upper classes. (Funnily enough, not so much attention has been paid to British Fascists as has been paid to British Communists.) The idea that Russia had been radical enough to actually create a more just society was inspirational, and it was hard to accept that "things began well, but turned out as they always do".

One serious aspect of official treatment of ex-Communists is indicated by Floud: he has been refused access to the security file about his father, Bernard, a one-time Communist, civil servant and MP. He had been interrogated by Peter Wright (of Spycatcher fame) and a leak passed to Chapman Pincher. When Christopher Andrew examined the file for his book on MI5, there was no evidence of Communist contacts after 1952, but the alarming thing is that some other statements in the Floud file were untrue. This raises an important issue about surveillance in general: how much of the information kept on secret files is reliable, and how much is mistaken, trivial or mendacious? Roderick Floud should be able, finally, to see his father's file in 2017, fifty years after his father's suicide.

Although the title and subtitle of the book summarise the contents well, it is worth noting the historical point that, after its foundation, the Communist Party of Great Britain remained for a long time a defiantly proletarian party, and only welcomed middle-class recruits when they adopted the 'Popular Front' approach in 1934–35. The mirror image of this is that middle-class people who became Communists at that time could be regarded by their peers as 'traitors to their class'.

Finally, your reviewer would like to pay tribute to this book on some of the most important aspects of British intellectual history in the inter-war period. The introduction, the reasoned re-interpretation of events of the time, the many illustrations, the personal profiles of those involved, the author biographies, the glossary, the large bibliography and the index all make this an outstanding introduction to the subject.

Andrew Jameson

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