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Feature

Russian Language under Peter the Great

By Andrew Jameson

What freak of genetics placed a manic epileptic giant on the throne of Russia in 1696 we shall never know, but it came not a moment too soon. In 1697 the 'giant' Peter Alekseyevich began a year's 'grand embassy' in Europe, travelling 'incognito' with a retinue of 150. On his return in August 1698, he looked at his semi-barbaric country with fresh eyes: Asiatic dress, long hair and beards, the country was still in effect the successor state to the Mongol-Tatar Empire of 200 years earlier.

At the same time some historians have pointed out that Peter's famous reforms, at least the later ones, were not actually part of a well-planned programme. Military considerations repeatedly led to financial measures, which led to edicts to stimulate Russian commerce and industry, then to changes in administration when the edicts proved ineffective, and finally to attempts to foster education without which a modern

administration could not function. Further to this, historians note that only one year in Peter's reign, 1724, passed entirely without conflict, so that the country was almost permanently at war.



Peter the Great Trimming the Beards of the Old Believers (SCRSS Library)

However, the first reforms were undoubtedly motivated by Peter's embarrassment when visiting foreign rulers with his own retinue in beards and kaftans. These signs of barbarity were the first to go. Beards were banned immediately upon his return. And from 1700 European dress was made obligatory for the whole urban population (clergy and peasantry were excepted). The same year, 1700, was re-numbered: instead of being 7208 from the Creation, it became 1700 from the birth of Christ.

In this year, too, the Russian alphabet was dramatically simplified. Peter ordered a printing house to print on large sheets of paper all the fonts they were using, and went through them personally. With his own hand, he crossed out all the letters with their decorative shapes used for religious books, and ordered that non-religious books be printed in what was called the new *grazhdanskaya azbuka* (civil alphabet). These sheets still survive today. Sets of the new fonts were made in Amsterdam and in Moscow, and the first book to be printed in the new typeface was *Geometria Slavenski Semlemerie* (devoted to the practical applications of geometry), with the double date 1708 and also 7216.

So what books were being published apart from the above? This leads us to a revelation that we might hardly believe. During Peter's reign no work of fiction at all was published. Why? Because literature in the Western sense simply did not exist in Russia at that time. There was, of course, a rich tradition of oral literature among the peasantry, but the gap between urban and rural populations was total, and had just been made wider by Peter himself. Moving straight from the Middle Ages to the modern age, Russia found itself in a serious language crisis. The problem was that nobody knew what the standard written language should be. Some people insisted that the language used in church (Church Slavonic) should be used, but this was (a) only half Russian, the other half being Macedonian, and (b) it completely lacked the vocabulary to deal with technical, business or governmental matters. Another possibility was the so-called chancery language (*prikazny yazyk*) which had evolved to deal with government and legal business. This also was inadequate.

Even if there had been 'literature', it could not have been printed because the print shops were publishing, non-stop, numerous translations of practical manuals on military matters, construction, mathematics, geography, navigation, etiquette (!), statutes and laws, all commissioned by Peter. As Peter flung open wide his "Window into Europe" things were moving fast and the

poor translators were struggling to catch up. The earliest translations were from Dutch and German (Peter spoke German from his time spent in the foreigners' suburb in Moscow). The Tsar was not a person whom it was a good idea to displease. It is recorded that a certain Volkov, finding himself unable to put into Russian the volume *Instructions sur les Jardins Fruitiers et Potagers* actually committed suicide. Other, less conscientious, 'translators' handed over work that was a horrifying hotchpotch of Russian, Church Slavonic and bastard foreign words (to quote Boris Unbegaun).

As necessity is the mother of invention, recourse was had to the device of 'doublets', that is to say that translations typically would reproduce the foreign word and then follow it with the nearest Russian equivalent. This at least had the benefit of introducing foreign terms (large numbers of which were adopted into Russian), although translators will know that the realia envisaged by the Russian side might not correspond very closely to the original! It is noteworthy that Vladimir Lenin used exactly the same technique in the early decrees of Soviet power when he was wanting to acquaint the Bolsheviks with Western political terminology.

In contrast to other Slav languages, Russian is stuffed full of foreign borrowings. The most unusual contribution, to quote Valentin Kiparsky's book on Russian vocabulary,¹ is the marine terminology from Dutch whose origin is solely attributable to one man – Peter. Kiparsky lists 260 words, mostly maritime, plus everyday ones (*magazin, passazhir, flag, nomer*) and then some curiosities: *avral!* (all hands on deck!), *zont/ik* (umbrella), originally a deck-awning in Dutch, and *tryum*, which incorporates a Dutch definite article, *(in)t'ruim*, meaning a ship's hold.

In 1703 Peter marked the founding of a city first called Sankt Pieterburkh by putting a cross on a small island that was to become the Peter and Paul Fortress. When corresponding, Peter always signed himself using the Dutch spelling Pieter or Piter, and

referred to Pieterburkh in the Dutch style. In colloquial Russian today, St Petersburg is often referred to as *Piter*, adjective *piterskii*. During the reigns of the Empresses Anna and Elizabeth the most favoured foreign language was German, and so the name of the city changed to the form we know now, in the German style.

There are two places in Sankt Pieterburkh that absolutely breathe the atmosphere of Peter Alekseyevich: his Summer Palace, in one corner of the Summer Garden, and New Holland, his shipbuilding warehouse on two islands at the junction of the Moyka and Kryukov Canal, which opened to visitors in 2016. Do visit them if you can, you can go as individuals, no need to organise an excursion.

Note: Materials providing more information, illustrations and word lists connected with this article are available by email. Contact the author at a.jameson2@dsl.pipex.com.

Footnote

¹ V Kiparsky, *Russische Historische Grammatik, Band III, Entwicklung des Wortschatzes*, Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1975

Andrew Jameson worked in sigint in Berlin, studied in Oxford with the linguist Boris Unbegaun, and taught Russian at Essex, Portsmouth and Lancaster. After retirement he made frequent lecture visits to St Petersburg and Moscow and once to Khabarovsk and Birobidzhan.

SCRSS News

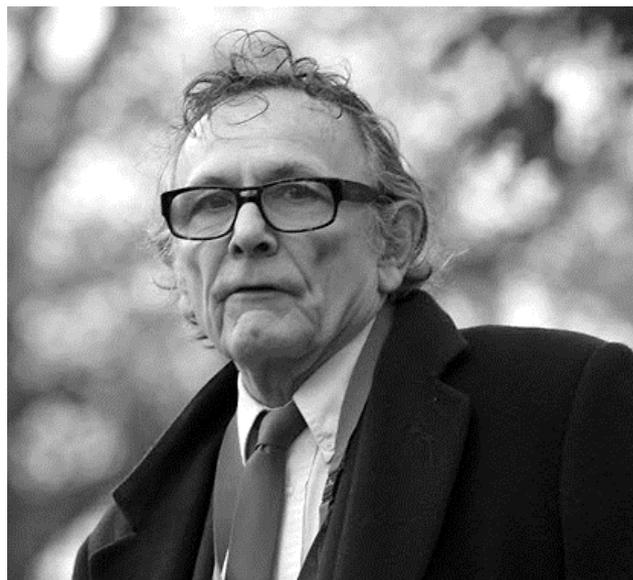
Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

John Cunningham (1943–2019)

John Cunningham, our stalwart library and administrative assistant since 1997, and for many years now our only paid member of staff, passed away in May. Despite several years of medical treatment, John continued to work to the best of his ability until a fall

earlier this year and a subsequent spell in hospital in April prevented him from coming to the centre.

It's perhaps one of those strange things that happen in life – someone without any obvious connection to the USSR and Russia comes to be the '*domovoi*' (or 'protective spirit') to an organisation devoted to extending knowledge and understanding of both. I am sure the fact that we were located within walking distance of John's beloved Brixton certainly helped! And perhaps that the work was so varied – from inputting membership details to assisting university professors to locate material, setting up for events and dealing with the catering. So often John was in the background, but he and his contribution did not go unnoticed – as shown by the dozens of messages the Society received following the announcement of his death.



John Cunningham (Photo: Karl Weiss)

I think everyone who met John will have vivid memories of their encounters. He has been described as "astute, anarchic, and hardworking"; "a spirited fighter"; a "faithful believer in the cause that the SCRSS represented"; and "a stalwart loyalist". John's passion for the Society and its unique collections was evident to me. Lately, while awaiting eye operations, he felt thwarted in not being able to do more of the digitising work he believed was vital to preserve the most important items – and to

make them more accessible to members and researchers.

Over the years, countless students and members have been grateful for his attentive support in their endeavours to find material relevant to their studies among our vast collections of books, photos, posters, newspaper cuttings and periodicals, to all of which he seemed to feel a personal attachment. He delighted in the discoveries he made in the archives of the Society itself, while seeking material for exhibitions, or scanning the annual reports and minutes of meetings.

Although John was employed only part-time from January 2009, he spent many additional unpaid hours ensuring the security of the building and working on all aspects of the Society's activity. This included dealing with researchers, working on the library collections (for example, the creation of the database we are using for our library catalogue and the replacement of much of the shelving in the art library), handling membership, dispatching the *SCRSS Digest*, arranging the ground floor for events (and ensuring refreshments were available), projecting films and presentations, covering room hire, digitising the Annual Reports, scanning photos and posters and other visual materials, helping to create exhibitions, and so on.

As Hon Secretary over the last six years I spent a lot of time working with John. It was not always calm and peaceful as he forcefully expressed his frustration at the many problems the SCRSS faced in its struggle to continue with its invaluable work. Over many years, so much of the activity of the Society relied on his presence, knowledge and experience. The valuable work he began on digitising the archives is just one example of his legacy. We shall miss him.

Remembering John

A small photo display and a collection of the condolence messages have been on display at the Society since June. At its recent

meeting, the SCRSS Council agreed to three proposals marking John Cunningham's contribution to the Society over many years. The money donated in his name by members and others will enable us to transform what is currently the General Office on the first floor into another shelved library space. This will facilitate a major reorganisation of the library that should allow us to properly shelve most, if not all, of our book collection. John's office will be named in his memory, and two flower beds outside the back door will be replanted and a suitable plaque installed. The Council would like to record its thanks to all members who have contributed thus far, and if further donations are received these will be allocated to further library development in some specific way. A memorial event is being planned for the October / November period – details will be included in the e-newsletter as soon as a date is fixed.

Online Donation

The SCRSS now has a donation page on the Virgin Money Giving website. The link can be found on the SCRSS website (on the Home and About Us pages). This will make it much easier to donate to the Society, and as the site can also process Gift Aid claims for eligible donors, the extra 25 per cent from the UK Government will come automatically – a large saving in administration for the Society. We are hoping members will make use of the link to encourage other individuals and organisations, who may not wish to join / affiliate, to support the work of the Society in this way. Please continue to make membership payments by cheque or bank transfer directly to the Society.

Gift Aid

Following its annual Gift Aid claim, the Society received almost £2,500 from HMRC for the year up to April. Although we cannot claim for membership fees, we can make a Gift Aid claim on all donations from eligible UK taxpayers. Most members have

completed the Gift Aid form that we need to process a claim. Even a £5.00 donation attracts an extra £1.25 Gift Aid. If you are eligible for the scheme and are not sure if you have completed one, please contact the Hon Secretary. The Gift Aid form is also available on the Society's website (About Us / Membership page).

Volunteering

With the sad loss of John Cunningham, the Society now operates on an entirely voluntary basis. The Hon Secretary and other volunteers continue the work here at the centre as much as possible, but for the time being the first-Saturday-of-the-month library openings, and our scheduled events, are the only times the building is open to visitors. If you are interested in volunteering – if only for a few hours a month – we can offer various opportunities to members both in the library and during events/centre openings. As always, if you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding the work of the Society, please get in touch – preferably by email.

Centenary Club

You will find enclosed a leaflet regarding the new SCRSS Centenary Club. The idea is to secure the day-to-day operational costs of the Society for the next five years – up to its centenary in 2024. This financial breathing space will be used to develop a five-year plan – Strategy 100 - for the long-term future of the SCRSS. The Strategy aims include: stabilising finances, and building up a reserve fund; improving security; opening the centre at least two days per week; completing the cataloguing of the library; securing grants / funding to renovate the building, and improve building access and emergency egress; increasing income from room hire; completing the digitisation of the photo archive, and increasing income from this source; running a more extensive programme of events (talks, film screenings, exhibitions, seminars, etc); improving storage of all collections, especially for rare / old material; improving governance,

including training for Council members (who are all Trustees of the charity); developing outreach to increase membership and use of the centre; improving facilities for members, students and researchers. Please support us in this endeavour by becoming a Centenary Club member and / or by suggesting institutions and organisations that the Society might approach. Please contact the Hon Secretary if you have any questions.

Next Events

Saturday 7 September 2019, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening

Thursday 19 September 2019, 19.00
Talk: Pauline Fairclough on *Do We Need Another Shostakovich Biography?*

Pauline Fairclough is Professor of Music at the University of Bristol and a well-known authority on Shostakovich and Soviet musical culture. Her new biography of Dmitri Shostakovich brings new perspectives on the composer's life and music to a wide readership. Since Laurel Fay published her authoritative biography in 2000, much has changed in the Shostakovichian public landscape: Cold War-inspired sparring over his political views has died down, but audiences' love of his music is as keen as it ever was. In her talk Pauline will reflect on the choices she made, and the key ideas she wanted to communicate, in her new biography.

Saturday 5 October 2019, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening

Friday 11 October 2019, 19.00
Talk: Simon Nicholls on *The Notebooks of Alexander Skryabin, 1872–1915*

Together with professional Russianist Michael Pushkin, Simon Nicholls has translated the writings of the Russian composer Alexander Skryabin (1872–1915). Skryabin's private journals, presented with relevant letters and other material from the composer and his contemporaries, go far towards explaining the origins of his idiosyncratic world-view. In *The Notebooks of Alexander Skryabin* (Oxford UP, 2018)

Simon Nicholls' research dispels popular misconceptions and reveals the constellation of philosophies that shaped the composer's ideas. In his talk Simon will include consideration of Skryabin's attitude to socialism and a short account of how this mystical idealist was posthumously adopted into the Soviet canon. Simon Nicholls is a pianist, teacher and independent researcher.

Saturday 2 November 2019, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members

Wednesday 20 November 2019, 19.00
Talk: Robert Chandler on Vasily Grossman, Lev Ozerov and the World of Soviet Jewry

In his talk renowned literary translator Robert Chandler will discuss his recent translations of Vasily Grossman's novel *Stalingrad* and Lev Ozerov's poetry collection *Portraits Without Frames*. Grossman's *Stalingrad* is the first of two closely related novels about the Battle of Stalingrad (the second is *Life and Fate*). *Life and Fate* memorably includes the last letter written from a Jewish ghetto by Viktor Shtrum's mother, and this is also powerfully felt in *Stalingrad*. Ozerov's 1946 poem about Babi Yar and his contributions to the documentary account *The Black Book* (co-edited by Grossman), address the Shoah on Soviet soil. His posthumously published *Portraits without Frames* includes moving portraits of the four Soviet Yiddish poets executed on Stalin's orders in August 1952.

Saturday 7 December 2019, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening

Saturday 28–Sunday 29 March 2020
Event: SCRSS Advanced Russian Language Seminar (TBC)

We are currently hoping to run our seminar again in 2020, with lecturers from St Petersburg, Russia. Further information TBC in the autumn, but please note the provisional dates for your diary.

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. Up-to-date 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.

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

Next Events

Sunday 10 November 2019, 12.30
Event: Remembrance Sunday Ceremony, Soviet War Memorial, London

Act of Remembrance marking the UK's Remembrance Sunday. The Mayor of Southwark, local politicians, diplomats from Russia and other former USSR states will join veterans and others to lay wreaths at the Soviet War Memorial and observe a two-minute silence. Members of the public are welcome to attend. If you intend to lay a wreath on behalf of an organisation, contact the Hon Secretary in advance at SWMT, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or via email: sovietwarmemorialtrust@gmail.com. For more information, or to make a donation, visit www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (surrounding the Imperial War Museum). The Memorial was unveiled in 1999 on the initiative of the SCRSS and the Society has been supporting the work of the SWMT since its foundation. The Trust organises three main ceremonies at the Memorial each year to mark Holocaust Memorial Day (January); Victory Day – 9 May; and Remembrance Sunday (November).

Feature

Memoirs of a Moscow Correspondent in the Gorbachov Years

By Kate Clark

These two extracts from 1988 are taken from Kate Clark's forthcoming memoir. Kate Clark was Moscow correspondent for the Morning Star from 1985–90 and The Scotsman from 1989–90, she was also Deputy Features Editor of the BBC Russian Service from 1993–96. Now retired, she is a Vice-Chair of the SCRSS Council. Her book 'Chile in My Heart: A Memoir of Love and Revolution', was published in 2013.



Kate Clark in Kiev, May 1986, when she was in the first group of journalists to visit Chernobyl shortly after the accident

Incentivising State Enterprises

Much was written, and talked, about the new Law on the State Enterprise, which was to enshrine in law that enterprises had to be self-financing and profitable. Loss-making enterprises would be allowed to go to the wall, instead of being propped up by funds

taken from the successful, profit-making ones.

I went on a visit to Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second biggest city, to report on how *perestroika* was faring in its industries. I visited one of the city's oldest works, the Svyetlana radio electronics amalgamation, employing 35,000 workers. They had introduced shift work to make use of the most advanced and productive machinery they had, and higher rates of pay were paid to evening and night shift workers. I was told that earlier incentives, such as socialist emulation and prizes, had not so far produced the necessary stimulus for high productivity or high-quality production.

"We were restructuring two years before the rest of the country!", boasted Director Oleg Filatov, "So I'm confident that we shall be successful when we go over to wholesale self-financing." But the Svyetlana works had problems, he said, in getting timely delivery of parts from other enterprises, and problems with quality.

He explained how twenty years ago Svyetlana had been given the right to deal directly with the Electronics Ministry, instead of having to deal with a go-between body set up by that Ministry – "a totally superfluous and bureaucratic link in the chain", he added.

"Up till now, the Ministry has had to continually subsidise unprofitable factories – so what incentive did the managements of those factories have to get out of that rut?", Filatov asked. Under the new Law on the State Enterprise, works would be independent entities, as they are under capitalism, Svyetlana's Director told me, "the difference being that our profits will go into reinvestment and social programmes, not into private shareholders' bank accounts".

It was fascinating to go around Soviet factories. Many of those I visited over the years were housed in old buildings; sometimes machinery and equipment looked pretty old compared with what I had seen of similar machine-shops in England.

But the photolithographic workshop at the Svyetlana works, which made microprocessors, light bulbs and calculators, looked state of the art. A team of about ten people were working behind sealed-off glass doors in a special microclimate to reduce dust and particles to a minimum. This was one of the enterprise's fifteen 'cost-account' teams i.e. teams whose work had to be profitable.

Because they worked in this rarefied air and enforced enclosure, the team received higher wages than the average: 250–260 roubles a month, compared to 200–220 average. They also received 'oxygen cocktails' during their breaks – a delicious frothy drink intended to oxygenate the lungs.

And to avoid monotony and psychological stress, the workers rotated jobs within the production team.



Kate Clark talking to a group of Uralmash workers in one of the plant's machine-shops, 1991

Once the new Law was operational, the major share of an enterprise's profits would no longer go to the state budget, I learned. A smaller share would go to the state, and the major share would be for the enterprise itself. Where self-financing was already in operation, as at Sumy's Frunze works for instance, productivity in 1985 had risen by more than 13 per cent and profits by 32 per cent.

"The bigger the profits, the more the enterprise's own workers get back in terms

of wages and social programmes, so they've become much more interested in meeting the higher production targets," said Boris Karyakin, head of one of the assembly workshops, where fifteen of the forty-nine teams had gone over to the cost-account system.

I asked what would happen to workers laid off when teams decided to fulfil their quotas with fewer members. "They are found new jobs either here or at other factories," Svyetlana's Personnel Manager Arkady Tyagushchev replied, "which helps to solve Leningrad's perennial labour shortage."

I knew that experiments such as the Sumy Frunze one and Leningrad's Elektrosila and Krasnogvardyeyets works, which I'd visited the year before, were the exception rather than the rule, and that a big percentage of Soviet factories actually operated at a loss. This, plus quality problems, plus the rigid centralised planning system that meant that factories were able to keep on 'fulfilling their norms', yet fail to produce goods that the population actually wanted to buy, had led to a crisis situation: workers on the new cost-accounting system, who were now earning higher wages as a result, did not have the desirable range of goods to buy with their extra money.

I had no doubt that *perestroika* was necessary, and I could see that where enterprises had become self-financing, results were good, so it seemed to me that this was indeed the way to make the whole system more efficient and more responsive to what the people wanted, in terms of widespread provision of good consumer goods, housing and leisure facilities.

A friend rang me one morning. "Katya, you couldn't possibly lend me 70 roubles till next week, could you? I've heard there are some Finnish winter boots in our local *univermag*, and I really need a new pair!"

I obliged, of course, but it was one of many examples that illustrated the problem: why wasn't *Soviet* industry producing good-quality and fashionable winter boots?

Soviet Schools – The Need for Change

The country's education system was also coming under the spotlight. A 1984 School Reform had been "ill thought out", *Pravda* said.



Classroom scene at School No 35, Moscow, which Kate Clark's twin daughters attended

I became friendly with a journalist, Tatiana, on the popular *Uchitelskaya Gazeta* (*Teachers' Gazette*). Its Editor, Vladimir Matveyev, told me: "What today's world needs is creative thinking. But our schools do not prepare our children for this!"

"We need a new quality of education. It must be oriented towards 'teaching to study', rather than presenting the children with a certain amount of regurgitated knowledge that gets outdated very quickly."

"Absurd curricula, stuffed full of totally unnecessary information", "difficult and boring textbooks" and "feeble teaching methods" were just a few of the epithets one teacher used, reported in the *Teacher's Gazette*.

The paper backed teachers trying new teaching methods, despite facing big problems with the authorities, Matveyev told me. "They've been very courageous, and we defend what they are doing." These 'innovators' were for 'cooperative pedagogy', as against the existing authoritarianism of Soviet schools.

The Academy of Pedagogical Sciences

needed new blood, Matveyev said, and more contact with reality and the real situation in schools.

I had many discussions with Matveyev and Tatiana on what I observed at our children's school. It is true that the textbooks seemed old fashioned and their presentation quality was poor. The classes were quite big – about thirty children – and they did not have group work within the class, but simply listened to the teacher at the front of the class, who followed the standard textbook which would be the same throughout the entire USSR.

For our daughters, who were only 6 years old when we arrived in Moscow, and who therefore started school at the same time as their Soviet peers, the system seemed satisfactory. At least they felt happy there, worked well and had many friends. They were also fond of their teachers.

For our son, who was 10 when he started his Moscow school – and had therefore known what a typical London state junior school was like – fitting in and accepting the style of teaching was more difficult. He was told off for sitting with his legs sticking out into the aisle, and for being rough during break-time play.

It came to a head when he and his friends were called *khuligany* (hooligans) at a Parents' Meeting at the school. My husband Ricardo stood up after listening to a catalogue of complaints against these boys and ripped into the accusers, saying: "Where is the spirit of your great Soviet educator, Makarenko?¹ You accuse, but you don't look at what reasons there are behind such behaviour!"

I agreed with Ricardo. The school had a whole top floor with toys and equipment that never seemed to be used. It had no playground so, obviously, energetic children cooped up and seated at desks for hours needed somewhere to let off their energy during the breaks – but there were no facilities at all for that, and the children were not allowed to run or play in the wide corridors alongside the classrooms.

Footnote

1 Anton Makarenko was an influential educational theorist and teacher. In the 1920s he organised the Gorky Colony, a rehabilitation settlement for children who had been made homeless by the Russian Revolution and ensuing Civil War. Makarenko's *Pedagogicheskaya poema (Pedagogical Poem)*, sometimes translated as *The Road to Life*, recounts his educational work at Gorky Colony.

Note: The photographs illustrating this article are the author's own.

Reviews

Stalin's Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course

By David Brandenberger and Mikhail V Zelenov (Yale University Press, April 2019, ISBN: 978-0-300-15536-5, Hbk, 744pp, £43.00)

In the words of its authors, this volume aims to fill a major gap in which the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* "has long escaped proper understanding as both a historic text and a historical narrative" (p. 29).

They discuss the political evolution in the 1930s of the writing of that official Soviet history, presenting the texts of drafts, contributions from its teams of authors, including the input, editing and supervision throughout of the Party's General Secretary, Joseph Stalin. It is "the USSR's master narrative – a hegemonic statement on history, philosophy, and ideology that scripted Soviet society for the better part of a generation [... and one] which he neither [...] wrote from scratch nor interpolated his own personal experiences into its narrative" (p. 1). After approval by the Party's leadership it was first published in 1938 and, known as the *Short Course*, was to be used in study and propagation throughout the Soviet Union and all Communist Parties.

It covered the course of creating a revolutionary party, its defence against

detractors, taking in the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, civil war and the defeat of foreign intervention, inner party disputes, industrialisation and the building of a socialist society.

The 86-page introduction to this *Critical Edition* is free of the widely propagated writings about Stalin's variously guessed at personality, of psychology, of 'great man' theories, of totalitarianism, dictatorship, megalomania and suchlike, much of which still obscures serious study of the politics and economics of the Soviet period. The scholars' introduction to the 631 pages of original documents, drafts and editing give researchers pointers to sources to consider for further research.

Readers will find Stalin's notes which include his repeated and at times angry rejection of others in the team of writers who praise individuals too much, including himself; where he insists on cutting out passages that attribute to him achievements of others; and denouncing any promoting of the cult of personality.

This volume allows the reader to concentrate on what the *Short Course* set out to do: on matters of theory, conflicts over policies within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and not primarily on individual leaders, as insisted on by Stalin. There is much that will be found useful for scholars who are not locked into the Cold War anti-Soviet 'paradigm' that dominates in 'Sovietology' to this day. From the evidence culled by Brandenberger and Zelenov from state archives there is much to suggest questioning of the widespread acceptance as gospel of Khrushchev's anti-Stalin speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU. On this last point, Grover Furr's *Khrushchev Lied* (Delhi, 2013, Aakar Books) is a useful additional pointer to further areas of research. There really is no excuse for students of politics and history not to read the increasingly available Soviet archives. Brandenberger and Zelenov's *Stalin's Master Narrative* is refreshing for doing this.

Mick Costello

The Adventures of Owen Hatherley in the Post-Soviet Space

By Owen Hatherley (Repeater Books, ISBN: 978-1912248261, November 2018, Pbk, 571pp, £14.99)

Between the years 2015 and 2017 Owen Hatherley visited eleven countries of the former Soviet Union: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova and Armenia.

His itinerary was influenced by the foreign language guides to Soviet cities published in the 1970s and 1980s by Progress Publishers, for which several past members of the SCRSS worked when living in Moscow at that time. These guides were based on each city or area's past history, events during the transition from tsarist feudal rule to the 1917 Russian Revolution's socialist society, the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 and socialist post-war reconstruction. They were written in the context of the national programme of building Communism.

Owen Hatherley is clearly no friend of Soviet Communism and criticises the Progress publications as historically selective and based on an ideal rather than fact. However, he admits that they are attractively produced and well illustrated with maps and drawings of the buildings to which the guides refer. The SCRSS Library has a collection of such guides, listed by Soviet republic, which is well worth a look.

What is interesting about Hatherley's book is the almost street-by-street description of his walks through various cities, including some only recently opened to the public because of their military or industrial significance. He describes impartially the effect that the collapse of the Soviet state had on these cities – from the destructive onslaught of naked capitalism on the remnants of Soviet town planning and buildings, to efforts by some local authorities to protect the former provision of subsidised housing and other public buildings. He is impressed at the use of traditional materials and craftsmanship in Soviet buildings,

particularly in the Central Asian and Southern republics. Yerevan in Armenia is a good example of this. Surprisingly, the Baltic republics, despite being the most hostile to Communism, have protected the Soviet period's tower blocks with good maintenance and landscaping.

The author is interested in the avant-garde architecture of the early twentieth century, much of which has been severely neglected in Moscow and St Petersburg. So, he is delighted to find it practically intact in Yekaterinburg, which he calls the Constructivist Capital. He is also supportive of the local organisations fighting to conserve this heritage. Being Yeltsin's home town, Yekaterinburg has more than its fair share of oligarchs seeking change.

Visiting Belarus, which he calls "the last dictatorship in Europe", he admits that its cleanliness and affluence is noticeably in contrast to nearby Poland. He is also impressed by its famous Brest Fortress, whose defenders held out for a week against the Nazi invasion in 1941. The Brest Fortress Memorial, a stunning monumental space opened on the 30th anniversary in 1971, is a tribute to their astonishing fortitude in the face of outstanding violence.

This book is a comprehensive and perceptive record of all the good – and bad – architecture still in existence in the post-Soviet space. It is well illustrated with the author's own black/white photographs, although the reproductions are often disappointingly dark.

Jean Turner

Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia

By Samuel A Greene and Graeme B Robertson (Yale University Press, April 2019, 287 +vii pp, £20.00)

Why yet another book about Vladimir Putin? There has been a spate following Putin's re-election in 2012 as President, starting with Richard Sakwa's *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (2014), followed by *The New Tsar* by

Stephen Lee Myers (2016); *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* by Mikhail Zygar (2017); *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past* by *The Guardian's* Shaun Walker (2018); and *We Need to Talk About Putin: Why the West Gets Him Wrong, and How to Get Him Right* by Mark Galeotti (2019). And in February 2020 Richard Sakwa will publish his second Putin book, *The Putin Paradox*.

Greene and Robertson are American political scientists; Greene is Director of the Russia Institute at King's College London. They do not criticise or even refer to the books listed above. Instead, in a book written for a non-academic readership, they argue that Putin, albeit "a relatively ordinary person" (p. 230), has gone from "being a leader picked by the oligarchy as a tool to defend their interests, to being a 'father of the nation' [...] a national leader largely immune from the everyday problems that attach themselves to those below him" (p. 229). This, they contend, has been achieved "through the support and emotional commitment of millions of Russians" (p. 230).

This is a bold claim. How do the authors justify it? By looking at Russian politics "from the bottom up", "rejecting stereotypes and prejudice", through "ground-breaking research", "including the first systematic study of the role of personality psychology in Russian politics". The authors apply a typology, developed for the US Air Force in the 1950s, of five "personality traits": Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism – OCEAN (pp 134–5). Proponents of the theory, mostly used in Human Resources departments for recruitment, admit that these 'traits' are the result of survey data, and it cannot be explained where they come from (p. 136).

Undeterred, in 2013 the authors carried out online interviews of 1,200 individuals, asking them also about their 'traits'. The results of the interviews were subjected to the full social science array of regression analyses, etc. The authors do not say in the book or in their more academic 2016 article (*Agreeable*

Authoritarians: Personality and Politics in Contemporary Russia) how the individuals were selected. They did, however, analyse data from Facebook and its Russian counterpart VKontakte. Between 2012 and 2015 they analysed 200,000 messages between 45,000 people (p. 171) and, in February to June 2017, 300,000 interactions between 30,000 people (p. 184) – from the opposition.

In addition, they conducted lengthy interviews with the journalist Mikhail Zygar (six references) and the controversial fascist philosopher Alexander Dugin (seven references). These were surprising choices.

The book contains much interesting detail. But this reviewer is unconvinced by the application of 'personality psychology'.

Bill Bowring

Reading and Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900–1960
Edited by Kimberley Reynolds, Jane Rosen & Michael Rosen (Oxford University Press, November 2018, ISBN: 9780198806189, Hbk, 463pp, £25.00, 200+ b/w illus)

This ten-section collection of extracts from twentieth-century books, periodicals, drama and music originating from a variety of sources that were to be found in left-wing families' homes of the time, provides a spectacular sweep over a little-researched field. In most cases the originals of the fascinating materials in this volume had been printed (or translated) in relatively small runs in contrast to, say, those of the children's literature and creative ephemera coming from non-radical sources. This is truly a rare glimpse back to cultural life in the years of the Cold War and those preceding it.

The spectrum of material is presented through the personal prisms of two individuals eminent in different facets of the field. Jane Rosen (a one-time librarian of the then Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR) has specialised in children's literature, and the SCRSS' own collection of

Soviet children's literature has been organised under her direction. Michael Rosen, author and Professor of Children's Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London, has published over 200 books and was Children's Laureate from 2007–2009. Jane Rosen and Michael Rosen each account for the differing parental choices of materials and what it was like to receive, read and experience them. Much of the material they were variously exposed to between the 1950s and 1980s had been generated in the first half of that century when Britain was an imperial power and the USSR was a global rebel.

Coming through the commentary are their attempts to explain the experience of growing up as the children of Communists in the Cold War (as they each did, although they are not related) while drawing from the materials themselves the intrinsic literary and artistic values that survive the historical changes. This naturally indicates a narrow starting prism, but the main feature of this sizeable volume is the potential for readers to assess at first hand some sixty-odd enthralling passages from materials many of which would otherwise have remained buried in history.

Some extracts have been re-typofaced while others, such as those with illustrations or music scores, appear as in their original versions. Particularly remarkable and varied examples include extracts from Mayakovsky's 1925 *What is Good and What is Bad* – a guide for Soviet children on improving personal habits and social attitudes; the British anti-fascist comic strip for children 'Blacking his Shirt' from Martin's 1935 *Annual*; and pieces from Alan Gifford and the Workers' Music Association's 1954 *If I Had a Song: A Song Book for Children Growing Up*.

What were the effects on Jane Rosen and Michael Rosen at the time, and how do they now feel about them? For Jane Rosen, both the origins and contexts of the materials, as well as their creative values, have provided her with a keen sense of questioning the world around her. Michael Rosen, on the other hand, is keen to point out that, while

any creative materials may come from circumstances that are later revealed to be disputable, the true literary and artistic values in them will survive.

Claire Weiss

My Cossack Family and Other Remarkable People in Russia and Ukraine

By Caroline Walton (Sirin Books, 2019, Pbk, 236pp, £14.99)

This book is a fascinating read for anyone with an interest in people, the history of the Soviet Union, in particular Russia and Ukraine, and in faith healing and all forms of spirituality.

You will not find a history of the Cossacks or indeed, very much history at all. What history the author includes is introduced here and there, when needed, to explain this or that phenomenon. But what you glean from Caroline Walton's book is an insight into a wealth of people with rich and often tragic lives, who have overcome enormous odds and who are not afraid to be different, even eccentric.

Caroline Walton first became interested in Russia and all things Russian at school, when she read Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and other Russian writers. Now married to Andrei, who is half Russian, half Ukrainian, she first travelled to Samara (formerly the closed town of Kuibyshev, named after a Communist leader and best known for its space rocket industry) in 1993, and has since visited and lived in both Russia and Ukraine.

Through the fascinating accounts of the people she has met, you learn about the human effects of forced collectivisation in Ukraine and Southern Russia, the repressions during the thirties and the deportations of suspected Nazi collaborators during World War II (WWII). We read about the cruel siege of Leningrad by the Nazis in WWII, when between 700,000 and 2 million citizens died, and the tenacity and grit of the survivors. We learn about what it was like at Chernobyl after the

1986 nuclear accident, through the words of Lyonya, who spent twelve years working in the cleanup there.

The indomitable human spirit shines through the many adversities described by Walton's relatives and acquaintances. Community spirit still survives, though many mourn its decline.

One of the book's intriguing characters is Larissa, a psychic and faith healer, who believes in the body's ability to heal itself. "Our organism is a pharmacy," she says. "Medicine only treats symptoms and it has side effects. I ask my patients to fast. The body cleans itself."

According to Larissa, many Soviet leaders and top Communists, including Stalin, consulted psychics. The 'militant atheism' of the Soviet period failed to eradicate faith and today, Walton says, the Church and all kinds of faith healing are widespread.

Through the colourful characters Walton meets, we glean such facts as: since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian Government spending on health has halved; people's country cottages (*dachas*) saved them from starvation during the 'shock therapy' period of the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin; rural life is pretty much unchanged since the 1980s and the abacus is still used in shops; bribery and corruption are rife in present-day Ukraine and many people believe in the need for a strong leader.

The picture Caroline Walton paints in this book of Russia and Ukraine since the end of the USSR will contribute in some small way to readers' understanding of what has happened there following the introduction of capitalism.

Kate Clark

Natalia Goncharova
Tate Modern, London (ends 8 September 2019)

Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962), was a major figure in Russia's vibrant, pre-World War I (WWI) avant-garde. An aristocrat, she

was born on her family's country estate and studied art in Moscow where she met Mikhail Larionov, who became her lifelong partner and collaborator.

Confident and courageous, she delighted in outraging her ruling class's rigidly traditional *moeurs* and high art aesthetics with 'primitive' paintings whose lack of life-like representation defied academic conventions. Her paintings, such as *Hay Cutting* of 1907–8, ignore rules of tone, scale and perspective, use raw, often unmixed, colours and large areas of flat shapes encased in bold, visible outlines. As did the contemporary French Fauves and German Expressionists. But whereas their simplifications were influenced by African art, Goncharova was inspired by Russian peasant arts and crafts. She collected peasant *lubki* (popular prints), icons and embroideries when they were still disparaged by the dominant class as the 'naive', inept low art of the uneducated.

Her subjects were also rooted in peasant culture with its rich folk tales and icons. Big eyed Madonnas, flying angels, grave saints, mythical creatures, animals, decorative flowers and scenes of peasant life abound. With uneven results.

Some paintings have overcrowded compositions and fussy, overworked brushwork that create unpleasant granular surfaces. But some paintings are spectacular. In *The Forest* of 1913, the pared down boldness of broadly brushed, judiciously limited colours and sweeping angular shapes convey sunlight filtering through the majesty of ancient, closely planted trees, and suggest subtly rustling leaves amid the silence.

Refusing to be typecast, Goncharova branched out into design, explored Cubism, Dada performances and Rayonism, which she invented with Larionov. A vividly coloured version of Futurism, it communicated the speed and modernity of recently industrialised urban life. *The City* of 1911 depicts newfangled aeroplanes flying over forbiddingly tall and faceless red modernist flats that dwarf Moscow's small,

traditional wooden houses, while a factory chimney belches smoke over a church spire. The repeated outlines of the cyclist's body and his bicycle's wheels in *The Cyclist* of 1913 convey speed, as do the briefly glimpsed fragmented street signs as he whizzes past.

Goncharova was at her best when painting on a large scale, as in the arresting nine-panelled *Harvest* of 1911, whose uncompromisingly dynamic composition, swift sweeps of vivid oranges, golds, purples, reds, magenta, cobalt and white, glow with the vibrancy of stained-glass windows.

That her true forte was in design was soon spotted by the impresario Serge Diaghilev. Sharing Goncharova's love of Russian folk arts, which he introduced to the West, he commissioned sets and costumes for his innovative ballets and operas. Her first designs were for *Le Coq d'Or* (*The Golden Cockerel*) which premiered in Paris in 1914. Perpetuating an idyllic vision of Russian peasant culture, all is brilliant colour, glittering headdresses, swirling skirts appliquéd with giant, child-like flowers and expertly embroidered blouses. Over a century old, these set designs and costumes, many of which are displayed in Tate Modern's exhibition, still look stunning.

Apart from their enforced return to Russia during WWI, she and Larionov chose to remain in France as émigrés for the rest of their lives.

Goncharova also designed decorative textiles, dresses, graphics, interiors and books, including a beautiful illustrated edition of Pushkin's stories. Unhampered by the need to define her own content, she responded with gusto and imagination to commissions that suited her gift for dramatic effects, decoration, terrific colour sense and adaption of Russian folk art.

But apart from her brief sortie into celebrations of modernity, the meanings generated or implied in her self-generated paintings and prints remained ideologically bourgeois, albeit avant-garde in form. She

depicted Russian peasants like a starry-eyed anthropologist observing their lives and culture with no empathy for their social conditions. This attitude can be equated with the French Cubists' and German Expressionists' patronising appropriation of African art.

Goncharova's uncritical reliance on Orthodox iconography and her ambivalent attitude to WWI is manifested in her series of prints on this subject. Their futurist designs are terrific and a few prints do indict the war's carnage, yet an unquestioning patriotism and mysticism features large. *Devoted Christian Troops* portrays a Madonna and child blessing the cavalry from the skies; other prints depict angels watching over undamaged corpses or mingling with aviators, implying that these are heroes willing to make 'good deaths', since their patriotism will be honoured in heaven. God is on their side.

An astonishingly prolific artist, Goncharova's output was uneven and its content was contradictory. Yet she produced some wonderful works and stunning designs that look as fresh today as they did almost a hundred years ago. This comprehensive exhibition is curated with care and clarity and has an excellent catalogue. Well worth a visit.

Christine Lindey

Note: This review first appeared in the *Morning Star*, 13–14 July 2019 issue.

Stalingrad

By Vasily Grossman (translated by Robert & Elizabeth Chandler, edited by Robert Chandler & Yury Bit-Yunan, Harvill Secker, London, June 2019, ISBN: 9781846555794, Hbk, xxv + 961pp, £25.00)

You have probably heard of Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*. The novel reviewed here is the prequel to *Life and Fate*. In it you will find the same characters at a happier time of their lives before the war, and then see how they survived the siege of Stalingrad itself.

There are three reasons why you might want to read, or study, this book. The first is its literary qualities. *The Economist* review of *Stalingrad* describes the novel as a “huge seething fresco of front-line combat, domestic routine under siege, and restless debate”. More than most books I have read, we get a look into the character and thoughts of each of the many characters, each in turn as their strand of the novel develops. The narrative moves quickly and neatly on, yet contains telling details and asides, intriguing observations and thoughts, and it is this style which particularly reminds me of Leo Tolstoy’s genius for observation, or Beethoven’s symphonies, continually embarking on new delightful themes. We move through it as if we were ourselves characters in the novel, never knowing what is going to happen to us next – just as in real life.

The second reason is as a chronicle of the war, as experienced in Stalingrad and Eastern Europe, from the individual’s point of view. Unlike Victor Nekrasov’s military account *Front-line Stalingrad (V okopakh Stalingrada, 1946)*, we learn the thoughts of those taking part in the military actions, and not just of the Russians but of the Germans too. We witness the Soviet retreat, the evacuation of Stalingrad, the capture of key characters and their fates. Grossman was a trusted war correspondent, and Alexandra Popoff’s biography of him (*Vasily Grossman and the Soviet Century*, Yale University Press, 2019) mentions that Stalin himself anticipated a *Soviet War and Peace*. *Stalingrad* was published in several editions under Stalin and later (under the circumstances described below).

The third reason for studying *Stalingrad* is for the light it sheds on the operation of Soviet censorship. Grossman had enough influence to be able to dispute and negotiate the decisions of the censors. His instinct for free artistic license continually pushed against the restrictions of Soviet censorship. Comparisons of the various editions with the manuscript show the curious pettiness and prudishness of the censors, yet combined with the desire to make political statements. In a most unusual departure, the editors of

this volume provide a 30-page appendix commenting on all the texts cut, changed and partially reinstated from 1949 (the year the novel was completed) to 1956, over four editions. In this translation, the editors have reinstated the frankest, often the most revealing, passages. One of the more bizarre examples of prudery is the story of General N: when his unit was surrounded, he plodded through a bog in full uniform, wearing all his medals, with a goat on a lead. When asked “Comrade General, are you following your compass?”, he replied: “Compass? This goat is my compass!” That had to go. An example of political interference forced on Grossman was the book’s first title *For a Just Cause*, which happened to be a phrase used in a speech by Molotov when the Germans invaded. Grossman’s preferred title was reinstated in later editions.

Andrew Jameson

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