



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

# THE PRINCESS DASHKOVA RUSSIAN CENTRE

## APRIL - MAY 2016 NEWSLETTER

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## The Dashkova Centre News

We are very pleased to host **Professor Marianna Shakhnovich** as a Visiting Dashkova fellow in May. Professor Shakhnovich is the Chair of Philosophy of Religion and Religious Studies at Saint-Petersburg State University, the Secretary of the Governing Council of the Association for Russian Centers for Study of Religions, and a former Member of the Executive Committee of the International Association for the History of Religions. She is a renowned specialist in Epicurean tradition in the European intellectual culture, philosophy of religion, and history of religious studies in Russia. Among her over 200 publications are monographs *Garden of Epicurus: Philosophy of Religion of Epicurus and Epicurean Tradition in History of European Culture* (2002) and *Essays on History of Religion* (2006). Among her recent works are *The Study of Religion in Russia: The Foundation of the Museum of the History of Religion* (2016), and *Religion in Contemporary Public Education in Russia* (2015).

## Reporting on our Events, February – May 2016

### Public Lecture: Professor Alexei Kudrin, 'The Russian Economy: Structural Problems and Perspectives on Economic Growth'

Wednesday, March 30

The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre was delighted to welcome back Alexey Kudrin to the University of Edinburgh. Last year, the title of Honorary Professor of the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures was conferred upon Alexey Kudrin, and this visit is a continuation of a series of his annual lectures that he delivers at the University.

In contrast with the last year's lecture which was focused on new trends in Russian and global economy and new ways of cooperation, this time Alexei Kudrin analysed structural problems of Russian economy and outlined potential solutions. He pointed out three key factors of slow growth of the Russian economy: oil price; geopolitical risks and sanctions; and structural problems within the Russian economy.

Professor Marianna Shakhnovich (Saint-Petersburg State University) 'Semyon Desnitsky, Scottish Enlightenment and the Origin of Religious Studies in Russia'

#### Roundtable

In co-operation with DELC's Language and Violence Research strand: 'Writing and Speaking from the Prison /Camp'



Kudrin sees the structural and institutional shortcomings as significant imbalances of Russian economy and society. He emphasised the fact that institutional problems are rooted in inefficient practices. According to Kudrin, in Russia significant structural and institutional issues include the following: demographics, especially the pension system and labour market; dependence on oil and gas; lack of investment in new technologies in businesses and lack of innovation in the economy; inefficient budget structure and a very high level of financial commitments; high inflation and very expensive credits; weak financial markets; a vast amount of state property and large number of state-owned enterprises; and problems with policing and the judicial system.

The speaker also identified solutions that could help with economic growth. These included liberalisation of economy, elimination of unprofitable industries, investment in modern technology, creation of a more favourable environment for business, reduction of military spending, and reduction of governmental shares in business and promotion of entrepreneurship. He also pointed to judicial independence as a vital condition for economic development.

This event attracted an audience of around 300 attendees who eagerly engaged in a conversation with Professor Kudrin during the questions and answers session. The lecture proved to be a great success, and we are looking forward to Alexei Kudrin's visit to the University of Edinburgh next year.

Shortly after his visit to the University of Edinburgh, Professor Kudrin was appointed vice-chairman to presidential economic council. He also accepted an offer to take a senior position at Russia's Centre for Strategic Research, as part of which he is going to draw up a new economic programme for the country.



## ‘SLOVO’: The Russian Word in Scotland A Poetry Evening with Dmitry Vodennikov

Monday, 29 February

As part of our SLOVO series of events, at the end of February, the Dashkova Centre welcomed the Russian poet and essayist Dmitry Vodennikov.



Dmitry Vodennikov is an author of seven collections of poetry, and is celebrated as one of the Russia’s most prominent poets of today. He is at the forefront of the ‘New Sincerity’ movement in Russian literature. He also contributes to several Russian magazines and hosts two radio shows dedicated to poetry: ‘Free Entry’ (Radio Kultura) and ‘The Poetic Minimum’ (Radio Rossii).

At the Dashkova Centre, Dmitry Vodennikov gave a lecture on the lesser known Russian poetry of the 20th century. He read and commented on poems of uncensored underground poets, as well as discussed influences on his own work.

*Because poems aren't raised like respectable children  
But sprout forth at night between one's thighs like thorns  
The poet-fool, the poet-father, poet-flower  
Once only in one hundred years is born.*

1. Yes. That's precisely the way  
That my dragged out spring scrambled,  
spitting out its farewells.  
And my long-awaited maturity arrived at last.  
Then, yesterday, why did you beat so fast  
my full, my sly heart  
Then why did you beat as if you had gone totally  
mad?

In a hard, burlap coat I stand upon this April hill.  
I have four lives to live. I have a letter from you.  
“Hello, — you write — I am seriously ill,  
And I don't have a life to live. Tomorrow I have  
chemotherapy.  
However, I will try to survive. I will fight for my  
life.  
As for you — you should try to be happy.

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Take it as easy as you can. And don't be afraid of  
anything”.  
So, here I am. Trying.

2. So then go on and try — resurrected and sweaty  
and ill  
to jot down this life on a torn piece of paper  
electronic, wooden, or green... azure-blue,  
and for this — like the rest — I will always be  
grateful to you.

So much joy all around, so much strength in people  
and beasts!  
... there is Anton Ochirov and Kiril Medvedev is  
chirping  
And here is the man (warming up on a sweltering  
stone)  
who, for several years bore his voluntary cross  
beside me  
with a back that he broke as a child,  
he looks like a sunray, so sharp, so mild  
and to my “poor, poor boy” invariably replies:  
“no, I am happy”

3. All these people — they stand straight and upright in my head  
 up to their hips in the earth  
 up to their shoulders in fiery grass  
 up to their foreheads in death  
 it won't be soon that they leave me without a trace.  
 As for those who fucked up, or got stranded, got lost,  
 those who stayed in Israel, Latvia, Poland, in Moscow marshes  
 we will take them along with us too, at no cost like the shot-down blueberry bushes.  
 in our trousers,  
 our outstretched skirts  
 in our palms —  
 our blueberry alms.

4. We are standing upon April hill  
 in our hard-felt, our foolish coats  
 Olya, Nastya and Roma and  
 Petya and Sasha and who the hell knows  
 with our e-pads, our cell phones  
 in the deep of the birch-grove  
 like heavenly pillars  
 with our faces transparent  
 turned up to the skies  
 perfectly still.  
 I will teach all of you how to speak from the Sparrow's Hill.



5. Hello — one will say — I, only one who defended poetry against humiliation.  
 am ready to sign your verdict against me:  
 “Yes, be it your way! All this is not poetry.  
 It is merely my beating,  
 my voice that's alive  
 that once promised the woman I loved  
 to make her immortal  
 but couldn't even manage to make her happy.”  
 Hello — another one will say —  
 if at some point in a smoky April  
 you will remember me  
 as you long for the life that never was  
 DO NOT DARE TO OPEN MY BOOKS  
 DO NORE DARE TO RESSURRECT MY  
 SCATTERED VOICE  
 DON'T. DON'T YOU DARE RATTLE MY  
 ASHES

— Because I loved you a lot more than you ever loved me —  
 the fourth will say.  
 And I needed you more than you would ever need me.  
 And that's why I will let you HAVE the winner's trophy  
 Because... after all — do I look like a winner to you?

6. ...However, since I am the one who is claiming to have an uneasy male fate  
 all that is left to me is to step forward,  
 bow towards the people (closer than anyone else)  
 and say:  
 You, my dear ones, my poor, my kind, half-alive.  
 We are all a bit dead, a little immortal and false.  
 So — as much as you possibly can — won't you try  
 to be happy and please have no fear  
 (except the fear of humiliation, raggedness and dogged out death)  
 But all in all, fear less.

Because all of you whose main battle is lost,  
 who stayed behind in Paris, on a hospital cot, in poems under the Moscow marshes,  
 we will gather you up in a heap and take you home at no cost  
 Like the scattered beads of shot-down strawberry bushes.

Dmitri Vodennikov

(translated: Yana Djin)

[http://vodennikov.ru/press/yana\\_djin\\_translation.htm](http://vodennikov.ru/press/yana_djin_translation.htm)



**Red Africa Festival in Edinburgh:**  
 'Black People in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia', an evening with TV journalist Yelena Khanga;  
 'Things Fall Apart', a Presentation by Exhibition Curator Professor Mark Nash;  
 Screening of Abderrahmane Sissako's film 'October/Октябрь' (1993)  
 Wednesday, March 2 and Friday, March 4

The 'Red Africa' Festival was arranged in collaboration with our partner Calvert 22 Foundation. Within this joint project, the Russian television journalist Yelena Khanga and the art historian Professor Mark Nash came to Edinburgh to deliver talks on issues of complex identities and Soviet influences on African art.

**Yelena Khanga** in the most well-known black Russian journalist and the author of the critically-acclaimed



book *Soul to Soul: A Black Russian-American Family 1865-1992*, in which she explores the complex history of her international family. In her presentation on March 2, Khanga shared fascinating details of her journey to self-understanding as she spoke about her life and career as a black journalist in the Soviet Union, the United States and modern Russia.

The daughter of the prominent African-American social activist Lily Golden, Khanga epitomised the liberal wave that swept Russian television in the 1990s. As the host of the popular chat show about sex –'Pro Eto' ('About That') she opened up a new chapter both in Russian journalism and in the country's tumultuous history of race relations.

The art and film studies expert Professor **Mark Nash** made a detailed presentation of the London-based exhibition 'Things Fall Apart', which he curated at Calvert 22 Art Gallery.



'Things Fall Apart' gathered the responses of contemporary artists to different aspects of Soviet interests in Africa. The exhibition took its title from Chinua Achebe's 1958 classic of post-colonial fiction, seen by many as the archetypal modern African novel in English, which reflects on the devastating impact of colonialism in Africa. The exhibition used this association to focus on a similar loss of utopian perspective following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc.



Mark Nash's presentation was accompanied by the screening of **Abderrahmane Sissako's** 'October/Октябрь' (1993), a near-silent black-and-white short film that told the story of the African student Idrissa and his Russian girlfriend Irina, and depicted the difficulties of forming a relationship across the racial and cultural divides of the 1980s, between Mali and Moscow.



## Dashkova Open Research Seminars

Dr Andrea Gullotta (The University of Glasgow)

**'Towards a New Understanding of the Gulag and of its Literature through the Prism of Auto-Biographical Studies'**

Thursday, March 17



Dr Gullotta's talk addressed the issue of developing a critical framework capable of assessing the GULAG literature as a distinctive part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature.

The concept of 'Gulag literature' still lacks a clear definition, and there is a continuous lack of assessment of this considerable area of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature. During the USSR times this literature was a taboo, a 'hidden' literature, which resulted in the lack of critical analysis during the post-Soviet period. In the meantime, there recently emerged a growing trend of rejection of the GULAG. As a result of the above, despite the fact that some outstanding works have been published on the topic, scholars still refer to the Gulag literature in vague terms, and include anything that 'has to do with the Gulag' in this concept.

In order to produce a clearer definition of what GULAG literature is, a study of such common characteristics as narrative strategies, stylistic features, and common structures is necessary. In his research, Gullotta is considering a wide corpus of texts, including those which have been less studied to date (e.g. oral poems composed within the camps).

His approach to developing a new critical framework for assessment of the GULAG literature involves: inclusion of both internal (such as works written and sometimes even published inside a camp) and external GULAG literature (such as works about the GULAG, even those based on the evidence of others, i.e., Grossman); consideration of such similar features of texts as impact of trauma (possible connection of trauma with brevity of the text), Aesopian language and oral poetry produced for memorization; consideration of a hypertext of Stalin's victims versus a diversity of victim's personal experiences after 1953; inclusion of victims' letters and memoirs into this corpus.

Andrea Gullotta concluded his presentation by pointing out the fact that this research still remains fraught with complex questions, such as whether this corpus of the GULAG literature should also include writings of the perpetrators.



### **Professor Sergei Zenkin (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow) 'Russian Formalism and the Thought of/from Outside'**

In cooperation with the Russian Research Seminar

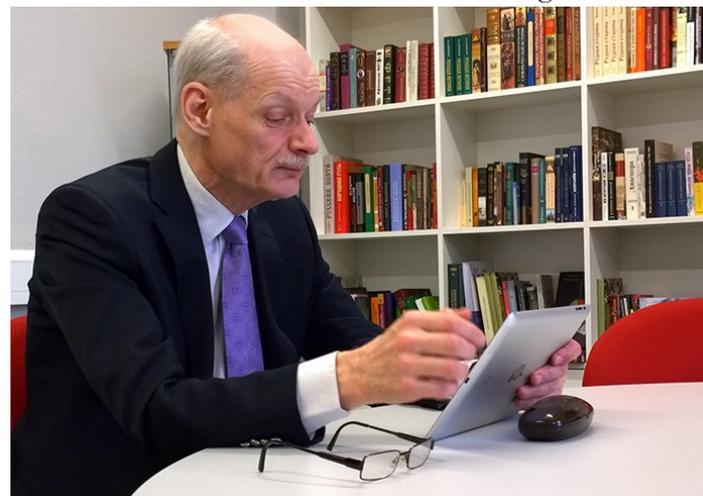
Thursday, March 24

In his lecture, Professor Zenkin explored the method of the Russian Formalists, as characterized by radical externalism. This approach excluded any idea of hermeneutics or of any creative subject, and, on the contrary, involved observation of literary objects from the outside. The Formalists considered *texts* as 'things', which had to be studied along with *structures* - structures of forces rather than structures of mental relations – and with dynamic interactions between texts as well as between texts and the social life (or *byt*).

According to Zenkin, four aspects of formalist externalism are: the formal, the mimetic, the nomothetic, and the historical one.

1. *The formal aspect.* The inner form of the word, for the Formalists tended to exteriorize, and to transform itself into an external form; this results in verbal 'estrangement'.

2. *The mimetic aspect.* Energy and corporeal mimesis by which the Formalists explain literary dynamics, manifest themselves outside or on the margin of consciousness (i.e., in poetry of the absurd, in the *skaz*, in mimetic evolution of genres).



3. *The nomothetic aspect.* The laws of 'poetical language' (its special phonetics, or its semantical 'unity and density') were as imperative as linguistic laws, but at the same time should be experienced not as automatic, but as laws of resistance or of transgression.

4. *The historical aspect.* Literary history had to be conceived as a 'history without proper names' and without time ('not a temporal movement but just a movement'), so that its processes exceed the actors' mind.

Thus, the formalist literary theory aimed to limit the human subject and even to take it away from the literary act, assimilating the latter less to organic or psychic life than to the functioning of a machine.

Professor Zenkin pointed out the convergence between the ideas of the Russian formalists and some of the trends of 20<sup>th</sup> century European philosophy, although they arose in a different intellectual context. Unlike Western philosophers, the Russian Formalists did not have to overcome the Cartesian or Kantian ideas of a sovereign subject, which are poorly presented in the Russian thought; their externalism, as well as its critique by Bakhtin, should be understood against the background of another conception of subject, possibly linked to the historical relationship between Russia and the West.

**Professor Marianna Shakhnovich (Saint-Petersburg State University)**

**‘Semyon Desnitsky, Scottish Enlightenment and the Origin of Religious Studies in Russia’**

Tuesday, 3 May



Professor Shakhnovich’s presentation contextualized Semyon Desnitsky’s (1740-1789) activity in the early history of religious studies in Russia. After graduating from Glasgow University as a Doctor of Civil and Church Law, Desnitsky started his professorship at Moscow University in 1767. He was a prominent figure in the philosophical circle formed in Moscow in the late 1760s where the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment enjoyed wide popularity.

Both Desnitsky and his friend Professor Dmitry Anichkov were influenced by David Hume’s ‘Natural History of Religion’, and their creative work was the first attempt to establish the rational philosophical concept of religion in the Russian thought.



**Roundtable, Language and Violence research stream  
‘Writing and Speaking from a Prison/Camp’**

Friday, March 18

As part of the DELC Language and Violence research stream, the Dashkova Centre hosted a roundtable discussion on the issues of language and writing from a prison/camp in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The roundtable focused on considering answers to the following questions: how to define a prison/camp, and how are the spaces of the prison/camp described?; is the voice of the prisoner being ‘taken’, ‘used’ or ‘preserved’ when someone speaks/writes on behalf of him/her?; what languages and/or language varieties are spoken?; how is this diversity translated/mediated for people outside the camp system?; how do we interpret the aestheticisation in the prison/camp writing or speaking?

Thus, Professor Peter Davies (German, DELC) in his presentation titled ‘Where does a witness speak from?’ discussed the position of a speaker at the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt (1963-65), when 22 former SS guards were accused, and 360 witnesses called. Davies’s study focused on the linguistic performance of the Auschwitz trial and of the means by which the witnesses’ speeches were processed and transformed in a consistent discourse for reaching a verdict.

Dr Andrea Gullotta (Russian, Glasgow University) discussed writing from a prison as an act of resistance drawing from the example of the GULAG literature.

Barbara Fernandez (Hispanic, DELC) presented an analysis of contemporary Chilean poetry written during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship and pointed out forms of allegory used for expression of resistance experience in poetry.

Dr Rose France's (Russian, DELC) presentation focused on translation and publication of Diaries of Children of War, 1941-45, raised a question of similarities between WW2 testimonies and Gulag testimonies. She discussed the issue of how we can talk about individual writing in an environment of strict state control of individual behaviour where the official state narrative of events is in contradiction to the individual testimonies. In particular, speaking about children's diaries, she drew attention to the link and transitions between the narrative of martyrdom and the narrative of heroism, and to the transformation of a heroism narrative into a victim narrative.

Of particular interest was the issue of what linguistic tools and tropes are used to construct subject positions and/or perform counter-violence in the prison speech. In her presentation, Dr Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (Russian, DELC) used the case study of the trial of the Ukrainian fighter pilot Nadezhda Savchenko to discuss the notion of linguistic violence as embodied language, and the place of linguistic violence in biopolitics and counter-biopolitics.



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