



# THE PRINCESS DASHKOVA RUSSIAN CENTRE

## MARCH 2015 NEWSLETTER

14 Buccleuch Place, EH8 9LN,  
Edinburgh, Tel: 0131 650 99 02

28 February, 2015, Issue 2

### February 2015 Events

Screening of Kirill Sokolov  
Documentary, and a  
Lecture by Dr Avril Pyman  
on 'The Concept of  
Tragedy in Russian Silver  
Age Thought'

Dashkova Open Seminar  
Dr Rose France, 'An  
Aesopian interpretation of  
Zoshchenko's *Retribution*'

### March 2015 Events

Dashkova Open Seminar.  
Prof Paul Dukes, U of  
Aberdeen 'The Urals:  
Russia's Crucible'  
Date: Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> March,  
5:10pm

Honorary Dashkova  
Lecture. Prof Andrei  
Zorin, U of Oxford  
'The Ways of Emotional  
Europeanization of the  
Russian Elite in the second  
half of the Eighteenth  
century'  
Date: Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup>  
March, 5:10pm

Honorary Erickson  
Lecture. Prof Jacek  
Saryusz-Wolski, Member  
of the European  
Parliament  
'The European Union and  
its values under test:  
terrorism, Greece, Russia'  
Date: Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March,  
5:30pm

Public Lecture. Charles  
Hendry, MP  
'Britain's relations with  
Russia and the CIS – the  
way ahead'  
Date: Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup>  
March, 6:00pm

## The assassination of Boris Nemtsov – a dark day for Russia

The colleagues of the Dashkova centre wish to express our shock and sadness at the news of the murder of opposition politician and former deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov in Moscow on 27<sup>th</sup> February.



Nemtsov, an outspoken critic of the government, was, allegedly, poised to reveal damaging information on Russian involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. While it is not known who carried out this crime, it has been quickly linked, in commentaries by Russian journalists, with the escalating rhetoric of violence and hate in the country's media, and the growing atmosphere of political intolerance since the beginning of the war with Ukraine. We salute all those brave enough to stand up for political freedom and condemn those who would silence their ideological opponents by force.



## Reporting on our February 2015 Events

Premiere Screening of *'Kirill Sokolov'*, a New Documentary by Benjamin Sadd,

and a Lecture by Dr Avril Pyman on *'The Concept of Tragedy in Russian Silver Age Thought'*

Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> February

The Princess Dashkova Centre in partnership with The Sutton Gallery was delighted to co-host the premiere of Benjamin Sadd's documentary about the life and work of the major Russian artist Kirill Sokolov (1930 - 2004). The film was accompanied by a lecture on 'The Concept of Tragedy in Russian Silver Age Thought' by the artist's widow, the renowned academic **Dr Avril Pyman**.

*"This event is a double treat" – Peter France, Professor Emeritus, University of Edinburgh*

A leading translator of Russian poetry into English, a key specialist on the Russian Silver Age and a biographer of Aleksandr Blok, Pyman has *A History of Russian Symbolism*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2006. She is a fellow of the British Academy.

"But after the old world fell: What then? Would man conquer death, disease, personal tragedy, his own shortcomings? And was even a just and materially successful society really the summit of man's ambitions? (...)

For those who persisted in asking these eternal, accursed questions (the 'children's questions', as Aleksander Blok called them), the quest led out into the realm of tragedy. Lev Shestov once wrote that – in this realm – even positivists accept the possibility of effect without cause. Tragedy replaces juridical guilt by the irrational but not unreasonable concept of 'tragic guilt'. The tragic hero can be slain by society, but can only be judged by gods". (...)



*Dr Avril Pyman*

Eventually, this road via 'the absence of all laws' was to lead back to a new acceptance of the moral imperative: whether as tragic courage, existential choice or acceptance of the implications of the cross of Christ..."

*"The nature of Kirill's art was tragedy, the theme of his art was Russia" – Dr Avril Pyman*

Throughout his career, **Kirill Sokolov's** work and art enjoyed a wide range of media and art forms, from books illustrations and silk-screen printing to oil painting, silkscreen, collage and sculpture. Filmed in 2013-14, Benjamin Sadd's documentary is the first to look at Sokolov's work in depth, from his early life in Russia to his emigration to Berwick Upon Tweed and then Durham in the 1970s.



Sadd's film featured new footage from Greece and Russia as well as extensive dialogues with Avril Pyman. Also appearing in the film to comment on Sokolov's achievements are the art historians and Russian specialists Professor John Milner, Professor John Elsworth and Dr Anthony Parton.

At the core of the film was an opportunity to see many works on paper, sculpture and oil paintings, which have been newly photographed in the studio and in some cases never exhibited outside Sokolov's close circle of family and friends. Showcasing the artist's range and vision across a wide range of media, the film makes the case for Sokolov as one of the most interesting artists working in Britain of the last 50 years.



The film is now publicly available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/86174391>

## Dashkova Open Research Seminar

**Dr Rose France, University of Edinburgh**

**Reading Between the Lines: Aesopian Language in Zoshchenko's Retribution**

"It is well-known that throughout the later Soviet period, many Soviet intellectuals became skilled in the use of "Aesopian language": writing or speaking in code to evade the censor; using allegories and hidden allusions to communicate a secret message to the reader or listener.

This paper is an attempt at an 'Aesopian' interpretation of generally neglected work by the writer Mikhail Zoshchenko, a fictional Civil War memoir, "Retribution". "Retribution" is one of a number of works that Zoshchenko produced in the late 1930s which appeared to toe the Party line, to eschew 'formalism' and to observe the requirements of Socialist Realism. Written at the beginning of the great purges

at a time when state-sanctioned violence and censorship were reaching unprecedented levels, at first glance, this story of a “positive” heroine and Bolshevik agent appears to fit the accepted historical narrative. However, a deeper knowledge of Zoshchenko’s own work and history, the political climate at the time, and the typical devices of Aesopian language allow for a different interpretation of the story, which suggests a deeper meaning lying beneath the surface.

This paper identifies at a number of possibly Aesopian strategies in “Retribution”. These include narrative irony (a marked distance between the implied author and the narrator); the use of a different timeframe which, with audience hindsight encourages comparisons between past and present; the placing of contentious statements in the mouths of “class enemies”; the use of intertextual references and embedded quotations – (with Blok's poem "Retribution" a particularly important subtextual presence); and the use of symbolic names.

It is also important to see how Retribution can be read in relation to Zoshchenko's other work.



*Dr Rose France*



The film version of  
“Retribution” –  
“Towards the Bright Fire”,  
1976

The theme of decadence and barbarism is a constant leitmotif in Zoshchenko's work and is also central to this one. The heroine’s victory over the Whites is, on some levels represented not as an ideological victory but rather as a victory of the life force. Zoshchenko encourages readers to ask: at what cost has this victory taken place?

Irina Sandomirskaya has recently drawn on Lydia Ginzburg’s writings to criticize Aesopian language for bringing about “necrosis” of the language in the late Stalin period. With Zoshchenko however, the case is different. He is able to use the form of a fictional first person “skaz” to manipulate narrative voice and perspective and to keep his own position ambiguous. The result may have attracted little attention and failed to communicate to any outside a select circle with the requisite skills to read the hidden messages. But perhaps, for a writer of Zoshchenko’s stature, there is hope that time will bring a reassessment of this and other works from the same period.”

## March 2015 Events

### Dashkova Open Research Seminar

**Professor Paul Dukes, University of Aberdeen**  
**The Urals: Russia’s Crucible**

**Date: Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 5:10pm**

**Venue: The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre**



Russia's 'Stone Belt' formed by the Ural Mountains was considered from early times to mark the division between Europe and Asia, and the impression remains. However, the Ural region's significance is much greater than as a mere boundary, especially because of its mineral wealth, extracted in trying circumstances.

'Russia's Crucible' is a more appropriate subtitle for this talk in both dictionary definitions: 'a container in which metals and other substances may be melted or subjected to high temperatures'; 'a situation of severe trial, or in which different elements interact to produce something new'. Indeed, the Urals have produced and suffered much in what has been called a 'mining-industrial culture'.

The talk will be based on a Powerpoint presentation of illustrations ranging from a map of 1549 to some recent photographs.

## Honorary Dashkova Lecture 2015

**Professor Andrei Zorin, University of Oxford**

**The Ways of Emotional Europeanization of the Russian Elite in the second half of the Eighteenth century**

**Date: Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 5:10pm**

**Venue: The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre**



This paper explores Europeanization of the Russian Elite as a cultural project during the reign of Catherine the Great. "Peter gave us being, Catherine – Soul" – this often quoted line became a rhetorical cliché, as it embodied the three main assumptions widespread at the time of its appearance. Firstly: to exist means to be European, whilst individuals and nations outside the European civilization do not have any sort of presence in the world. Secondly: having acquired European clothes, appearances and customs under Peter the Great's rule, the members of Russian elite had been "created" only physically, and could be compared to soulless bodies. They had to wait until the start of the age of Astrea to claim their moral existence. Finally: the prerogative to endow the nation with a being and soul fully belongs to the state power, and in Russia's case to the monarch.

## Honorary Erickson Lecture

**Dr Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Member of the European Parliament**

**The European Union and its values under test: terrorism, Greece, Russia**

**Date: Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 5:30pm**

**Venue: Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation, Old High School, Infirmary Street, EH1 1LT**

### **The Erickson Lecture**

The annual Erickson Lecture was established to mark the seminal contributions to military history and analysis made by Professor John Erickson FRSE FBA while Professor of Defence Studies at the University of Edinburgh. It is hosted by the University of Edinburgh Princess Dashkova Russia Centre, the University of

Edinburgh Europa Institute and the University of Edinburgh Politics and International Relations Transatlantic Seminar Series.

**The 2015 Erickson Lecturer: Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI**, Member of the European Parliament



Elected as a Member of the European Parliament in 2004 and in 2009, Dr. Jacek Saryusz-Wolski is currently the Chairman of the Delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Vice-Chair of the Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and a Member of the Conference of Delegation Chairs, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Delegation to the EU-Armenia, EU-Azerbaijan and EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committees, as well as Substitute Member of the Budget Committee. In the years 1991-1996, he served as the Government Plenipotentiary for European Integration and Foreign Assistance, leading negotiations of the Polish Association Agreement with the European Community.

The event is free but booking is essential. To book your place, please contact [Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk)

## Public Lecture

**Charles Hendry, MP**

**Britain's relations with Russia and the CIS – the way ahead**

**Date: Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 6:00pm**

**Venue: room LT183, Old College, South Bridge**



Charles Hendry has been Member of Parliament for Wealden since 2001. He served as Minister of State for Energy and Climate Change from 2010-2012. His previous posts included Shadow Energy Minister (2005-2010), Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party (2003-2005) and Shadow Minister for Young People. In 2012, the Prime Minister appointed Charles Hendry as Trade Envoy to Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. He has also been appointed as Visiting Professor at the University of Edinburgh, associated with both the Business School and the Academy of Government.

The event is free but booking is essential. To book your place, please go to <https://charleshendrymp.eventbrite.co.uk>

### We're on the Web!

Follow us on Facebook for regular updates of news and events.

<https://www.facebook.com/DashkovaCentre>



The Dashkova Centre is on Twitter! You can follow us on [@DashkovaCentre](https://twitter.com/DashkovaCentre)

**To become a friend of the Dashkova Centre please contact**  
**[Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk)**

### The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre

The University of Edinburgh

14 Buccleuch Place, EH8 9LN, Edinburgh, Tel: 0131 650 99 02, Email: [Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk).