

The sixth Moffat Russian Conference took place last weekend. It was entitled '**The Russian Phoenix: Art and Literature in the era of the 1905 and 1917 Revolutions**'. Its programme made me well aware that, in this year which marks the **100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1917 Russian Revolution**, the conference must be regarded as pivotal to the future of the Demarco Archive. This archive is now regarded by the **Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art** as an unique academic resource, particularly in relation to the fact that 2017 also marked the **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Edinburgh Festival**. This year, our Russian participants spent valuable time in the Russian Department of the Universities of both Glasgow and Edinburgh. They also benefitted from their expeditions to the worlds of Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott in both Dumfriesshire and the Scottish Borders.

It is arguable that everything in terms of 20<sup>th</sup> century expressions of art in the spirit of avant-gardism stems from the Russian Revolutions of 2005 and 2017. That spirit can be found in the history of Jim Haynes' **Paperback Bookshop**, the first of its kind in the United Kingdom. It can also be found in the history of **The Traverse Theatre Club and Art Gallery** from 1963 to 67, and in The Demarco Gallery, from 1966 to 1992, which had the responsibility of keeping alive the hopes and aspirations of the founders of The Traverse Theatre as a club, free of the constraints of the Lord Chamberlain's dictates. Indeed, The Traverse Theatre could be likened to the **Café Voltaire** in Switzerland and the café society in Paris between the two World Wars. There is no doubt in my mind that the Paperback Bookshop, The Traverse Theatre Club and the Demarco Gallery attracted like minds inspired by the spirit of modernism expressed through the language of all the arts.

As one of the four founders of the Demarco Gallery 1966, I was fully aware that the Gallery's primary aim from 1967 to 1992 was to defend the spirit of modernism made manifest in cultural terms in a post-World War Two Europe.

My twenty-five-year-long role, from 1967-1991, as the director of the official Edinburgh Festival programme of contemporary visual arts exhibitions helped me to bring the spirit of the European avant-garde in its multifarious ways into the world of the Edinburgh Festival. There is no doubt that this spirit originated in the genius of those revolutionary Russian artists who gave the world nourishing food for thought in terms of literature, music, architecture, design, calligraphy, cinema, folklore, as well as religion.

In 1954, the official Edinburgh Festival contained an historic exhibition conceived and directed by **Richard Buckle**. The exhibition was a hymn of praise to the genius of **Serge Diaghilev**. It introduced me to the fact that the cultural heritage of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was heavily indebted to the Russian dimension created by the **Ballets Russes**. The Edinburgh Festival has, since that exhibition, contained every imaginable aspect of Russian 20<sup>th</sup> century culture. I now must plan an exhibition, together with a conference, for next year's Edinburgh Festival which celebrates the ways in which the Edinburgh Festival has helped keep alive the unassailable fact that the European cultural heritage is meaningless without a Russian dimension.

Thankfully, this year's Russian Conference in Moffat benefitted from an informative publication edited by **Elizabeth Roberts** and **Masha Bond**. This was published under the aegis of Moffat Book Events in collaboration with Moffat Russian Conferences. For those who were not fortunate to be able to experience this year's conference, this publication is of the utmost importance. It deserves close scrutiny. It provides an unique insight into the much-needed Anglo-Russian cultural dialogue in this period of political uncertainty.

The Conference benefitted from a most impressive exhibition entitled '**Twelve Russian Writers as a mirror of the 1917 Revolution**' (from the collection of the Russian State Literature Museum). **Daria Kaverina**, the exhibition curator, placed the exhibition outside the Moffat Town Hall in collaboration with **Alan Thomson**, the Russians' field officer, so that it could be effectively experienced by the people of Moffat.

There were many essays that I found particularly interesting in the Conference publication. **Professor Alan Riach** of Glasgow University reminded me of the fruitful impact of the Russian Revolutionary literature on Hugh McDairmid and other Scottish poets, particularly Edwin Morgan, and **Roger Scruton's** essay emphasised the importance of the need of a programme of public education so that the twin legacies of Marxism and Fascism can be properly understood.

Thankfully, as a unique academic resource, the Demarco Archive contains innumerable references to the Russian contributions made over the past seventy-year history of the Edinburgh Festival. I am fully aware as I write this Newsletter that I am doing so wearing two hats: those of the **Director** of the **Demarco European Art Foundation** and the **Chairman of Moffat Book Events** which gives the Russian Conference its legal status. My experience of this year's Russian Conference has made it clear that I now have the responsibility of focusing on the extraordinary Russian contributions made on the international stage of the Edinburgh Festival to provide lengthy and on-going proof positive that the programmes of the official Edinburgh Festival and the Festival Fringe have both benefitted enormously from their Russian content.

The Demarco Gallery and the Demarco European Art Foundation have together made a significant contribution to maintain this Russian dimension since the founding of The Traverse Theatre Club in 1963.

Perhaps the one outstanding Russian contribution made by the Demarco European Art Foundation to the Edinburgh Festival was that which was presented in 1995, not in Edinburgh but in Dundee on the 'state-of-the-art' stage of Dundee's renowned Repertory Theatre. It proved to be the perfect setting to present the full blast of Russian revolutionary theatre. It consisted of two plays under the aegis of the **Oskaras Korsunovas Company**. These two plays entitled '**There to be Here**' and '**An Old Woman**' combined parody, comedy, farce and comic opera with absurdist theatre. This resulted in a highly visual example of theatre which transcended the 'here and now'. As expected, it achieved critical acclaim. The Glasgow Herald theatre critic wrote: '*Dear People of Dundee, there is, in your midst, a theatre company of exceptional originality and artistry.....the Oskar Korsunovas Company are so good, they eclipse just about the lot. Choreographed with finesse, without being dance.....a joy to look at without being visual art - it is certainly theatre but I have never seen anything quite like it.*' The Scotsman theatre critic wrote: '*..... An immensely strong visual impact, coupled with a stunning fluidity of visual movement.*' The critic of The Stage newspaper wrote: '*An evening of unparalleled accomplishment and mind-snapping brilliance.*' The Dundee Courier's theatre critic wrote: '*..... full of invention..... intriguing. Dreamlike one minute, Chaplinesque-like the next.*'

The words of all these critics are a summation of the revolutionary spirit of Russian theatre. As a result, I felt it was necessary to invite Oskaras Korsunovas to again direct his homage to the spirit of Russian theatre in 1996. He decided to present a full-blown example of Russian opera imbued with the unique characteristics of Russian Revolutionary artists such as **Aleksandr Rodchenko**, **Vladimir Mayakovsky** and **Kazimir Malevich**. This opera was entitled '**Hello Sonya New Year**'. This presented 'the shock of the new' to the world of British opera. It provided ample proof that Russian culture was well received in Edinburgh Festival programmes.

It was entirely appropriate that the 2017 Russian Conference should begin on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October with a discussion on **'The Twelve: Russian Writers as a mirror of the 2017 Revolution from the collection of the Russian State Library Museum in Moscow'**.

The title of the 2017 Moffat Russian Conference exhibition was a play on the title of **Aleksander Blok's** poem entitled **'The Twelve'** and Lenin's Famous Work **'Leo Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution'**.

Twelve Russian writers were chosen to reveal the contradictory and complex events of the era from 1905 to 1917 in Russia – resulting in two revolutions. They are **Demian Bedny, Alexey Remizov, Maximilian Voloshin, Alexander Vertinsky, Ivan Bunin, Marina Tsvetayeva, Zinaida Gippius, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Aleksander Blok, Valery Bryusov, Maxim Gorky** and **Anatoly Lunacharsky**.

The Russian organisers of the conference who attended were **Svetlana Gorokhova**, the head of the **Foreign Department of the All Russia State Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow, Anastasia Kornienko** of the Institute for Translation, Moscow, **Eugeniy Reznichenko**, Director of The Institute for Translation, Moscow, **Irina Kirillova**, who is a member of the International Board of Trustees for the State Library of Foreign Literature and a lecturer in Russian Studies (retired), University of Cambridge, and **Alan Thomson** the Dumfries and Galloway-based event organiser.

One of this year's Conference speakers was **Major General (retired) Mungo Melvin** CB, OBE. He lectured on the 1905 and 2017 mutinies of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. He plans to move to Scotland in the near future. His military experience of Russian politics and his work as an impressive historian should be invaluable to the future of the Russian Conferences. Melrose is the heartland of Sir Walter Scott's fabled Scottish Borders. This is also the land of **Sir Thomas Learmonth**, the scion of Mikhail Lermontov's Scottish ancestors. In the Scottish Borders town of **Earlston**, there can be found a bronze memorial to Lermontov.

Among the other British speakers were **Alan Riach**, Professor of Scottish Literature, University of Glasgow; **Frances Robson**, award-winning poet and literary translator; **Lesley Milne**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Nottingham. Her contribution was highly entertaining, scholarly and thought-provoking, inspired by the commentary on the Russian Revolution made by Britain's **'Punch' writers** and those of Russia's equivalent satirical journals. **Professor Jeremy Hicks** as a specialist in early Soviet cinema, at Queen Mary University, London, contributed an insightful personal interpretation of the work of Russian film-makers. **David Elliott** was the highly influential Director of Oxford Museum of Modern Art 1976-96. Under his enlightened directorship, Britain's cultural life benefitted from his personal commitment to the culture of Russia and those parts of Europe on the Soviet Russian controlled side of the Iron Curtain.

Among the Russian speakers were **Olga Sinitsyna**, Russian art historian, independent expert on museum and library projects and Deputy Director General of All-Russian State Library of Foreign Literature; **Peter Bagrov**, Senior Curator of the **Gosfilmfond** of Russia; **Daria Kaverina**, exhibition curator, State Literature Museum, Moscow; **Grigory Cheredov**, publisher, the Rudomino Centre for the Book; **Diana Vrouba**, works in USSR Academy of Arts workshops in Moscow, and is a sculptor and installation artist; **Eugeniy Dobrenko**, scholar of History of Russian literary theory and criticism, Professor of Russian Studies, Head of Department of the University of Sheffield; **Kristina Matvienko**, theatre critic and artistic director of Moscow's new Drama Festival, curator of the **Stanislavsky Electrotheater's School of Contemporary Viewers and Listeners in 2015**. Her talk was about **'Mystery-Bouffe'** by **Vladimir Mayakovsky** and **Vsevolod Meyerhold**. I was particularly interested

in the contribution of novelist **Vladimir Sharov**, whose writings have been translated into English, French and Chinese.

I was particularly interested in reading essays published under **Elizabeth Roberts'** editorship by **Svetlana Matinovskaya, Vitaly Maksimov, Dimitri Bak**, and **Masha Bond**. **Ian Mitchell** introduced a humorous and relaxed note to his highly-professional chairmanship of key sessions. **Elizabeth Roberts** added informative essays on the history of the Moffat Russian Conferences and on Moffat as a Dumfriesshire town which, two hundred years ago, welcomed the **Grand Duke Nicholas** (later Tsar Nicholas I) to Moffat.

He and his entourage were on an 'educational tour' of Scotland organised by his mother the Dowager Empress Maria Federovna. His reception in Edinburgh was choreographed by Sir Walter Scott. They were much impressed by the spirit of The Scottish Enlightenment. This led to the powerful role which Scotland played in the British Industrial Revolution. Nicholas was made well aware of the fact that Glasgow was becoming known as the Second City of the British Empire. He was also aware of the fact that Moffat was associated with **John McAdam** who was responsible for giving the surface of the roads of Europe a Macadamised surface. Of course, the history of Russia benefitted from the presence of many Scots associated with the modernisation of Russia's army and navy. Moffat is also associated with the life and work of a Dumfries-shire-born doctor, **John Rogerson**, who became the personal physician to Catherine the Great. It should not be forgotten that Catherine the Great was well-served by a legendary Scottish soldier, **General Tam Dalyell of The Binns**. The history of Scotland and Russia is summed up by Russia's appreciation of the genius of Robert Burns. He provides, to this day, a source of inspiration to all those in Russia who seek to defend the freedom of the individual. It is highly significant that setting for the Russian Conferences is also the world of Robert Burns.

As Chairman of the Moffat Book Events, I feel indebted to the unswerving loyalty of my fellow members, **Charles and May McKerrell of Hillhouse, Janet Wheatcroft, Irina Kirillova, Masha Bond, Ian Mitchell, Simon Tweedie** who owns the hotel which gave a warm welcome to The Grand Duke Nicholas, and to my indefatigable colleague, **Terry Ann Newman**. Over the last six years, the main function and purpose has been the annual Moffat Russian Conference. This originates from the friendship of **Elizabeth Roberts** and **Ekaterina Genieva**. I sorely missed the presence of Ekaterina Genieva and also **Andrew Wheatcroft**. Thankfully, **Vicky Jardine-Paterson**, as Chairman of the Moffat Russian Conference, more than made up for their absence. Her highly-professional Chairmanship was all-important to the ways in which the Conference was raised to a level which provides ample proof that the Conference has a bright and important future. An excellent short video of the Conference was made by **Fynn Elkington** of 'FoSho Video' and can be seen on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/EWB7G9UT2dw>

Terry Ann Newman and myself were well-prepared for this year's conference by our experience of the historic Conference held at Glasgow University's School of Russian Studies in September. This conference celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this important school. The Conference brought together a gathering of impressive experts in Russian culture. We were pleased to meet in particular **Dr. Andrea Gullotta**, Lecturer in Russian. He and the Vice-Chancellor of Glasgow University, **Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli**, added an unexpected Italian dimension to the Conference. I look forward to meeting them with my proposal that Glasgow's School of Russian Studies could consider having a suite of my prints dedicated to **Mikhail Lermontov** and his passionate desire to 'fly like a Raven' towards Scotland, the land of his Scottish ancestors, and in particular, Sir Thomas Learmonth whose 12<sup>th</sup> century reputation as a soothsayer gave rise to the

legend of **Thomas the Rhymer** and his beloved Fairie Queen in which Scotland's history and mythology are forever intertwined.