

GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS



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1917 saw not one but two revolutions in Russia.

The seeds of the second Revolution in October were sown in the confused outcome of the first Revolution in February.

Writers were not directly involved in the revolutions in the way they were in the 1916 Easter Rising, for example – although Maxim Gorky was involved on the fringes. There is, however, a tremendous body of literature – prose, poetry, polemic and non-fiction – arising out of Russia 1917.

The Road to 1917

"The Tsar paddled on, dignified and proper, eyes on the horizon, the current hauling him towards a cataract"



Bloody Sunday 1905, when 1,000 or more peaceful demonstrators were killed by Tsarist troops, was a turning point in Russian history

That 1917 turned out to be a Revolutionary year could be no surprise to any observer of Russia, inside the country or outside. Russian troops marched off to war in August 1914, full of patriotic feelings, but soon came face to face with superior German strategy and weaponry. More than any other of Europe's empires, even the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire, the continuing attrition in men and money caused Russian society to fracture and implode.

While Russian cities saw a degree of industrialisation in the late 19th century, there was no comparable modernisation of society. Just half a century on from the abolition of serfdom in Russia, its political structures, and society in general, were from an earlier age. The Russian Empire was poorer, less educated, and more unequal than any other comparable power. For all these reasons, Russia in early 1917 was a powder keg.



War poster encouraging Russian workers and peasants to join up

The February Revolution

"There is something almost Herculean about the Tsar's ability to refuse reality while his capital went up in flames, his police fled, his soldiers rebelled, and his officials, his own brother, implored him to do something, anything"



Nicholas II was the last of the Romanov line of Tsars, which lasted over 300 years

While the February revolution seemed to break out spontaneously, without any real leadership or formal planning, the continuing disaster at the front, coupled with food shortages, were the major contributor to the collapse of the Tsarist regime. The underlying discontent with the Tsar erupted into mass protests against food rationing on 23 February.

On 27 February matters came to a head. For the first time soldiers sided with the people. The tide turned when disaffected soldiers from the city's garrison joined the people demanding bread, and angry industrial workers. Petrograd fell into chaos, and three days later Tsar Nicholas II abdicated, bringing to an end the Romanov dynasty, and the Russian Empire. The Tsar's council of Ministers was replaced by a Russian Provisional Government under Prince Georgy Lvov, although Aleksandr Kerensky held the real power from late February to the autumn of the year.

More than 1,300 people were killed in February. The role of mutinous soldiers – and sailors from the Kronstadt garrison – set the tone for the rest of 1917.



Petrograd or St Petersburg in the first decades of the 20th century

October or November?

Until 1918 Russians used the Julian calendar, running 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar which was used in the rest of Europe and the world. Thus while the taking of the Winter Palace by the Bolsheviks was on 5 November by the Gregorian calendar, for the soldiers involved it was 26 October.

Bolsheviks vs Mensheviks

At the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party held in London in 1903, Lenin succeeded in having a majority of his choices elected to the Party's Central Committee. Majority in Russian is bolshinstvo, minority is menshinstvo, giving birth to these iconic terms 'Bolshevik' and 'Menshevik'.

St Petersburg or Petrograd

Tsar Peter the Great named the city St Petersburg (Sankt Peterburg in Russian). On the outbreak of World War I, the Imperial government renamed the city Petrograd, meaning "Peter's City", to rid the name of the German words Sankt and Burg.

Note: the quotations above are from China Miéville *October: the story of the Russian revolution*, a comprehensive account.

Timeline

Politics

- 23 February – Revolution starts on International Women's Day. In Petrograd women factory workers strike demanding the end of World War I and food shortages.
- March – Tsar Nicholas II abdicates. Moscow joins uprising. Tsar and wife Alexandra imprisoned by Provisional government.
- April – Lenin arrived in Finland station. Petrograd, condemns Provisional Government to Bolshevik supporters and calls for proletarian revolution.
- May – Provisional government under Lvov sworn in comprising divergent political views.

Literature

- Anna Akhmatova [1889-1966] publishes *Belaya staya* (White flock).
- Mikhail Kuzmin composes poem *Russian Revolution*
- Sergey Esenin composes poem *I'll glance in the field*
- Boris Pasternak [1880-1960] – publishes *Over the barriers*; writes *My sister's life and Themes and variations* (published later)
- Writes the poem *Spring rain*.
- Leon Trotsky [1879-1940] – *Programma Mira* (Program of peace).
- Arthur Ransome [1884-1967] (foreign correspondent) – *Dispatches from Russia 1917 vol. 1* (from February Revolution to before October Revolution)
- Hugh Walpole [1884-1941] – witnesses the February Revolution & writes reports for the Foreign Office in his role as Red Cross volunteer.
- Vladimir Mayakovsky [1893-1930] (friend of Maxim Gorky) publishes poem *The war and the world* and *Chaliapin*, articles in *Letopis*, 3
- Ivan Bunin [1870 – 1953] – *Cursed days* (1917/18)
- April/May – David Bergelson writes *Red train* and *The bellybutton* from *Scenes from the revolution*.
- June – Tefli – prose piece – A few words about Lenin

Culture / Visual & Performing arts

- Prokofiev composed the opera *The Gambler* based on Dostoyevsky's novel of the same name. The premiere was scheduled for February 1917 but had to be cancelled due to the February Revolution.
- March – Commission for the protection of Art Valuables established to save artworks and palaces from the threat of war and revolution – Maxim Gorky one of the prime movers of this.
- Founding of the All-Arts Movement uniting all Russian artists.
- April – All-Arts Movement petitions provisional government that the development of art in Russia be managed by the artists themselves.
- Early summer – Prokofiev composed his first symphony *The Classical* which was scheduled to premiere in November 1917 but had to wait until 21 April 1918.



The Tsar's abdication decree



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Red October

"Put the locomotive in top gear and keep it on the rails" Lenin

Events through 1917

"Tough sandpaper has polished all our words" Mikhail Kuzmin, poet



Aleksandr Kerensky was Minister of War and the most powerful figure in the government set up after the February Revolution. The so-called 'Kerensky Offensive' in June seemed to promise success in the War, but this was short-lived. At home the spread of soviets (Russian word for 'Councils') encouraged long-suppressed peasants to try and take power into their own hands, and to get even with landowners. They took over meadows, 'private' woods, while paying only the price they felt was fair for seeds.

At the same time the Empire's minorities saw their chance. In the spring and early summer of 1917 nationalist congresses in the Caucasus mountains, in predominantly Muslim lands in Central Asia, and among the Buddhist people of eastern Siberia, agitated for autonomy, if not outright independence.

The never-ending slaughter at the front was driving opinion to the left. July was a torrid month, in the words of Arthur Ransome, present in Russia for the whole of 1917:

"One lives the whole time in an atmosphere of mental conflict of the most violent kind".

On 3 July a protest march by Bolshevik sympathisers led to extreme violence in central Petrograd, aggravated by a counter demonstration by right-wing 'Black Hundreds'. On 4 July a train carrying Lenin and his small party of family and supporters crossed from Finland (part of the Empire) into Russia proper.

As the year went on it was the Bolsheviks who were the most effective in seeking 'Peace, Land and Bread' the core demands of the mass of the people.

"the masses, in so far as they were organized, were organized by the Bolsheviks and followed them . . . Without (them), the committee was impotent . . . it could only have passed the time with appeals and idle speeches."

Sukhanov, a non-Bolshevik socialist writer.

Strikes broke out – postal workers, milliners, factory workers of all types – leading to economic chaos. Kerensky sealed his own fate by trying – and failing – to suppress those political forces to his left.



Vladimir I. Lenin

The Congress of Soviets, based in the Smolny Institute, by late autumn the most powerful body in Russia, began its sitting in late October. 25 October started as a normal day; most trams were running, most shops stayed open. At midday armed revolutionary soldiers turned up at the Mariinsky Palace. That night, and into the early hours of 26 October, a large body of soldiers took over the Winter Palace; 'stormed' is far too strong a word, they just turned up, entered, and with minimal opposition took over the seat of the Russian government.

The Bolshevik takeover was almost complete and the non-Bolsheviks in the Congress were left powerless. Martov, a former ally but now an opponent of Lenin, shouted at those present in the Congress.

"One day you will understand the crime in which you are taking part".

Realising his impotence, he walked out after this statement.



The Winter Palace (the large white-coloured block at centre) was home to the Provisional Russian Government



Bolshevik troops guarding the Smolny Institute

Whatever one's views on the success or otherwise of the October Revolution, and the following seven decades, it remains one of the most important events in human history.

Within days of the takeover of the Winter Palace the new revolutionary government had introduced workers' control of production, peasants' control of the land, equal rights for women and men, maternity support, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, free and universal education: **'a change in the soul as much as in the factory'** according to Lunacharsky, the first Soviet People's Commissar responsible for culture and education.

Timeline

Politics

July – general unrest; fighting breaks out – workers and soldiers want Soviets to take power. Lenin leaves for Finland.

Second Provisional government under Kerensky sworn in.

August – Tsar and family exiled in Siberia

Bolsheviks win control over Petrograd and Moscow Soviets.

September – Russia declared a republic. Lenin returns to Russia.

24 October – Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee seizes control of Petrograd's transport systems, utilities, communications and printing facilities and overthrows Provisional government.

26/27 October – Bolsheviks take control of the Winter Palace, seat of the Provisional government.

26/27 October – Lenin announces formation of new government. Mensheviks protest. Bolsheviks seize control of the countryside and declare a law to hand over land to village communities.

17 November – civil war breaks out. **December** – government establishes the Cheka (military and security arm of the Bolshevik Party).

1918 – Civil war continues until 1922; capital is moved to Moscow. Industries nationalised. Tsar and family murdered in Ekaterinburg. Second attempt on Lenin's life; Red Terror commences.

Literature

June/July – Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) – *Struggle for state power.*

August – Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) – *The state and revolution.*

August – poet *Andrey Bely* composes poem *Russia*

September – *Alexander Kuprin* writes short story *Sasha and Yasha – an old story.*

Alexander Grin writes short story – *The soul's penitulum*

Marina Tsvetaeva publishes poem *North-Northeast*

Marina Tsvetaeva writes poem *Feodosia: last days of October 1917.*

Late November – *Zamyatin* wrote *The Islanders* (publ. 1918) and *The fisher of men.*

Satirical newspaper *Russkoe Slovo* closed down by the Bolsheviks.

Immediate Aftermath of revolution –

December – *Osip Mandelstam* writes poem *Kassandra* (written for *Anna Akhmatova*)

December – *Mayakovsky* writes poems *Our march* and *To Russia*

December – *Alexander Sarafimovich* writes *How he died – a true story.*

January 1918 – *Alexander Blok* writes poem *The Twelve*

Tefi writes *The guillotine* (a blackly humorous story about the revolution)

Culture / Visual & Performing arts

Summer – *Prokofiev* composed his first symphony – *The Classical* which was scheduled to premiere in November 1917 but had to wait until 21 April 1918.

July – nationalisation of all imperial palaces including the Winter Palace in Petrograd.

August – *Rachmaninoff's* final performance in Russia takes place in Yalta.

September – works of art from the Hermitage and other museums and galleries evacuated to Moscow.

October – *Anatoly Lunacharsky* (Commissar of Future Enlightenment) calls the first conference of proletarian cultural-education organisations.

Proletarian Cultural Organisation is formed, led by *Alexander Bogdanov*, philosopher, physician and science fiction writer.

Winter Palace in Petrograd becomes a state museum.

Ballet impresario *Diaghilev* leaves Russia after the revolution. The Soviet regime condemns him as an especially insidious example of bourgeois decadence.

November – reports of destruction of palaces in Moscow.

December – *Rachmaninoff* flees to Finland.

Film – 1927 – *The end of St. Petersburg* – directed by *Vsevolod Pudovkin* – commemorates the 10th anniversary of the revolution.

Film – 1928 – *October, 10 days that shook the world* – directed by *Sergei Eisenstein* – recreates the events of October 1917.



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SILVER AGE POETS

AMONG THOSE THAT LEFT



David Burliuk

1882 – 1967

Considered a poetic trailblazer, in 1990 the Russian Academy of Futurist Poetry established the annual David Burliuk Prize for experimental poetry.

He was a co-author (along with Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov) of the futurist manifesto *A Slop in the Face of Public Taste*. In 1917 Burliuk, Mayakovsky and Kamensky opened the Poet's Café.

His brother was drafted into service in 1916, and died in Salonika in 1917. Within months Burliuk, the father of Russian Futurism, began his travels which brought him through Siberia, Japan and Canada. He arrived in the United States in 1922 and was allowed to visit the Soviet Union only in 1956 and 1965.



Zinaida Gippius 1869 – 1945

A critic of tsarism she welcomed the February Revolution and denounced the October Revolution and emigrated to Poland, France and Italy. The events of October 1917 led to Gippius severing all ties with most of those who admired her poetry, including Blok, Bryusov and Bely.

"The Germans collected a whole bunch of these mischievous Trishkas, gave them a whole train, sealed it (so that the spirit did not drift to German soil) and sent to us: here, collect." 18 April 1917

"It felt as if some pillow fell on you to strangle... Strange what — the city? The country? No, something much, much bigger," Diary, 26 October 1917

"In Kiev 1200 officers killed, legs severed, boots taken off." — 23 February.

"In Rostov teenager cadets shot down — for being mistakenly taken for Constitutional Democratic Party cadets, the banned ones" — 17 March

"Those who still have a soul in them walk around like corpses: neither protesting, nor suffering waiting for nothing, bodies and souls slumped into hunger-induced dormancy."

In 1919 she obtained permission to leave Petrograd and fled to Poland and on to Paris.

AMONG THOSE THAT STAYED



Anna Akhmatova 1889 – 1966

Born to an aristocratic family, this poet of the Silver Age anticipated the afflictions that awaited her in the Soviet state yet she never considered emigration a viable option. Her work was condemned and censored by Stalinist authorities and she is notable for choosing not to emigrate.

Although she was still censored in the 1960s she was allowed to travel and in November 1965, after visiting Oxford, Akhmatova suffered a heart attack and was hospitalised. She was moved to a sanatorium in Moscow in the spring of 1966 and died of heart failure on March 5, at the age of 76.

Thousands attended the two memorial ceremonies which were held in Moscow and in Leningrad. After being displayed in an open coffin, she was interred at Komarovo Cemetery in St Petersburg.



Andrei Bely 1880 – 1934

The philosopher Mikhail Solovoyov gave Boris Bugaev his pseudonym Andrei Bely. Bely's first three books of verse are his most important contributions to poetry. He generated a new mythology with images of the despair of Russian life using a somewhat ironic philosophical lyricism.

He supported the Bolshevik rise to power and later dedicated his efforts to Soviet culture, serving on the Organizational Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers. He considered the Revolution a possible way of avoiding global catastrophe, but he never advocated it. In the post-revolutionary years, Bely lectured the young writers of Proletcult.

Nabokov refers to Bely in *The Gift* and *Notes on Prosydy*.

The Andrei Bely Prize is the oldest independent literary prize awarded in Russia, established in 1978 by the largest samizdat literary journal in Leningrad, to recognize excellence in prose, poetry, and theory.

*A voice came to me. It called out comfortingly.
It said, "Come here,
Leave your deaf and sinful land,
Leave Russia forever,
I will wash the blood from your hands,
Root out the black shame from your heart,
[...] calmly and indifferently,
I covered my ears with my hands,
So that my sorrowing spirit
Would not be stained by those shameful words.
—When in suicidal anguish, trans. Jane Kenyon*

When Gumilev was murdered by the Cheka for the fabricated Tagantsev conspiracy, despite Gorky getting a release order for Gumilev personally from Lenin, Akhmatova wrote:

*Terror fingers all things in the dark,
Leads moonlight to the axe.
There's an ominous knock behind the
wall:
A ghost, a thief or a rat...*

The widespread worship of her memory in Soviet Union today, both as an artist and as an unsundering human being, has, so far as I know, no parallel. The legend of her life and unyielding passive resistance to what she regarded as unworthy of her country and herself, transformed her into a figure [...] not merely in Russian literature, but in Russian history in [the Twentieth] century. —Isaiah Berlin



Alexander Blok 1880 – 1921

Perhaps the most important poet of the Silver Age, in May 1917 Blok was appointed as a stenographer for the Extraordinary Commission to investigate illegal actions ex officio Ministers and to transcribe the interrogations of those who knew Rasputin.

Blok enthusiastically welcomed the Russian Revolution, considering it an outburst of cathartic power and experienced a boost of creativity which was crowned with his best-known poems *The Twelve* (*Dvenadsat*, 1918) and *The Scythians* (*Skify*, 1918).

Over a million of copies of *The Twelve* were sold in the first year and it was even prohibited in some countries as blasphemous.

Blok quickly became disillusioned with the Bolsheviks and their methods of governing, and soon he even stopped composing poetry. From 1918 till 1921 he worked as an essayist, editor, translator, publisher and theatre worker in different government organisations and publishing houses.

By 1921 he claimed he lost his "faith in the wisdom of humanity". He grew ill and Gorky wrote to Anatoly Lunacarsky: "Blok is Russia's finest poet. If you forbid him to go abroad, and he dies, you and your comrades will be guilty of his death". His health deteriorated sharply and he died before he could go abroad.

*Our sons have gone
to serve the Reds
to risk their heads!
—To get the bourgeoisie
We'll start a fire
a worldwide fire, and drench it
in blood—
The good Lord bless us!
—O you bitter bitterness,
boring boredom,
deadly boredom.
This is how I will
spend my time.
This is how I will
scratch my head,
munch on seeds,
some sunflower seeds,
play with my knife
play with my knife.
You bourgeoisie, fly as a sparrow!
I'll drink your blood,
your warm blood, for love,
for dark-eyed love.*



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Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?"

AMONG THE POETS THAT STAYED

Nikolai Gumilyov 1886 – 1921

He established the Guild of Poets (Acmeists) along with Sergei Gorodetsky.

During the Russian Revolution, Gumilyov served in the Russian Expedition Corps in Paris. Despite advice to the contrary he returned to Petrograd where he published new collections, *Tabernacle* and *Bonfire*, and finally divorced Akhmatova in August 1918.



In 1920 he co-founded the All-Russia Union of Writers.

He was arrested on fabricated charges alleging participation in monarchist conspiracy known as "Petrograd military organization" or Tagantsev conspiracy on August 3, and murdered by the Cheka on August 25 1921.

*The executioner, with a face like an ox,
red-shirted, stout as an ox,*

*has chopped off my head. Along with the others,
it lies at the bottom of a slippery box.*

(From *The Lost Tram* translated by Boris Drayluk)

Osip Mandelstam 1891 – 1938

He had the reputation for being the leading poet of his generation and initially supported the Revolution. He was a supporter of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power. He made peace with the Soviets without identifying himself wholly with Bolshevik methods or goals and became disillusioned by the increasing demands of the regime for poetry to serve the political and collective, rather than the personal and the human and was absolutely unwilling to yield to the political doctrine of a regime that had executed Gumilyov in 1921.

"Only in Russia is poetry respected, it gets people killed. Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?"



In 1934 he was arrested six months after writing his *Ode to Stalin* and on December 27 1938 he died in a transit camp near Vladivostok.

Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote memoirs about her life and times with her husband in *Hope against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned*.



Vladimir Mayakovsky 1893 – 1930

"Mayakovsky was and remains the best and most talented poet of our Soviet epoch ... Indifference to his memory and to his work is a crime." – Stalin

Mayakovsky welcomed the revolution and was an admirer of Lenin. He ran the Poet's Café with Burluk in Moscow in 1917/1918, designed agitprop posters for the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, wrote and starred in three silent movies in 1918 and wrote a 3,000 line epic on the death of Lenin. Yet his relationship with the regime was tumultuous and works that contained criticism or satire of aspects of the Soviet system, such as the poem *"Talking With the Taxman About Poetry"* (1926) were met with scorn by the literary establishment.

He shot himself in the heart in April 1930.

His suicide note said: "Do not blame anyone for my death and please do not gossip. The deceased terribly dislike this sort of thing. Mamma, sisters, and comrades, forgive me -- this is not a way out (I do not recommend it to others), but I have none other. Lily -- love me ... Comrades of the VAPP -- do not think me weak-spirited. Seriously -- there was nothing else I could do."

150,000 people attended his funeral



Titsian Tabidze 1895 – 1937

Titsian Tabidze, simply referred to as Titsiani was a Georgian poet and one of the leaders of Georgian symbolist movement. In 1916 he co-founded the Blue Horns. Tabidze was a close friend of Boris Pasternak who translated his poetry into Russian.

In 1936 he was attacked for his failure to free himself *"from the old traditions and forge closer contact with the people."* On 10 October 1937 Tabidze was expelled from the Union of Georgian Writers and arrested the same day. He was charged for treason and tortured in prison, naming, with bitter humor, only the 18th-century Georgian poet Besiki as an accomplice in his anti-Soviet activities. Then he was killed by the NKVD.

A Poem's Pain

Dear reader, if you want

to know me, listen to my poems.

I no longer hear their melody.

You can have these words, if you wait.

Suddenly, pain strikes me.

The words inside me sing.



Marina Tsvetaeva 1892 – 1941

She studied at the Sorbonne at 16, self published her well received first collection *Vecherny Album (Evening Album)* in 1910 and two years later she married Sergei Efron. She wrote the epic verse cycle *Lebedinyi Stan ('The Encampment of the Swans')* about the civil war, glorifying those who fought against the communists.

In 1919, she placed both of her daughters in a state orphanage, mistakenly believing that they would be better fed there. Alya became ill, and Tsvetaeva removed her, but Irina died there of starvation in 1920.

She left Russia in 1922 to live in poverty in Prague, Berlin and Paris where she corresponded with Pasternak and Rilke. In Paris she contracted tuberculosis before returning to Moscow in 1939. She was looked on with suspicion, her husband was shot in 1941 and her daughter was imprisoned for eight years (released only after Stalin died).

In August 1941 unable to find a job and without any means to support herself and her son she hanged herself.

Shostakovich set six of Tsvetaeva's poems to music.

"Amidst the dust of bookshops, wide dispersed

And never purchased there by anyone,

Yet similar to precious wines, my verse can wait

its time will come."



Sergei Yesenin 1895 – 1925

Born to a peasant family he began to write poetry when he was aged nine. In 1916-17, Yesenin served in the military as an orderly on a Sanitar train and defected from the army shortly after the Revolution of 1917.

In 1922 Yesenin married the dancer Isadora Duncan and accompanied her on a tour of Europe. Often drunk, his smashing up of hotel rooms, received a great deal of publicity in the world's press. Yesenin returned to his homeland in 1923.

Yesenin was at first thrilled by the October Revolution and truly hoped it would lead to a better future for the peasantry. These hopes crystallized in the collection *Inaniyoye* (1918). Later, in *The Stern October Has Deceived Me*, Yesenin revealed his disappointment with the Bolsheviks. In his long poetic drama *Pugachyov* (1921-1922), Yesenin lauded the spirit of the past and glorified rebellious 18th-century peasant leaders. *Confessions of a Hoaligan* (1921), written in the same period, revealed a newly emerged side of Yesenin's personality: provocative, vulgar, wounded and anguished.

He founded the publishing house Labor Company of the Artists of the Word in September 1918.

In 1925 he married Tolstoy's granddaughter but at the end of December that year he was found dead (hanging) in a room in Hotel Angleterre in St Petersburg, conspiracy theorists suggest it was an assassination and that he was killed by the NKVD.

Although he was one of Russia's most popular poets and had been given an elaborate funeral by the State, most of his writings were banned by the Kremlin during the reign of Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev. Nikolay Bukharin's criticism of Yesenin contributed significantly to the banning. Only in 1966 were most of his works republished.



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FOREIGN WITNESSES

It did not matter much that the British and French ambassadors in Petrograd spoke no Russian, since the court language was French and ministers also spoke German or English.

A few foreign writers were in Russia in 1917 and they wrote about their exciting experiences in letters, diaries, dispatches, articles, memoirs and novels.



William Somerset Maugham 1874-1965

William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) was sent to Russia a month after his marriage to Gwendolyn Barnardo Wellcome, having returned from Tahiti where he investigated Gaughin (for the Charles Strickland character in *The Moon and Sixpence*).

Maugham believed, perhaps naively, that his mission might have succeeded. He was sent with \$21,000 to support the Kerensky government, prevent the Bolshevik revolution and keep Russia in the war against Germany.

Maugham received valuable help from Alexandra (Sasha) Kropotkin, the lively, dark-haired daughter of the notorious anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin, and from Boris Savinkov the assassin of V.K. de Plehve, the reactionary Tsarist minister of the interior, in July 1904, and the Grand Duke Sergius, uncle of the Tsar, who Savinkov blew up in February 1905.

He thought Kerensky was a man of speech, not action, a leader whose vanity did not permit disagreement and whose colleagues were no more than toadies.

Maugham stressed that if the situation in Russia was "entirely out of hand, and that no propaganda or organised support undertaken by the Allies could possibly stem the rising tide of Bolshevism".



In 1933 he told Lockhart that if he had been sent to Russia sooner, and with greater resources and power, he could have made the "Bolshevik coup d'état impossible".

"I am going to Russia, and shall be occupied there presumably till the end of the war"

Arthur Ransome 1884-1967



Arthur Ransome (1884-1967), in his thirties, learnt to read and speak Russian.

"Ransome was a Don Quixote with a walrus moustache, a sentimentalist, who could always be relied upon to champion the under-dog, and a visionary, whose imagination had been fired by the revolution. He was an excellent terms with the Bolsheviks and frequently brought us information of the greatest value. An incorrigible romanticist, who could spin a fairy-tale out of nothing, he was an amusing and good-natured companion." – Lockhart on Ransome.

Ransome came under fire in March and said he felt like "a horribly observant warder in a lunatic asylum who cannot help imitating the grimaces of the patients".

Ransome saw Lenin arrive and be welcomed by the crowd at the Finland Station in Petrograd.

Ransome predicted that a Bolshevik revolution would take place in January 1918. In October 1917 he returned to England to advocate his political views and missed the long-awaited revolt.

Returning to Russia in December, Ransome saw Trotsky every day and began an affair with the Commissar's secretary, Evgenia Shepelina. He eventually left Russia with her as his common-law wife and married her in 1924.

In January 1918, he advised the government to establish diplomatic relations with the Bolsheviks and use them to defeat the Germans instead of invading the country and trying to overthrow them. He was then considered a dangerous Red and suspected of disloyalty by the British intelligence services.

Ransome began to shift his allegiance from Trotsky and became a close friend of the powerful Polish-born leader Karl Radek, who had been on the train with Lenin from Zurich to the Finland Station. Even after Russia signed the treaty, Ransome remained adamant and insisted that it was only an expedient measure: "Every step taken against the Soviets helps Germany. Russia is temporarily concluding a separate peace. If the Soviet power is overthrown, that peace may be permanent." He even blamed Britain rather than Russia for the crippling agreement signed by the Russian dictators: "The old fools who governed England had rejected the friendship of democratic Russia and driven her to make peace with Germany."

After returning to England, Ransome used his imagination more fruitfully and wrote the highly successful series of children's books that began with *Swallows and Amazons* (1930).



Hugh Walpole 1884-1941



Hugh Walpole (1884-1941), in his thirties, accepted a journalistic appointment based in Moscow, reporting for *The Saturday Review* and *The Daily Mail*. A Red Cross volunteer, he learnt to read and speak Russian when he was appointed as a Russian officer, in the Sanitar.

He despairingly wrote to his mentor and idol, Henry James: "The streets swam in mud, I got no news of the war because I couldn't read [Russian], the food was all sweets and cabbage, and I was lonely beyond belief. I felt too that I was utterly useless."

During the March revolution, Walpole heard "a terrific noise of firing and shouting, went to our windows and saw whole revolutionary mob pass down our street. About two thousand soldiers, many civilians armed, motor lorries with flags. All orderly, picketing the streets as they passed."

November 7 brought the outbreak of the revolution and Walpole described the tumultuous scene in his diary:

"The latest news that Kerensky has defied the Bolsheviks and arrested their committee ... News in the morning that the Bolsheviks have the upper hand ... Firing in the evening. Shelling of Winter Palace ... Learn as I go to bed that the whole town in hands of Bolsheviks ... Putting barricades up in the streets. Saw the damage shells had done to the Winter Palace."

His book *The Secret City* won the inaugural James Tait Black Memorial Prize. On 7 November he left Petrograd as he was appointed to a post at the Foreign Office in its Department of Information.

Maugham satirised him in *Cakes and Ale* (1930) as *Alroy Kear*, a pushy mediocrity with a bogus reputation.

Robert Bruce Lockhart 1887-1970



Robert Bruce Lockhart (1887-1970), in his thirties, a diplomat who spoke Russian fluently and with an excellent accent.

Lockhart slyly called Nicholas II a "man of all the domestic virtues, but of no vices and no will-power", and said he wasn't fit to run a village post office.

"I arrived in Moscow early in January 1912, as a young Vice-Consul of 24 and, apart from two short visits to the United Kingdom in January 1913 and in the autumn of 1917 [when he was recalled to London and briefed King George V], I remained in Russia until October 1918."

"I had excellent sources of information ... I had friendly relations not only with the leading lights of the Moscow intelligentsia, but also with the big industrialists. I knew intimately the editors of the Moscow newspapers, and I had immediate access to the Prefect of Moscow." Moura Budberg confirmed his egoistic claims and thought he was perfect for his job: "Lockhart was intelligent, he spoke Russian, he was observant, he knew how to cultivate contacts, he had wit and vigour and a great many friends everywhere."

He accurately predicted the revolution in March 1917, and he also gave a lucid account of the main causes of the revolution:

"It took place because the patience of the Russian people broke down under a system of unparalleled inefficiency and corruption ... the disgraceful mishandling of food-supplies, the complete break-down of transport, and the senseless mobilisation of millions of unwanted and unemployable troops ... the shameless profiteering of nearly everyone engaged in the giving and taking of war contracts."

"It seems impossible that the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat can be liquidated without further bloodshed. When this clash will come no one knows, but the outlook for the war is full of foreboding."

After the November revolution, the city seemed eerily calm: "For some days life in Petrograd continued more or less normally. Shops and cinemas stayed open, and on the surface there was little indication that Russia had passed a decisive turning-point in her history."

In September 1918, Lockhart was accused of plotting to assassinate Lenin, and condemned to death. The following month he was exchanged for the Soviet diplomat Maxim Litvinov.



GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS



William Gerhardie 1895-1977

William Gerhardie (1895-1977), a native speaker of Russian, in his twenties and a soldier.

Gerhardie actually witnessed both the March and November 1917 revolutions in Petrograd.

In March he reported: *"The revolution had already broken out. The [British] Admiral had just witnessed the sacking of the Arsenal by a disorderly crowd. Regiment after regiment was going over to the revolution. Solitary shots, and now and then machine-gun fire, were heard from various quarters of the city."*

The rebels "all seemed drunk with the revolution. Shots were heard every now and then, mostly fired in the air, while the low courts had gone up in flames."

When the real revolution exploded in November, Gerhardie merely noted, *"Barricades appeared in the streets. Bridges were being suspended. Lories of joy-riding proletarians became familiarly conspicuous."*

Bolsheviks according to Gerhardie, *"behave like real gentlemen and there is really no actual danger living in this place. The whole thing is a Gilbert and Sullivan Comic Opera."*

Louise Bryant 1885-1936



Louise Bryant (1885-1936), in her thirties, left for Petrograd in August 1917 with Reed, the Bell Syndicate assigned Bryant to report "from a woman's point of view."

Amongst her interviewees were Katherine Breshkovsky, the "grandmother of the revolution", Maria Spindonova, a revolutionary who had been tortured and imprisoned after the 1905 revolution (on 11 September 1941 she was executed by order of Stalin in Medvedev Forest outside Oryol), and Aleksandra Kollontai who was the only woman in the Bolshevik cabinet.

Six Red Months in Russia was published in 1918 when she returned to New York. She went back to Petrograd in August 1920.

Bessie Beatty

Bessie Beatty interviewed Leon Trotsky, and members of the Women's Battalion, whose courage and strength impressed her.

Her book about that trip, *The Red Heart of Russia*, was published in 1918. *"I had been alive at a great moment, and knew it was great,"* she wrote of her time in Russia.



Morgan Philips Price



Morgan Philips Price was a special correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* and one of the few Englishmen in Russia during all phases of the Revolution.

Although his Bolshevik sympathies accorded him an insider's perspective on much of the turmoil, his reports were often heavily revised or suppressed.

Harold Williams 1876-1928

Harold Williams (1876-1928), in his forties, is said to have known over 58 languages including Old Irish, wrote *Russia and the Russians* (1914) and was the only foreign correspondent to take part in Cossack raids penetrating over the Hungarian frontier.

Williams advocated Allied intervention in the revolution, and he was sought after as one of the few people who knew the Soviet leaders intimately, recounting to the British Prime Minister Lloyd George that Trotsky's last words to him before he left Russia were, *"It will be the happiest day of my life when I see a revolution in England."* His wife Ariadna Vladimirovna Tyrkova-Williams was the first woman elected to the Duma. A supporter of the February Bourgeois Democratic Revolution, she was a Constitutional Democrat and organized anti-Bolshevik resistance after the Great October Socialist Revolution. Williams said *"They want external peace for internal war. Remember my words the Bolsheviks will fight no one except the Russians."*



Ernest Poole 1880-1950



Ernest Poole (1880-1950), in his thirties, was an American journalist, novelist, and playwright and the winner of the first Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

In 1917 the *Saturday Evening Post* dispatched Poole to Russia to report on the Russian Revolution. The articles he wrote provided the raw material for two works of non-fiction, *The Dark People*, *Russia's Crisis* and *The Village: Russian Impressions*, both of which were published in book form by Macmillan in 1918.

"What kind of crops do they raise in the towns? Only Grand Dukes, Bolsheviks and drunkards!" - Ernest Poole, from *The Village: Russian Impressions* (1918)

Rheta Childe Dorr

Rheta Childe Dorr *"For heaven's sake, don't send us any essays on the Russian soul!"* her editor told the New York journalist before she left for Petrograd in May 1917.

Having twice been to Russia, Dorr was anxious to observe the 1917 revolution. One night she lay in her hotel bed listening to the murder of a general in the next room. When she tried to leave the country after five months, all of her notes were confiscated by the authorities so she wrote *Inside the Russian Revolution* (1917) entirely from memory. In her opinion, Russia had become *"a barbarous and half-insane land... Oratory held the stupid populace spellbound while the Germans invaded the country boosted Lenin into power and paved the way for the treaty of Brest-Litovsk... Russia was done."*



John Reed 1887-1920

John Reed (1887-1920), in his thirties, left for Petrograd in August 1917. Reed was commissioned to write articles for *The Masses*, *The New York Call* and *Seven Arts*, and he reached Petrograd in September 1917.

30th October, 1917, Reed interviewed Alexander Kerensky: *"The Russian people are suffering from economic fatigue - and from disillusionment with the Allies. The world thinks that the Russian Revolution is just beginning."* It was the last statement that Kerensky made before being forced to go into hiding.

8th November, 1917, Reed spent time with Lenin: *"A short, stocky figure, with a big head set down in his shoulders, bald and bulging little eyes, a snubbin nose, wide, generous mouth, and heavy chin; clean-shaven now, but already beginning to bristle with the well-known beard of his past and future. Dressed in shabby clothes, his trousers much too long for him. Unimpressive, to be the idol of a mob, loved and revered as perhaps few leaders in history have been. A strange popular leader 'a leader purely by virtue of intellect; colourless, humourless, uncompromising and detached, without picturesque idiosyncrasies - but with the power of explaining profound ideas in simple terms, of analysing a concrete situation. And combined with shrewdness, the greatest intellectual audacity."*

"All revolutions are good; some revolutions are better than others; the Bolshevik revolution was of the best."

On 17th March, 1918, James Larkin established the James Connolly Socialist Club in New York City and it became the centre of left-wing activities among the Irish socialists in the city. One of the first people to speak at the club was John Reed, who gave a talk on the Russian Revolution. He decided to return to Russia in 1920 to attend the Second Congress of the Communist International in Moscow. As his passport had been confiscated by the United States government, James Larkin arranged for him to be smuggled out of the country and he arrived in Moscow via Stockholm and Helsinki.

John Reed died on 19th October, 1920. He was given a state funeral and was buried in the Kremlin.



Emmeline Pankhurst

Emmeline Pankhurst hoped to convince them not to accept Germany's conditions for peace, which she saw as a potential defeat for Britain and Russia. UK Prime Minister David Lloyd George agreed to sponsor her trip to Russia, which she took in June. She told one crowd: *"I came to Petrograd with a prayer from the English nation to the Russian nation, that you may continue the war on which depends the face of civilisation and freedom."* In August she met with Alexander Kerensky, the Russian Prime Minister. Although she had been active with the socialist-leaning ILP in years past, Pankhurst had begun to see leftist politics as disagreeable, an attitude which intensified while she was in Russia. The meeting was uncomfortable for both parties; he felt that she was unable to appreciate the class-based conflict driving Russian policy at the time. He concluded by telling her that English women had nothing to teach women in Russia. She later told the *New York Times* that he was the *"biggest fraud of modern times"* and that his government could "destroy civilisation."



Florence Harper



Florence Harper arrived in time to dodge revolutionary bullets on the streets of Petrograd in February 1917. She left for the UK in August, departing on the same boat as Emmeline Pankhurst.

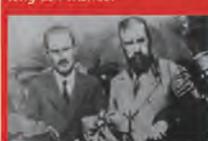
With war photographer Donald Thompson she created the photo book *Bloodstained Russia and From Tsar to Kaiser: The betrayal of Russia*. In 1918 she published *Runaway Russia*, describing events at greater length.

Captain Donald C. Thompson

Captain Donald C. Thompson was sent with Florence Harper by Leslie's Weekly magazine. Thompson wrote to his wife: *"I smell trouble and thank God I am here to get the photographs of it."*

On 15 July 1917 he said

I went out to Lenine's place and tried to see him and make a picture of him. I saw him after a wait of two hours and asked him to pose for a picture. When Boris told him I was from America, he told Boris to tell me he would have nothing to do with me and that we had better leave Petrograd. I told Boris to tell him that I was not going to leave Petrograd and that I would stay as long as I wished.



I have made photographs of Lenine and a man named Trotsky who has come from New York. Trotsky! find a very mysterious man. He does not commit himself. (Thompson in Russia, p. 284.)

We do not know the identity of the men in the subsequent photograph taken at the house of Mathilde Kschessinskaya whom Thompson claimed to be "Lenine" and "Trotsky."



Arno Dosch-Fleuret

Arno Dosch-Fleuret wrote *Through War to Revolution, Being the Experiences of a Newspaper Correspondent in War and Revolution 1914-1920* and claimed to have been the first to use the term "Red Terror" in the American Press.

These were not the only foreigners in Russia at the time. In his book *Between Red and White*, Leon Trotsky makes sarcastic reference to the charge that the Soviets held Petrograd and Moscow *"by the aid of Lettish, Chinese, German and Bashkir regiments"*. In 1919, there were some 700 Chinese troops in the Cheka. There is a 1923 short story, *Chinese Story* by Mikhail Bulgakov, about a Chinese mercenary in the Red Army.

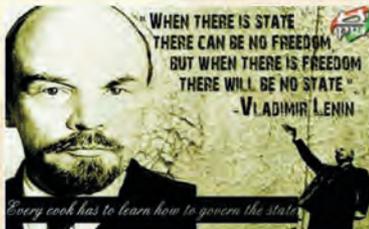


GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

LITERATURE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1917

FICTION AND PROSE

1917 was one of the most turbulent periods in modern Russian history. The autocratic rule of the Tsars ended when Vladimir Lenin and his socialist Bolshevik party swept to power after the October revolution. At first the avant-garde welcomed and supported the revolution. Writers and artists embraced this brave new world with passion and verve and produced some of the most exciting works of art and literature of the post-World War 1 era - everything seemed possible. However, within a short space of time this freedom and euphoria fell victim to Bolshevik ideology and propaganda. As early as 1921 there were intimations of repression and dictatorship and a desire on the part of the state for artists and writers to conform to a Marxist view of culture, thus stifling artistic creativity. The poet Alexander Blok died in this year and his death symbolised the death of the revolution. As a result, many writers emigrated and even those that stayed in Russia and who initially supported the Bolsheviks were severely constrained and subject to mass censorship.



"Everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions. But every voluntary association (including the party) is also free to expel members who use the name of the party to advocate anti-party views. Freedom of speech and the press must be complete. But then freedom of association must be complete too. I am bound to accord you, in the name of free speech, the full right to shout, lie and write to your heart's content. But you are bound to grant me, in the name of freedom of association, the right to enter into, or withdraw from, association with people advocating this or that view. The party is a voluntary association, which would inevitably break up, first ideologically and then physically, if it did not cleanse itself of people advocating anti-party views."

Vladimir Ilich Lenin – *Party organization and party literature* - published: *Novaya Zhizn*, No. 12, November 13, 1905.

AMONG THOSE THAT STAYED

Boris Pasternak 1890-1960



Considered one of the greatest poets of the Silver Age Pasternak was best known in the west for his novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. Completed in the 1950s it was based on the Russian revolutions and the subsequent civil war. Very critical of the revolutions, it was deemed anti-Soviet and failed to get published in the USSR. Feltrinelli in Milan published it in 1957 in Italian and Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature the following year. English and French editions soon followed and Feltrinelli finally published a Russian version in 1958. Even though Pasternak tried to keep on the right side of the regime throughout his life, winning the Nobel sparked a non-too favourable reaction and he subsequently declined to accept the award –

"Considering the meaning this award has been given in the society to which I belong, I must refuse it. Please do not take offense at my voluntary rejection." Quote from Pasternak.

This prompted the Pulitzer Award winning cartoonist Bill Mauldin to publish this cartoon (referencing Pasternak's situation) in 1959 with the caption "I won the Nobel Prize for literature. What was your crime?"



"No single man makes history. History cannot be seen, just as one cannot see grass growing. Wars and revolutions, kings and Robespierres, are history's organic agents, its yeast. But revolutions are made by fanatical men of action with one-track minds, geniuses in their ability to confine themselves to a limited field. They overturn the old order in a few hours or days, the whole upheaval takes a few weeks or at most years, but the fanatical spirit that inspired the upheavals is worshipped for decades thereafter, for centuries." Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago

Mikhail Bulgakov 1891-1940

A prolific writer of short stories, novels, plays, essays and biographies Bulgakov was best known in the West for the novel *The Master and Marguerita*. His work was banned periodically but, ironically, he was favoured by Stalin who intervened on his behalf when, in 1929, all his work was subject to government censorship and Stalin gave him permission to continue work at the Art Theatre. Unsurprisingly however, much of his work remained unpublished until after his death. Despite his many requests to leave Russia he was refused.



Future prospects - written soon after the revolution and in the middle of the civil war this essay blames the present generation (i.e. the Bolsheviks) for the bloody violent conflict and the disastrous effects that it would have on future generations. In it he expresses admiration for Western Europe and the rebuilding of its society after the Great War. He berates the cowardice and irresponsibility of the regime and predicts that the promising and halcyon future that he hopes for will be a very distant one.

"Now when our unhappy motherland finds itself at the very bottom of the pit of shame and hardship into which it has been driven by the by the "great socialist revolution", many of us are haunted by a single thought. The thought is persistent. Dark and gloomy, it looms in the consciousness, imperiously demanding a response. The thought is simple enough: what will become of us? It is a natural question.

We will have to pay for the folly of March, for the folly of October, for the independent traitors, for the depravity of the workers, for Brest, for the mindless use of the factory machine to mint money... for everything!

And we, the representatives of an unfortunate generation, dying still in the rank of piteous, bankrupted men, will be forced to say to our children: "Pay, pay honestly, and eternally remember the Socialist Revolution!"

Future Prospects (extract) published in *Gazeta Grozny*, November 13/26, 1919.



GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

AMONG THOSE THAT STAYED

Isaac Babel 1894-1940



A journalist, playwright, translator and short story writer, Babel was best known as the author of the collections *Red Cavalry* and *Odessa Tales*. The stories in *Red Cavalry* are based on life at the time of the revolution and the Polish Soviet War of 1920. They are narrated by the reporter Lutov (based on Babel himself while he served in the cavalry army). That work earned him the wrath of his commander Budwenny who accused him of slander. However, his friend Maxim Gorky intervened and supported Babel and was instrumental in getting *Red Cavalry* published in 1926.

Odessa Tales are stories about the life of Jewish gangsters before and after the Russian Revolution.

Jorge Luis Borges said of *Red Cavalry* – "The music of its style contrasts with the almost ineffable brutality of certain scenes. One of the stories, "Salt" enjoys a glory seemingly reserved for poems and rarely attained by prose: many people know it by heart."

Babel eventually became disillusioned with the Soviet system, in particular collectivization and said "The bounty of the past is gone – it is due to the famine in Ukraine and the destruction of the village across our land" – Antonina Pirozhkova : *At his side: the last years of Isaac Babel*, page 18.

In the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers (1934), Babel noted that he was becoming "the master of a new literary genre, the genre of silence".

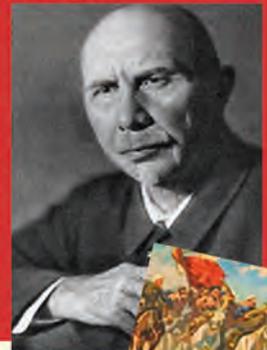
He was eventually a victim of the Great Purge becoming an enemy of the people and was executed in 1940.



Alexander Serafimovich 1863-1949

Always a defender of the peasants under Tsarist rule and deeply concerned about the plight of Russian Jews Serafimovich joined the Bolsheviks in early 1917. Before he wrote *The iron flood* in 1924 (a classic novel of the Russian Revolution and Civil War) he wrote stories of revolutionary men and women and the miserable lives of Russian peasants pre 1917. *The iron flood* was based on a real incident involving a Red Army engagement with the White Army. It was later adapted for the stage. Serafimovich became a member of the literary group Sreda in 1902 along with Gorky, Chekov, Bunin and others. He also took a great interest in budding writers and had a particular influence on Mikhail Shokolov (*Quiet flows the Don*).

He spent all his life in Russia, truly committed to the Soviet system, having been awarded the Order of Lenin in 1933, the Stalin Prize in 1943 and other such awards. He died in Moscow in 1949.



Yevgeny Zamyatin 1884-1937 – stayed until 1931

Zamyatin's dystopian novel *We* had a profound influence on George Orwell (who wrote a review of the book and is reported to have said that he "was taking it as the model for his next novel" i.e. *Nineteen eighty four*). It was the first work banned by Goskomizdat, the new Soviet censorship bureau, in 1921. It's also thought to have inspired Huxley's *Brave new world*. Initially a supporter of the Bolshevik regime and collectivism, Zamyatin was nevertheless disquieted by the Soviet Union's censorship and clampdown of the arts after the October Revolution.

Like Orwell's *Animal Farm* *We* criticised the communist utopia and as a result Zamyatin was banned and imprisoned until 1931 when Maxim Gorky made an intervention on his behalf - he was released and moved to France where he died six years later.

In the early 1930s he was condemned by the Union of Soviet Writers – he resigned his membership as a result saying "I find it impossible to belong to a literary organization which, even if only indirectly, takes a part in the persecution of a fellow member."

There is no final one; revolutions are infinite.

— Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*

True literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy functionaries, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, and skeptics.

— Yevgeny Zamyatin, - *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*



Maxim Gorky 1868-1936



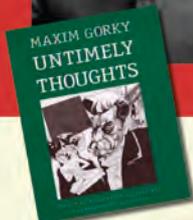
Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) [remained until 1921 when he went into exile to Italy but returned in 1932.]

Gorky, one of the titans of Russian literature and founder of socialist realism, was revered as one of the leading intellectuals of the Russian Revolution and was an ardent supporter of the Bolsheviks at the time. However, when his newspaper, *Novaya Zhizn* (*New Life*) was subject to censorship, he published a collection of essays critical of the regime - *Untimely thoughts* (1918). He is particularly scathing of Lenin for the suppression of free thought –

"Lenin and his associates consider it possible to commit all kinds of crimes.... the abolition of free speech and senseless arrests..... A cold-blooded trickster [Lenin] who spares neither the honour nor the life of the proletariat."

"Politics is something similar to the lower physiological functions, with the unpleasant difference that political functions are unavoidably carried out in public."

Untimely Thoughts: Essays on Revolution, Culture, and the Bolsheviks, 1917-1918



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GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

AMONG THOSE THAT LEFT

Dovid Bergelson 1884-1952



Novelist, short story writer and essayist, Bergelson, born in the Ukraine and writing initially in Hebrew and Russian and then in Yiddish, was active in advancing Kiev as a centre of Yiddish culture and was instrumental in the promotion of Yiddish literature in Russia especially after the optimism of the February Revolution.

Hope and joy are evident in his short pieces from *Scenes from the revolution* (*Red train* and *The bellybutton*) written immediately after the February Revolution –

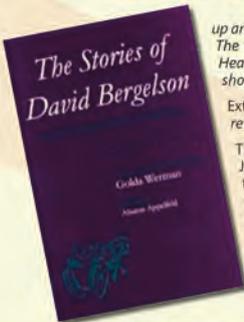
The great day has come, the day of the great holiday of free will. Many suns light up and, among them- there it is, the eminent and eternal. The street teems with people. Celebratory faces beam. Heads crowned with flowers and banners on walls. New shouts of happiness, of a life reborn, newly dreamt up.

Extract from *The Bellybutton* from *Scenes from the revolution*, April/May 1917.

The 1917 revolutions promised equality to Russian Jews but as this didn't come to pass and the fact that he found life under the Bolsheviks difficult (his hopes for Jewish autonomy in the Ukraine weren't realised) he became highly critical of the Soviet system and was driven into exile in 1921, although returned in 1934.

His most well-known works during the period in exile include *Divine Justice*, *Three centres*, *Storm days*, *At the Dnieper* and *Materiai*

When Bergelson returned to Russia in 1934 he became a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee but in an increasingly anti-Semitic Soviet Union he eventually fell foul of the authorities and he and fellow committee members were eventually executed in 1952 under Stalin's orders (Night of the Murdered Poets).



Teffi [Nadezhda Alexandrovna Likhvitskaya] 1872-1952



Teffi, (journalist, humourist, short story writer, poet and prose writer), one of Russia's most loved writers, revered by both the Tsar and Lenin (for a time), lived through revolutions and exile and is most famous for her *Memories: from Moscow to the Black Sea*. This was her story of the disintegration of Tsarist Russia, the aftermath of the 1917 revolutions and her subsequent journey into exile in 1919. Fiercely critical of the Bolsheviks (stemming from the 1905 revolution) in June of 1917 she wrote –

"Every pickpocket who takes a wallet from some heedless passer-by can now say that he's a follower of Lenin. Why not? Lenin takes somebody else's house, a pickpocket takes somebody else's wallet. The only difference is one of scale. After all, great ships need deep waters."

A few words about Lenin, (extract, 1917)

She was a regular columnist for the liberal newspaper *Russkoe Slovo* (*The Russian word*) which published satirical pieces about both the Tsarist and Bolshevik regimes resulting in the newspaper being closed down by the Bolsheviks in late November 1917. In *The Guillotine* she derides the Russian bourgeoisie for being out of touch with the realities of the revolution. In *We are still living* she describes life in Petrograd just after the October revolution *"everything is cold and awful. The electricity is only on for five hours a day..... the only people that can get eggs now are children. Four children are entitled to one egg between them, once a year. That's how we live. A lot of people are starting to think that we aren't living but quite simply dying. But then, when people are very hungry and very cold and unhappy into the bargain its probably all too easy for them to imagine that they're dying."*

Despite her efforts and that of her determined fellow journalists to reopen the newspaper under different names all failed and life grew intolerable for her. She went into exile in 1919, settling in Paris in 1920 until her death in 1952.



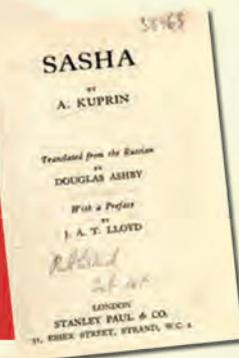
Alexander Kuprin 1870-1938



By no means a revolutionary but disillusioned with the Tsarist regime Kuprin empathised with the plight of the Russian peasantry and poor. In 1917 he published two works *Sasha* and *Yasha* and *Liudi-Pitsy* neither of which deal with the social and political upheavals happening at the time.

"Diversity and even confusion characterise his writing [between the revolutions of 1917]. While welcoming the freedom brought by the February Revolution he foresaw the excesses that further upheaval might bring and feared lest Russia plunge into an orgy of bloodshed." Nicholas J.L. Luker [*Alexander Kuprin*, Twayne Publ., 1978 p145.]

After the October Revolution he emigrated to France, although returned to Russia in 1938



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GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

AMONG THOSE THAT LEFT

Ivan Bunin 1870-1953



Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) – first Russian writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Fiercely critical of the Soviet regime and revolutions in general, Bunin left the Soviet Union in 1920. He also finished his friendship with the (at the time) pro-Bolshevik Gorky in 1917 on account of their opposing political views. In 1925/26 he published *Cursed days*, the anti-Bolshevik diary of the Russian Revolution and the civil war. It is a memoir of the times and chronicles the years of revolution. It is graphic in its descriptions of the dangerous day to day lives of the people of Odessa and Moscow. It captures the frantic upheaval of society and the effects of the demise of Tsarist Russia.

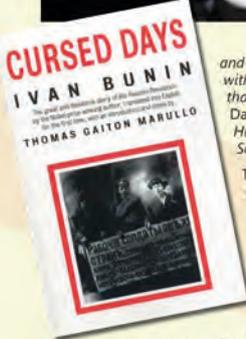
"Bunin's diary foreshadowed such libellous memoirs as Evgenia Ginsberg's *Journey into the whirlwind* (1967) and Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope against hope* (1970) and *Hope abandoned* (1974), the accounts of two courageous women caught up in the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. *Cursed Days* also preceded the "rebellious" anti-Soviet tradition that began with Evgeny Zamyatin and Yury Olesha, moved on to Mikhail Bulgakov, and reached an apex with Boris Pasternak and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. One can argue that, in its painful exposés of political and social utopias, *Cursed Days* heralded the anti-utopian writing of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Bunin and Zamyatin had correctly understood that the Soviet experiment was destined to self-destruct."

Thomas Gaiton Marullo, in his introduction to his translation of *Cursed days* (1998)

"But surely many people knew that a revolution is only a bloody game of swapping places that always ends up with ordinary people, even if they do manage to sit, revel and rage on the governing throne for some time, ultimately ending up in a worse situation than before?" *Cursed days: a diary of a revolution* (extract)

"I have still no more things to say... [for] I have no intention of hiding my emotions... I have a genuinely savage hatred and a genuinely savage contempt for revolutions and believe that one cannot help but have these emotions." *Cursed days: a diary of a revolution*. p 236.

Emigrating to France in 1920 Bunin wrote articles for the Russian émigré press and published many of his pre-revolutionary works as well as new prose works and collections. His abhorrence of Lenin and the Bolsheviks never abated.



Mark Aldanov

(Mark Alexandrovich Landau)

1888/89 – 1957



Jewish, liberal, born in Kiev. Aldanov remained resolutely anti-Bolshevik all of his life, emigrating to France in 1919. Aldanov's first book, *Lenin*, was written in French but translated into several languages and was followed by *Two Revolutions* in 1922, a comparison of the Russian and French revolutions. Also a prolific writer of fiction, one cycle of novels was a trilogy about the Russian Revolutions – *The key*, *The escape* and *The cave*. In later years he was nominated six times for the Nobel Literature Prize by Ivan Bunin.

He moved to New York in 1941 and founded the émigré journal *The New Review* (*Novy Zhurnal*) with his friend Mikhail Tsetlin. Other contributors to this journal included Bunin, Nabokov, Brodsky and Solzhenitsyn. Along with Nabokov he was one of the most successful Russian writers in America. He returned to Europe in 1947 and died in Nice in 1957. His works were banned in the USSR until 1989.

In 1936 the poet Demyan Bedny (whose poetry glorified the 1917 revolutions) wrote of Aldanov

"The reactionary litterateur Aldanov, who writes historical novels which treat the emancipatory movement of mankind from the standpoint of an alarmed philistine, has occupied himself of late with writing historical notations to the October Revolution. In one of his feuilletons, basing himself on a ludicrous analysis of the budget of Pravda for the year 1917, he attempts to prove that the Bolsheviks did "just the same" receive German money. To be sure, in the process, the multi-million subsidy is reduced to a very modest sum; but, in return, the moral and mental equipment of the historian himself rises to its heights."

New Militant, 26 February, 1936



Vladimir Nabokov 1899-1977



The last word can be given to Vladimir Nabokov -

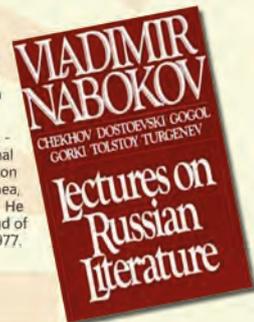
"that a country exists where for almost a quarter of a century literature has been limited to illustrating the advertisements of a firm of slave-traders is hardly credible to people for whom writing and reading books is synonymous with having and voicing individual opinions. But if you do not believe in the existence of such conditions, you may at least imagine them and once you have imagined them you will realise with new purity and pride the value of real books written by free men for free men to read"

-from an untitled piece on Soviet literature in his introduction to *Lectures in Russian literature* - a collection of his lectures given in the 1950s at Wellesley and Cornell Universities.

Although Nabokov's first poetry collection was published in

1916 while still in his teens, he didn't write anything of significance until the 1930s onwards, eventually achieving fame as he began to write in English when finally settling in America.

Nabokov was strongly anti-Bolshevik - his father was a member of the provisional government after the February revolution but the family had to flee to Crimea, eventually going into exile in 1919. He had no desire to ever return to the land of his birth and died in Switzerland in 1977.



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GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

REVOLUTIONARY POSTERS



"Women workers, take up your rifles" – a poster from the early days of the Civil War, circa 1918, calling for working-class women to join in armed resistance against the White Guard enemies of Bolshevism.



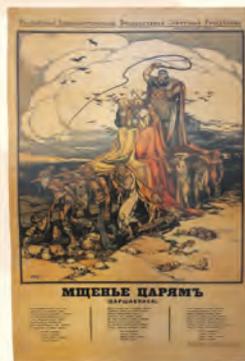
"A message to the betrayed brothers in the White Army Trenches" – poster by Alexander Apsit, text by poet Demyan Bedny, October 1918.



"Proletarians of all lands unite. Long live the International Army of Labour" – poster by Dimitri Moor for the Workers and Peasants' Red Army, 1918.



"We are victorious" – a poster commemorating the first anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. A Red Guard patrol hurries through the cobbled streets of Petrograd on the night of October 25th 1917.



"Revenge on the Tsars" by Alexander Apsit, 1918.



"Dear Illyich, we remember your commands!" – an unsigned poster from 1924 showing Lenin mobbed by adoring women of the Soviet Union.



"Year One of the Proletarian Dictatorship" by Alexander Apsit. Petrograd, 1918.



"Comrades! With rifles and hammers, let's celebrate Red October" – poster by Dimitri Moor, 1920.



"Down with Capital, Long Live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!" A poster by Dimitri Melnikov published in Moscow in 1920, celebrating the third anniversary of the October Revolution.

Images:
Russian Revolutionary
Posters by David King
- published by Tate
Publishing, 2017



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GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

IRISH ECHOES

Michael O’Riordan 1917 –2006

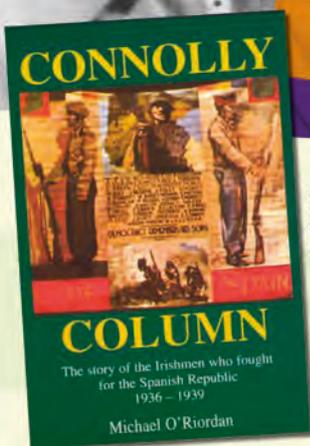


Michael O’Riordan (1917 –2006) was born at 37 Pope’s Quay, Cork City, on 11 November 1917. He was the youngest of five children. He was educated at the North Monastery School by the Christian Brothers and joined the Fianna Éireann Republican scout movement before joining the IRA at a period of intense clashes with the Blueshirts. In 1934, he joined the short-lived left radical republican movement, the Republican Congress where he joined forces with Frank Ryan. In 1937, O’Riordan and Ryan would become a member of the famous ‘Connolly Column’, part of the fifteenth International Brigade on the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War.

Michael O’Riordan in International Brigade Uniform



Michael O’Riordan was born in Cork in 1917, in a city at war



Connolly Column, O’Riordan’s account of his service in the Spanish Civil War, was first published in 1979

During seven months of service, O’Riordan reached the rank of corporal, and was a machine-gunner in the battalion’s No 4 company which crossed the Ebro river at Asco on the moonlit night of July 25 1938. The attack took the enemy by surprise, and XV brigade reached the town of Gandesa, where, at the heavily fortified Hill 481 known as “the Pimple”, it was checked by heavy casualties.

In December he was repatriated to Ireland, after the International Brigades were disbanded. In 1938 O’Riordan was offered an Irish Army commission by the Irish Free State but chose instead to train IRA units in Cork. As a result of his IRA activities, which included the attempted rescue of Tomás Óg McCurtain, during ‘The Emergency’, he was interned without trial by order of the Minister for Finance, Seán T. O’Kelly, on 22 February 1940, and did not regain his freedom until released by order of the Minister for Justice, Gerald Boland, on 9 August 1943.



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IRISH ECHOES

Michael O’Riordan

1917 –2006

With his friend Jim Savage, in 1944, Michael joined the Labour Party and with other friends and former fellow-internees established the Liam Mellows Branch and contested the city council election. In 1945 he was founding secretary of the Cork Socialist Party. Put forward as a candidate, O’Riordan was eliminated only at the last count. After marrying fellow Republican activist, Kay Keohane, they spent their honeymoon visiting IRA prisoners in Parkhurst prison on the Isle of Wight

The following year he contested a by-election for Dáil Éireann and won 3,180 votes, finishing ahead of Tom Barry. In all he ran for election five times

He then moved to Dublin where he lived in Victoria St with his wife Kay, continuing to work as a bus conductor and remaining active in the ITGWU.

In the 1960s, he was a pivotal figure in the Dublin Housing Action Committee and the protests against the Vietnam War. In 1966 he attended the International Brigades’ Reunion in Berlin and was instrumental in having Frank Ryan’s remains repatriated from Germany to Ireland in 1979.

In 1969, O’Riordan was approached by then IRA leaders Séamus Costello and Cathal Goulding to go to Moscow to secure arms for the IRA, but these did not arrive until 1972. His book *Connolly Column: The Story of the Irishmen who fought for the Spanish Republic, 1936–1939* was published in 1979.



Michael O’Riordan on the election trail.

He received playwright Sean O’Casey’s endorsement in 1951:

“Mr O’Riordan is his own message. He has nothing to sell but his soul. But he hasn’t done that, though he will be told he’ll lose it by holding on to it.”



Michael O’Riordan in old age at a commemoration of the International Brigades

Later political campaigns by O’Riordan included campaigning for the release of the Birmingham Six. He was also presented with Cuba’s Medal of Friendship by the Cuban Consul to Ireland Terisita Trujillo on behalf of Cuban President Fidel Castro in 2005.

In 1991, O’Riordan’s wife Kay died at their home aged 81. He fell ill in November 2005 and was taken to the Mater Hospital. Soon afterwards he was moved to St. Mary’s Hospital in the Phoenix Park where he spent the final few months of his life, before his death at the age of 88.



Michael O’Riordan’s funeral in 2006. His coffin bears the flag of the Connolly Column, based on the flag of the Spanish Republic. Mourners carry the ‘Starry Plough’ flag, behind the coffin.



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GRAND DUKES, BOLSHEVIKS AND DRUNKARDS: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE WRITERS

IRISH ECHOES

The Thomas Ashe Hall A centre of Radicalism in Cork

The Thomas Ashe Hall

A small building located at 15 Fr Mathew Quay (formerly Charlotte Quay) played a surprisingly important role in radical politics in Cork during the 20th century. The premises served a variety of purposes from the 1840s on – it was a parish hall for Holy Trinity Church of Ireland, a private house, the Cork Intermediate School for Girls, and housed language classes for ‘army officers and university students’.

The earliest known mention of a radical connection was when the *Freeman's Journal* recorded court proceedings in March 1917 against individuals arrested at the ‘Sinn Féin rooms at 15 Charlotte Quay’. This was a corner of Cork regularly ‘visited’ by the RIC and British military; the Conradh na Gaeilge base in the city, known as ‘An Dún’ was around the corner on Queen Street, now Fr Mathew St. The Hall was named after Thomas Ashe in 1917 following his death on hunger strike in September of that year.



Thomas Patrick Ashe was born on 12 January 1885 in Lispolie in the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula, Kerry. He was a founding member of the Irish Volunteers, and was a member of Conradh na Gaeilge (Gaelic League), and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). He led the Fingal Battalion of the Volunteers in the Battle of Ashbourne, Co Meath during the Easter Rising 1916; this group of Volunteers was the last to surrender when the Rising ended.

Released from prison in June 1917 he was re-arrested in August of that year. When he was refused prisoner of war status he went on hunger strike and died on 25 September 1917. His death is recognized as revitalizing the freedom struggle, 18 months or so after the Easter Rising.

The hall was the Sinn Féin election headquarters for the local elections in January 1920, when that party secured a large majority on Cork Corporation. Very soon after this election the Councillors voted to rename both Charlotte Quay and Queen Street after Fr. Mathew. In February 1920 around 150 RIC and 100 British Army soldiers raided the Hall during an Irish language class, arresting four men. The following month the Hall was attacked by RIC, the caretaker and her children were verbally assaulted, the contents and fittings were ransacked, and the building was burned. In December 1920, the night of the Burning of Cork, a bomb or grenade was thrown in through a window, causing substantial damage. It was repaired and re-opened in the 1920s.

The Hall remained the Sinn Féin headquarters in the city for more than 70 years. When that movement split because of the Northern Ireland troubles in 1969 / 1970, the Hall remained under the control of the Official arm of the Republican movement, who were the majority in the city at that time.



Thomas Ashe Hall, Fr Mathew Quay

In the decades since the 1920s, the Thomas Ashe Hall was the hub for many radical groups:

- Sinn Féin party offices and meeting space - later Official Sinn Féin, then Sinn Féin Workers Party, then Workers Party;
- Trade Union meetings;
- Weapons training / drilling for IRA volunteers;
- Cork Volunteers Pipe Band rehearsal room;
- Irish Democratic Youth Movement;
- Cumann na mBan;
- Left wing / Republican bookshop;
- An office for General Tom Barry;
- Temporary shelter for refugees from Northern Ireland at the start of the troubles.

It was at various times a sibiñ (unlicensed public house), small cinema for radical films, gathering place for marches and demos, Irish language classes, dances and socials, practice room for a ska band (!) and space for karate classes.

The building was sold in 1999. It was refurbished at the beginning of this century as office space and retains the façade it had in its 80 years as a centre of radicalism in Cork.



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