

East-West Review

Journal of the Great Britain-Russia Society

New Year 2022



East–West Review

The journal of the Great Britain–Russia Society, registered charity no. 1148802

Editor: Andrew Sheppard

Sub-Editor: Martin Dewhirst

East–West Review is published three times a year; succeeding issues are designated Spring/Summer, Autumn and New Year. The views expressed by contributors should not be taken as representing those of the Great Britain–Russia Society itself.

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The Great Britain–Russia Society’s aim is to advance the education of the public in particular but not exclusively in the following: the historical background, culture, the economic, political, social conditions and trends in the Russian Federation and its near neighbours. This is done through lectures and members’ meetings and this journal, as well as by encouraging as wide a range of people as possible to become members.

You can join or renew membership of the Great Britain–Russia Society on www.GBRussia.org/membership. There you will find a range of options including joint membership, institutional and corporate membership. Or, you can send a cheque for £20 in favour of Great Britain–Russia Society to the Hon. Treasurer at the address above.

Back numbers of *East–West Review* published from Spring 2014 onwards and offprints of most articles published in Volume 7 (2008) and later can be obtained from the Editor; contact details as above.

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Cover picture
Ice cutting on the Neva
Painted c. 1913 by Frédéric de Haenen (1853-1929)

List of Contributors

Jane Bugaeva is an acclaimed translator of children's literature and poetry. *The New Adventures of Helen: Magical Tales* by Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, translated by Jane, is newly published by Deep Vellum Publishing.

Martin Dewhirst had a long and distinguished career as a lecturer in Russian in the Department of Slavonic Studies at the University of Glasgow, where he is now an Honorary Fellow. He has written and published widely on contemporary Russian literature and the arts.

Thom Dinsdale is a writer and international advertising professional based in Amsterdam. His writing and work take him to Russia and beyond.

Barbara Emerson is Vice Chairman of the Great Britain–Russia Society. She read PPE at Oxford and is the author of three biographies.

Nick Fielding is the co-author of the Introduction to a new edition of Lucy Atkinson's 1863 *Recollections of Tartar Steppes and their Inhabitants*. Among his past works are an edition of *Selected Works of Chokan Valikhanov: Pioneering ethnographer and historian of the Great Steppe*, and *South to the Great Steppe – The travels of Thomas and Lucy Atkinson in Eastern Kazakhstan, 1847-1852*. His 'Chokan Valikhanov

and the English-speaking world', first published in the Spring/Summer 2021 issue of *East-West Review*, has been translated into Russian and Kazakh, published in the Kazakh national press, and awarded second prize in the international section of the annual journalism competition organized by the Library of the First President of Kazakhstan and the Nursultan Nazarbayev Foundation.

Claire Garry studied Russian at the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies, Trinity College Dublin. She has wonderful memories of a school trip to the Soviet Union, and has recently completed a small-scale research project analysing British and Irish children's experiences at Soviet Bloc Pioneer camps during the 1970s.

Kate Pursglove read Modern History at Oxford and has taught Russian history. She has visited the USSR and Russia with her husband, who taught and now translates Russian literature. She enjoys reading Russian novels and poetry, and writes, publishes and reviews poetry.

Michael Pursglove is a former Senior Lecturer in Russian and is now a freelance translator. His translation of two texts by Turgenev, *Parasha and other Poems* and *Memoirs of a Hunter* are forthcoming from Alma Books.

Andrew Sheppard is the editor of *East-West Review*.



Isaak Levitan's 'Above Eternal Peace' (*Nad vechnym pokoyem*) (1894) is featured on the dust jacket of *Patterns of Russia: History, Culture, Spaces* by Robin Milner-Gulland. Reviewing the book on page 42 of this issue of *East-West Review*, Martin Dewhirst writes that in his view the painting is Levitan's 'greatest'.

Kolobok: A Russian bun on the run

by Siân Valvis (Illustrated by Dovile Ciapaite)
 (Fontanka, 2021) 48pp., £12.99 ISBN: 978-1906257415

Reviewed by Jane Bugaeva

As I read *Kolobok: A Russian bun on the run*, Siân Valvis's adaptation of a classic Slavic folktale, with my five-year-old daughter, we marvelled at the striking, block-printed illustrations and giggled at the jaunty, rhyming verse. This book is a true delight!

The tale is a simple one: an old woman cobbles together a bun that comes to life and escapes the windowsill on which it cools. Into the Russian forest it rolls, encountering a hare, a wolf, and a bear – escaping the jaws of each by way of singing them a joyful ditty. Until, that is, it meets a fox – who is as clever as we'd expect.

Most of all, I was struck by Valvis's choice to use rhyme. Apart from the kolobok's little song, the Russian versions I know are not written in verse. Even if this is not immediately evident to today's readers, the choice to make the entire story rhyme positions it within the Slavic tradition of classic folktales. It also brings the child (or any reader) into the rhythm and flavour of the kolobok's world, making his signature song all the more fitting once it appears a few pages into the story.

And now on to my very favourite bit: the kolobok's song! I actually prefer Valvis's version to the original because it is more inventive. The kolobok sings his song four times and each one varies ever-so-slightly. This is to maintain the rhyme of the new lines added in each iteration: the song grows with the mention of the kolobok's escape from the previous animal. But each additional line could easily have ended in the same end-rhyme as the previous one (as in the original). But Valvis decided to do more – the result is that, without exactly noticing why, the reader never gets bored. Each time the song comes up, the reader's expectation of it is met... and then exceeded. These miniscule details signal Valvis's deep engagement with the text and her deliberate choice to improve it results in an English text that captivates the reader.

This fun ingenuity comes through in the songs' first lines as well. Here, the whimsical beginnings of all four songs:

'I'm a little kolobok – a jolly, little bun!'

'I'm a little kolobok – a roly, poly bun!'

'I'm a little kolobok – a happy, scrappy bun!'

'I'm a little kolobok – a merry little bun!'

How darling! And again: not in the original. I do



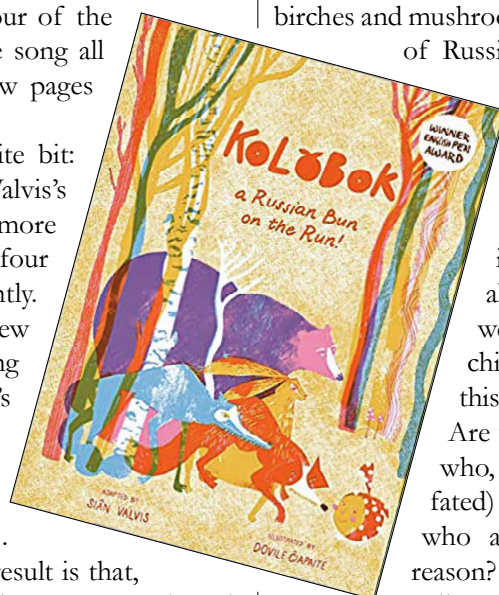
think this is important to emphasize – these little extras take imagination to think up and confidence to add. Quite seamlessly, at that. In this simple children's tale, the hard work of the translator-writer is really brought to light: the text flows effortlessly in rhyme, and each detail is carefully curated and thought of – a task that is difficult to do well.

A short word about the illustrations: breath-taking. The pastel primary-colours lend the story a warm, homey feel; and the attention to Russian details – a samovar, a house cat, the birches and mushrooms in the forest – are perfect reflections

of Russian pastoral life. And I especially loved the two-page spreads of animal faces, in close up, from the point of view of the character with the upper hand.

And when it comes to the end of the tale – I don't necessarily want to spoil it, though I'm sure many readers know it all too well. The ending did subvert what we typically expect from modern-day children's books: a happy ending. Though this begs the question: happy for whom? Are we to side with the wily main character who, being a bun, is expected (perhaps even fated) to be eaten? With the poor old couple, who are left without supper for no good reason? With the forest animals, who are so easily persuaded by a singing bun that they are perhaps not deserving of a snack? Or do we side with the clever fox, who might just know how to outsmart the self-assured kolobok?

Regardless of whom you root for, after reading this delightful adaptation I immediately went to the kitchen to whip up a yeasty bread roll to enjoy with my daughter over a cup of black Russian tea. □





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Great Britain–Russia Society

Talks Programme: New Year 2022

The Nagorno-Karabakh War: One year on
Neil Hauer

Thursday 20th January, 6.00-7.30pm (Zoom only)

Neil Hauer is a freelance journalist and security analyst focussing in particular on the North and South Caucasus region and Syria. His work has featured in the Guardian, on CNN, AJEnglish, and more.

*Russia's Shift to the Market:
What worked, what didn't, and what could have been changed?*
Andrei Movchan

Tuesday 15th February, 7.00-8.30pm

Andrei Movchan is a Russian investment manager and commentator based in London.

Soviet Art House: The Lenfilm studio under Brezhnev
Catriona Kelly

Tuesday 1st March, 7.00-8.30pm

Catriona Kelly is a Research Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge.

*The Lockhart Plot:
Love, betrayal, assassination and counter-revolution in Lenin's Russia*
Jonathan Schneer

Thursday 17th March, 7.00-8.30pm (Zoom only)

Jonathan Schneer, an American historian of modern Britain, is an Emeritus Professor at Georgia Tech's School of History, Technology, and Society.

'The Human Factor' and other interpretations of the Cold War's ending
Archie Brown

Wednesday 30th March, 7.00-8.30pm

Archie Brown is an Emeritus Professor of Politics at the University of Oxford. He will base his talk on his recently published book, *The Human Factor*, which won the 2021 Pushkin House Russian Book Prize.

Please note that Neil Hauer's talk on Thursday, 20th January will be from 6.00pm to 7.30pm, an exception to the more usual 7.00pm to 8.30pm timing of our talks.

The 20th January and 17th March talks will be Zoom only. Those on 15th February, 1st March and 30th March will also be available live on Zoom but, in addition, the Society is exploring the practicalities of transmitting those talks from a physical location in London with a live audience. Should that prove possible, an announcement inviting personal attendance will be made by way of a circular e-mail to all GBRS members and associates for whom we have a current e-mail address. Please ensure that we have yours.

All details are subject to change. Check www.gbrussia.org for the latest information.