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Introduction: Scotland and Russia Since 1900

Anna Vaninskaya

The history of literary encounters between Scotland and Russia – whether conceived in terms of personal connections, reading and publishing networks, or ideological and formal influences – is a long and fascinating one. In the last few years, as the rate of new encounters has intensified – including innovative Scottish productions of Russian and Ukrainian plays, Scots translations of Russian poetry and original poetry by Russian Scots, the Scotland-Russia Sonnets Exchange project, and radio and television documentaries about Scots in Russia – academic exploration of the historical roots of these twenty-first-century synergies has lagged behind.¹ The papers collected in this symposium, focusing on major figures such as Burns, Stevenson, MacDiarmid, McGrath and Lochhead, offer a timely intervention, advancing the critical understanding of Scottish-Russian literary interaction from several methodological angles. Patrick Crotty and Natalia Kaloh Vid² explore poetic reception and translation, Rania Karoula's and Ksenija Horvat's essays consider dramatic adaptation and influence,³ and Rose France looks at conjunctions in the novel form.

Versions of all five papers were first delivered at the symposia of the “Scotland-Russia: Cultural Encounters Since 1900” project in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee.⁴ Patrick

¹ See Peter France and Robyn Marsack, eds., *After Lermontov: Translations for the Bicentenary* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014); Slava Zaitsev, *Russia-Scotland: Selected Poems (in Russian)* (Self-published: Blurb, 2013); “Russia: Sonnets Exchange,” British Council, accessed 27 December, 2017, <https://www.britishcouncil.ru/en/events/sonnets-exchange-scotland/>; “Brian Cox’s Russia,” BBC Two Scotland, accessed 27 December, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08n8v8m> and *The Scots in Russia*, BBC Radio Scotland, excerpts available on the “Scotland-Russia” Project website: <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/billy-kay/>. For examples of recent academic engagements see the “Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe” series: Murray Pittock, ed., *The Reception of Robert Burns in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) and *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

² See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/robert-burns/>. Vid’s essay makes a good companion piece to Yang De-you, “On Marshak’s Russian Translation of Robert Burns,” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 22, no. 1 (1987): 10-29.

³ See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/arts/theatre/>.

⁴ See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/project/>. Project funding has come from the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the University of Edinburgh. The project website provides a digital gateway to previously unavailable or dispersed cultural materials dealing with Scottish-Russian relations. It gathers together an

Crotty's contribution is presented in an expanded form, and is the first appearance in print of new research arising from his forthcoming definitive edition of Hugh MacDiarmid's *Complete Collected Poems* (Carcanet). The project at which his findings, and those of the other four contributors, were first aired was launched in 2014 to bring together scholars from Russian Studies, English and Scottish Literature, Drama and Performance, History, Politics and Musicology with translators and theatre and music professionals. The aim was to provide a platform for sharing the most cutting-edge research in all areas of modern Scottish-Russian cultural exchange. Investigation of the mechanisms of the Russian reception of Scottish writers, especially the institutional and individual forces behind their popular appeal during the Soviet period, and the reciprocal engagement of Scottish authors and practitioners with Russian literature and drama, has constituted one of the project's more prominent strands.⁵

The current need for the reflections gathered in this symposium, as well as the project's overall rationale, are best understood in perspective. The last decade has seen a mounting tide of publications, conferences and research networks dedicated to Anglo-Russian cultural relations, especially in the twentieth century.⁶ But against this backdrop, *Scottish-Russian* engagement since 1900 has received relatively little attention, either as part of the broader trend or as a separate field worthy of independent study. The pre-1900 period is much better served in this

extensive array of texts, images, websites, recordings and films, including a series of specially commissioned translations of articles on Scotland from pre-revolutionary and Soviet-era periodicals; a photographic exhibition of Russian theatre in performance; specially digitised books; and a wide selection of scholarly and primary texts dealing with Robert Burns, Arthur Conan Doyle and other Scottish writers in Russia.

⁵ See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/literature/>.

⁶ See Emily Finer, *Turning into Sterne: Viktor Shklovskii and Literary Reception* (Leeds: MHRA/Legenda, 2010); Galya Diment, *A Russian Jew of Bloomsbury: The Life and Times of Samuel Koteliensky* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Angus Wrenn and Olga Soboleva, *The Only Hope of the World: George Bernard Shaw and Russia* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012); Anthony Cross, ed., *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture* (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2012); Jonathan Pitches, ed., *The Russians in Britain: British Theatre and the Russian Tradition of Actor Training* (London: Routledge, 2012); Rebecca Beasley and Philip R. Bullock, eds. *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Caroline MacLean, *The Vogue for Russia: Mysticism and Modernism in Britain, 1900-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain: Writing the Russian Revolution in Mid-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); and an edited collection on Wells and Russia currently in the works. For centres and networks see: <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/resources/centres-networks/>.

regard: the Scottish diaspora contributed significantly to Russia's military, medical and industrial development in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this is widely recognised in studies of Scottish emigration. Books of popular history, such as Jock Gallagher's *Scotland's Global Empire*, predictably dedicate many pages to the Scottish presence in Russia prior to 1900, and not a single page to the years since.⁷ This chronological imbalance has not always been typical, nor is it equally representative of all disciplinary areas which touch upon Scottish-Russian cultural engagement,⁸ and yet the comparative neglect of the Scottish dimension by Anglo-Russianists remains palpable. There is, of course, no historical justification for such disregard. Wherever one looks, whether to ethnographic, social and political perceptions and their impact upon public discourse, or to direct artistic, musical, theatrical and, of course, literary interactions,⁹ the cultural conversation between Scotland and Russia in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been no less vibrant than that between Russia and England. A brief narrative of the development of this conversation, using some of the key examples addressed by the project, will situate the case studies presented in the following five essays.

The twentieth century began with the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901 (attended by over 11 million visitors – more than attended the London Olympics of 2012), whose star attraction was the “Russian Village” designed by the *art nouveau* architect Fyodor

⁷ Jock Gallagher, *Scotland's Global Empire: A Chronicle of Great Scots* (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2013). Interestingly, Thomas Devine's *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750-2010* (London: Penguin, 2012) has virtually nothing to say about Russia at all.

⁸ See Paul Dukes, ed., *The Caledonian Phalanx: Scots in Russia* (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1987); Dmitry Fedosov, *The Caledonian Connection: Scotland-Russia Ties: Middle Ages to Early Twentieth Century* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Centre for Scottish Studies, 1996); Murray Frame and Mark Cornwall, eds., *Scotland and the Slavs: Cultures in Contact, 1500-2000* (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 2001); Peter Henry, et. al., eds., *Scotland and the Slavs: Selected Papers* (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993); Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987). See the Project bibliography: <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/resources/bibliography/> for a much fuller list of secondary sources on Scottish-Russian links.

⁹ See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/history-politics/> and <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/arts/>.

Shekhtel and artists from the Stroganov School.¹⁰ It was described at the time as “the largest and most costly section ever staged by the Tsar’s government at any exhibition”.¹¹ The English felt left out: journalists from the south complained that the exhibition had been turned from a properly international enterprise into a “Scotto-Russian” one, and insisted on confusing Glaswegian and Russian styles.¹² The confusion was symptomatic, for the exhibition did indeed inaugurate collaboration between Scottish and Russian avant-garde artists, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the MacDonald sisters were accordingly invited to the Moscow Exhibition of 1903, where they reciprocated with a Scottish display. But English journalists were not the only ones to raise national questions in response to the exhibition. Among the millions of visitors to Glasgow in 1901 was Semyon Rapoport, the British correspondent of the leading Russian periodical, *The Herald of Europe*, who used the exhibition as an occasion to reflect on Scottish national identity and consciousness in a lengthy account of his Scottish travels published the following year.¹³

The intense mutual interest of these opening years of the century marked what was to come. In 1916, the journalist and writer Korney Chukovsky visited Inverness as part of a wartime delegation. Later on, touring the camp of the Australian survivors of Gallipoli, Chukovsky met Andrew Fisher, High Commissioner of Australia in London and three times Australian Labor Prime Minister. He recounted the meeting in the pro-British propaganda book he published upon his return to Russia in 1917, *England on the Eve of Victory*. Fisher was a

¹⁰ See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/glasgow-international-exhibition-1901/>.

¹¹ Qtd. in Catherine Cooke, “Fyodor Shekhtel as a Creator of the Russian ‘Brand’: ‘The Russian Village’ at the International Exhibition in Glasgow of 1901,” *Pinakothek*, 18-19 (2004): 44-52, p. 44. See also Vladimir Aronov, “Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Moscow at the 1902/3 Exhibition of Art Nouveau Architecture, Arts and Crafts,” *Pinakothek*, 18-19 (2004): 53-56.

¹² Juliet Kinchin, “Re-visioning Glasgow: The ‘New Art’ Exhibited at Home and Abroad 1901-1903,” *Réseau Art Nouveau Network*, accessed 27 December, 2017, <http://www.artnouveau-net.eu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=tA6bxXkmvi0%3D&tabid=204>.

¹³ Semyon Rapoport, “My Trip to Scotland: Notes and Reminiscences,” *Herald of Europe*, July 1902, 79-139. See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/s-i-rapoport-my-trip-to-scotland-1902/> for a new English translation of the article. See also <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/the-international-exhibition-in-glasgow-niva-1901/> for another example of Russian coverage of the exhibition.

Scot, who started life as a strike leader with the Ayrshire Miners' Union in the 1880s, and Chukovsky emphasised his Scottish provenance:

The son of a coalminer, he worked in Scottish mines from the age of 10; he dragged coal carts down such narrow underground passages that his head scraped the ceiling. Then when he grew up he became not quite an agitator, but a restless person, and the owners sacked him. He could not find a job anywhere and was forced to emigrate to Australia, where in a few years he became Prime Minister, the uncrowned king of a whole continent.¹⁴

Chukovsky was amazed by Fisher's down-to-earth attitude: in a work of wartime ally propaganda, who better to praise Britain's fight for "world democracy" than a former East Ayrshire pit boy turned Australia's "Peter the Great"? In fact, Chukovsky was no stranger to using Scottish images in the service of Russian pro-British propaganda. Just two years previously he had published another book about "English" soldiers whose cover illustration – a portrait of a stereotypical Scottish private – was taken from the cover of *Private Spud Tamson* by R. W. Campbell, "the Scottish Captain" as Chukovsky called him.¹⁵ Scotland thus literally became the face of the British war effort for the tens of thousands of Russian students and soldiers for whose reading Chukovsky's book, in its four lavishly illustrated editions, was governmentally approved. Scottish images appeared inside the book as well.¹⁶

If the Scottish Spud Tamson replaced the English Tommy Atkins in the imagination of some Russian readers during the Great War, this was indicative of a wider trend, and Scotland remained the object of the fascinated gaze of Russian observers for the duration of the twentieth century, several changes of political system notwithstanding. In the Soviet period, this

¹⁴ Korney Chukovsky, *England on the Eve of Victory* (Petrograd: A. F. Marks, 1917), 73, my translation. See <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/history-politics/pre-1917-period/world-war-i/>.

¹⁵ R. W. Campbell, *Private Spud Tamson* (Edinburgh: Blackwood 1915) and Korney Chukovsky, *The Silent Have Spoken: Tommy Atkins at War* (Petrograd: A. F. Marks, 1915), later republished as *The Silent Have Spoken! The English and War*. There were at least 4 expanded illustrated editions in 1915-16 and beyond.

¹⁶ Pictures of Scots appeared on the cover and on pp. 39 and 41. Chukovsky took his illustrations of the Western Front from British periodicals, including the ones in which Scottish war correspondents such as Robert Scotland Liddell published their accounts of the Eastern Front. See Anthony Cross, "Scotland at the Russian Front in the First World War: Robert Scotland Liddell, War Correspondent and Photographer, Red Cross Worker and Russian Officer," *Slavonica* 21, nos.1-2 (2016): 16-36, a version of which was presented at one of the Project symposia. Chukovsky's book offered a portrait of the war through an analysis of the British soldiers' letters that appeared in newspapers and contemporary British anthologies.

fascination flowered most luxuriously in the field of literature. Walter Scott and R. L. Stevenson, already household names in tsarist Russia, became staples of Soviet childhood reading (and viewing); Stevenson in no small part thanks to the translations of Chukovsky's son, Nikolai. Even émigré writers like Vladimir Nabokov could not escape from Stevenson's shadow, as Rose France demonstrates in her essay. Arthur Conan Doyle's creation Sherlock Holmes, in the meantime, was turned from a pre-Revolutionary literary and theatrical phenomenon into a much-loved character of Soviet cinema.¹⁷

Robert Burns was probably more popular in Russia than anywhere else outside of Scotland in the twentieth century – the USSR had a Robert Burns stamp before Britain did – and he was naturalised as a Russian “bard” largely thanks to the translations of Chukovsky's fellow anglophile poet and man of letters Samuil Marshak, the subject of Natalia Kaloh Vid's essay below. Marshak and Burns biographer Anna Elistratova even toured Scotland under the auspices of the Scotland-USSR Society during the International Burns Festival of 1955.¹⁸ The Society sponsored a steady stream of visitors and delegations from the Soviet Union during the decades of the Cold War and encouraged interaction between Soviet and Scottish cultural figures. On one such trip, Marshak met Hugh MacDiarmid, who himself owed significant debts to Russian writers ranging from Pushkin to Shestov, and was but one of a series of poets (including Edwin Morgan, the translator of Mayakovsky) to render Russian verse into Scots. Patrick Crotty's contribution to the symposium explores the Russian inflections of both MacDiarmid's Scottish nationalism and his poetics, uncovering the variety and complexity of his engagements with the country, which long predate his notorious Cold War Stalinism. Crotty

¹⁷ On Stevenson see Liliya Burganova, “Distribution and Perception of Stevenson's Works in Pre-Revolutionary Russia,” *Philology and Culture* 44, no. 2 (2016): 216-222, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/rasprostranenie-i-vospriyatie-proizvedeniy-stivensona-v-dorevoljucionnoy-rossii>. For cinematic adaptations of Scott's, Stevenson's and Doyle's books see: <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/archives/arts/films/>.

¹⁸ Elistratova's visit was covered by the *Kilmarnock Standard*. For a modern-day equivalent see “From Russia with Love of Robert Burns,” University of Glasgow, 3 November, 2017, https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/headline_557310_en.html.

unpicks the textual and aesthetic detail of this “decades-long involvement,” as well as its intellectual and biographical underpinnings, and throws up some genuine surprises along the way.

As the case of MacDiarmid vividly demonstrates, Russia was as much an object of fascination for Scotland as the other way about. Major historical upheavals such as the Revolution left a strong mark on Scottish public discourse, and Russia proved crucial to Scottish socialist and communist activity, both political and literary. The political dimension of literary engagement was especially prominent in Soviet times: MacDiarmid and Naomi Mitchison are two of the best-known examples, but communist Russia was in the background of many lesser-known writers’ minds as well. The 1926 play by West Fife miner and poet Joe Corrie, *In Time o’ Strife*, is a case in point. The play, performed by a local drama troupe composed of miners and their wives to raise morale and money for soup kitchens, dealt with the effects of the General Strike on Corrie’s mining community. It toured Scotland with great success, and mining village and music hall audiences were asked to reflect for themselves on the following exchange:

TAM: (*To Jock*) Was you on the picket?

JOCK: Too true I was. Up at the pit at five o’clock.

JEAN: He’s been singin’ “The Red Flag” since he came hame.

JOCK: This country’s gaun to be a wee Russia if this strike lasts much langer.

TAM: And would you like to see it a wee Russia?

JOCK: Yes! and the sooner the better.

TAM: You had ay plenty to say against the Bolshies and Russia before.

JOCK: Ay, but my brains seem to be in my stomach.

TAM: Weel, I don't want to see this country made into a wee Russia, it would bring it to ruination.¹⁹

More talk about the role of the “Bolshies” in the strike follows, and government propaganda depicting Russia as the spiritual home of political agitators is deftly skewered.

1926 was, of course, neither the first nor the last time that developments in Russia served as a point of reference in local Scottish politics (real or fictional). But Corrie's play was also one of many nodes in the network of connections between Scottish and Russian performance traditions: naturalist, socialist realist, agit-prop or avant-garde. Those connections stretch from 1909, when the first-ever British production of a Chekhov play (*The Seagull*) took place at the Royalty Theatre in Glasgow, and 1914, when the Russian actress Lydia Yavorska toured Scotland with productions of *Anna Karenina* and Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, via Glasgow Unity Theatre's ground-breaking working-class Scots production of *The Lower Depths* in the 1940s,²⁰ to the contemporary Chekhov adaptations of Scottish playwrights Liz Lochhead and John Byrne, translations of Sergei Tretyakov's Constructivist plays by Scottish-based theatre director Robert Leach, and the Scottish-Russian collaborative work of award-winning playwright and director Nicola McCartney.²¹ Rania Karoula's and Ksenija Horvat's essays below pick up and develop some of these threads. Horvat focuses on one of the latest instalments in the long tradition of Scottish stagings of Chekhov – Liz Lochhead's *Three Sisters* – and Karoula on the cross-over between popular and political theatre in the work of the early Soviet Blue Blouse Group and the 7:84 Scottish Theatre Company.

¹⁹ Joe Corrie, *In Time o' Strife*, in *Twentieth-Century Scottish Drama: An Anthology*, eds. Cairns Craig and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2001), 86. The National Theatre of Scotland revived the play in 2014 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the miners' strike.

²⁰ See Bill Findlay, “‘By Policy a Native Theatre’: Glasgow Unity Theatre and the Significance of Robert Mitchell's Scottish Adaptation of *The Lower Depths*,” *International Journal of Scottish Theatre* 2, no. 1 (June 2001), <https://ijosts.ubiquitypress.com/articles/242/>; see also Bill Findlay, ed., *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations Into Scots* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004).

²¹ Both Leach and McCartney were Project participants, see e.g. <http://www.scotland-russia.llc.ed.ac.uk/performance-workshop-michael-chekhov-and-ena-lamont-stewart/>.

The five essays between them give a tantalising glimpse of a few pages from the story of Scottish-Russian literary engagement since 1900, and will hopefully serve as inspiration for further research in this area.

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