



THE PRINCESS DASHKOVA RUSSIAN CENTRE JUNE 2014 NEWSLETTER



May Events

The Dashkova Centre's May programme began with a book launch and poetry evening and ended with an international conference organised in conjunction with the University's New Centre for Cultural Relations.

Book Launch



Robyn Marsak and Andrei Pritsepov

On 2nd May, in connection with the Scottish Poetry Library, the Dashkova Centre hosted a book launch for the bilingual volume *After Lermontov: Poems for the Bicentenary*. The publication was planned to mark the bi-centenary of the birth

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of the renowned Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, and to celebrate the poet’s cultural ties with Scotland. The launch was attended by the Russian Consul General Andrei Pritsepov, who opened the evening with an address stressing the need to maintain cultural links between Russia and the West, particularly given the current political situation. After this the editors of the book, Peter France and Robyn Marsak introduced the project and spoke of their desire to bring Lermontov’s poetry to a wider audience. A number of the contributing poets were then invited to read a selection of the poems from the book, some in English, and some in Scots. The poems were also read in Russian by colleagues of the Dashkova centre, so that the audience were able to compare the translations with the originals. A very enjoyable evening was rounded up by a musical performance of a romance written to Lermontov’s lyrics.



Alexander Hutchison reads Lermontov’s poem

Dashkova Research Seminar



Gasán Guseinov

On 8th May, Gasán Guseinov, Professor at the National Research University - Higher School of Economics (Moscow), presented a research seminar on developments in the Russian political language and the new vocabulary arising from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Professor Guseinov argued that Soviet discourse and Russian imperialist discourse have been synthesized to form a new type of post-Soviet imperial discourse, which is being used in order to justify Russian actions in Ukraine. Professor Guseinov noted a

number of “unsolved problems” currently affecting Russian political discourse: the fact that Soviet political discourse has entered everyday language and is used in an unthinking way; the “mirroring” of western formulas – such as “president” or “democracy”, which while they resemble western concepts, are actually understood differently when used in relation to Russia; and the use on the Internet of “uncensored” language which introduces a harsh, aggressive tone into everyday political discourse. He also looked at how current negative attitudes to Russian language policy in Ukraine are a response to a historical legacy of restrictions on Ukrainian language.

Postgraduate Research Seminars

On 15th May, Cathy Ratcliff, a postgraduate student in Russian Language Studies at the University of Edinburgh, presented a research seminar outlining findings from her research into the representation of Africa in Soviet newspapers from the period between 1925 and 2011. In her presentation, she argued that the representation of Africa in the Soviet press at this time differs considerably from that of the Western press at the same period, in which a more



Cathy Ratcliff (right) and Lara Ryazanova-Clarke

colonialist, paternalist attitude is evident. Papers such as *Pravda* portrayed Africa as an active subject,

and a strong emphasis was placed on workers' rights and the socialist movement. Moreover, parallels were drawn in Soviet news reports between the development of the Soviet Union and that of Africa. This identification with Africa was not a feature of western news reports of the same period. These generally represented Africa as a cultural "other", requiring aid from the West.



Yulia Lukyanova

Another postgraduate research seminar took place on 22nd May. This time the subject was the problematization of "being political" in Russia. The speaker was Yulia Lukyanova, a PhD student in the Department of Psychology studying identity studies, discursive psychology/conversation analysis and social theories of collective action. Lukyanova presented the findings of a number of interviews with political protesters in Russia in order to study the psychology of political protest. She argued that many opposition protesters in Russia do not overtly identify themselves as political, but that actually this attitude

masked an intense interest in political matters. In the discussion after the presentation, it was suggested that perhaps politics has, in Russia become a severely compromised concept, hence the desire shared by many Russians to present themselves as apolitical.

International Conference:

“Russia as a Value Centre: Contemporary Russian Identity and Soft Power”

The month’s events ended with an international conference organized jointly with the University’s newly established Centre for Cultural Relations and Luke March from Politics and International Relations at Edinburgh University: “Russia as a Value Centre: Contemporary Russian Identity and Soft Power”. The conference took place on the 23 May at the Princess Dashkova Centre.

The idea of “soft power”, coined by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability to get ‘others to want the outcomes you want’. Unlike hard power, soft power does not involve the use of coercion or payment. The aim of the conference was to examine how soft power has become an integral part of Russia’s efforts to boost its own global image, attractiveness and influence. The conference sought to highlight different aspects of Russia as a value centre: looking at the particular cultural values contemporary Russia claims as its own; how these are propagated through domestic and foreign media and cultural realms; and how they are reflected in official doctrine and debates.

The first conference panel, chaired by Luke March, was devoted to political values and norms, soft power and foreign policy. The panel opened with Hanna Smith from the Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki, who compared Russia’s “great power” identity, generally regarded as one of the guiding principles of Russian foreign policy, with the “soft power” which, she argued, has been an important element in Russian foreign policy for at least a decade. The next presentation, by Derek Averre, from CREES (University of Birmingham) was on the topic of norms of intervention, with reference to the tensions arising around the principles of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) programme due to conflicting values. It was argued that while some nations see humanitarian issues as central to R2P, Russia sees sovereignty and the re-establishment of the primacy of state order as more important objectives of international law. The final speaker in the panel, Natasha Kuhrt (King’s College, London) addressed the subject of the language of international law in Russia since the fall of the USSR, examining possible differences in perception between Russian and international audiences that could affect the understanding of certain key terms, such as self-determination, statehood and secession.



From the left: Derek Averre, Natasha Kuhrt, Hanna Smith and Luke March



The audience of the conference

The second panel, chaired by Derek Averre, was on soft power strategies and institutions. The first speaker was Valentina Feklyunina from Newcastle. Her presentation concerned the imagined community of 'Russkii mir', which has been central to Putin's narrative of Russia's distinctness in the international arena, and looked at the evolution of Russia's approach to public diplomacy over the past decade and at the concept of the 'Russian world' within its overall strategy. The second speaker, Victoria Hudson from Aston, spoke on soft power and state identity in Russia. She argued that Russia has undergone an identity crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union, a lack

of consensus on geo-political values which has resulted in an often incoherent and contradictory foreign policy. Although under Putin's leadership the Russian Federation has gained a more assured sense of its place in the world, the nation's relationship with the rest of the world is still disputed, and this is reflected in the co-existence of various soft power strategies, each reflecting the agenda of different elite groups.

The third panel, chaired by Vera Zvereva, took as its subject soft power in media discourse. The first speaker was Ilya Yablokov (Manchester) who addressed the subject of conspiracy narratives in the news agenda of the Russian television channel Russia Today (RT). The presentation argued that RT has deliberately exploited populist, alternative theories of power (conspiracy theories) in order to legitimize Russian domestic and foreign policies, and to delegitimize the position of the U.S. government. This component of RT broadcasting is a powerful political instrument in the



Stephen Hutchings

post-Cold War de-ideologized world, and has proved very successful in attracting audiences around the world with different political views. The second speaker, Stephen Hutchings from Manchester, offered a comparative analysis of coverage of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi by RT and BBC World TV. His study described how news narratives were constructed by each channel

through the interplay of broadcast and material social media, and assessed the extent to which those narratives were shaped by 'soft power' goals. Some of the particular issues examined were security and openness; LGBT rights; and national and cosmopolitan identities. The relationship between the Olympics and the looming Ukraine crisis was also addressed. The last speaker on the panel, Lara Ryazanova-Clarke from Edinburgh, presented an account of Russian state-sponsored efforts to use the Russian language media as an instrument of soft power. The paper explored the semantics of homogeneity called upon for the construction of the post-Soviet collective "linguistic imaginary", using the illustration of data from 'Mir', a broadcasting corporation targeting the CIS. It was argued that Mir's programmes employ certain linguistic and discursive forms in order to represent the post-Soviet world as a coherent unity. However, the delivery of the semantics of homogeneity was shown to be constantly disrupted, with narratives being conflicting and fluid and subject positions uncertain.



Gulnaz Sharafutdinova

'populist nationalism', which sees the US as a civilization threatened by 'barbarians at the gate'. Thus, nationalism within the US and Russia may, in fact, resemble one another more closely than we think. The second speaker was Yulia Kiseleva from King's College London, who spoke on civil society and Russian soft power. Kiseleva argued that Russia has, in recent years, expressed a strong interest in exercising soft power to shape its relations with the West but has not found it easy to do so. She argued that it was differences between Russian and Western understandings of the role of civil society that made it difficult for Russia to use soft power and attraction in order to influence Western policy decisions. Finally, Gulnaz Sharafutdinova from King's College, London, examined the role of emotions in the processes unfolding in relation to the Ukraine, and the role of political leadership in enabling the expression, legitimization and promotion of these emotions. It was argued that that political leaders on all sides played a role in intensifying and legitimating certain emotional reactions - fear, anger, anxiety and *ressentiment* – which attended and affected political events and processes in post-Maidan Ukraine. Important for political analysts and policy makers to understand emotion as a driving force behind political processes.

The final panel, chaired by Hanna Smith, was on the subject of new East-West divides. It began with a paper by Luke March from the University of Edinburgh on the manifestation of nationalism in Russian and US foreign policy. The paper attempted to put Russian nationalism into a comparative context, given that much analysis, particularly in the US, risks 'Orientalising' Russia, (as James D. White notes (2010)), by uncritically regarding its nationalistic proclivities as deviations from a 'normal' path espoused by Western states. The paper argued that American political culture includes an element of

July Events

Guitar Concert

Musician Oleg Timofeev is expected to come to Edinburgh 4th of July to present music composed by Princess Dashkova and her contemporaries.

In this lecture-recital, he will present an illustrated history of his instrument that was created during the reign of Catherine the Great and reached the peak of its popularity in the 1820s-1840s. Oleg Timofeev will play the compositions of Ekaterina Dashkova, but also I. von Held, A. Svientitsky, A. Sychra, and others.

The tickets will be available on-line at the Dashkova website soon.



Oleg Timofeev

All of the staff at the Dashkova Centre would like to wish all our friends and associates an enjoyable summer break.



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