

# The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

## Russia and Scotland: Russia's debt to Sir Walter.

*Transcript of the talk given on Thursday 15th May 2014 by Lt Cdr Dairmid Gunn OBE  
to members of The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club in Edinburgh.*

To begin this paper on Russia's debt to Sir Walter Scott I must turn to a Russian play that some years ago was highly acclaimed at the Edinburgh Festival. The play, *Poor Liza*, was based on a story written in 1792, 21 years after the birth of Scott, by a philologist, historian and man of letters, Nikolai Karamzin. The subject of the sad story was a peasant girl and the story was written in Russian. These two facts are pertinent to the understanding of the cultural development of Russia during the 18th century. A knowledge of that century is indeed essential in the understanding of the emergence of the Russian novel and the enthusiastic acceptance of Walter Scott as a great author from the West.

To set the scene, a brutally brief sketch of Russia in the 18th century is essential. At the beginning of that century Peter the Great had his great city of St Petersburg built on the marshy land of the estuary of the Neva river as his window on the West. It was a practical and political venture, an attempt to achieve for his country status as a European power. The city began with the construction of a fortress and the concomitant import into the Russian language of words of a practical nature from English, German and Dutch. It fell to Peter's daughter, Elizabeth, (1741-1762) to expand and embellish that which her father had begun. Magnificent buildings and wide thoroughfares were the signs of a transformation of a fortress to an elegant European city. At the same time another Western influence manifested itself, this time in the use of the French language, the language that dominated the cultural scene in Continental Europe. It became the language of the aristocracy of St Petersburg, the Imperial capital, and that of the older city of Moscow. It was the language of the salon, and the medium for private conversation; it was the vehicle for memoirs, diaries, personal correspondence and even for short stories. To speak French was an essential accomplishment for entry into the upper echelons of society.

But what of Russian? There were important developments in that language too. For the first half of the 18th century there had been two Slavonic languages in use in Russia – everyday or chancery Russian and Church Slavonic, a language used exclusively by the Russian Orthodox Church. The secular language belonged to the Eastern Slavonic family of languages whilst the church language came from the South bringing with it the Cyrillic alphabet. Thanks to the efforts of a polymath, Mikhail Lomonosov, aided by Nikolai Karamzin, the two languages were fused together with the everyday language borrowing from the church language words of a philosophical, abstract and religious nature. The resultant language had become a medium capable of fulfilling all the needs of a rich European language.

During the reign of the Empress Catherine II, better known as Catherine the Great (1762-1796), French, however, maintained its position as the chosen language medium for social and cultural intercourse. Catherine corresponded with Voltaire (1694-1778) and the famous encyclopaedist, Diderot (1713-1784), who managed to visit St Petersburg. Russian, nevertheless, continued to be the language of the law courts and legal documents. It had its prestige increased when Catherine decreed that Russian should be used for delivering lectures at the newly created university of Moscow. Russian had begun to rival and even surpass French as the literary language for plays and poetry. Karamzin with his *Poor Liza* was in the van of that move to the wider use of the newly enriched language and at the same time was showing the influence of Western liberal thinking in concentrating on the plight of a peasant girl and not on a lady of the nobility.

Two events were to give the Russian language the confidence it needed to become a national language and the Russian themselves a sense of European identity. Firstly, in 1799 a Russian, who was to become Russia's greatest poet, was born in Moscow. Alexander Pushkin had made his appearance. Secondly, the early years of the 19th century were the years of the Napoleonic wars, in which France became the enemy of Russia. The second development led to French being disliked in certain circles and associated with superficiality, decadence and promiscuity. Russian had begun to give rise to the idea of simplicity and nobility of what could be described as Russianness. Karamzin's venture in the Russian language with his book, *Poor Liza*, was widely praised.

Yet even in the Napoleonic period French clung on as an essential ingredient of Russian education for the nobility and wealthier classes, and classics from other European languages were read by them in French. This complex linguistic situation was that in which the young Pushkin found himself when growing up in Moscow. He had a French governess and a Russian nanny; the language with his nanny was Russian and that with his parents French. He adored his nanny, Arina Rodionovna, and felt little affection for his parents. He received some solace from parental supervision as he had access to his father's extensive library where all the books were in French. His father could never understand why his son, who could recite Molière and understand Racine, seemed to be enchanted with the words spoken to him by a simple Russian nanny. But Pushkin was to write later, 'I spoke and read in French, but I dreamt in Russian.' But Pushkin was to do more than dream in Russian as this assessment from the introduction to one of Pushkin's works by a scholar in the Russian language lucidly explains. 'Pushkin is above all a poet, and so absolute a poet in his own language that he cannot be translated. His poems taught the Russians how to speak, to be themselves and rejoice in their language, to know who they were and how they felt.' Karamzin and others had helped enormously with the adoption of the Russian language as a literary language. Pushkin did more; he stretched it, fashioned it and introduced words that were derived from a rich folk culture and the rich liturgical language of the Orthodox church. His debt to Arina Rodionovna and the church is immense but his feel for the language was furthered and perfected by his being selected to study in a new school created by the Emperor Alexander I for talented boys, who, it was hoped, would eventually occupy important positions in the Empire. This was indeed a novelty as most of the more talented sons of the aristocracy attended schools in the capital run by the Jesuits. It was at this experimental school, where Russian was the language for the classroom, that Pushkin began to show his exceptional creative ability. At a gathering of the governors, other interested parties and the great poet of the time, Gavriil Derzhavin, Pushkin astonished and delighted all by declaiming a poem he had written in honour of the old poet, and his words were in Russian.

A promising life lay ahead for the young Pushkin but he soon realised that his creative potential was not going to be given full rein in the life of a functionary in the Empire. He felt at ease in literary society and had the good fortune to have his talent nurtured by the great Russian poet and translator, Vasilii Zhukovsky. This supremely well-educated man had translated such widely known poems as Gray's *Elegy* and Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* and *The Eve of St John*. It would be fair to assume that Pushkin came across the name of Scott at that time, or shortly afterwards. Pushkin was fortunate, indeed, to have Zhukov as an overseer for his creative work in Russian as the excellence of this man as a teacher led to his being appointed as private tutor to the future Tsar Alexander II, the Tsar who, in 1861, passed the decree liberating the serfs.

But there were attractions in St Petersburg for the young Pushkin other than those offered by the literary circles, attractions that took the form of drinking and womanising with the spirited young aristocrats of his own age. His light, erotic and sometimes politically seditious poems were greatly appreciated by his peers but not by the Foreign Office, for which Pushkin served as an official; it disapproved of the conduct and political leanings of the young aristocrat, and, after a probationary period, had him exiled to South of Russia to be kept under the eye of prestigious families in government service living there. He became acquainted with the Crimea and the Caucasus and the poetry of Byron in French translation. It was there

that he wrote two fine poems in Byronic style based on life in the Crimea and the Caucasus, the mountainous isthmus that separates the Black and Caspian seas.

His non-conformism and amatory escapades, including one with the wife of the governor general of Odessa, led in 1822 to another period of exile, this time at the family estate of Mikhailovskoye in the North near the ancient city of Pskov. He was under house arrest and his social life was limited but he occupied his time with visiting local markets to hear the country language and collect stories told there. All this was to augment what he was still hearing from his former nanny, Arina Rodionovna, who was comfortably installed in the estate as a devoted friend of the author and a wonderful raconteur of fairy tales, proverbs and folk sayings. In a strange way, Pushkin's gathering of old Russian fairy tales and other forms of folk culture echoed what Scott had done some years earlier in the creation of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

Another source of inspiration for Pushkin came from his correspondence with literary friends in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In one such letter he was to make the following request for things to make his time in exile more agreeable. His request included: 'Scott's novels and Limburg cheese, Fouché's memoirs and pickles, the works of Schiller and a cork screw.' It was a time for reading and such important novels as *Waverley*, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Rob Roy* and *Ivanhoe* were available in French translation, and Pushkin became acquainted with Scott's work in that language. It was much later in that decade that these novels appeared in Russian to satisfy the needs of a wider readership. Women formed a large part of that readership in both French and Russian. What had an immense appeal for them was the portrayal of Scott's heroines – spirited ladies such as Diana Vernon in *Rob Roy*, Alice Lee in *Woodstock* and the fiery Flora MacIvor in *Waverley*. In an age when opportunities for intelligent and active women were few, this appeal is understandable. In that sense Scott shared his popularity with the emancipated Madame de Staël, the author of *Corinne* (1807), one of the most celebrated books of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the problems of depending on French translators was their poor rendering of the robust language spoken in the good Scots tongue. In some translations the language of such characters as Andrew Fairservice in *Rob Roy* and Caleb Balderstone in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and that of *Waverley* and Diana Vernon appeared to be the same. This gave rise in some reading circles to the opinion that the Scottish peasantry were the most refined country folk in Europe.

On a lighter note, Scott had his appeal in the world of fashion. In Paris whence all fashions emanated, even after the fall of Napoleon, the influence of Scott was to be seen. In the 1820s Paris fashions were popular in Russia, especially those with a Scottish flavour. Available were tartans à la White Lady (Scott's *Monastery*) and hats à la Walter Scott. In 1825 the Russian newspaper the *Severnaya Pchela* (the Northern Bee) commented, 'Scottish many coloured tartans are so much in fashion that manufacturers are now making a larger amount of velvet in checks and white stripes for ladies' winter hats'. The *Moscow Telegraph* of the same year alluded to *Quentin Durward* coats in checks and stripes of the brightest colours and Rebecca caps from Paris. As late as 1834 at court and state balls and masquerades there were tableaux vivants taken from *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth*, of which the scene from *Ivanhoe* of Rowena receiving Rebecca was a favourite. Scott himself had an experience of his popularity among the Russian ladies. In 1826 during his visit to Paris Scott made the acquaintance of a distinguished Russian lady, a Princess Galatzina, a great admirer of Scott's, and accepted an invitation to call on her. An extract from Lockhart's *Life of Scott* reads: 'In the evening to Princess Galatzina's, where a whole covey of Princesses of Russia arrayed in tartan with music and singing to boot.' It is interesting to note that this gesture of admiration if not adulation by the Russian ladies was made before Scott admitted to his authorship of the *Waverley* novels. For the French, and, therefore, for the Russians, it had always been assumed that Scott was the author of the *Waverley* novels

But let us turn from the glitter of Paris to the modest country home of Pushkin at Mikhailovskoye. This period of house arrest had firmly implanted in Pushkin's mind the idea of the historical novel. He was greatly taken by the way Scott used well known historical figures as a backdrop for the thoughts and

activities of the more modest characters that were the creation of the author. There were plenty of examples in this sort of historical novel, ranging from Jeanie Deans and Queen Caroline in *The Heart of Midlothian* to Alice Lee and King Charles II in *Woodstock*. He was to use this idea and others from Scott when in 1830 he began to write serious prose. He had used the form of the novel in his most famous work Eugene Onegin, an encyclopaedia of Russian life at all levels in the 1820s, but a work in verse. His virtuosity and brilliance as a poet had enabled him to escape the more rigorous interventions of the censor. The novel in prose posed him problems. Because of his association with a group of young aristocrats who had attempted a coup in December 1825, known in history as the Decembrists, Tsar Nicholas I kept Pushkin under strict surveillance. Indeed, he appointed himself as Pushkin's private censor, a doubtful honour. Pushkin began his prose writing warily and chose as his first work a clutch of four short stories under the name of *Tales of Belkin*. Borrowing Scott's ingenious device in the introduction to *Tales of my Landlord*, where the novels of that series were claimed to have been composed by Peter Patterson, an assistant schoolmaster, from stories told by the landlord of the Wallace Inn, Gandercleugh. Pushkin in his turn put himself between the stories and the reader by using a fictitious figure, a country squire, Ivan Petrovich Belkin, as the narrator. The reader is taken on visits to a Russian country house, a post coach station, the artisans' quarter and an army garrison. Pushkin preserved the anonymity of the author, his good self, for a couple of years. Perhaps this was because he was concerned that this new form of expression might not meet with the public's approval and tarnish his reputation as Russia's foremost poet. Another theory is that it was Pushkin's aim that there should be no authorial presence in the tales and no sign of an omniscient narrator. The stories were to stand by themselves – clear, brief and unadorned.

Scott's influence, however, is at its strongest in Pushkin's famous novel, *The Captain's Daughter*, a novel that has been hailed as a classic and is still mandatory reading for Russian schoolchildren. In a century that was to be dominated by the novels of Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, this was the introductory novel for the new genre of artistic creation. The subject of the novel is historical. Pushkin was fascinated by a rebellion against Catherine the Great in 1773-75, a rebellion that bore the name of its leader Emelyan Pugachev. It was no mean rebellion; the swashbuckling Pugachev with his Cossacks from the Urals posed a serious threat to the Imperial authorities in St Petersburg. It was surprising that the Emperor Nicholas I allowed Pushkin to write a history of this event. After all he had told Pushkin that a rebel had no past. The history was interesting because of its historical novelty as Karamzin's history of Russia written in 1816 ended before the rebellion and before the first Romanov had ascended the throne in 1613. In writing it, Pushkin felt constrained as the subject concerned the ruling authorities at that time. He would have derived some encouragement from the editor's brief history of the setting of *Rob Roy* in the introduction to Scott's novel of that name. He might also have derived some comfort from the Tsar Nicholas's liking of the novels of Scott. That admiration for Scott came to light when Pushkin was contemplating the writing of a novel of the life and times of a controversial historical character, Boris Godunov. The recommendation from Nicholas I was that he write the novel à la Scott. Pushkin was not receptive to the Tsar's recommendation but he took the Tsar's advice when writing about Emelyan Pugachev in his novel, the Captain's daughter.

At first reading *The Captain's Daughter* does not seem to have in common with Scott's historical novels. It is very short and the story evolves with the brevity and clarity of poem. Yet, the discerning reader will note that story contains within itself characters and incidents that are to be found in *Rob Roy*, *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Heart of Midlothian*. The story itself is simple. A young gentleman en route to a small fort in the Urals for military service is caught in a violent snowstorm and has to take shelter in a country inn. The young man is accompanied by a servant, Savelich, a grumpy, outspoken and gruff old man, whose great virtue is his loyalty to his young master. He is the absolute image of Caleb Balderstone in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, who shows boundless loyalty to the young Master of Ravenswood. In the inn the young officer, Grinyev, and his servant meet a stranger, who had also sought refuge from the storm. The inadequate attire of the stranger moves the young man to give him a woollen garment to brave the elements. Later in the book in very different circumstances the stranger reveals himself as the

notorious Pugachev. The inn and the introduction of the stranger recall the scene in the Black Bear in Darlington where the young Frank Osbaldiston meets a Scottish gentleman with interests in the cattle business who, later in the novel turns out to be no other than Rob Roy.

But let us return to Russia. The young officer and the faithful, Savelich, eventually arrive at the fort, where they meet the captain of this rather primitive garrison, an honourable and honest elderly officer of the old school. The old man's daughter, Masha, is a seemingly retiring and submissive girl, whose appearance and pleasant ways soon win the sincere affections of the young officer. The period of gentle wooing is cut short by the capture of the fort by a rebel force under the direct command of Pugachev. The Captain is hanged but Grinyev's life for some reason is spared. The young man is quick to recognise that the author of this merciful act is the stranger to whom he had given a warm garment. Pugachev did not forget a kindness. This gesture by Pugachev has serious consequences for the young Grinyev as later in the story he is accused of supporting the rebel, and imprisoned. To plead for his life the gentle Masha takes the bold and courageous step of journeying all the way to St Petersburg to place the matter in the hands of the Empress, Catherine the Great. Her courage and pleas are rewarded by the grand lady with the granting of a pardon for Grinyev. There is no doubt that Masha's act is a mirror image of that of Jeanie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian*, who makes the journey to London in the hope of a meeting with Queen Caroline to plea for her sister Effie's life.

What a tragedy for literature it was that Pushkin's life was cut short only 6 years after the publication of *The Captain's Daughter*. Another most talented victim of a duel was brilliant young Russian poet, Mikhail Lermontov, the bicentenary of whose birth is being celebrated this year. The name of Lermontov is a Russified form of the surname Learmonth, a fact of which the poet was acutely aware. His ancestor was a certain Yuri or George Learmonth, who as a soldier of fortune had settled in Russia in the early 17th century during the reign of Tsar Mikhail Romanov, the first Romanov of the new dynasty. The family he had left behind in Scotland claimed direct descent from Thomas the Rhymer. It is probably fanciful to assume that he inherited his poetic genius from that distant Scottish ancestor. Genius he certainly was, and his poems occupy the pinnacle of Russian romantic poetry. The mountain area of the Caucasus served as a source of inspiration for him. For the Russians the northern part of the Caucasus was as the North West Frontier was for the British in India. His prose output is small and is more or less confined to a collection of four stories under the title, *A Hero of our Time* (1836-40). The stories set in the Caucasus are contemporaneous with his own time. Perhaps that was why he singled out Scott's *St Ronan's Well* as one of his favourite novels; but there are other similarities. The locations for both works are spas, the love affairs end unhappily and a duel plays its part in the action. Lermontov liked *The Lady of the Lake* the poetry of *Ossian* but generally found Scott's novels dry. It is interesting to note, however, that Lermontov alludes to a Scott novel in an important scene concerning the principal character of *A Hero of Our Time*, Pechorin. On the eve of a duel Pechorin is restless and pensive, and to quell his tortured feelings takes down a book from the shelf. The book is no other than *Old Mortality*. Subsequently, he forgets himself and is carried away with mystical thoughts. In a foot note in an old edition of the book the reader is informed that Scott's novels at the time were considered appropriate reading for those awaiting death, or suffering from illness or boredom. The note would appear to have some sense when thought is given to the many educated people at that time who were in exile.

Before leaving the subject of the South and its romantic scenery and addressing that of St Petersburg in the North to study Dostoyevsky's reaction to the works of Scott, it would seem appropriate to digress for a short time to dwell on architecture. The subject is a palace built between 1828 and 1848 for the powerful and influential Vorontsov family. Count Mikhail Vorontsov, the viceroy for the whole of the Caucasus, had this palace at Alupka in the Crimea built as his summer residence. It is a strange architectural ensemble, one facade, that facing the sea, is in Tartar or Moorish style; the other has running through it the flavour of the Scottish baronial or Gothic. Viewing the landward side the viewer can be forgiven for conjuring up images of Abbotsford. Mikhail Vorontsov had been brought up in London and like his father, Semyon Vorontsov, who was the Russian ambassador at the Court of St James for over 20 years, could be described

a victim or beneficiary of anglomania, a man fascinated by all things British, including, almost certainly, the works of Walter Scott.

After that departure from the literary scene let us return to the novel and St Petersburg, to one of its most famous sons, Fyodor Dostoyevsky. A member of the minor nobility and a man who had suffered from social exclusion and financial problems, Dostoyevsky, like most educated Russians had read the works of Scott. His first step toward literary fame was the publication of his first novel, *Poor Folk*, a short epistolary novel based on the correspondence between a lowly clerk with literary aspirations and an equally impoverished young woman, a seamstress, whose main aspiration is to free escape from the poverty trap. When she eventually intimates to her devoted correspondent that she has decided to accept the offer of marriage to a wealthy man, whom she loathes, to achieve material freedom, the affair comes to a rapid conclusion, leaving the clerk with his literary dreams and unrequited love to carry on in debilitating poverty. It is claimed that Dostoyevsky derived some inspiration from the works of Scott, and in this context two novels are mentioned – *The Monastery* and *St Ronan's Well*. One theory is that both novels concern the differing fates of two people, two brothers in the Monastery and a brother and a step brother in *St Ronan's Well*. The authorities, however, put a different interpretation on *Poor Folk* because of its sympathy with the predicament of the disadvantaged, and considered it to be mildly seditious; this allied to Dostoyevsky's association with the liberal critic, Belinsky, incidentally also a Scott admirer, got the young author into serious trouble, almost leading to his execution. This was transmuted into 5 years hard labour in a prison in Siberia. Although the works of Scott were recommended reading for those in exile, Dostoyevsky's type of imprisonment denied him access to literature; his sole reading was the Bible. He did not have even the company of reasonably cultured people as most of the prisoners with whom he worked were hardened criminals. It is a miracle that he was able to return to a normal life and write such great books as *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is revealing that after his return he was able to give his mature view of what Scott had meant to him in his thoughts during captivity. He recommended Scott to young readers for developing a powerful imagination and a lofty reconciliation of heart and mind. He praised Scott for his serene wisdom and his devotion to family traditions and eternal human values.

The second half of the 19th century saw a decline in the popularity of Scott's novels for various reasons. Available to readers were many books written in the style of Scott by Russian authors. They could not compare in any way with those of Scott, but they were easier to read and more popular with the less cultivated and rapidly growing reading public, who found Scott's novels too slow moving and complex. Then there was the appearance of novels by two distinguished French authors, Alexander Dumas (father) and Victor Hugo. The racy style and adventurous narratives of such books as Dumas's *Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*, both with historical backgrounds, had an understandable appeal for the casual reader. They may have lost Scott's conscientious thoroughness and thoughtful narration, but they had the popularity of a new song based on an old one. Another detractor from Scott's popularity was the emergence of many volumes of a new history of Russia, written in the 1860s and 1870s, the first serious attempt to portray Russia's past since the appearance as far back as Karamzin's short history of Russia in 1816. Enthusiastic readers wanted history direct from the historian and not through the medium of an historical novel. Besides, this was Russian history and not that of Scotland, England or medieval France. Russia awaited a novelist who could write a novel with a historical background that was not foreign but Russian. The man who was able to satisfy this need was an aristocrat and former army officer, a Count Leo Tolstoy.

It was as a young artillery officer in the defence of Sebastopol against the British and French during the Crimean War (1854-56) that Leo Tolstoy began his literary career. His first publication took the form of vivid description of certain incidents he witnessed during the conflict. They could be called the impressions gained by a sensitive and remarkably talented war correspondent. It was a year after this bloody conflict that he wrote a very different type of narrative, this time of an autobiographical nature. Three books appeared in a series – *Childhood*, *Boyhood* and *Youth*. In the last mentioned, he describes a

family gathering for what could be called a book at bedtime read by his sister, Liza. The book was *Ivanhoe*. He writes, 'We ranged ourselves comfortably round the work table. Liza took the book and began to read in her low melodious contralto voice. The reading was very pleasant. It was not a pretext for sitting together. Rather from the observations that would interrupt it from time to time, it was a matter of the listeners' enthusiasm and love for its thoughts and elegance. At last at 11 o'clock Liza stood up, summed up what had been read and announced it was time for bed.'

What a difference there is between the *Sebastopol Sketches* and *Youth*, a difference between war and peace. Readers had to wait until 1869 for the publication of Tolstoy's masterpiece of that name. There is a gap of about 60 years between the writing of the novel, which was begun in 1863, and the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the 19th century, a fact that brings to mind the alternative title for Scott's *Waverley*, 'Tis 60 Years Since'. An accidental similarity, a coincidence perhaps, but there is no doubt that Tolstoy's great novel follows the principles of the Scott historical novel. Although the Tsar or Emperor, Alexander I and the field marshal in command of the Russian army, Mikhail Kutkuzov, appear in the story, they are of secondary importance when compared with members of two noble families, the Bolkonskys and Rostovs and the enigmatic character, Pierre Bezukhov. Readers see how these families fare in the Napoleonic wars, and feel for them as their way of life and their aspirations are threatened by forces beyond their control. They come over as real people faced by disaster and the loss of all that is dear to them. Natasha Rostova with all her foibles has the courage and humanity that makes her one of the great heroines of world literature. The background is real too – the charge of the Russian cavalry at Austerlitz, the Battle of Borodino, the burning of Moscow in 1812 contrasted with conversations in the fashionable salons of St Petersburg and the famous Nobles' Club in Moscow.

But there are great differences between the works. The conversations in *War and Peace* between the principal characters are more searching and intellectually satisfying than those between the protagonists in Scott's novels. But when it comes to descriptions of common folk in the novels set in Scotland, Scott scores higher points. In *War and Peace* there is only Karataev, as a representative of the common people, a fabricated character, whose simplicity and innate kindness help his fellow prisoner of war, the restless Pierre Bezukhov to find a meaning in life. There is no-one in *War and Peace* to equate to Andrew Fairservice, Caleb Balderstone, Eddie Ochiltree or Meg Merrilies. Tolstoy wrote about the class he knew best; he believed in the people, as he tried to show in *Anna Karenina* through his character, Levin, but did not know them in the way that Scott knew them, a reflection of two very different societies of that time.

All the Russian writers mentioned, and such writers as Ivan Turgenev and Nikolai Gogol, were affected in varying degrees by the works of Scott. For cultured society he was simply a 'given', and there was the general assumption that educated people were acquainted with his work. The later decades of the 19th century saw his books moved from the library to the nursery. It was the diet for the young, and this was no bad thing. In the 1890s a distinguished professor from Odessa was to write: 'In particular, Sir Walter Scott is essential for our children and youth when our schooling so weakens their knowledge of history and impairs their artistic taste.'

At the beginning of the 20th century thanks to the works of Robert Louis Stevenson Scott's novels enjoyed a revival. *Treasure Island* joined *Ivanhoe* as a book that had an immense appeal for young and old and acted as reminder of the books Scott had made so well known. To this day both books are known to a wide reading public. The Soviet period fascinates by the changes in government policy over the acceptance or rejection of Western novels and indeed of Russian novels of the 19th century. Between 1928 and 1929 all of Scott's works were published. Although few were subsequently re-published, several appeared in serial form in literary magazines. A big break-through came in the early 1960s, the period of the 'Mini Thaw' during the rule of Nikita Khrushchev, when 20 volumes of Scott's works were published. Although five novels were not published, those that were retained Scott's prefaces and annotations. There was also a volume given over to Scott's poetry and one to his diaries and essays. The improved

access to Scott met with tremendous success; thousands of copies of *Waverley* were sold within the space of a few weeks. During a period of stagnation in the political and cultural worlds after the Thaw some of Scott's books appeared in certain literary magazines in serial form. In the 1980s the editor of *Ogonyok*, a non literary but serious journal with a wide circulation, decided to follow suit and introduced Scott to his readers using the serial form.

After the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the rapprochement with the West the Russian public began to spend less money on books as a percentage of income than formerly. Much to many a Russian grandmother's disappointment, the youth were starting to find the long Russian 19th century novels and their Western counterparts too long for their tastes or power of concentration. Abridged versions and videos began to supplant the originals; the obstacles, real or imaginary, facing the young readers bore a resemblance to those being experienced in Britain. At least in Russia such novels as *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy* continued to be recommended optional reading.

The enjoyment of some of Scott's novels and the influence of them on serious Russian readers are still there. The assessment of a Professor Dolinin, who has written on Scott in terms of the historical novel is optimistic about the future of Scott for Russian children. He writes, 'The novels of Scott are really most necessary for our children – necessary as ideal initiatory texts, which, possessing fragments of myths, stories, traditions and legends, can teach the basic human virtues forming the foundation of general morality; they are necessary as a first course in historical thinking and historical feeling.'

Perhaps the Professor's assessment is over-optimistic as today's thought processes for the assimilation of information in the Western world is so different from those of the 1980s. In a world of sound bites, tweets and texts the long novel à la Scott or Tolstoy presents a problem. Recently a so-called fast reader using some new discipline or technique claimed he could read *War and Peace* in ten minutes. He read, and was questioned afterwards about what the novel concerned. He thought for longer than the time taken by a tweet and said gravely, I think it was about Russia. He was right, but what a lot he had missed.

[www.eswsc.com](http://www.eswsc.com)