



**SERGEI  
TRETYAKOV**

***a REVOLUTIONARY***

***WRITER IN***

***STALIN'S***

***RUSSIA***

**BY**

**ROBERT LEACH**



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SERGEI TRETAKOV  
A Revolutionary Writer in Stalin's Russia

by Robert Leach

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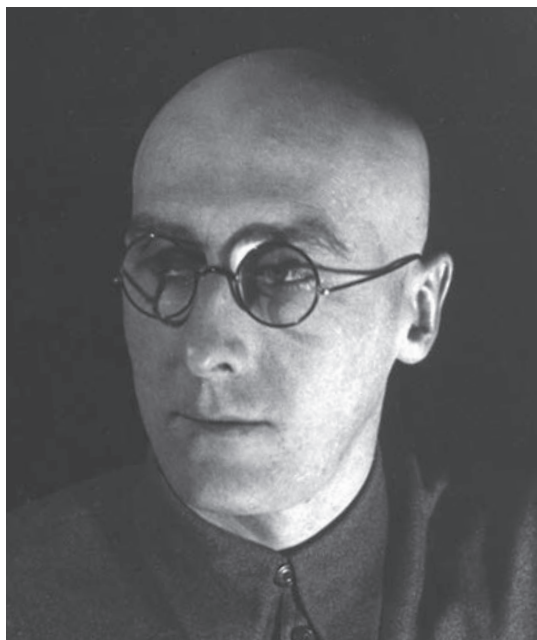
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Sergei Tretyakov

1892 - 1937



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## INTRODUCTION

*'Human biographies, or parts of them,  
make the most remarkable books.'*

– Sergei Tretyakov, 1934

Sergei Tretyakov collaborated closely with Sergei Eisenstein in both film and the theatre. He was one of the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky's most intimate associates. He was a crucial influence in the formulation of Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics and of Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. He was a potent force behind Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. He was therefore absolutely at the heart of *avant-garde* modernism. Yet he seems curiously elusive. Who exactly was he? What did he do? A victim of Stalin's Great Terror, declared an 'enemy of the people', his works were 'disappeared' and his name forbidden to be mentioned.

The first aim of this biography, therefore, is to excavate Tretyakov's life, to give a more rounded, more detailed account of his work, and to indicate the vitality and continued relevance of his thought. A second aim is to humanize him. When he is mentioned in works on Russian Futurism or the *avant-garde* of the 1920s, he seems a distant, almost austere, figure. This book aims to show him as a warm, even charismatic person, an energetic youngster who became an affectionate and caring husband and a fun-loving father. He was kind, sociable and possessed a strong sense of humour and irony. He made rhymes and drawings of and about his siblings, his friends and acquaintances, and he was a gentle and tender-hearted nurse when any member of his family

was sick. But he was also an unyielding writer-fighter, the implacable proponent of a happier, revolutionized future.

From his earliest years, expectations were placed on him. He was a leader of the games he played with his brothers and sisters when he was a child, and he turned into a brilliant student and a young poet of the highest promise. He was also interested in ideas. When he addressed a subject, he was determined to get to the bottom of it. He was argumentative and passionate in his belief in the need to drive his projects forward. To call Tretyakov a 'revolutionary writer' (as the subtitle of this book does) is actually to underestimate him. A poet and a playwright, he was in fact an artistic polymath, an intellectual and a formidable cultural theorist. He played the piano with skill, precision and feeling, he could draw cartoons good enough to be reproduced in newspapers, he became one of Russia's foremost radio broadcasters, and he was an outstanding photographer. He approached everything he did ambitiously and critically. He consciously strove to articulate the function of his art, to show how it could organise life, and he addressed these questions thoughtfully and productively.

He lived in a time of transition, when the world was just moving into the technological and informational age, and all this fired him. He worked on such a variety of projects simultaneously that the biographer is sometimes baffled by how to keep each strand of his life and work in balance and comprehensible. For instance, in 1928, Tretyakov was engaged with the theatre and the fate of his play *I Want a Baby*,<sup>1</sup> he was heavily involved with film-making in the Georgian Film Studios, he was editing the *avant-garde* journal *New LEF*, he was experimenting in depth with photo-journalism, he published a long book about China, and he was answering the call of the First Five Year Plan for writers and artists to go to the countryside and help with the collectivization of agriculture. For most people, one or two of these undertakings would have sufficed; for Tretyakov, they were not even all his activities in that one year. Consequently, in this book, the reader will find that the contents of many of the chapters overlap in terms of

---

1 A volume of Sergei Tretyakov's plays *I Want a Baby and Other Plays* was published by Glagoslav Publications in 2019, in my and Stephen Holland's translation into English.

the time they cover, as each one tends to follow only one or two strands of Tretyakov's work over a period of years.

In 1988 I met Tatyana Sergeyevna Gomolitskaya-Tretyakova, the adopted daughter of Sergei Tretyakov, who never had children of his own. She was known by the diminutive, 'Tanya,' which is how she usually appears in this book. Her encouragement set me off on this project to make Tretyakov's life and work more accessible to the world. She was a beautiful person, beautiful in her appearance and in her soul. How she retained this intrinsic beauty after all she had been through, I am not qualified to explain. My personal tribute to her appears in the Epilogue to this book, which was originally published by Q.Q. Press in 2004.

Over a period of years I talked with her at length. She stayed at my house in England on more than one occasion, and I saw much of her in Moscow. I recorded some of our conversations, she wrote down for me some of her thoughts and memories, and she gave me copies of playscripts, articles, typescripts and books. These included the memoir, running to over twenty closely-typed pages, 'My Family,' written by her aunt, Tretyakov's younger sister, Nina, when that lady was well into her eighties. These materials form a unique source for this book, but they are unpublished. Consequently, usually in the text, where I quote other writers, I have added footnotes to my published sources, but where there are no footnotes, the quotation is taken from one of the typescripts (or sometimes manuscripts) given to me by Tanya. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

\* \* \* \* \*

I wish to record my sincere thanks to many people who have helped to make this book possible.

First of these, of course, for the reasons given above, is Tanya Tretyakova, who committed suicide in 1996. Even after her death, she continued to motivate and inspire me.

I am also deeply grateful to Mark Rozovsky, who invited me to direct the first Russian production of Tretyakov's formerly-banned play, *I Want a Baby*, at his Teatr u Nikitskikh Vorot in Moscow. Thanks, too, to my assistant director, Svetlana Sergiyenko, to my translator and personal assistant, Angela Yermarkova, to Viktoria Zaslavskaya who

played the part of Milda, and to the whole of the theatre company, actors and crew, who worked on that production.

I have directed this play twice in England, and I would like to thank all those who took part in those productions, too, especially Sarah Rose and Caroline Hadley, my two English Mildas. Thanks too to those who took part in my production of *Gas Masks* at the Midlands Arts Centre in 1989.

Many people have answered my queries, entered into correspondence with me, supplied me with information, or read various chapters of the book in draft form. I wish to thank all of them, including Janis Silavs who showed me round Riga Gymnasium (secondary school), John Biggart, Katerina Clark, Chris Creed, Eddi Ditschek, Mark Gamsa, Rod Griffiths, Tatjana Hofmann, Steve Holland, Jules Horne, Christina Lodder, Simon Nicholls, David Parker and Olga Taxidou. Any mistakes, omissions or misapprehensions in this book, however, are – needless to say – my responsibility.

To my wife, Joy Parker, a special thank you for reading drafts of the book, for reading the part of Milda in public and above all for living with Sergei Mikhailovich and all his works for so many years.

Finally I would like to record my gratitude to Ksenia Papazova of Glagoslav Publications for her enthusiasm, her efficiency and her support throughout my ‘Tretyakov project’. She never thought when she took on the project that it would include playing a part in public readings in English of *I Want a Baby*, but even here she did not let me – or Tretyakov – down!

Robert Leach

## PROLOGUE: DEATH OF A POET

At the end of March 1930, Sergei Tretyakov returned home to Moscow from the 'Communist Lighthouse' *kolkhoz* (collective farm) where he had been working as a cultural animateur.

A fortnight later, on the morning of 14 April, the phone rang in the Tretyakov flat. Olga Viktorovna, Tretyakov's wife, answered. She went pale, put the phone down. 'Volodya Mayakovsky has shot himself', she said. Their sixteen-year-old daughter, Tatyana, burst into tears, but it was as if Olga had been turned to stone. Tretyakov himself immediately left for Mayakovsky's flat, but the phone in their apartment kept ringing. Olga repeated to all the callers: 'Yes, it's true, this morning'. As her daughter explained, 'Everybody was ringing because if Olga Viktorovna said it, they knew it was true'.

Mayakovsky's body was moved that afternoon to his flat in Hendrikov Alley. The OGPU, the secret police, were in charge. That evening Olga and Tatyana went there, joining Sergei in the adjoining room. Mayakovsky 'lay on the couch in his own room, covered with a rug to his chest, and on his chest was a rose. It was only because of this that one could accept that he was dead. We sat in the next room, weighed down with immense grief. This was not only the shock and the bitterness at the loss of a great poet and a close friend, but a kind of inconceivable sense of the approach of something horrific', Tatyana wrote.

She had known Mayakovsky for almost a decade. Indeed on one occasion when she was a small girl, he had strapped her small body to his own and they had dangled together on a rope over the stage of the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow while he declaimed his ferocious

lines as ‘The Person of the Future’ in his play *Mystery Bouffe*. Tretyakov had known him for much longer. They had been bohemian Futurist poets together before the First World War, when Mayakovsky had had a brief love affair with one of Tretyakov’s sisters. After the revolution they had stood shoulder to shoulder as revolutionary writers: they read their poems together at poetry recitals, they had worked on pro-Soviet advertising jingles and posters together, and they had co-edited the revolutionary *avant-garde* journal, *LEF*.

For three days, Mayakovsky’s body lay in state at the Writers’ Club with a changing guard of honour of poets and writers – Tretyakov, Nikolai Aseyev, Boris Pasternak, Viktor Shklovsky, the artist Alexander Rodchenko, the former Minister for Education and the Arts, Anatoly Lunacharsky, and others. There was a screen like a slanted black wall over the casket as endless crowds, probably at least 150,000 people, filed past.

The funeral was held at 3 o’clock on the afternoon of 18 April. The first speaker was Sergei Tretyakov. After other speeches, the coffin was draped in black and borne by Tretyakov, Aseyev, Osip Brik and others to the hearse. In the street, mounted police had to hold back the swarming crowds, who followed the procession past more crowds, including people hanging out of windows, up lamp posts and on roofs. At the crematorium the throng was so dense the cortege could hardly pass through. Only family and Mayakovsky’s closest friends, including the Tretyakovs, were allowed in. They paid their last respects, the ‘Internationale’ was played, and the coffin disappeared from view.

Tatyana Tretyakova wrote: ‘Then the end, and the terrible anguish. My father threw himself into work’. But something had changed.



# CHAPTER 1.

## CHILDHOOD

Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov was born in the small town of Kuldiga (then called Goldingen) in west Latvia on 21 June 1892.

The region was largely forested. In the summer there were berries to be picked and in the autumn mushrooms. Midsummer days had twenty hours of daylight; midwinter days were correspondingly short.

What is now the independent country of Latvia was then a province in the Russian Empire, though for much of its history it had been dominated by Sweden or Germany and the Lutheran Church. The struggle between Germanic and Russian influences, and the fact that both were in conflict with any independent Latvian aspirations, was the cause of ongoing social and indeed political tensions which simmered, not necessarily openly, all through Tretyakov's childhood. It may be illustrated by the existence and use of different languages in the country at the time – Russian, German and Latvian (also known as Lettish). Thus, Sergei Eisenstein, the future theatre and film director, who grew up in Latvia at the same time as Tretyakov, recorded that he spoke German first, and then Russian, whereas Tretyakov himself claimed that the language he spoke first was Latvian.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Latvia, which incorporated what had been Swedish Livonia and the independent Duchy of Courland, where Kuldiga was situated, had become part of the Russian empire, and in the following decades the tsars devoted considerable energy to Russifying the province. The abolition of serfdom throughout the Russian empire in 1861 was one step in this process, and from the 1880s Tsar Alexander III's policies overtly aimed at reducing the sway of the landholding Baltic German nobility. A primary battleground

was over the language question. Alexander III ruled that Russian should become the official language, replacing the use of German – and incidentally Latvian – in educational establishments and in the conduct of official business. It was not a way to reduce tensions.

However, the Russian influence was not entirely baleful. Once serfdom was abolished, Latvia began to industrialise. Railways, factories and banks were opened, and cultural life – new schools, theatres, museums and public parks – began to flourish. In terms of industrial productivity, Riga became the third most productive city behind Moscow and St Petersburg in the Russian empire, and it was the empire's busiest port. Moreover, the long sandy beaches on the Gulf of Riga led to its development as a spa in the 1880s, and it became noted for nude bathing. By the 1890s, over ninety per cent of the Latvian population could read, and Riga's growing importance and prosperity led to the building of some of the most spectacular *art nouveau* buildings in the world. Typically, they were tall, decorative, and even palatial, and still today almost a third of the buildings in the centre of Riga are in this style. It is worth noting, too, that many of the most impressive were designed by Mikhail Osipovich Eisenstein, father of Sergei Eisenstein.

At the same time there was a slow national awakening in Latvia, with an emphasis, perhaps not surprisingly, on the Latvian language. Even as early as the 1850s the 'Young Latvian' movement was gaining adherents. A largely cultural campaign which excavated traditional folk arts, crafts, stories and legends, it was instrumental in planting the seeds of the idea of Latvian independence, and by the 1890s it had given way to the 'New Current', a much more political and aggressive nationalist organisation. It was led by two brothers-in-law, the poet Rainis (whose real name was Janis Plieksans) and Peteris Stucka, and found its voice in their newspaper, *Dienos Lapa*. Self-proclaimed Marxists, New Current was behind the founding of the Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party, and became most active in the 1905 Russian Revolution.

These developments were clearly observable in Kuldiga. With a population approaching 10,000 by 1900, this pleasant town stands at a crossroads between the waterway of the Venta River and the overland route between Riga and Prussia. With wide streets, slatted wooden houses and Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox churches, Kuldiga is

probably best known for the Rumba waterfall, which is reputed to be the widest in Europe at 250 metres. In the second half of the nineteenth century, small industrial enterprises sprang up, making needles, cloth, tobacco products, soap, and vodka and soft drinks. In 1868 the City Hall was erected, followed by a new bridge over the Venta, a new prison, and a German-language secondary school. Social civic societies were established, such as the German Society, the Muse Union and the Latvian Fellowship Union, a gym hall was built in 1877 where annual sporting festivals were held, and a Cyclists Union was formed in 1880. The first local newspaper, the German language *Goldingenscher Anzeiger*, began publishing in 1876, and the Baltic Teachers' Seminary, noted for its choral concerts, was founded here ten years later.

It was in this expanding town that Sergei Tretyakov's parents, Mikhail Konstantinovich Tretyakov and Elfrida Emmanuilovna Meller, met, fell in love and were married. They were an energetically happy couple, but there were skeletons in both their cupboards.

When they met, Elfrida was governess in a well-to-do Kuldiga family, but she had come there from Archangel in the far north of Russia, where her German-speaking, strict Lutheran family lived. Her father taught German in the Archangel secondary school. He was renowned for the flowers he grew in his garden, including, for example, pale blue and black tulips imported from the Netherlands, and his garden was a sight not to be missed by visitors to Archangel. Her mother was Dutch (née van Brinnen), and there were seven children in the family – five boys, none of whom survived into adulthood, and two girls, Elfrida and her sister Emma, a spinster who came to live near the Tretyakovs and who was adored by the Tretyakov children.

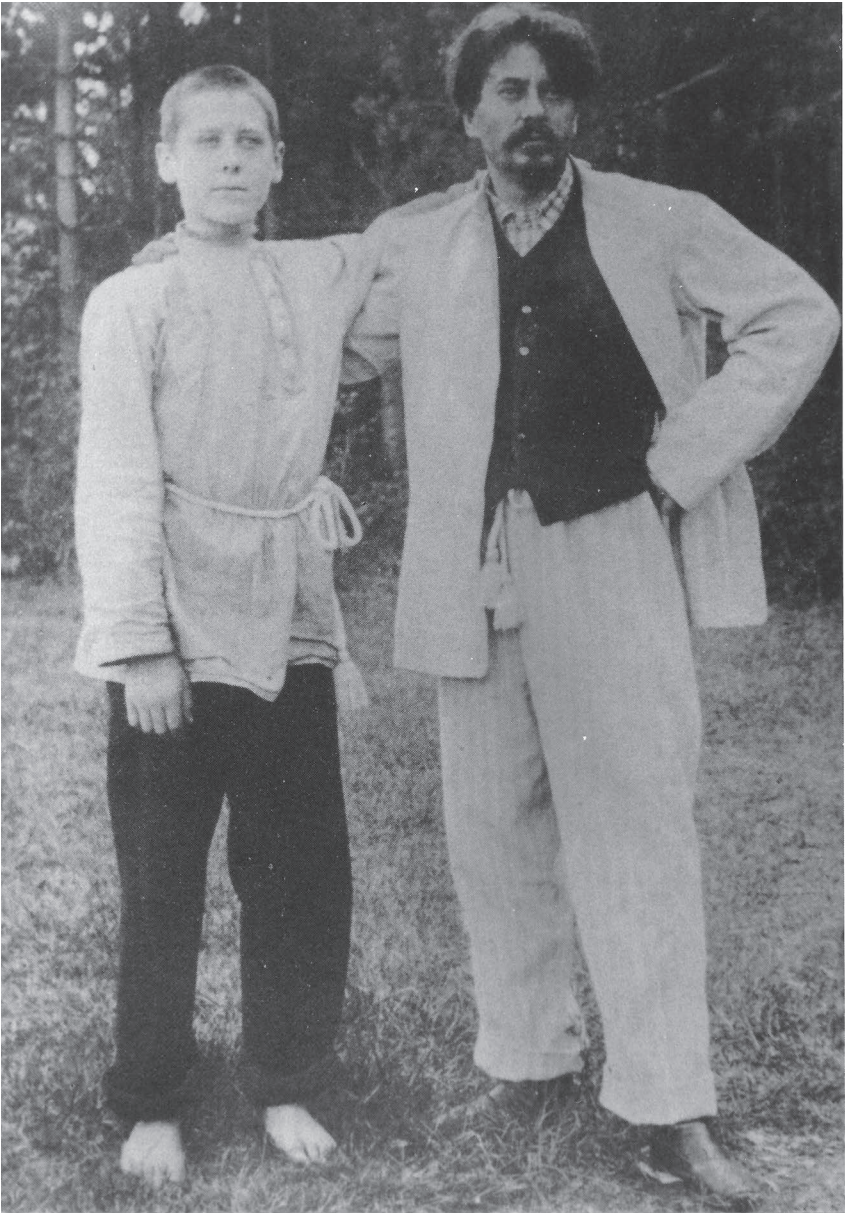
Mikhail Konstantinovich was born in Trubchevsk, Orlovsky Province, south west of Moscow. His grandfather was a self-made shoemaker and cobbler but his son, Konstantin, seems to have been something of a wastrel, overfond of alcohol. Mikhail, however, was a clever boy, especially good at Maths, and his teacher, a Mr Sokolov, spotted his potential. Weighing up the situation, Sokolov suggested to Mikhail's mother that the boy should live with him and his family, and this move probably ensured his successful school career. Mikhail graduated with a gold medal, which enabled him to be accepted as a student at the Teachers' Seminary in Moscow. From here he obtained his first job, teaching Maths in the gymnasium at Yelgava, then called

Mitau, before moving to the gymnasium in Kuldiga. His was a restless intelligence: for instance, in later life he taught himself to make shoes like his grandfather, and he also learned bookbinding, and though he remained a member of the Orthodox Church, he indefatigably upheld Tolstoy's social philosophy.

The marriage brought Elfrida and Mikhail into sharp conflict with her parents. Once they had decided to marry, Elfrida had to convert to Orthodoxy, at which point she took the name Yelizaveta. Her inflexible Lutheran father was furious, and refused to accept her. It cast a shadow over the otherwise gregarious Yelizaveta's life, and though she and her father were superficially reconciled some years later when Yelizaveta brought the five year old Sergei to visit her parents in Archangel, the *rapprochement* was partial at best.

Nevertheless she and her husband created a warm, affectionate family. They loved each other and rarely if ever quarrelled. Their shared liberal values meant that they never smacked the children, and if it was Mikhail who spoiled them and Yelizaveta who was the stricter of the two, they never disagreed about how the children should be brought up. Sergei ('Seryozha') was the eldest and there were four other boys – Vyacheslav ('Vava'), Valery ('Lyussik') who died at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, Oleg ('Olezhika' or 'Olka') and Lev ('Levushka') who succumbed to kidney disease in 1940. The three girls were Natalia ('Natasha'), Nina, and Yevgenia, the youngest child, born in 1903. Both Natasha and Nina became actresses: Natasha emigrated to Paris, but Nina, having trained in the Stanislavsky system, remained in Russia. She was reputedly the best looking of the girls.

All the children were gifted, especially in the arts, but probably Seryozha was the most talented. He quickly discovered his natural abilities in the arts, drawing cartoons of his family and friends, learning the piano and discovering he had perfect pitch, and writing little verses about his brothers and sisters. When he was three his father taught him to swim and he became an enthusiastic swimmer. He remembered at the age of four taking gigantic strides down the street in Kuldiga and hearing a voice shouting in Lettish: 'Pietur! Pietur! Pagaid bishkin!' ('Hold on! Hold on! Wait a bit!'). The rhythm of this echoed in his head, as did the cries of the street hawkers who plied their trades in the town. He attended church assiduously, and soon learned the service by heart. These were perhaps scraps which fed his nascent attraction to poetry.



Tretyakov, left, aged about 12.

Meanwhile as a small child he played outdoors by creating a feast of berries which he served to himself on a plate made of a maple leaf. His game of 'robbers' climaxed when he stabbed his 'victim' with a wooden sword, then robbed the body before performing a solemn funeral rite for him. Indoors, he remembered imagining the chair legs as trees and digging up imaginary mushrooms, only to discover that in reality mushrooms are not dug up but gathered. This realization made him furious with himself for what he described later as pandering to a non-realist illusion – an intellectual response which he claimed led to his later theoretical formulations about the arts.

When he was eight he encountered a 'real' poet for the first time in his life. This was Vsevolod Yefgrafovich Cheshikhin, translator of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. 'He sat on the verandah of the *dacha* by the Riga seashore on a small chair with his back to the people passing by and wrote. It seemed to me that his ink flowed like water'. Here was perhaps a model to be followed.

In 1902 the family moved to Tartu in Estonia which, like Latvia, was within the Russian tsarist empire. Tartu was famed for its ancient University, and among young Estonians there was a strong movement, similar to the 'Young Latvian' movement, to rid the province of the longstanding oppressive German culture and landlordism. Like Latvia's 'New Current', the young Estonians claimed to be Marxist, and they, too, would support the 1905 revolution. The family lived in the centre of the city at 11 Myasnitskaya Street in a five-room, first floor flat across the main boulevard from the Emayogi River. It was here that Yevgenia was born, and the family hired a nanny to help them cope.

The Tretyakovs still found plenty of ways to amuse themselves. Mikhail, the father, kept bees in seven squat yellow hives in the garden of the school where he now taught, beside a pond alive with noisy frogs, fruit trees and flowers. Seryozha was his father's assistant in the bee-keeping project: they both wore black net masks making them resemble, as Nina Tretyakova put it, 'devils practising witchcraft over the little yellow dwellings'. Yelizaveta, the mother, followed her estranged father's hobby of cultivating exotic flowers, and the flat became known to their friends as the 'Botanical Gardens'. She even grew an Italian palm tree in a tub.

When Nina and Lyussik fell seriously ill with scarlet fever, their father was their chief nurse, fussing around them in a white lab coat,

following the doctor's instructions. Seryozha was again his chief assistant, and he cared for the two younger children 'very tenderly'. One of his jobs was to feed them grapes, which he peeled, removing the pips before commanding the patient to open their mouth. Then he lobbed the fruit into the gaping maw. By this time he was wearing spectacles, but his sister remembered him as tall, handsome and very kind. He was also progressing with his piano playing: he was to become something of a virtuoso amateur musician, playing the piano for pleasure or relaxation for the rest of his life. His sister remembered how he would practice for hours works by Liszt, Skryabin, Chopin and others, and how the family would 'get cosy on the big sofa and listen to him play'.

In 1905 Seryozha was accepted as a pupil at the prestigious Riga Gymnasium, which had been founded as early as 1211 and so was one of the world's oldest educational establishments. The school's *alumnae* from this period included poets, architects, scientists (including a Nobel Prize winner for Chemistry) and politicians, one of whom was Peteris Stucka, co-founder of the New Current movement and later leader of the Bolshevik government of Latvia at the time of the Latvian war of independence in 1918. The school is still housed in the imposing, white-fronted building which Seryozha knew, with wide corridors and high ceilings, where footsteps echo on the uncarpeted floors and the classrooms still contain straight rows of old-fashioned school desks. The Gymnasium was funded by the state, not the city, and consequently accepted students from across the Baltic provinces.

Pupils were aged from 11 to 20, and the main teaching language was Russian. For students who did not speak Russian there were two years of preliminary classes which concentrated on teaching the language. The basic subjects taught, which Seryozha must have learned, were religious studies, Russian, Latin, mathematics, and sports. These subjects were compulsory throughout the student's life at the Gymnasium. In the earlier years, geography, art (mostly drawing) and handwriting were added to this basic curriculum, and these subjects were more or less replaced by Greek, physics, history, German and French from the second, third and fourth grades, while Logic and Cosmology were added in the final year. School started at 9 a.m. and continued until 3 p.m., and each class contained between 35 and 40 pupils. The best students graduated with gold medals, which gave them access to Universities such as Riga, Tartu, St Petersburg and Moscow.



Riga Gymnasium in 2019.



Two years after Seryozha had started his school career here, his father, Mikhail Konstantinovich, was appointed Inspector of National Schools in Latvia, and the family moved to Riga. They rented a cottage near the beach on the gulf of Riga, though Mikhail Konstantinovich also retained a  *pied à terre*  in Riga itself, where Seryozha stayed during the school term time. The boy's interests at this time ranged widely, from collecting stamps to spiritualism to archaeology and beyond. He read classical literature – 'Ovid's primitive hexameters' particularly appealed – and modern Russian authors such as Konstantin Balmont, Alexander Blok, Mikhail Kuzmin and even more controversial authors like Igor Severyanin, and continued to draw cartoons. In fact his sketch book, full of cartoons, fell into the hands of the headteacher, who easily recognized one caricature as being of himself. Instead of – as expected – flying into a rage at the boy's impertinence, he was delighted, and begged Seryozha to let him have it. When Seryozha gave it to him, he carefully preserved it.

As for poetry, his earliest work mixed Lettish and Russian more or less unintelligibly, but created interesting 'soundscapes':

Lyura – plyura  
Noodle – poodle<sup>2</sup>

Of course he learned rude rhymes from other boys, which amused him, but he attempted to create more ambitious works of his own, including love poetry –

It was in the snow  
That I saw her:  
You appeared to me,  
And wound round my heart.

He also made a bold attempt at writing an epic, which described the events of a single day. It opened:

The air is pure, the day clear  
Under the limpid shade.

---

2 Kruchyonikh, A., *15 let russkogo futurizma, 1912-1927*, Moscow: Vserossiiskii soyuz poetov, 1928, p. 46.



Tretyakov aged about 18, with his younger brother, Lev.

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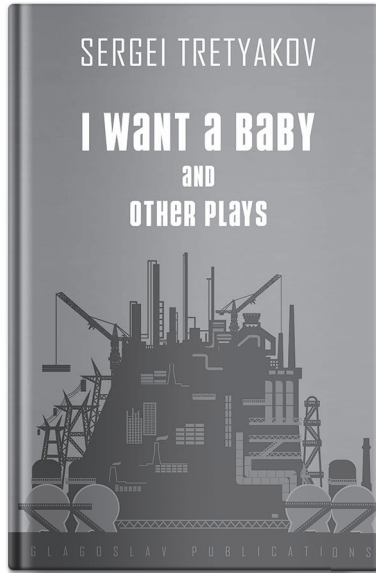
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# *I Want a Baby and Other Plays*

by Sergei Tretyakov



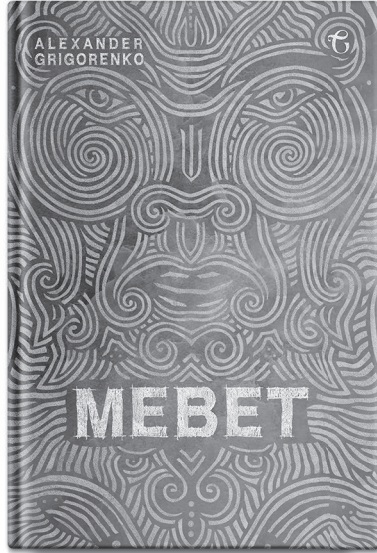
When Sergei Tretyakov's ground-breaking play, *I Want a Baby*, was banned by Stalin's censor in 1927, it was a signal that the radical and innovative theatre of the early Soviet years was to be brought to an end. A glittering, unblinking exploration of the realities of post-revolutionary Soviet life, *I Want a Baby* marks a high point in modernist experimental drama.

Tretyakov's plays are notable for their formal originality and their revolutionary content. *The World Upside Down*, which was staged by Vsevolod Meyerhold in 1923, concerns a failed agrarian revolution. *A Wise Man*, originally directed by the great film director and Tretyakov's friend, Sergei Eisenstein, is a clown show set in the Paris of the émigré White Russians. *Are You Listening, Moscow?!* and *Gas Masks* are 'agit-melodramas', fierce, fast-moving and edgy...

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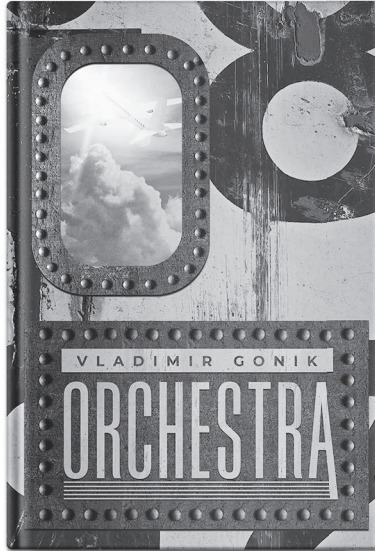
*Mebet* concerns a man of the taiga, a hunter, in a moving narrative that blends ethnographic detail, indigenous mythology, and the snowy landscapes of the Arctic. The protagonist is a Nenets, a member of one of the peoples who call far northern Russia home. Dubbed “The Gods’ Favorite” for his seeming imperviousness to harm or grief, Mebet earns the envy and derision of his fellow tribesmen. He lives that carefree and blessed life until his old age, when one day a supernatural messenger arrives to lead him to where the realms of the living and the dead meet. Now the Gods’ Favorite must confront the price to be paid for his elevated position, and a series of dread trials that lie in store.

Called a dark and terrifying fantasy and the Nenets *Lord of the Rings* by Russian writer and journalist Sergey Kuznetsov, Grigorenko’s *Mebet* is a powerful story about humanity, personal fate, and responsibility. Leading Russian literary critic Galina Yuzefovich welcomed *Mebet* as a true epic for the Nenets, a book that is profound, thrilling and vibrant. Whether the book will earn that lofty place within Nenets culture remains to be seen, but the very publication of the book marks a watershed event.

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by Vladimir Gonik



This novel by Russian novelist and screenwriter Vladimir Gonik is set in eleven countries around the world.

Orchestra is based on documentary materials: the author has delved into the archives and met eyewitnesses, and now he recounts secret operations that took place across the globe in the second half of the twentieth century.

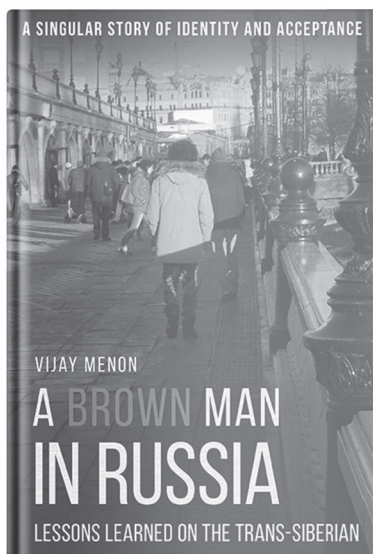
The novel tells of certain little-known and mysterious events, some of which the author was personally involved in, and it is a story of extraordinary human lives, and of course, love...

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# A Brown Man in Russia

## Lessons Learned on the Trans-Siberian

by Vijay Menon

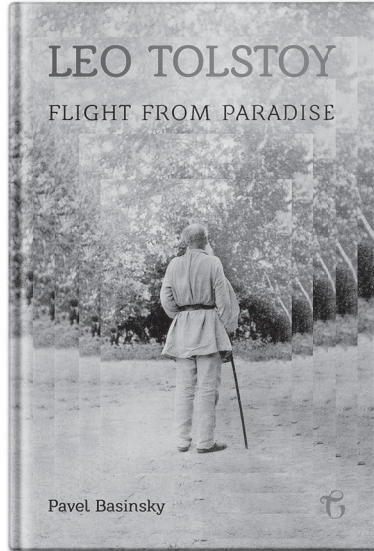


*A Brown Man in Russia* describes the fantastical travels of a young, colored American traveler as he backpacks across Russia in the middle of winter via the Trans-Siberian. The book is a hybrid between the curmudgeonly travelogues of Paul Theroux and the philosophical works of Robert Pirsig. Styled in the vein of Hofstadter, the author lays out a series of absurd, but true stories followed by a deeper rumination on what they mean and why they matter. Each chapter presents a vivid anecdote from the perspective of the fumbling traveler and concludes with a deeper lesson to be gleaned. For those who recognize the discordant nature of our world in a time ripe for demagoguery and for those who want to make it better, the book is an all too welcome antidote. It explores the current global climate of despair over differences and outputs a very different message – one of hope and shared understanding. At times surreal, at times inappropriate, at times hilarious, and at times deeply human, *A Brown Man in Russia* is a reminder to those who feel marginalized, hopeless, or endlessly divided that harmony is achievable even in the most unlikely of places.

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# Leo Tolstoy – Flight from Paradise

by Pavel Basinsky



Over a hundred years ago, something truly outrageous occurred at Yasnaya Polyana. Count Leo Tolstoy, a famous author aged eighty-two at the time, took off, destination unknown. Since then, the circumstances surrounding the writer's whereabouts during his final days and his eventual death have given rise to many myths and legends. In this book, popular Russian writer and reporter Pavel Basinsky delves into the archives and presents his interpretation of the situation prior to Leo Tolstoy's mysterious disappearance. Basinsky follows Leo Tolstoy throughout his life, right up to his final moments. Reconstructing the story from historical documents, he creates a visionary account of the events that led to the Tolstoy's family drama.

*Flight from Paradise* will be of particular interest to international researchers studying Leo Tolstoy's life and works, and is highly recommended to a broader audience worldwide.

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*More coming soon...*



Sergei Tretyakov is one of those artists and intellectuals from the first half of the twentieth century whose name is known, but whose achievements are barely recognized. He seems curiously elusive. Who exactly was he? What did he do? A victim of Stalin's Great Terror, declared an 'enemy of the people', his works were 'disappeared' and his name forbidden to be mentioned.

But he was at the very heart of avant-garde modernism. He collaborated with Sergei Eisenstein both in the theatre and on films, and was behind Eisenstein's formative theory of 'the montage of attractions'. He was one of Vladimir Mayakovsky's most intimate associates. He was a crucial influence in the formulation of Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics and of Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, and he was a potent force behind Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

His influence grew from the astonishing range of his intellectual and artistic work. He was a distinguished poet and playwright, and a formidable cultural theorist. He played the piano with skill, precision and feeling, he could draw cartoons good enough to be reproduced in newspapers, he became one of Russia's foremost radio broadcasters, and he was an outstanding photographer.

At the same time, he was a warm and affectionate husband and father, a bold, argumentative and charismatic friend, and a shrewd observer of revolutionary Russia's hopes and struggles.

This book uncovers the multifarious facets of this fascinating artist and thinker, sets his ideas in the context of his time and for the first time reveals the significance of his diverse achievements.

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**Robert Leach** is an academic, a writer and a freelance theatre director. He has a Ph.D. from Cambridge University, and has been Reader in Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham and Senior Lecturer in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Edinburgh University. His professional theatre work has included acting in the USA and directing in Moscow, where he staged the Russian premiere of *I Want a Baby* in 1990.

He has written over a dozen books on the theatre, including *Revolutionary Theatre* (Routledge 1994) and *Russian Futurist Theatre: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), and he co-edited with Victor Borovsky *A History of Russian Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). He is also a poet, and five collections of his poetry have been published. He has specialised in the work of Sergei Tretyakov, whose daughter, Tatyana Tretyakova, he worked with. A volume of Sergei Tretyakov's plays, *I Want a Baby and Other Plays*, in his and Stephen Holland's English translation, is also available from Glagoslav.

