

SNOWDROPS AND THE ENGLISH EXPATRIATE IN RUSSIA

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AD Miller's novel *Snowdrops* opens with the helpful epigraphic gloss:

Snowdrop. 1. An early-flowering bulbous plant, having a white pendent flower. 2. Moscow slang. A corpse that lies buried or hidden in the winter snows, emerging only in the thaw.'

As an English thriller published last year, *Snowdrops* is probably not available in Belorussian bookshops, and, as will become clear, there are reasons why Russian translators and publishers are unlikely to think it worth their while to translate it.

So I will give an introduction to the novel for those of you who have not read it, and this will include plot spoilers. If you haven't read the book, intend to, and want to enjoy its plot from a position of ignorance, then I'm afraid you will have to leave the room now.

A.D. Miller was the foreign correspondent of *The Economist* in Moscow between 2004 and 2007. *The Economist* is a British weekly magazine concerned mainly with economics, which has a decidedly right-wing political slant. In 2011 Miller published

Snowdrops which, remarkably for a first novel, was shortlisted for the most prestigious prize for fiction in Britain and the Commonwealth – the £50,000 ManBooker Prize. (It was won not by *Snowdrops* but by Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*).

It has since been translated into 19 languages, and was made a BBC Radio 4 book at bedtime.

It is set in Moscow during the period that Miller was working there, but its protagonist is not, autobiographically, an English journalist – but rather an English lawyer working for an international law firm which arranges loans to Russian companies from Western banks.

There are two major plots and one minor one. One of the major ones concerns a project at Nicholas's work, arranging a 500m dollar loan to a Russian consortium to build an oil pipeline on the Barents Sea. What Nicholas doesn't realise is that the project is a fake, and that he therefore enables the transfer of millions of dollars to a man called the 'Cossack', who promptly disappears. As a result, at the end of the novel Nicholas is recalled by his company from Moscow to England, where he is given a trivial job with no contact with clients. This is the job he is doing at the time that he narrates the novel.

The second main plot concerns Nicholas's private life in Moscow. After nearly four years' living there, one day by chance in the metro he rescues two girls from a mugging. He makes friends with both of them, and becomes the lover of one of them. They are sisters and have an aunt living in Moscow. This aunt, Tatania Vladimirovna, has a splendid flat on Chistie Prudy, but is thinking of moving out of the hassle and crowds of central Moscow to the Southern outskirts, where a friend of the girls' is

working on a residential building project. Masha and Katia enlist Nicholas's help in sorting out the legal paperwork for the sale of her Moscow flat and purchase of her suburban flat, which is done as an exchange, with a surplus 50k dollars given to her as compensation for the difference in value. However, Nicholas is as much a dupe in this plot as in the other. Masha and Katia are not sisters; Tatiana is not their aunt, but a trusting woman whom they met one day in the metro; their friend is not involved in the building project, but is left as the legal owner of Tatiana's flat; and Tatiana is left homeless and, it is strongly implied, is murdered.

The third, minor, plot echoes the second one and concerns Nicholas's elderly neighbour Oleg Nikolaevich, who has lost contact with a friend of his, Konstantin Andreyevich, who lives in a neighbouring 'dom'. Oleg enlists Nicholas's help in trying to track his friend down; Nicholas makes a few perfunctory enquiries and then gives up. The following spring, however, the melting snow reveals Konstantin Andreyevich's body inside a rusting Zhiguli parked in front of Nicholas's 'dom'. Konstantin's flat now belongs to strangers. He is the 'snowdrop' of the novel's title. This time Nicholas has not actually been involved in the crime – but his realization at around the same time of his involvement in the other two crimes leads him to reflect that he, with his Xturpitude and wilful ignorance, is his own snowdrop.

Now, the novel's inclusion on the Booker shortlist was controversial, mainly because it is 'genre' fiction. Like many literary critics I prefer my fiction not to be strongly governed by the conventions of a popular genre, and it was with surprise that for the first time in my life I found myself buying a novel in the 'crime' section of Blackwells when I came to buy this one.

The chair of the Booker judges that year, Stella Rimington, defended her decision to include the novel, and declared that 'readability' and 'zipping along' were amongst the chief criteria of inclusion. But that does not make *Snowdrops* top flight literature, even within the range of the thriller genre. Some of its imagery is weak or ill-considered: Nicholas once describes Moscow as 'smelling of beer and revolution', but there is no sign whatsoever of any kind of revolution elsewhere in the novel. His narration is often flippant in a way that becomes wearing.

The plots, as several critics pointed out, are predictable – though I have to confess that I am not of their view. Not being a devotee of the thriller genre I am not sufficiently familiar with its conventions in order to predict conformity to them.

But it is worth pointing out that that Nicholas *is* aware of the thriller genre, and sees the Moscow he experiences partly through its lense. For example, he describes his cynical journalist friend Steve Walsh as 'technically British, but he had been trying to avoid England and himself for so long and in so many far-out places [...] that by the time I met him he had become one of those lost foreign correspondents that you read about in Graham Greene, a citizen of the republic of cynicism.' When Nicholas first sees Masha she is wearing, quote, a 'Brezhnev era autumn coat' which 'from a distance [...] makes the girl in the coat look like the honey-trap in a Cold War thriller' [8]. Clearly he *likes* his girls to look like honey-traps in Cold War thrillers, for the same reasons as the makers of Cold War thrillers made them look like that. And for his own part, Nicholas likes the feeling of acting a *part* in a thriller, although he tends to displace this feeling onto other expats rather than acknowledging it in himself. He feels he is superior to the expat lawyers who, quote, 'generally only stayed [in Moscow] for two or three oblivious years, then retreated to service more reputable crooks in London or New York, sometimes as a partner in Shyster and Shyster or

wherever, taking with them a handy offshore bank balance and some tits-and-Kalashnikov Wild East stories to console their live-long commutes'. [134] But Nicholas's narrative *itself* includes 'tits-and-Kalashnikov Wild East stories' which are currently consoling his 'live-long commutes'. The opening of his narrative, with the discovery of the snowdrop, unconsciously echoes the opening of Martin Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*, another thriller set in Moscow. But this failure of self-knowledge is eclipsed by a more important one. Not only is he not fully conscious of his own desire to act in a thriller –he does not realise that he in fact *is* in a thriller. That his actions contribute towards a thriller plot, which he fails wholly to predict. He fails, therefore, at literary criticism of his own world. He thought that he was contemptuously likening Moscow and its inhabitants to the components of a gangster movie. He *didn't* realise how closely Moscow in fact resembled just that, and that he himself was part of its plot. He is a victim not just of gangsters but genre.

It was appropriate, then, that the chair of the Booker judges that year was the former head of MI5. One would assume that a literary-inclined former-spymaster, if anyone, would have an eye for how reality can imitate fiction as well as vice versa.

Similarly, Nicholas Platt is the victim of his own name, which he did not choose, and which he nowhere gives an indication of having realised the aptness of. 'Nicholas' is the patron saint of secret gift giving – and he does indeed give major gifts to two sets of con artists, although in this case the giving is secret from himself rather than from them. The transfer of fifty million dollars goes through at New Year, just in time to be a massive Christmas gift from Niklaus to the Cossack. To take now the contraction of the name, to 'Nick' means to steal, and he unwittingly assists with several thefts. But it also, through a similar motion of 'grabbing', means to arrest someone, and he utterly

fails to 'nick' any of the major criminals of the novel, all of whom vanish, whilst he himself is 'nicked' by his company and his own conscience. 'Platt' means flat in German – like Nick's low-key English style. He is not particularly bad, intelligent, charming, lustful, or remorseful. His colours are muted. But 'platt' also means dysfunctional, like a flat tyre, and he *is* dysfunctional as a lawyer, employee, lover, and friend. Finally, 'Platts' is an international provider of information concerning energy markets – Russian energy markets being the one thing which it was Nick's job to understand, and which he didn't – not, at least, enough. But he can't help, and does not understand, his name any more than, it seems, he can fully control or understand his own developing plot.

So where does this leave the reader?

Well, the reader is positioned alongside Nicholas's unnamed fiancée. The whole of the narrative is in fact, as gradually emerges, addressed to a woman whom he met after he returned to England from Moscow, and whom he is due to marry in three months' time. The novel is his several-hundred-page answer to her question: 'why did you leave Moscow?'.
[10]

For a lot of the narrative one can forget that this is the frame – it reads simply as first person narration to a generic reader. But occasionally Nick will make reference to 'you', to the fact that she knows what his parents are like, and so on. When he mentions that the area around the Kremlin is nice to visit, he adds 'though I'm not certain *we* ever will' [10]

And I think it's important that the reader is explicitly aligned with – looking over the shoulder of – an English person with no familiarity with Russia. It indicates the target readership of this novel, and as a device gives the narrator a naturalistic excuse to

explain things which such a person wouldn't know. For example, when Nicholas mentions a *place* name such as 'Ploshchad Revolyutsii', he immediately offers the translation, 'Revolution Square'. He has reasonably good Russian, as must Miller himself, and is in this sense well-placed to be 'our' – the outsider English person's - guide in Moscow, except that within the narrated time he doesn't understand what is going on. This is matched by the *limitations* in his Russian; as he says, ' Most of the other foreigners managed to shuttle between their offices, gated apartments, expense-account brothers, upscale restaurants and the airport on twenty-odd words. I was on my way to being fluent, but my *accent* still gave me away halfway through my first syllable.' [12] When Russians speak low and fast to one another – as Katia and Masha often do - he can't understand them [11]. For their own part, none of the Russians have perfect English either. Sergei Borisovich, an eager young employee in Nicholas's company, has a favourite word - 'extreme' – which he uses with hilarious frequency and non-appropriateness. Masha and Katia's grammar is shaky; the latter says of a female friend in England, with regard to the split taps - 'hot water sometimes is burning her hand.' [13] But none of the Russians, apart from Sergei, are ever in a circumambient Anglophone environment. They are linguistically on home ground, and in any conversation between Nicholas and Russians, it seems to be up to them rather than him which language is spoken (this, by the way, is a phenomenon with which I am familiar with from living in Russia). Nicholas comes to understand what he identifies as their 'language game [...] The Russian girls always said they wanted to practise their English. But sometimes they also wanted to make you feel that you were in charge, in their country but safe in your own language.' [10] – and safe in his own language is precisely what he is *not*. Indeed, in Tatiana Ivanovna's presence Masha and Katia insist on switching to English, precisely in order that she will not

understand their discussions – even at this point Nicholas's suspicions are not sufficiently raised. [136] The reader – especially the reader well-versed in thrillers – will understand more than Nicholas of what is going on at any point in the novel, *despite* the fact that *he* is introducing Moscow to the majority of readers who are not familiar with it first hand.

But all English readers will of course have certain impressions of modern Russia and Moscow, gained mainly from television news, newspapers such as Steve Walsh's *Independent*, and journals such as A.D. Miller's very own *Economist*. The attitude towards the Russian government, and impression of modern Russian life, of most of these mainstream outlets is negative. And this is the more remarkable since it makes Russia one of the few topics which unites the left and the right-wing press. The right-wing press, insofar as it is guided by the US government, follows it to some degree in seeing Russia as an actual or easily potential enemy. The left-wing press criticises the Russian government for derogations from democracy, for corruption, and oppression. The most striking example of this leftist hostility is on the part of *The Guardian* newspaper - probably more hostile than any other mainstream British media outlet. This is doubtless in part because its Moscow correspondent Luke Harding was, he and the newspaper allege, harrassed by the FSB, and had his work visa revoked by the Russian government. London is of course a major destination of choice for rich people hostile to that government, and the dominant impression of British people of is that Russia is sliding back into dictatorship and that its corruption is increasing. Those individuals who have any conception of Moscow in particular consider it to be dangerous and sleazy. Simon Sebag Montefiore, the British historian of Russia, praises the, quote 'darkly delicious Russian corruption and decadence', as blurb on the

front cover of the novel [hold it up]. The Guardian's review of *Snowdrops* published at the beginning of 2011 argues that the novel, quote, 'adds little to what we already know about life in Putin's Russia: the cascading vulgarity of *elitny* shops and restaurants; the flesh bars with their painted girls and dwarves in tiger-stripe thongs; the top-to-bottom corruption; the gangsters.' In other words the reviewer seems to believe what the novel asserts – that life in Moscow *does* resemble a thriller. The implication is that there is no *point* in just writing a *thriller* about modern Moscow, because from such a novel we would learn nothing.

But the phrase 'what we already know about life in Putin's Russia' is by definition group thought on the part of a population which doesn't live there; it is probably in fact partly based partly on reading such novels, and is certainly not claimed as being based on the reviewer's own direct impressions of the city. Since I lived in Moscow during the period in which the novel is set, I naturally measured it against my own memories.

One thing immediately apparent to me in trying to do this, however, was that I had not been living in the social world of *Snowdrops*. I was working as a teacher of English as a foreign language. I didn't know any English expats, and I didn't, to my knowledge, know any Russian gangsters, con-artists, or murderers. My friends were of the professional classes, but none of them happened to be lawyers. One *was* a banker working for HSBC, but I didn't get the impression that he was involved in massive fraud, although he may have been involved in trying to avoid it. The highly flamboyant, pornographic, hyper-self-conscious, nakedly status-and-money orientated nightlife as represented by the novel accorded with my impressions of it – although of course the experience of an expat woman, and of an expat man, in such a situation, is very different. Given the limitations of my own ability to assess the

verisimilitude of the novel, I was interested in the impressions of a friend I had made after my time living in Moscow, who is currently a law undergraduate at Moscow Law School, and who works part time for Cleary Gottlieb Steen and Hamilton, an international law firm based in the very same crenellated tower next to Paveletskii Vokzal as Nicholas's office is in. This friend was *extremely* dismissive of the novel as *literature*, but he considered it to be accurate: 'I have been leaving in a rather rude and violent world, since such stories do not impress me at all. I believe that it is because we see and hear similar things everyday'. He also wrote that 'the author has naturally and authentically [...] *peredal atmosferu* [here his English failed him] of what it is to see the naked, dirty and phoney Moscow [...] I think every foreigner who has plans to live in Russia should read it, no doubt. While I was reading the only thought that always came across me is that I really felt miserably for him. I wanted to stop him and explain how things are in Moscow, to protect him, in other words. [...] All in all, this story is an excellent and exciting guide for visitors, but it is everyday routine for Muscovites. [...] I would definitely recommend it to people I know abroad.'

This is a striking endorsement of the novel's verisimilitude, especially given that we are now nearly a decade on from when the novel is set, and that the novel makes pointed reference to its own particular place in time. For example, there are numerous comparative glances back to the nineties as a decade, now safely over, which was even wilder than the early naughties of the present. When Nicholas's first invitation to Masha and Katia is turned down, he reflects that had he made it only a few years before, when Western professional men in Moscow were of greater novelty, rarity, relative wealth, and therefore desirability, his invitation would probably have been accepted. Life has, so far as I can tell from my own annual or biennial visits, become

consistently calmer, safer, and happier in Moscow over that intervening decade – but not according to my friend.

Let me then take on trust the fact that such crimes as described in the novel still occur – though one would have thought that the very existence of the novel could serve as a warning, as my friend suggested, to help foreign visitors to Moscow law offices avoid being similarly exploited.

What I am in a better position to judge is tone. Even if the *events* of the novel are probable, this does not mean that Nicholas is a transparent window through which they and Moscow can accurately be seen. His narration is relentlessly dismissive. The contempt which the crassness of the nightclubs, for example, understandably provokes in him, spills out indiscriminately onto features of Moscow which others may find neutral or even admirable. The metro stations which I have always found to be of a comfortable temperature, have what Nicholas describes as ‘cloying year-round warmth’ [9]. The ethnic restaurants which I have always rather enjoyed, are dismissed as cheesy. Lenin has what Nicholas calls a ‘freak-show tomb in Red Square’ [11]. He flings casual ethnic abuse, for example “[Russians] could wallow in mud and vodka for a decade, then conjure up a skyscraper or execute a royal family in an afternoon.” The quote ‘weasel President’ is crassly described as ‘a mass murderer, like all Russian leaders as far as I can tell’ [135]. Nor is his narration presented as unreliable, so that readers are encouraged to see the limitations of his view – but it should be obvious enough, even to someone who has never set foot in Moscow, that his view is not so much disillusioned and clear-sighted but jaundiced. Thus far, the novel – as several of its reviewers implicitly acknowledged – conforms to contemporary English anti-Russian prejudice.

Despite this, however, there are positive aspects in Russia's presentation, and negative ones in the representation of England – which I consider most of the novel's reviewers to have understated. Nick is keenly alive to the beauty of Russian winter, which he describes with beauty, even though the snow is also presented as a literal and metaphoric concealer of crime.

There are two wholly good Russian characters. Tatiana Vladimirovna, the woman who is conned out of her flat, is selfless, trusting, and kind. Nick's neighbour Oleg Nikolaevich is a fount of epigrammatic wisdom. He does not know anything about Nicholas's life, but when he encounters him on the stairs of their 'dom' he invariably gives him uncannily pertinent advice, which he invariably fails to take. Appropriately, these two positive characters, who are of about an age, on one occasion meet each other. They spent a moment warily sizing each other up, and then rightly decide to like and trust one another.

Nicholas also at one point reflects that Russia's evil is probably matched by its exceptional good: quote, 'It's a strange country, Russia, with its talented sinners and occasional saint, bona fide saints that only a place of such accomplished cruelty could produce, a crazy mix of filth and glory.' This is a clichéd statement of a sentiment expressed in much of Russian literature, notably that of Dostoevsky, by whom Nicholas is probably influenced in feeling it. It is not in fact strongly supported by the novel, in which no one as degraded as, for example, Fyodor Karamazov, nor as saintly as Sonia Marmeladova, exists. But it is significant that Nicholas has sensed its possible truth, because it is one indication that his cynicism is not absolute.

More important, though, is the fact that Nicholas Platt is clearly addicted to the Russia he so relentlessly criticises. Addictions are by definition not healthy, but also by definition they are directed at something which offers some kind of good. Nicholas's

addiction has two main components. First, living in Moscow he has the very common expatriate's sentiment that there he *is* someone, a 'corporate-law hero' [109] doing massive deals, skirting (as he thinks) danger, and with the power of relative wealth, whereas in England he had felt that he was nobody – a lawyer with a safe suburban life, one amongst thousands. Second, in Russia he experiences an intensity of living which is not remotely matched by anything he has ever experienced in England. When Masha and Katia take him to a dacha, and they jump into the snow after leaving the banya, quote, 'The tingly pain proved that I was alive, every inch of me was alive, more alive than ever.' [105] He is addicted, in other words, to what Miller himself called 'the allure and the intensity of Russia'. This addiction is particularly apparent when he goes home to stay with his parents at Christmas, which is one of the most striking and telling episodes in the novel.

'At the airport, as my passport was stamped, I felt the lightness everyone always feels, even if they love Moscow – the lifting of the weight of rude shopkeepers and predatory police and impossible weather, the lightness of leaving Russia.' 109

'Three hours later, in my parents' Luton semi, I was howling on the inside and knocking back my father's supermarket-brand Scotch' 109.

He holds out through three nauseating days of awkwardness and boredom with his family until the day after Boxing Day, then moves his return flight to Moscow forwards by a week and returns on New Year's Eve. When he leaves the airport he finds that the temperature has dropped a full ten degrees since he left, and that it is now unfeasibly cold – but he never for a moment regrets being back.

Moscow is after all a place where stories happen, and the novel perforce stalls, along with Nick's life, when he briefly visits England. Nothing happens in England –

nothing that Nicholas finds worth narrating in his own *before* he moves to Moscow at the age of thirty-four; nothing, it would seem, has happened worth narrating in his life after his move back and up to the point when he narrates the novel – even including his meeting of and engagement to an Englishwoman, in which he and the novel show very little interest.

In fact, the novel not only answers the fiancée's question as to why he *left* – but the rather more interesting question why he wanted to be there in the first place. The novel is a *confession* to his fiancée, since he is telling her that he was involved in major financial and violent crime *and* that he was in love and lust with one of the criminals. But he saves his greatest confession to the novel's last page, and this confession retrospectively changes the meaning of everything that has preceded, for which reason I find it one of the most striking endings to a novel that I know.

Here are the last two, short, paragraphs:

'Since I'm being honest, or trying to be, since I'm telling you almost everything, I should tell you the other reason, maybe the main reason [why I haven't been able to tell you this before]. It's up to you what you do about it.

Of course when I think about it there is guilt, there is some guilt. But most of all there is loss. That is what really hurts. I miss the toasts and the snow. I miss the rush of neon on the Bulvar in the middle of the night. I miss Masha. I miss Moscow.'

It is in fact a tragedy. In the only place that made him feel alive he was not fit to succeed or even survive, and is now condemned to live the rest of his life in a purgatory of dullness, with or without the woman who, given this confession, would probably not now want to marry him.

The point is also repeatedly made in the novel that there is in fact no great moral distinction to be made between Russia and anywhere else, and Russians and the expats who live there. Miller emphasised this in an interview about the novel, and this is perhaps being suggested when the *Independent* journalist Steve Walsh is described as looking 'a bit like Boris Yeltsin' [76]. At the end of the novel Nicholas admits that Masha, who was secretly supporting a young son, had some excuse for what she did; but that he had none. In one remarkable scene, Nicholas describes the Cossack as a 'barbarian' after he has left the room. At this, Paolo, Nicholas's Italian colleague, explodes:

'Mr English Gentleman, you think they do things so much differently in London? Yes, they are more subtle, ecco, more nice, more clean but it is the same. In Italy also. In everywhere the same [...] It isn't because of Russia. This is life. My life, Nicholas, and your life also. [...] This Cossack is how we make our bonus, understand? No Cossack, no bonus. You are sure you are different? You are sure? You and me, we are the fleas on the Cossack's arse.' [202]

Steve Walsh is a thorough going debauchee and cynic, but to be wholly cynical about Russia hardly elevates you above it.

Miller described the novel as a 'moral thriller', and the novel is not cynical in that it holds up certain values as represented in real people and situations.

One is goodness, such as that of Tatiana Vladimirovna.

One is wisdom, such as that of Oleg Nikolaevich.

One is simply happiness, of a kind which, significantly, is attributed to no person or society in the present, but is located in the Soviet past. Tatiana Vladimirovna is

described as an 'old communist'; in her flat there is a photo of her in Yalta in 1956 looking radiantly healthy and happy as, quote, 'Nicholas didn't think Soviet people were meant to have been'. [65] She had survived the Siege of Leningrad, and got happily married to a successful engineer and party member.

A further value is honesty, such as that of Nick in telling his story to his fiancée.

And finally there is intensity of experience, such as makes Nicholas miss Moscow.

But this last value is not entirely in accord with the others. It does without them, and in fact thrives on situations which lack them. He tells his fiancée that after he discovers how Masha has deceived him, he *still* wants to live with her, even if she continued to deceive him – and that he only left Moscow because his company withdrew his means of working there, and because Masha herself disappeared.

It is not, I think, coincidence, that Miller chose the name 'Masha' for his anti-heroine, out of the seven or eight other Russian female names which it could easily have been. He wanted a name that alliterated with Moscow, that allowed for the alliterative beauty of the novel's two last sentences ('I miss Masha. I miss Moscow'), *and* which perhaps hinted at the vital connection of the two. Because the novel does raise a question about agency – whether people like Masha make Moscow what it is, or whether Moscow makes Mashas.

The English author Lawrence Durrell, on the first page of his 1957 quartet of novels concerning Alexandria, wrote a sentence which strikes me as directly relevant to *Snowdrops*: 'I return link by link along the iron chains of memory to the city we inhabited so briefly together: the city which used us as its flora —precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own'. I wouldn't go so far as to claim that the same is true of Miller's Moscow, but certainly *Snowdrops* is not only the portrait of certain inhabitants of Moscow, but a portrait of the city itself, of which

the name is the novel's last word, and which has been presented as not only as seething with crime and vice, but as the most compelling place known to the protagonist, and as only superficially worse than other cities of the world which are generally considered its moral superiors.

The novel's conflict of values is unresolved, and honestly so. It is true to this particular thirty-eight-year-old Englishman, and it would be comprehensible in many other people.

But it would not be surprising if Russians didn't like this novel, as my friend obviously didn't. It's tone perhaps too persistently critical and flippant.

This is an English novel directed at English people and Westerners more broadly which I would say does capture something of the Moscow of that period, and even of Moscow today – but does so within the conventions of a thriller which leaves much of life out, just as modern British media coverage of Russia also does.

Whether the English would be any more receptive to an equivalent Russian or Belorussian novel told from the perspective of a young professional Russian in a London law firm, is open to question. I doubt it. In general I think that novels of cultural critique meet with limited success in the culture being criticised from a foreigner's perspective, and in this sense they do little to improve international relations. By the way – if any of you know of such novels please do let me know. But if one is open to discerning the fact, *Snowdrops* is also a great confession of love of Russia – and valid reasons for it are presented. *Snowdrops* is unlikely to survive on its strengths as great literature, but it deserves to survive as a document of English expatriate experience of Russia at a particular moment in its, as well as England's, history. Thank you.