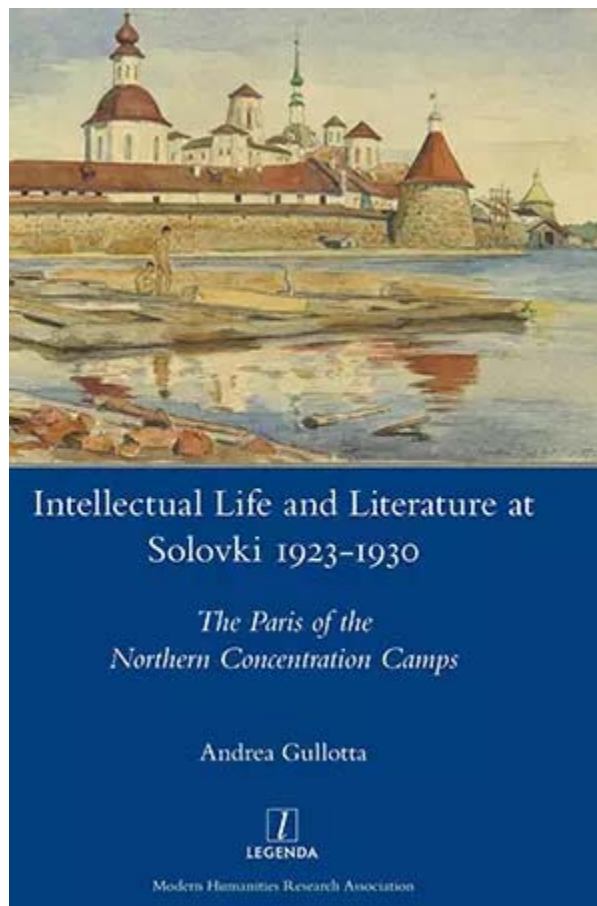


political elite; in the mid-1930s, one of Moscow's liveliest literary salons was run by the wife of Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD secret police.

Remarkable poems were published in Solovki. Among them is a cycle of parodies by Yuri Kazarnovsky, who spent four years in the camp in the late 1920s. Brilliantly recreating their voices, he imagines what Pushkin, Mayakovsky, Yesenin and other poets might have written had they, or their characters, been sent to the camp. An example is his version of the first lines of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*:

*My uncle is a man of honour.
When he "fell ill", quite suddenly,
He had to leave his Moscow manor
And serve a term on Solovki.
A man of property, he'd led
The easy life of lords and peers.
You know what rhymes with peers? Ten years —
And that's what his wise judges said!*

The deftness and boldness of these lines, which closely track the original, are easy to appreciate. What I would not have known, without Gullotta's commentary, is that they are biographically accurate. In *Onegin*, the narrator's uncle simply falls ill and dies; in reality, Pushkin's uncle was imprisoned on Solovki from 1827 to 1832. From its first years, the monastery had doubled as a prison.



Small and remote as it is, Solovki has always been central to Russian culture. Nearly all the central themes of Russian history — the power and schisms of the Orthodox Church and its intimacy with the state; the development of the Gulag — are reflected, or more often anticipated, in its history. One of the more troubling developments in Vladimir Putin's Russia is the state's determination to take over the memory of the Gulag. Museums set up by human rights organisations are being closed. New state-sponsored ones convey the message that though there may have been needless sacrifices under Stalin, his legacy was positive: victory over Germany ultimately justified everything.

Events sponsored by the human rights organisation Memorial attract hostile attention from the police. The aim is to replace them by events at which only clergy or officials have a voice or that consist simply of singing and the laying of flowers.

Remembrance of victims is acceptable; questions about the perpetrators of the Terror are not. The writer and photographer Yuri Brodsky, author of *Solovki: Labyrinth of Transfigurations*, has received death threats for detailing how members of the clergy collaborated with the Bolsheviks. The Gulag section of the Solovki museum has been closed, and the abbot recently tried to evict Olga Bochkaryova, the museum's former director, from her apartment. Yuri Dmitriev, a historian who has devoted 30 years to discovering the main execution sites in Karelia, has been tried on trumped-up charges of child pornography. Encouragingly, a local court has just ruled in favour of Bochkaryova, and Dmitriev has just been acquitted.

The legacy of the Terror remains a battlefield. Books as scrupulously researched as Gullotta's are invaluable.

Intellectual Life and Literature at Solovki 1923-1930, by Andrea Gullotta, *Legenda*, RRP£75, 370 pages

Robert Chandler is the translator of Vasily Grossman's 'Life and Fate'

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