

“BIOGRAPHY” OF THE KREMLIN WINS SECOND PUSHKIN HOUSE RUSSIAN BOOK PRIZE

Red Fortress, a “biography” of the Kremlin by Catherine Merridale, was this evening (Wednesday 30th April) revealed as the winner of the Pushkin House Russian Book Prize 2014.

Announced by Chair of Judges Dr Rowan Williams at a ceremony at Pushkin House, the premier centre for Russian culture in London, the former Archbishop of Canterbury described Merridale’s work as ‘profoundly engaging’ with ‘a sharp relevance to current issues’.

Beating off stiff competition from a shortlist of six titles, *Red Fortress: The Secret Heart of Russia’s History* received widespread critical acclaim on publication, and tells the story of one of the most significant, mysterious and emblematic buildings in Russian history.

Dr Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, former Archbishop of Canterbury and Chair of the 2014 judging panel said: ‘I’m very pleased that we have been able to identify as the winner of this Prize a book which combines acute historical scholarship, readable and lively prose and a sharp relevance to current issues. Catherine Merridale’s “biography” of the Kremlin is a profoundly engaging history that gives the reader a much enhanced understanding of the imaginative as well as the political life of Russia, the myths and (literally) icons of power that have made the country and culture what they are. It’s the kind of understanding we badly need at the moment, and any and every reader will gain something from this book’.

Boris Akunin, Pushkin Prize judge, Russia’s bestselling crime author, literary translator and essayist, said: ‘I’ve lived a big part of my life within walking distance from the Kremlin. I’ve been reading about the Kremlin since I was a kid. The castle figures in a number of my historical novels. I thought I knew everything about the place. I thought that it was a stone symbol of the Empire’s greatness and weakness. But *Red Fortress* made me see the Kremlin differently – as a keyhole. The book provides a key to this lock. The door opens. I look inside and I understand my own country better’.

Viv Groskop, Pushkin Prize judge, broadcaster, writer, comedian and Artistic Director of the Independent Bath Literature Festival 2014, said: ‘On the surface this is a fantastically readable biography of the Kremlin, the place itself and everything it represents. Buried just beneath the surface is a history of power of extraordinary relevance to what’s going on in Russia today. I loved this book. Catherine Merridale delves into every nook and cranny - often literally, with the authorities snapping at her heels - and comes out with a great story.’

The Pushkin House Russian Book Prize, in association with Waterstones and now in its second year, rewards the best non-fiction writing on Russia and was established to encourage public understanding and intelligent debate about the Russian-speaking world.

James Daunt, Managing Director of Waterstones, said: ‘*Red Fortress* is intensely topical and readable, and winning the Prize will assure it of much deserved success. As with Douglas Smith’s *Former People* last year, we look forward to it becoming a major bestseller at Waterstones.’

Andrew Jack, co-chairman of Pushkin House, said: ‘We are thrilled at the judges’ choice. Catherine Merridale has consistently produced some of the best modern writing about Russia and *Red Fortress* is a very

worthy winner that meets our objectives in seeking to bridge understanding and high quality analysis between Russian and English cultures.'

Merridale, who received a cheque for £5,000, is professor of contemporary history at Queen Mary, University of London, and a writer and broadcaster on Russian politics, culture and current affairs.

For further press information, author and jacket images, and interview requests please contact Alice Ingall or Anwen Hooson at Riot Communications on 020 3174 0118 / alice@riotcommunications.com / anwen@riotcommunications.com.

Notes to Editors

1. The panel of judges for the 2014 Pushkin House Russian Book Prize included: Russia's bestselling crime author, literary translator and essayist, Boris Akunin; broadcaster, writer, comedian and Artistic Director of the *Independent* Bath Literature Festival 2014, Viv Groskop; Professor of Russian at New College, Oxford, Catriona Kelly; and the historian Douglas Smith, whose *Former People* won the inaugural Pushkin House Russian Book Prize in 2013.

2. The Pushkin House Russian Book Prize shortlist in full:

- *The Black Russian* by Vladimir Alexandrov (Head of Zeus)
- *A Spy in the Archives: a Memoir of Cold War Russia* by Sheila Fitzpatrick (I.B. Tauris)
- *Glorious Misadventures: Nikolai Rezanov and the Dream of a Russian America* by Owen Matthews (Bloomsbury)
- *Red Fortress: the Secret Heart of Russia's History* by Catherine Merridale (Allen Lane)
- *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking: a Memoir of Food and Longing* by Anya von Bremzen (Transworld)
- *Musorgsky and His Circle: a Russian Musical Adventure* by Stephen Walsh (Faber & Faber)

3. About *Red Fortress: The Secret Heart of Russia's History* by Catherine Merridale (Allen Lane)

Both beautiful and profoundly menacing, the Kremlin has dominated Moscow for many centuries. A threatening palace of astonishing scale, it is one of the very few buildings in the world which still keeps its original, late medieval function: built to intimidate and to consolidate the ruler's power.

Red Fortress revels in the drama of this frightening compound, taking us behind its great red walls and towers and revealing the most startling events in Russia's history. From sacred Orthodox religious site to tyrant's lair, from sumptuous palace to greasy Bolshevik canteen, the Kremlin has been continually reshaped to accord with shifting ideological needs, bearing the traces of each ruler's social, spiritual, military or regal priorities. It has allowed all its inhabitants to claim to be the heirs of Russia's great historic destiny, as potent now under Vladimir Putin as it was under earlier, baleful inhabitants.

4. About Catherine Merridale:

Catherine Merridale is an award-winning writer and historian. She is the author of four other books on Russian history, including *Night of Stone*, which won the 2001 Heinemann Prize for Literature and was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, and *Ivan's War*, a history of the experience of Red Army soldiers in the Second World War. Her books, which have won international acclaim, have been translated into 15 languages. Merridale also writes and broadcasts about Russian politics, culture and current affairs, and she is a regular visitor to Moscow and St Petersburg. She is Professor of Contemporary History at Queen Mary University of London.

5. About the Pushkin House Russian Book Prize:

The prize of £5,000 is awarded to the author of the best book about Russia or the Russian-speaking world, which is accessible to the general reader, and published in English for the first time between 1st January and 31st December 2013. Translations from other languages are eligible and actively sought.

The advisory board for the Pushkin House Russian Book Prize includes:

- Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former British ambassador to Moscow and author of *Afgantys: the Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89*



- James Daunt, Managing Director, Waterstones
- Andrew Jack (chair), co-chairman, Pushkin House, and journalist at the *Financial Times*
- Andrew Nurnberg, Managing Director, Andrew Nurnberg Associates literary agency
- Ion Trewin, Literary Director of the Man Booker Prizes

6. About Pushkin House:

Pushkin House, the home of Russian culture in London, is 60-years-old this year. It was created in 1954 by a group of Russian friends in a house in London for the enjoyment, understanding and promotion of Russian culture and for the exchange of views in a lively, informal atmosphere, with freedom of speech a core principle. Its wide-ranging, year-round cultural programme in its beautiful early Georgian home in the heart of Bloomsbury includes over 100 events: lectures and talks, exhibitions, films, concerts, theatre and readings, as well as special entertainment for children and families. Pushkin House is a politically independent Registered Charity owned and run by the Pushkin House Trust.

7. About Waterstones:

The Waterstones business is the UK's leading high street bookseller, operating through 278 shops across the UK and Ireland, employing over 3,000 people. Waterstones is the only national specialist book retailer of scale in the UK, with the average sized shop merchandising a range of around 30,000 individual books, with 200,000 titles in the largest shop. Waterstones was acquired by A&NN Group, an investment subsidiary of the family trust associated with international investor and businessman, Alexander Mamut, from HMV Group PLC on 29th June 2011.

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