

Petrarch's correspondence

Russian emigré and former Moscow University professor Marina Sonkina focuses on the correspondence of Petrarch, mostly known for poems celebrating his unrequited love of Laura, a married woman.

April 09th, 2014

WHEN: Thursday, **April 17**

TIME: **7:30** pm

WHERE: Simon Fraser University downtown campus, **515 West Hastings**



Sponsored by the Canadian Academy of Independent Scholars, administered by Mark Dwor, Marina Sonkina will speak on Petrarch's extraordinary 24 books of prose epistles addressed to his contemporaries, as well as to Cicero, Seneca and Virgil. Although these letters are less-known than Petrarch's Laura poems, Sonkina will discuss how it is these letters that reveal Petrarch as the first humanist, the man of modern sensibilities; a celebrated scholar of antiquity, a traveler, a mountain-climber, a man of insatiable intellectual curiosity with unorthodox opinions on everything: from music to medicine to gardening. His soul-searching correspondence reflects the doubts of the man many consider a precursor of Existentialism.

ABOUT MARINA SONKINA

Marina Sonkina left her career as a professor at Moscow University to immigrate to Canada as a single mother with two boys, convinced they would be forced into military service for Russia. She found work in the Russian section of Radio Canada International at CBC, in Montreal. One son became a tenured professor of mathematics in Halifax; the other returned to Moscow as a Canadian citizen and achieved success as an actor. She has no regrets about her move to Canada. Marina Sonkina teaches literature courses at both UBC and Simon Fraser University.

Sonkina's first two collections of stories in English, *Tractorina's Travel* and *Runic Alphabet*, are published by MW Books of Garden Bay, B.C. Locales for her stories include the Bahamas, Moscow, Mexico and California.

The stories in her third collection, *Lucia's Eyes and Other Stories* (Guernica 2011), also draw upon her experiences as a Russian expatriate. With the exception of *Lucia's Eyes* and *Angels, Ascending Descending*, most of these stories are drawn from her two preceding volumes. This third volume includes the story called *Tractorina's Travels*, about a twice-married Russian who is uneasy about Perestroika, and the longest story called *Carmelita*, about a volatile, Bohemian painter who has a poignant, sensual and ultimately lethal relationship with a much older narrator, Joseph, in Mexico.

Illustrated by colourful propaganda posters from the Stalinist era that glorify Socialism and the

Russian people, *Comrade Stalin's Baby Tooth* (MW Books 2012) is a hardcover, satirical novella that opens with an acerbic but alluring character portrait of Joseph Stalin. This unusual introductory essay describes Stalin's horrific reign with a purposeful glibness, punctuated by a few personal asides about the author's relatives. The grotesqueness and madness of life in the USSR under Stalin is then described through the eyes of eleven-year-old Natasha trying to make sense of the fears and cruelty that encompass everyday life. The story is packaged by designer Włodzimierz Milewski in the manner of an official document from KGB files and yet it's clearly a personal protest against the absurdity of the totalitarian regime from which Sonkina has fled.

BOOKS:

Runic Alphabet (MW Books)

Tractorina's Travels and Other Stories (MW Books)

Lucia's Eyes and Other Stories (Guernica 2011)

The Violin That Wanted To See The World (MW Books, 2011). Children's book.

Comrade Stalin's Baby Tooth (MW Books 2012)

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