

RUSSIAN MIND

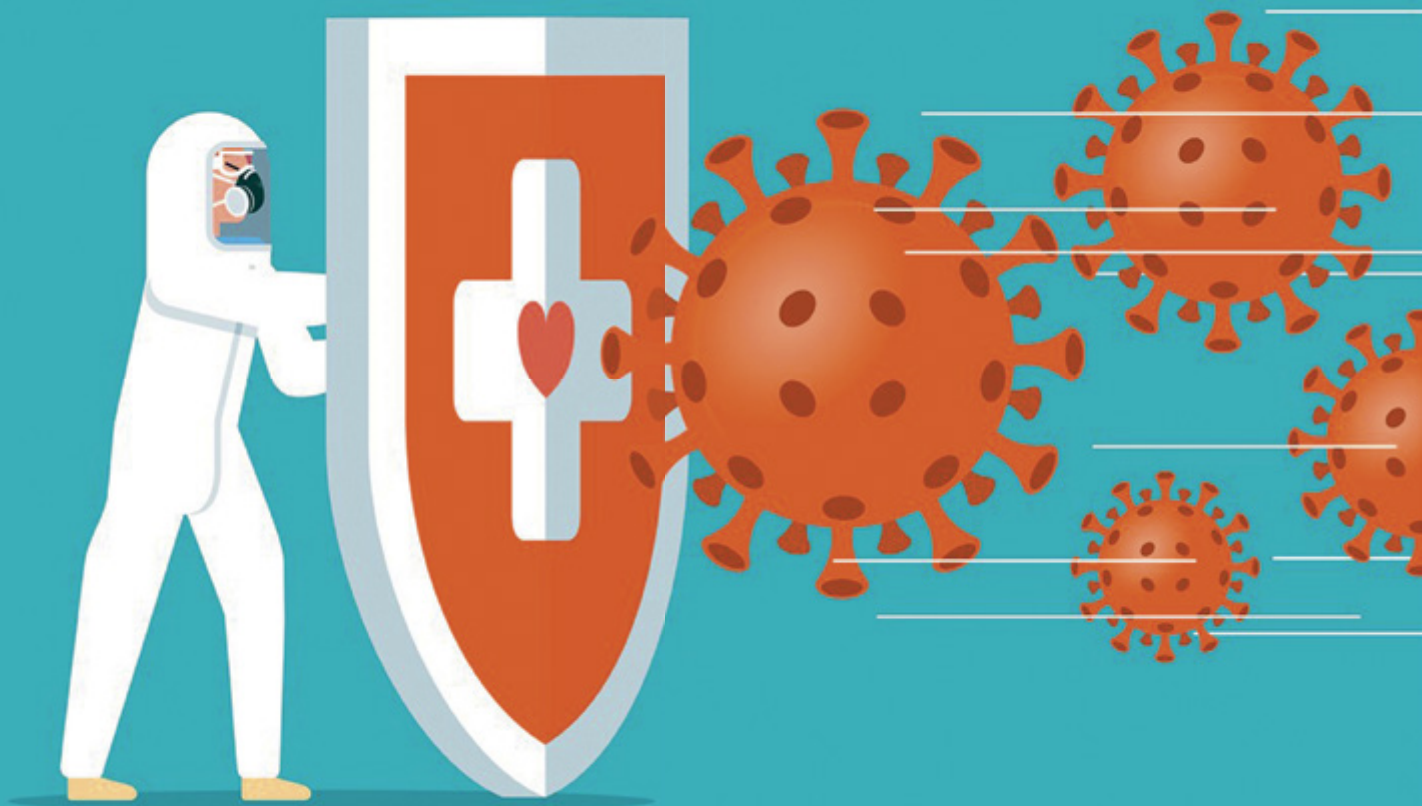
LA PENSEE RUSSE

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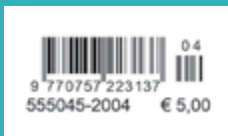
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EDITOR'S LETTER FROZEN ITALY



We have been always writing about Italy with enthusiasm and warmth. Italy is not a simply beautiful and pleasant place – for many of us it embodies the light generated by European culture and civilisation.

Italy never attracted people for its high quality of life. Foreigners' interest for Italy never had a practical ground. Italians had lived poorly for a long time, were economic migrants moving for job – not only to the USA, but also to France or Belgium. Italy attracted generations of educated people from any parts of the world due to its inspirational history, legendary ruins if you prefer such language. These people included Henry James, Stendhal, and Nikolai Gogol.

Italy means restaurants. Italy means museums. Italy means a romantic reminiscence of ancient Rome and Renaissance.

But modern Italy means Coronavirus. The whole country stopped dead due to overwhelming, unknown and deathful monster being.

The European Union is a pandemic epicentre now. But inside Europe, the epicentre is referring to Italy.

When looking at totally empty streets of then beautiful Italian cities, we unintentionally think of ghastly dreams. It looks like if citizens died out, but architecture remained. Yes, we know that the houses host frightened habitants. With this, we perceive the appearance emotionally like paranoids.

How and when will it come to the end? Nobody knows – and nobody can know it in advance. Actually, this is not a quarantine – this is a real military law. It is impossible to fight against this enemy invader – we only can hide and lay low irrationally waiting until its logical death.

I often wrote about modern challenges which were picturesque and specific. But I never thought of modern challenges as of invisible and killer infection.

Take care of yourselves, dear readers!

Victor Loupan

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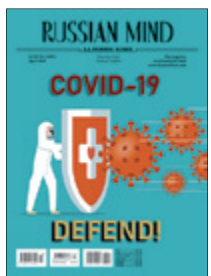
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HIGHLIGHTS

PARANOIA OR RAPANOIA?

Interstate borders were about to be cancelled, but they have been built again — one by one

VICTOR LOUPAN,
Head of the Editorial Board

According to Salvador Dali, rapanoic is a critical paranoic.

Until quite recently nobody knew what Coronavirus was. When unknown disease symptoms were detected in Wuhan, an unpopular Chinese town that is a capital of the even less known Hubei province, the Chinese government spent two months to realise the reality. However, once they understood the subject matter, they took drastic measures. The province was completely isolated from the rest world, people stayed locked at home; road ways, sidewalks and urban buildings facades was showered with disinfectants, and the infected citizens having relocated to other parts of the country were immediately quarantined stringently together with their inner circle. Giant, ultramodern hospital complexes had been built over the surprisingly short period of time, and distribution of Coronavirus was blocked, with the reverse dynamics of its distribution.

While Chinese people were messing around with the symptoms, European mass media domineeringly criticised the Chinese government for its “closedness” and deriving inefficiency in adequate reacting to such challenges. While these hapless journalists were revelling in advantages existing in an open democratic society compared to the closed and non-democratic Chinese system, the Coronavirus epicentre sudden-

ly switched from China to Europe. How it was? And why? Still nobody knows! It does not really matter. What really matters is, Europe began showing chaos.

Italy became the first infected country in Europe that took unprecedented measures. First of all, local authorities closed schools, restaurants, cafes, theatres, cinemas. Then they completely shut down public transportation, with production plants stopping their operation. Finally, they locked citizens at their homes prohibiting show up to the streets without a special permit. It looked like the country ceased breathing. Italian cities became totally empty like in the ghastly dreams described by Howard Lovecraft.

It should be noted, that even before the Italian government applied all these significant steps, “friendly” France just closed its border adjacent

to its neighbour in the South, thus killing EU’s dogma on integration and mutual aid.

However, in next to no time France applied almost same extreme level efforts, while the number of infected French persons was two or three times less than the numbers in Italy, with the French population exceeding the Italian population by nearly eight million people.

All these confusing, sometimes frenzied efforts are accompanied with panic-style coverage in official mass media throughout the whole Europe. France had 4,500 confirmed patients at the moment of introduction of the extreme precautions. Belgium had 91 confirmed patients, with the similar measures taken on the same day. With the knowledge that the situation gets weird, the governments started explaining people that the efforts were “preventive”. That the martial



law status, with the legal closing time and military response teams strolling around the blocks, was an adequate and proportional respond to the challenge thrown down to the world.

Interstate borders were about to be cancelled, but they have been built again — one by one, like the countries never put their signatures under the Schengen Agreement. Like the EU’s dogma about cancellation of any interstate borders never drilled into the mind over the decades.

It is possible, that inadequacy of the above mentioned may be explained through a panic reaction to the challenge unexpectedly thrown down by the reality. If you pay ten minutes to watch any German, French, or Italian information channel, you will immediately catch a feeling of a military law. I am a bit ironic, because, on the one side, we see closed cafes, restaurants, shops, schools, churches, parks and gardens; but, on the other side, trains are full of people, subway is still operating in Paris where hundreds of thousands of people are crowded everyday, and aircrafts still con-

nect the countries. However, people are allowed to gather in groups not exceeding one hundred persons. That obviously excludes any protest movement.

Western community famous for its efficiency and well-organised nature, suddenly turned to talk too straight. Many started mentioning the end of era. At least, they talk about the final rehearsal before the destruction of the global dependence system. Such words as “failure”, “collapse”, “downfall” enter our minds.

In 2011 Steven Soderbergh, an American filmmaker, filmed the “Contagion” movie. This is the idea: a young woman arrives from Hong Kong by air and suddenly dies, after which her young son also dies just in two of three hours. Then a global epidemics start. While the scientists are seeking for an antidote, panic progresses even faster than the contamination itself, and implosion inside the societies and countries develops.

Failure, collapse, downfall — what does it matter? Experts mention downfall talking about drop in oil

prices; failure means drop on the major stock markets; collapse refers to the social part of healthcare system.

What we see is not the End of Days. However, it is very like the beginning of the end of the vicious hyperglobalisation system featuring the highest levels of mutual infrastructure and production dependences, which makes Coronavirus as a disturbance critically dangerous for the entire social, political and economic system. What can we expect in case of much more serious disturbances — for example, climate change?

Globalisation that was always “sold” by the authorities to the Western world being explained as its advantage over the rest part of the world, actually made it bare and revealed its ontological fragility.

Exactly according to the Soderbergh’s film, the developing pandemia started with the animal having infected a human. Not due to bite or a sting, but due to a human killing and eating an animal.

So much for Coronavirus as a metaphoric expression!

DISSENTING OPINION

HOW HAS LIFE IN MOSCOW CHANGED DUE TO CORONAVIRUS?

VICTORIA RYABIKOVA

Russia is shutting down like many other countries these days. From March 17, all schools and universities are closed. All public events have been cancelled and many employees have been advised to work from home.

In the meantime, Muscovites are stockpiling essential foods and trying not to leave home unless they have to. And this is far from everything that is happening in Moscow because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Russia is to restrict entry to all foreigners from March 18 to May 1, TASS has reported, citing the Russian cabinet of ministers. The announcement came after the number of people who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Russia increased by 30 in a single day. Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin has introduced new restrictions on residents of the city, while some people have seen their life change dramatically over the past several days.

Starting from March 16, 2020, Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin has instructed all employers to screen their employees for fever and send those who have high temperature home. All Moscow schools have been temporarily closed, while university students have switched to distance learning.

Some companies have introduced remote-working arrangements even

before these official measures were announced.

"We were told that work in the office was being suspended for at least two to three months until everything settles down. At first everyone was happy, but now it is scary," a TASS news agency employee told.

Russian Internet company Mail.ru Group has introduced working from home arrangements for most of its employees, says the company's press service.

"Colleagues will work from home. The office will continue to operate for those who cannot perform their duties

Muscovites have begun stockpiling salt, sugar, cereals and hygiene products.

"There was plenty of toilet paper, some antiseptic hand gel left, but canned meat and cereals have almost disappeared! Canned food is fast disappearing too! Friends, get ready, keep well!" one shopper wrote on Instagram.

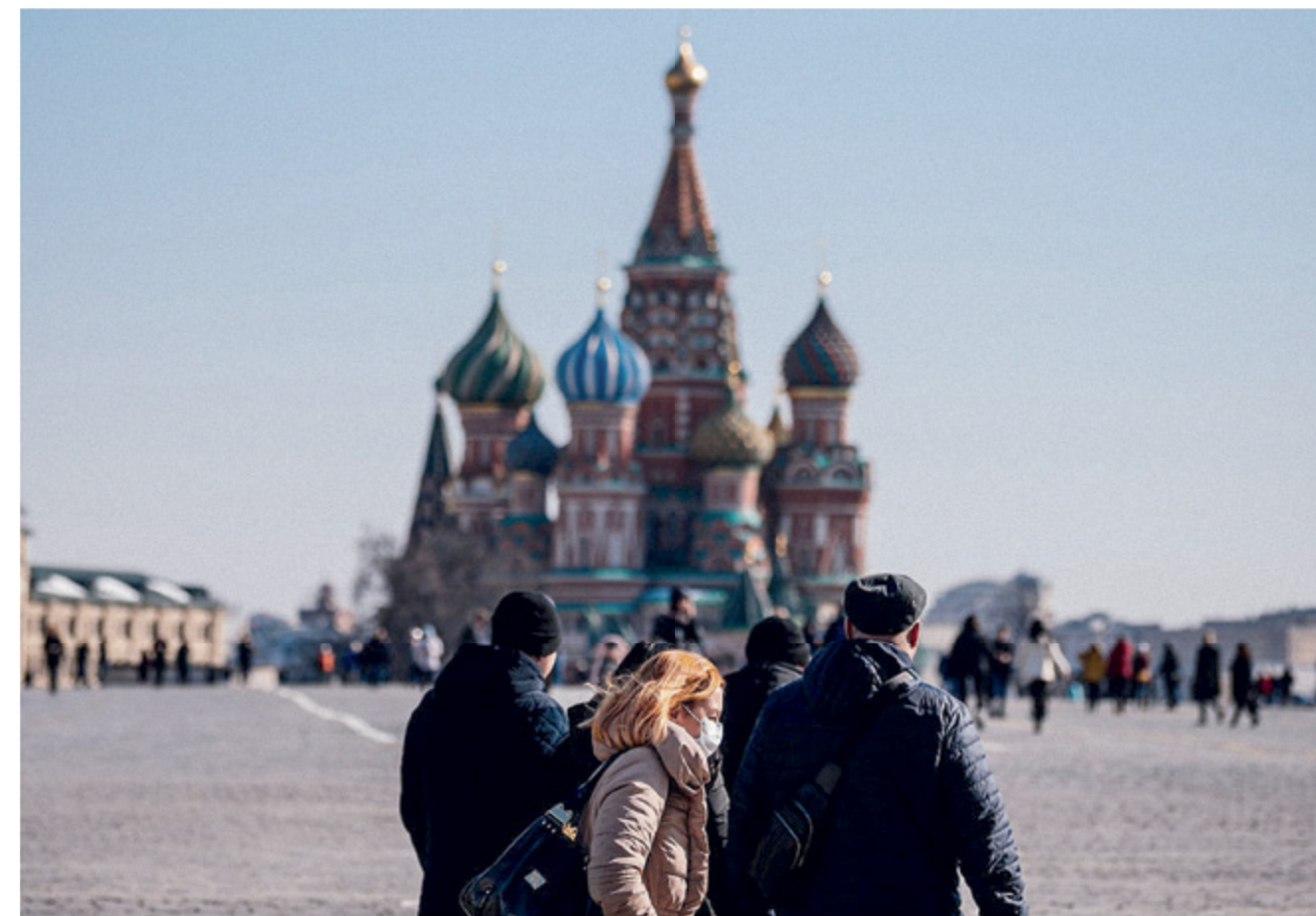
The Russian Ministry of Industry and Trade said that shelves were empty because supermarket staff were not always able to restock them quickly enough, while retail chains had already increased orders from suppliers, so there was no reason to expect any shortages.



remotely, but the canteen, the restaurant, the gym, and the fresh bar will close," Mail.ru Group said in a statement. Employees who will continue to work in the office will be provided with coupons for taxi to and from the office.

At the same time, many Muscovites have stopped going to the shops altogether, switching instead to home delivery.

On March 16, 25-year-old Tatyana Morozova from Moscow woke up with



a cough and a runny nose. She wanted to call in a doctor and be tested for coronavirus – just in case – but she was unable to get through to the nearest clinic: they were just not picking up. The health care website, where you could sign up for an appointment online, was down, and all the operators on the health hotline were engaged. Several hours later, when the girl was already running a fever, she finally managed to call in a doctor.

"He listened to my lungs, checked my throat, asked if I had been in contact with any foreigners in recent weeks or been abroad. He prescribed me aspirin and paracetamol and told me to drink more water, but refused to take any tests," claims Tatyana.

On the same day, Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin instructed medical institutions to have all patients with respiratory symptoms tested for coronavirus.

"Each new case requires hospitalization not only of the sick person, but also

of all the people who were in contact with them, if they show the slightest signs of an acute respiratory viral infection," Sobyenin wrote in his blog.

In addition, Moscow has allocated a site for the construction of a new hospital for those infected with coronavirus. Residents of Moscow who have recently arrived from Europe have been ordered to self-isolate at home. The same restrictions apply to their family members.

The mayor of Moscow has banned, until April 10, any mass events involving more than 50 people.

A couple of days prior to that, the Moscow Garage Museum had already announced a temporary closure. The Culture Ministry has introduced a Russia-wide ban on visiting libraries, RIA Novosti reports.

The Vakhtangov and Sovremennik theaters have announced that all their performances from March 17 to April 10 will be cancelled. The Jewish Museum, the Museum of Russian

Impressionism and the Gulag History Museum remain open, but have cancelled all events, the Vedomosti newspaper reports.

To keep Russians entertained in self-isolation, Russian online cinemas have opened free access to movies and TV shows. The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts will be moving its conferences and lectures online, reports Rossiyskaya Gazeta, citing the museum. The Pushkin Museum, the Hermitage and the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg also offer virtual tours.

It is not yet clear whether Moscow will be ordering other crowded places – cinemas, restaurants, bars and shopping centers – to close, too. Alexei, an 18-year-old student from Moscow, says he has no intention of giving up his weekend visits to the bars.

"You can't deprive people of their last joy, otherwise people risk dying of boredom more than of coronavirus," he argues.

rbth.com

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF SAINT NICHOLAS, BARI

Alexey Shchusev, an architect, was invited to design the Church of Saint Nicholas in 1910



A. V. Shchusev, 1916

Several years ago the album "Church of Saint Nicholas in Bari. Project by A. V. Shchusev" was published by Kuchkovo Pole Publishing House as a part of the exhibition project "Buildings by Alexey Shchusev in Italy". The book describes the history of establishment of the Russian mission with the Church of Saint Nicholas in Bari, an Italian city, and is based on project designs, artists' sketches, documentary evidences provided by construction participants, and imperial-era photo shoots.

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker is one of the foremost saints in Russia and a patron for travellers (especially seamen), prisoners, and orphans. During persecution of Christians at Diocletianus he was imprisoned and then released at the Emperor Constantine the Great. Saint Nicholas died at great age in Myra of Lycia.

In 1087 his hallows were moved from Myra of Lycia to Bari, an Italian city. Since then, Bari (or so-called Bargrad) turned into the important pilgrimage center for Russian devotees. However, followers wishing to pay respects to Saint Nicholas also included those who were interested in Myra itself as the place seeing his episcopal ministration and wonders and hosting the empty shrine located among VIII century basilica ruins which was a part of the New Syon monastery.

The famous traveller Andrey Muravyov visited these holy places in 1850. Upon return to his motherland, Muravyov reached bishops to point that this memorial remained abandoned, and upon his initiative the parcel, together with the basilica, was bought in 1853 at the expense of the Count N. P. Ignatyev, the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople.

They got an idea about represtination of the monastery and initiated fundraising for that purpose; the money they raised was placed under control of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (OPS). In 1904 the Chairman of the Palestine Society, Grand Duke Sergiy Alexandrovich,

who was a donator to the chapel in Myra of Lycia, was killed in a terror incident, after which his wife Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna replaced him as a Chairman.

Among those events in 1897 the architect Alexey Shchusev graduated from the Imperial Academy of Arts holding a gold medal. When he was granted the right to a pension trip, he travelled around Europe and, among this, explored Italian architecture.

Since 1901 Shchusev worked as an outsourcing architect for the Holy Synod. His outstanding templar masterworks included iconostases and pictorial decoration for the churches of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra (1900–1910), the Trinity cathedral of the Pochaev lavolta (1904–1910), re-building of the Volynia ancient monument and Saint Basil Church in Ovruch (1904–1911), after which he was granted the academicien title for his "notability in the field of arts". Additionally, Shchusev was commissioned by the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna to design Marfo-Mariinsky Convent in Moscow and a sacellum in the Virgin Monastery of Kazan. These creations were highly appreciated by the Grand Duchess.

Once purchase of the land parcel in Myra of Lycia failed preventing from church construction, the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society got back to its plan of building the pilgrimage center in Bari. After research of a proper location, in 1911 they organised a committee for the purpose of supervising purchase of the parcel and establishment of the church and the metochion. Alexey Viktorovich Shchusev was invited by the Palestine Society to design the Church of Saint Nicholas and pilgrim's mansion in 1910 – back at the time when construction was still planned to happen in Myra of Lycia. The architect reserved this project even after its transfer to Bari.

Following the initial choice of Russian-style designs, Shchusev went ahead with the outline sketch which had to be approved personally by the



K. S. Petrov-Vodkin. "The Archangel Michael". The sketch for decoration of a porch of the Church of Saint Nicolas, 1916

Emperor Nicholas II who patronized the Bargrad committee. During his work the architect continued his exercises with the Russian style, with the unconditional priority of Novgorodian and Pskovian themes. This project was adopted on May 30, 1912: the Emperor Nicholas II considered Shchusev's outline sketch and a provisional estimate prepared by him. The sheet showing the west front is still bearing Emperor's decision: "Approved".

According to the outline sketch presented by Shchusev, the monapsal church has a square ground plan and four internal piers. Its walls are divided by pilaster-strips into three zones and completed with three-step archlets. The central zone – similar to a previous version of design – has a large splash of colour (meaning the icon revealing the picture of Saint Nicolas' life) with two high windows above it at the loft level. Pskovian style two-chamber bell-tower with two bells has much more complications in comparison with earlier designs. Decoration of the dome drum and façade zones look something like clas-

sic Novgorodian monuments of the second half of the 14th and the 15th centuries, such as the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilyina Street, the Church of St. Theodore Stratilatus on the Brook, the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Kozhevniky. Probably, church walls were planned to be plastered and whitened, and the dome be covered with green maiolica roof tiles.

The church construction was divided into several stages: in 1913 a temporary church was established to serve pilgrims, and the principal construction works took two years between 1913 and 1915. During the construction Shchusev visited Bari several times to supervise the works. Some pictures featuring the construction site still exist.

During this period Shchusev continued his work over the project to develop options for the external side of the door panel and land fencing, design interiors, furniture, and the iconostasis. In 1914 the Russian Empire entered World War I. The war complicated postal communication with Russia, raised prices to construction materials, prevented from sending the structure components manufactured in Russia under Shchusev's patterns, to Bari. The construction committee members concerned about helping Russians who left Europe in a hurry. However, the construction works continued.

Mural decorations of the Orthodox Church in Bari were aligned with the complex setting of the whole courtyard. When completing the set of drawings to be presented to the Emperor Nicholas II, the architect depicted Saint Nicolas as Nicola Mozhaisky. This iconographic type was specifically respected in Rus and had no parallel in Catholicism. The legend of origin of the image tells about a passionate prayer brought by the habitants of embattled Mozhaysk and a wonderful appearance of the awesome Saint in the sky, holding a sword in one hand and a city (or a church) in the other hand. The image chosen by the architect was a symbol



The outline sketch of the Bari courtyard submitted to the Emperor Nicholas II for approval

of heavenlike protection of the place of receipt. Shchusev documented it on the final detailed drawing of the façade in 1912.

Shchusev's business correspondence mentions that the mural was planned to be mosaic. It was important to engage a proper artist to perform this colour accent in the pilgrims' complex. There are documents evidencing the approval of sketches of some icon of Saint Nicolas presented by Nikolai Konstantinovich Rerikh, by the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna; these sketches might refer to the subject matter. However, there was no evidence of renewal of negotiations with Rerikh regarding this project.

Many artists who were attracted due to the opportunity to approve themselves in an international large-scale project, offered their services since the very early stage of construction of the Russian courtyard in Bari. Kuzma Sergeevich Petrov-Vodkin

who already had experienced co-operation with the architect several times, also showed his interest.

After successful completion of the icons for the iconostasis installed in the Trinity Church in Sumy, the artist became one of the candidates for Bari church decoration. Petrov-Vodkin's water-colour painting "The Archangel Michael" prepared for a church porch survived till now. Shchusev placed this image near the lower staircase landing on the sectional view. The artist's sketch shows a full-length figure. The Archangel's sword is lowered, and his body slightly turning towards the stair steps looks like an invitation to come in. He is backgrounded by the picture of an ancient city located at the sea beach – this is a symbolic image of Bari. His left hand holds the Orthodox church, thus connecting him again to Nicola Mozhaisky, who, like the Archangel Michael protecting the entrance, also protects the metochion.

Petrov-Vodkin was not a single artist creating designs for the courtyard. In 1916 the following persons were invited to participate in the Bargrad committee in addition to him: A. Ye. Yakovlev, V.I. Shukhaev, V.A. Plotnikov, and V. S. Shcherbakov.

The October revolution drew the line with the artists' pursuit. Shchusev's project never was completed. Plotnikov died in Petrograd overtaken by rebellion; Yakovlev and Shukhaev emigrated.

That small part of murals executed before the revolution gives an idea of preparation of not only religious, but also a notable artistic event in Bari. It failed to happen – similar to more extensive graphic decoration of Moscow Kazansky railway station which was also projected by Shchusev with the engagement of many major artists of the time.

After the revolution of 1917 the courtyard passed into the ownership of Italy, that caused harm to

the unique architectural-artistic complex. The initial composition degraded due to accessory buildings and additional arrangements and suffered from irreplaceable losses. Historical floorings and cornices on the north side of the place of receipt did not survive. The church dome lost its unique maiolica tiles which were its mostly notable detail exceeding similar surface of the Russian church in Florence for its artistic excellence.

In the late 20th century Russian pilgrims headed to Bari again to pay their respects to Saint Nicolas' hallows. In 1998 the local municipality allowed Moscow Patriarchate to use the Orthodox Church and a part of the



Church construction, 1914



Construction of the Bari courtyard during World War I, 1915

receipt building according to their intended use; but some rooms were still managed by Italy as they hosted an orphan home. So, the courtyard was granted the status of the Patri-

archal Metochion and was fully returned into the ownership of Russia in 2009, however nowadays it still requires professional restoration with an academic approach.

TONINO GUERRA'S RUSSIAN WIFE

He won two Oscars and was honoured with the title of Best European Screenwriter, but his greatest reward always was the opportunity to work and create

ELIZABETH WYATT

Tonino Guerra is a scriptwriter, a poet, an artist, and a designer of fountains. The peasant childhood and a German concentration camp, life in Rome and collaboration with the great film directors Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Theo Angelopoulos, Andrei Tarkovsky and many others – all of this can be found in his biography. He won two Oscars, was honoured with the title of Best European Screenwriter and received other awards, but his only greatest reward always was the opportunity to work and create.

Once he told his wife, Eleonora Yablochkina, that he felt like an abandoned house. Why so? Why a house? 'I live in the small town of Pennabilli; it is called "Borgo" in Italian. It is just a cluster of old houses, a church, with a large number of abandoned cottages around. And I visit them frequently. And I have now remembered these abandoned houses for the following reason. When we are over forty, we often come up to the window and see not what is actually behind it but what we want to see there. For example, I often recognize Russia in that valley which can be seen from my window. The older you get the more you begin to shun the things which make the spectacle of life or the masterpieces which attract many tourists. When you grow old, something happens inside you and it makes you understand that the music of rain is the best concert in life, that the greatest spectacle is when snow falls, and, as the excellent Italian film

director Ermanno Olmi once said, there is nothing better than having a cup of coffee with your friends!' he used to explain.

'I am Russian by my wife,' Tonino Guerra used to repeat. He met his Eleonora in 1975 in Moscow when he came there together with Michelangelo Antonioni for a film festival – and ever since that day they always were together. And Guerra more and more put down roots in Russian culture: learned the language, became Honorary Doctor of Gerasimov All-Russian State University of Cinematography, and was awarded an Order of Friendship. In addition to



this, he worked together with Russian film directors. It was Guerra who wrote the screenplay for the film *Nostalgia* by Andrei Tarkovsky. Yet his romance with Lora (this is how he called his wife Eleonora) was an extraordinary one. He did not know a

single word in Russian, while she did not speak Italian. 'During our walks we once came to a bird market where I bought Lora an empty cage, and afterwards we went to her apartment... As I initially felt timid in my relationship with her, I asked her to give me some paper and began to write. And I filled that cage with my numerous notes with phrases that I came up with. These were romantic phrases. But since I was a shameless seller of my own imagination [as Tonino used to say – auth.], this same scene later appeared in the film *Good Morning, Babylon*, by the Tamiani brothers.' From that time on Eleonora spent long evenings translating these notes. Thus the woman learned Italian, thus Tonino won her heart forever, and that same cage with the notes (which have already turned yellow) still exists. 'But I still cannot figure out which words he meant. Tonino wrote:

"Today I want to speak to you with round words." That is the way it is,' Lora shares her memories of him.

'I have strained relations with the little town of my childhood. I even don't like to return there. It has remained in my memory only in black

and white colours. It is like a black-and-white film,' Guerra used to say. His birthplace was the town of Santarcangelo di Romagna, in the province of Rimini, and it is there that Federico Fellini, his close friend and colleague, was born, too. Did Guerra and Fellini know in their youth that they would produce films and that their names would become the trademark of Italian and even world film-making?.. The former was to become a prominent screenwriter, and the latter – a great film director. For before the Second World War both of them earned their living by drawing: Fellini sold his caricatures in the streets of Rome, while Guerra worked as a designer for newspapers

and magazines. But the war dotted the I's and crossed the t's. During his imprisonment at Troisdorf concentration camp, where he (like thousands of his compatriots) had been sent during the war, Guerra started composing poetry in his home Romagnol dialect and writing prose.

'I was about twenty when Fascists took me, transferred me to the Germans who sent me to the camp. I was held there together with natives of Emilia Romagna. I was the youngest of them. When in the evenings we came back to the barracks after our labours – exhausted, hungry and feeling chilly – my fellow-citizens wanted me to speak to them in the native Romagnol dialect. It was important to them to hear it, to hear these words, regardless of the content. And I would prepare for it all the day. Of course, there were neither pens nor pencils in the camp. And, in order to survive, I began to compose poems to myself – it was easier to memorize them this way (these were rhymes). And before Christmas even the lorry, which used to deliver that skilly

(thin soup) of several cabbage leaves to the captives, overturned. And in the end we were given nothing on that day. And then my fellow-inmates asked me: "Please, don't recite poems any more. Instead, recollect and tell us how to cook tagliatelle." Tagliatelle is a kind of home-made



pasta. "Will I tell you?" I asked. "Yes, please do!" they replied. So I began to recall how my mother had cooked it in my childhood. "So I am sifting flour on the table. Adding water. But there are many of you, so I will whisk a lot of eggs. Now I am going to roll out dough. Look." And then I began to "cut, cut and cut noodles". And all of them were looking at me, coming nearer one after another. I went on with my story: "Meanwhile water is boiling. Look, I am throwing tagliatelle into water." And at last I began to offer the "cooked tagliatelle" to everybody: "Do you want? And what about you? And you? Will I sprinkle parmesan cheese on your pasta?" I "distributed" this "pasta" among all of them. And it was so quiet... Soon one of them rose and uttered: "Please, can you give me a second helping?" "Here you are. Of course," I answered. He came up to me and I gave him "another helping". And at that moment I realised that when you are listening to someone who is talking about food you can feel full. It is possible,' Guerra recalled.

It subsequently emerged that one of the camp labourers had had a pencil with him and had written down all Guerra's poems. Later, already after the war, they were published. At that time Tonino was a student at University of Urbino. 'When I returned to my homeland after war, I recounted all that had happened to me at the concentration camp to many people: friends, acquaintances and strangers. It is perhaps due to these stories that I eventually ended up in the film industry,' Tonino relates. 'I never wrote about those times. Although it was a rather dramatic period of my life, it prompted me to think of life, love and death very seriously. And in this sense the period was fabulous. I was hap-

py and content many times in my life, but the happiest moment was when I was released in Germany and I could look at a butterfly without a desire to eat it,' Guerra admitted.

Much later, having gone through tribulations and disappointments, the first encounter with Rome, unemployment and other trials, Tonino Guerra became so popular that he had to work 'on two fronts', as the phrase is. He wrote for Fellini, he collaborated with Antonioni. 'Each of them took from me what he needed. All three of us are Romagnoli and Emiliani. Each of us hails from the same region of Italy. And when we were boys we had the same jokes as well,' he used to say.

And Tonino also had a dream: he dreamed that one day one of his fountains would appear in Moscow. After all, he decorated the cities he loved dearly. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to realise his dream. But he did hope that someone else would be imbued with this idea and the fountain would appear nevertheless.

CULTURE

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF
RUSSIANS IN FLORENCE

DARIA KLIMENKO

*The doors inhale air and exhale steam;
but you will not return here, where,
breaking into pairs, the crowds go
strolling by the Arno's failing stream,
like some new breed of quadruped;
doors slamming behind them, beasts
appearing on the roadway.
Truly, there is something of the
woodland shade about this city. It
is a handsome city, Yet at a certain
age you simply turn up your collar,
shutting out its people from your
gaze.*

*Joseph Brodsky,
December in Florence, 1976*

Florence is a wonderful forge of skilled men. This cradle of the Renaissance produced such great geniuses that all other cities can only sigh and envy. This small city was home to Donatello, Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, who nearly elbowed one another there. One could bow down low to Florence for Botticelli, da Vinci and Buonarroti alone. And these are just a few names among the many talented figures... Giotto, Massaccio, Ghirlandaio, Filippino Lippi, Verrocchio, Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi and, lastly, Dante.

I would need to use the encyclopaedia in order to continue this long list, and then the entire article would consist only of the names of great Florentines. Foreign luminaries loved this flowering city as well. Dostoevsky, Tchaikovsky, Tarkovsky and Brodsky lived here. Although Brodsky is more associated with Ven-

ice, Joseph visited the capital of the Renaissance and was inspired by it. Perhaps only Alexander Blok was not impressed by Florence.

The wealthy Demidov family made generous contributions to restore the great monuments of Florence, Brodsky and Tarkovsky praised the city in their work, while Dostoevsky and Tchaikovsky usually stopped at Florence during their travels through Europe. All of them left their imprints on Florence in one way or another.

Russians became interested in Florence and first arrived there as far back as 1439. It was related to one significant religious event – the Florentine Union, that is, a failed attempt to unite the Russian Orthodox and the Catholic Churches. From that time on the city was visited by Russian pilgrims (who briefly looked round the city and hastened to Rome and Bari) along with Russian intellectuals, captivated by Dante and the masters of the Renaissance. Among them were also the so-called ‘holiday-makers’ who came to Florence for long periods to improve their health and eventually stayed there forever, becoming the patrons of art and collectors. These were followed by emigrants, among whom we can include Dostoevsky, Brodsky, Tarkovsky and others.

Wherever you might stay within Florence, try to start your tour of the city with the Duomo. This symbol of Florence comprises three buildings: the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Baptistery with the golden Gates of Paradise by Ghiberti and Giotto's Bell-tower.

Looking at the Duomo's interesting façade, one should remember that its

construction was largely financed by the Demidovs, factory owners from the Urals. This family's coat of arms is situated in the place of honour – to the right of the main entrance to the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

The connection of the Demidov family with Florence began with Nikolai Nikitich Demidov who in 1819 moved to Tuscany to recover his health and stayed there forever. Florence and the region of Tuscany became his second motherland. According to different sources, Demidov served there as Russian Ambassador or as charge d'affaires at the court of Tuscany, and he won fame among ordinary Italians by his generosity, love for the arts and large-scale charitable activities.

In a public garden, located at a square with the name Piazza Demidoff, the grateful residents of Florence installed a white marble monument to the first member of the Demidov family in Florence – Nikolai. It was Anatole Demidov who commissioned Lorenzo Bartolini to sculpt this statue. The symbols that represent the might and the merits of Demidov are interesting: Nikolai himself is depicted as a Roman senator, pressing his son Anatole to his bosom, and a female figure beside him symbolises gratitude and presents him with a laurel wreath. At the corners of the pedestal are four statues-allegories: Nature, Arts, Mercy, Siberia (by the way, ‘Siberia’ holds Plutus – the Greek pagan god of wealth – with a bag of money, symbolising the Demidovs' glut of wealth). Take note of this feature: only the fourth figure, ‘Siberia’, is fully clothed



Lorenzo Bartolini, the monument to Nikolai Demidov at Piazza Demidoff, Florence



'Florence is the city that gives back your hope,' this is what Tarkovsky, who had become a homeless wanderer in Europe, wrote

and wears a hat – an indication that all Italians are aware of occasional extreme cold weather in Russia.

On his arrival in Florence Nikolai Nikitich founded a home for orphans and the elderly at this square, which was called 'Demidov Asylum'. Today its façade is adorned with a high relief of Nikolai Nikitich. The asylum stands close to Palazzo Serristori (to the left of the monument in the public garden – 21 Lungarno Serristori), where Demidov initially lived. Today this building is closed, but its neglected exterior can gladden the eyes of many photographers and lovers of the antique.

By coincidence, the name of Nikolai Demidov is remembered throughout this

district of Florence: the district itself is named after St Nicholas the Wonder-worker, and there are also a street, an arch and a church with the same name there. And Florentines

often joke that if the locals are used to meet near the statue of David, then Russian patriots should go out on a date near the monument to Demidov. Nikolai Demidov donated mon-



In March 1996 Joseph Brodsky was given a title of the Honourable Citizen of Florence for his contribution to world culture



ey to hospitals, helped the poor, and was a keen collector of works of art. His son Anatole financed the restoration of Santa Croce Church's front and acquired works of Perugino, Giorgione, Tiziano, and Tintoretto, and received the title of Prince of San Donato (named after the family villa outside Florence) from the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Pavel Demidov, Anatole's nephew, opened schools in Florence, cheap dining halls, and shelters for the homeless. In addition to this, he donated 38,000 lire (in the nineteenth century there was still a system by which the value of a currency was defined in terms of gold; this sum was equal to hundreds of thousands euros) for the restoration work and completion of the façade of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, which until the nineteenth century had been covered with unpolished stone (San Lorenzo Cathedral has a similar façade). Today tourists' eyes are fairly dazzled at the sight of the numerous sculptures and decorative elements of white, green and pinkish marble.

If you pass round the cathedral on the left side, you will find yourself in the street with the name Via dei Servi, leading to Santissima Annunziata Square. Here, near the house no. 2, we can remember another compatriot of ours, Count Dmitry Petrovich Buturlin.

The Buturlins, natives of Moscow, following the terrible fire of 1812, when they lost their huge library, became the first Russian emigrants in Italy (1818). Settling down in Florence, they began to collect books again in the splendid Renaissance mansion called Palazzo Montauti-Niccolini (today – Palazzo Niccolini) in the very centre of the city. Until recently this mansion was labelled on the city maps as Palazzo Buturlin, while the façade still retains the coat of arms of Dmitry Petrovich Buturlin.

Now this mansion is used as a luxury hotel where the whole nineteenth-century interior has been preserved. If you ask for permission, you will be allowed to see not only the mansion's courtyard, but

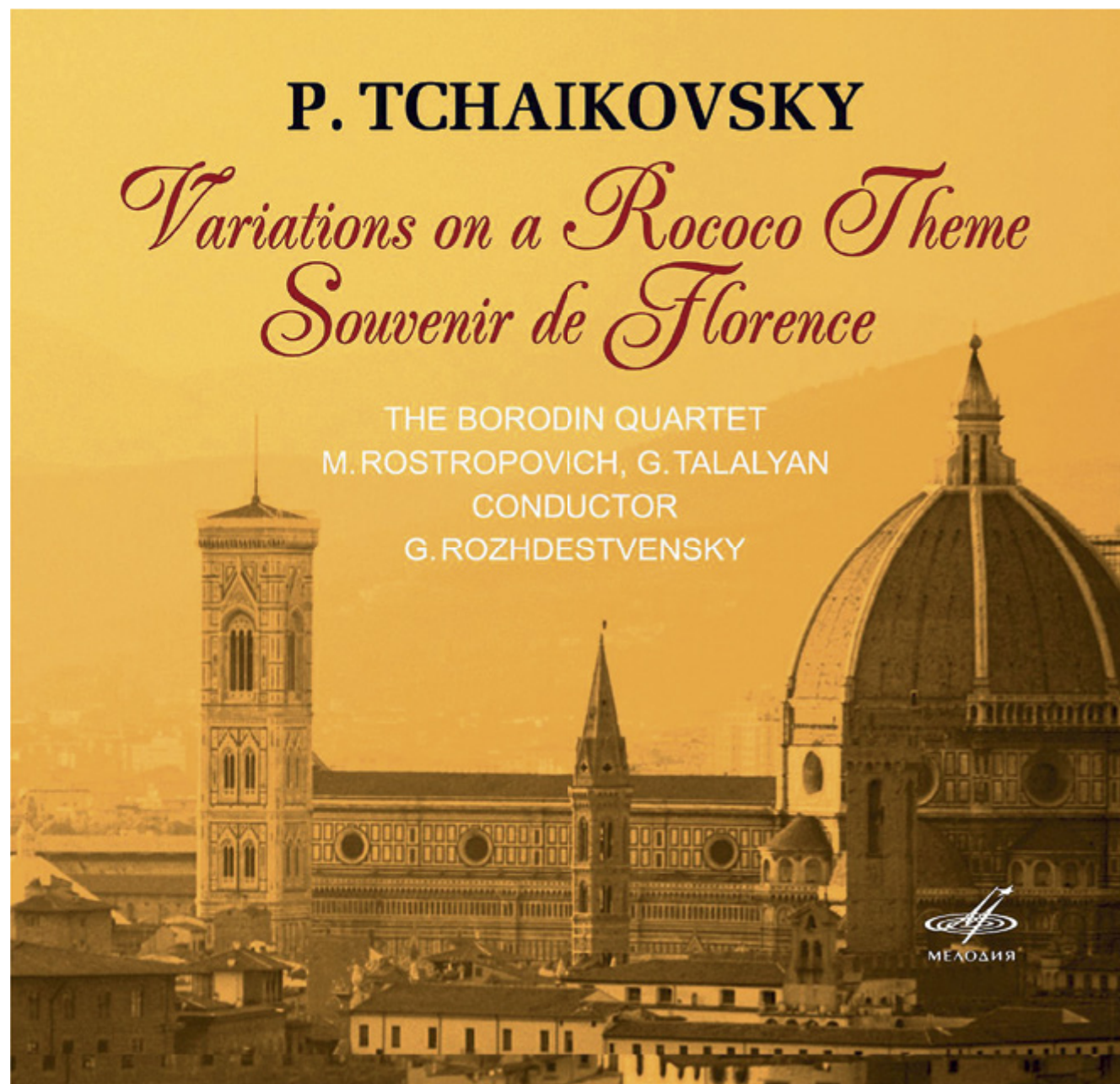
also its interior (enter through its gate and on your left go up the stairs to the first floor).

Moving along Dei Cerchi, you can reach the square called della Signoria and the town hall, called Palazzo Vecchio. It was here that in March 1996 Joseph Brodsky was given a title of the Honourable Citizen of Florence for his contribution to world culture and was awarded the Golden Florin – a replica of the medieval Florentine coin.

That trip to Florence in 1996 was his final visit to Italy. The poet passed away in the same year in the USA.

Not long ago a plaque appeared on a rather modest house, 91 Via San Niccolò, Florence, which reads: 'Andrei Tarkovsky, a peerless film director on spiritual themes, an exile in Florence, spent the final years of his life in this house. A guest and Honourable Citizen of the city of Florence.'

'Florence is the city that gives back your hope,' this is what the film director, who had become a homeless wanderer in Europe, wrote. The Flor-



ence city hall gave him a room in Via San Niccolo, where the great Russian director resided from 1983 till 1986 and where he wrote the scripts to his last films, 'Nostalgia' and 'The Sacrifice'. There are similarities in the fates of these two masters – Brodsky and Tarkovsky. Both of them loved Florence, both spent the final years of their lives there, both became Honorable Citizens of Florence.

By the way, if you are a big fan of Andrei Tarkovsky's works, then you can take a short tour of Flor-

ence's surroundings, visiting the places where the film 'Nostalgia' was shot. These are the unfinished cathedral of San Galgano and the pool at Bagni Vignoni.

Notice the memorial plaque at 64 Via San Leonardo: 'In 1878 Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky lived and worked in this villa, where, of the boundless plains of Russia and the sweet hills of Tuscany he materialised the undying harmonies of both regions.'

It is not the only place in Florence where Tchaikovsky stayed during his

visits to this city. However, the hotels Sofitel and Washington are not so romantic places to have such beautiful words left on their walls, as opposed to Villa Bonciani which is situated in Via San Leonardo, one of the prettiest streets of Florence.

It was at a hotel near this mansion that Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, a great admirer of Tchaikovsky's talent and his patron for many years, lived. The composer communicated with von Meck for thirteen years only by correspondence and never

met with her in person. Nadezhda Filaretovna gave him extensive financial support, but wished to remain practically unknown to the object of her admiration.

Tchaikovsky was passionate about Florence, called it an excellent source of inspiration, the city which nurtured creative personalities and his second home. It was in the Washington Hotel where the famous opera The Queen of Spades was composed, and it was first performed at the City Theatre of Opera and Ballet. This hotel stood at 8 Amerigo Vespucci Embankment, now it is a popular tourist bar. But I wonder if its customers are aware of this building's significance for world music and that early in 1890 the great composer in one breath, over forty-four days, composed here his most favourite brainchild, The Queen of Spades. The sophisticated Florentines nicknamed The Queen of Spades 'The Florentine opera' because it was created on the banks of the Arno River. The famous opera was put on the stage again in 1974, and in 1999 it opened the May Festival. Tchaikovsky became attached to Florence and more than once said that it was his most beloved and desirable city. And it came to pass that the composer obtained a house, or, to be more exact, a villa in Florence. What is most remarkable is that this villa was provided for him by his patron Nadezhda von Meck.

Tchaikovsky also dedicated his famous sextet to his beloved Florence. He particularly liked to dedicate his compositions to the places where he used to stay that played a special role in his life and were dear to his heart.

Florence inspired one more great Russian man. 'Late in November,

1868, we moved to the then capital of Italy and took up our residence near Palazzo Pitti. The move proved wholesome for my husband and we began to visit churches, museums and palaces,' this is what Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina, second spouse of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, wrote in her reminiscences.



The exact address of Dostoevsky's home in Florence remained unknown. However, in the twentieth century the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko examined documents of that time and found out that Dostoevsky had lived at 22 Via Guicciardini, where later a memorial plaque appeared. According to some evidence, it was there that in 1869 Fyodor Mikhailovich completed work on his famous novel, The Idiot, which he had been writing for seventeen months.

Dostoevsky first visited the city of Florence in 1862 together with the literary critic Nikolai Nikolaevich Strakhov, and later, following wasteful travels across Europe, he returned there with his new wife, Anna Snitkina, who supported the writer financially. Florence attracted Dostoevsky by its clement climate and the library.

According to Anna Grigoryevna's evidence, 'a fine library with a reading room and two Russian newspapers were found' and the writer 'used to call at the library for reading daily after dinner.' It was the scientific and literary Gabinetto Vieusseux [the library, founded in 1819 by Giovan Pietro Vieusseux who was

of Swiss descent], which received all the major books published in Europe. Today this collection is housed at Palazzo Strozzi.

'The doctor instructed me to walk a lot, so every day Fyodor Mikhailovich and I went to the Giardino Boboli gardens (situated behind the Pitty Palace), where roses were blooming in spite of January. There we would bask in the sunshine and dream of our happy future,' Anna Grigoryevna wrote.

There are cities to which one cannot return.

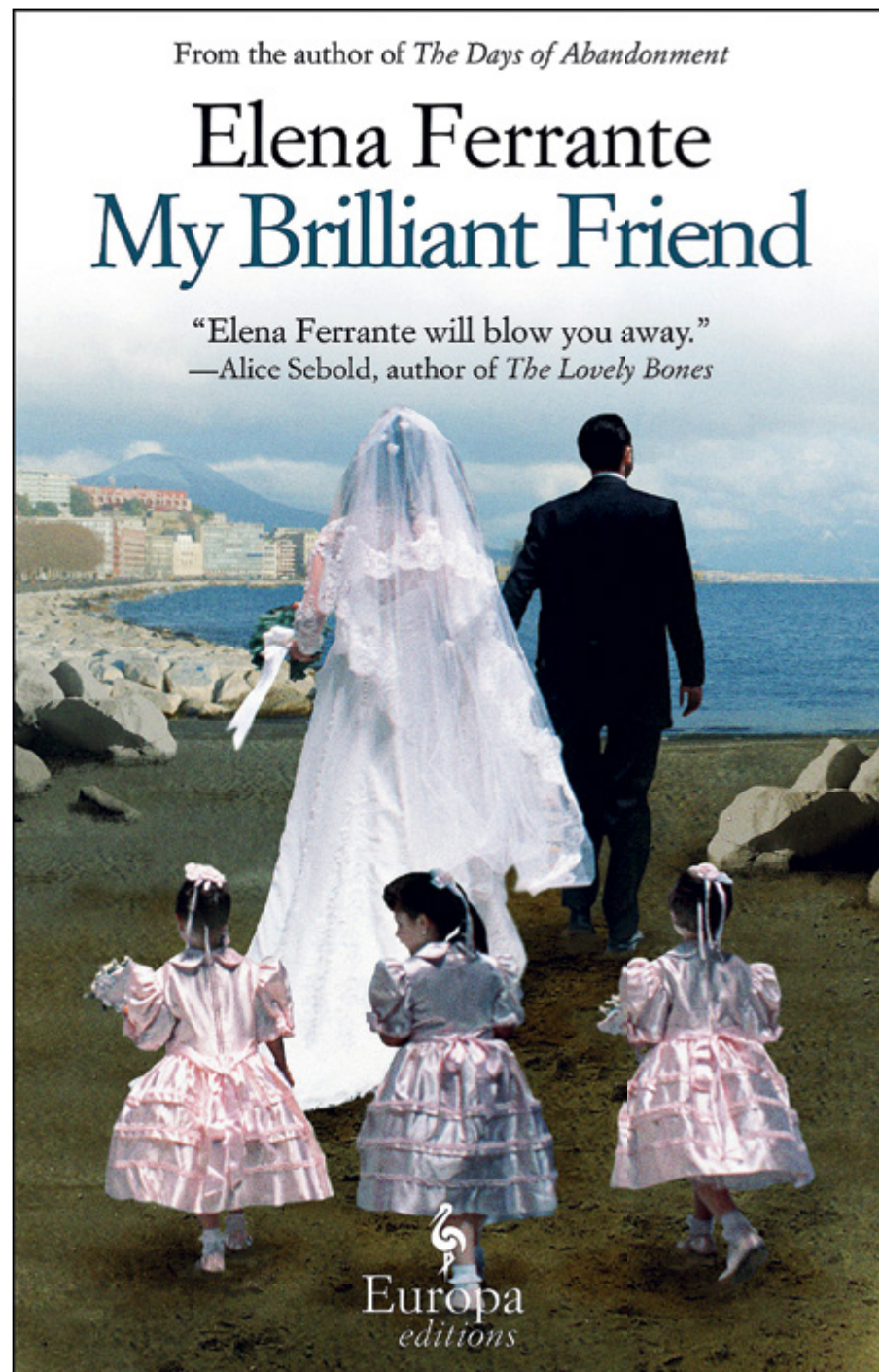
The Sun beats on their windows as though on polished mirrors.

And it means that no amount of gold will make their hinged gates turn...

(Joseph Brodsky, December in Florence)

10 CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN NOVELS

CINZIA FERRI



Books are just a perfect way to dive deep into the culture of a certain country. That's why I selected ten great contemporary Italian novels, which will give you the opportunity of getting to know more about us Italians, keeping you entertained and hooked at the same time.

I decided to include only Italian books translated into English and this made things quite difficult – or pretty easy, depending on how you look at it – because there aren't many contemporary novels who have an English version as well. The choice is quite limited, but the selection is worthy nonetheless.

I hope you'll find this selection interesting, I tried to include a variety of genres so that you can have an idea of contemporary Italian books.

Elena Ferrante – The Neapolitan Novels

Let's start not with just one book, but with actually four. The Neapolitan Novels are a series of four titles (*My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, and *The Story of the Lost Child*) which tell the story of two smart girls, Elena (Lenù) and Raffaella (Lila), who grow up in a poor neighborhood just outside Naples.

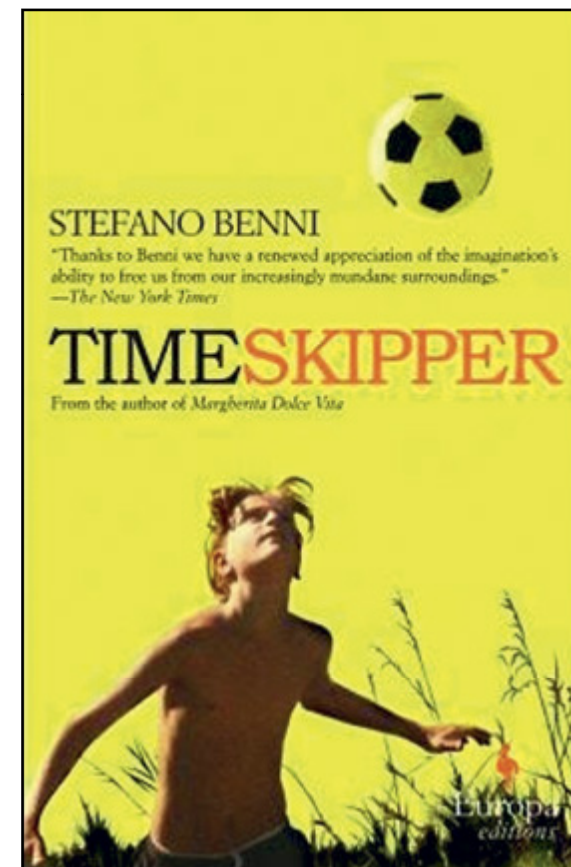
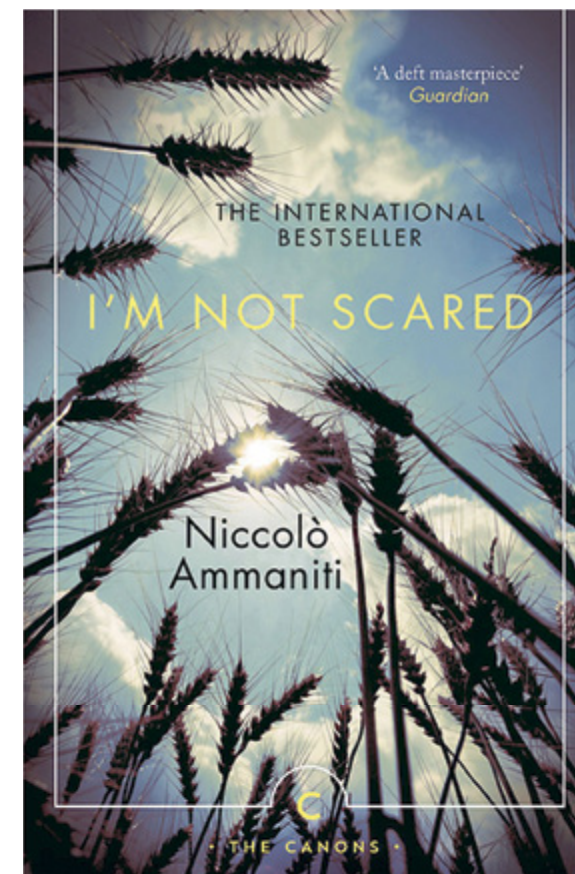
Elena Ferrante, whose identity is actually unknown, is an amazing writer and has been able to create a saga which hooks you from the

very beginning, telling the story of a friendship and depicting fifty years of Italian history at the same time.

Niccolò Ammaniti – I'm Not Scared

First published in 2001, *I'm Not Scared* is probably the most famous book by Ammaniti. It tells the story of Michele Amitrano, a nine-year-old boy who, on a hot summer day in the south of Italy, stumbles upon a terrible secret – which will eventually become even more terrible as the story unfolds.

The book, which has been made into a great movie by Academy



Award winner director Gabriele Salvatores, is both a mystery and a coming of age story and is certainly a book about innocence, childhood, and adulthood. One of my favorite books of all time.

Stefano Benni – Timeskipper

Stefano Benni is a very prolific writer, but just a few of his books have been translated into English. This is one of them, the story of a young man who has an amazing gift: he can see into the future. With such gift, he can foresee – and live at the same time – some crucial events of Italian history.

The book is a strange tale that describes the transformation of Italy and its society in the 50s and 60. Stefano Benni's prose is quite weird and causes mixed reactions: you basically either love it or hate it. However, he is one of Italy's most important satirist, definitely worth reading if you want to know more about our literature.

Margaret Mazzantini – Don't Move

On a rainy day, teenage Angela falls from her scooter and has an accident. While she is in a coma, her father Timoteo is forced to come to terms with its past. While he waits for her awakening, he confesses his deepest

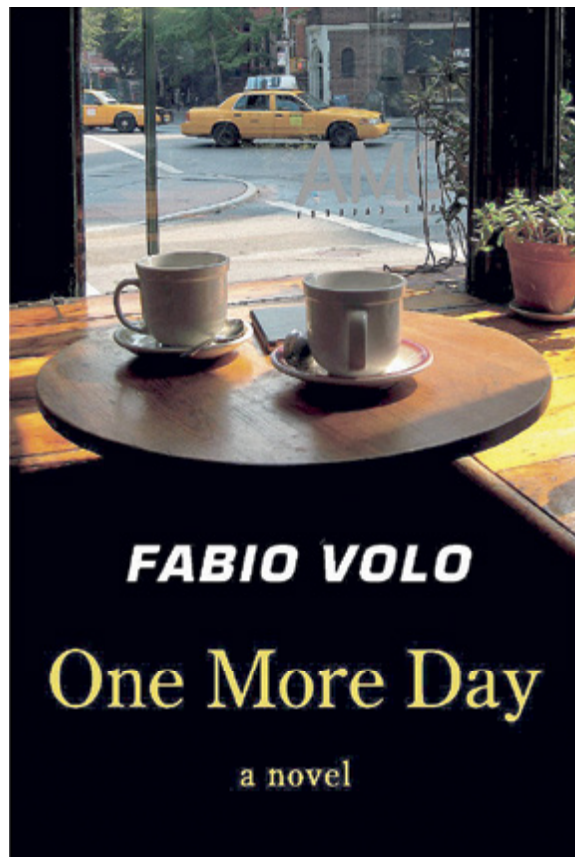


secrets both to his daughter and to himself.

This is not exactly my kind of novel, way too passionate and full of drama, but it's been one of the most popular novels in Italy these last years, winner of a number of prizes and made into a movie as well, which I thought made it worth including in this selection.

Fabio Volo – One More Day

Fabio Volo, who first started his career as a comedian and TV star, is a

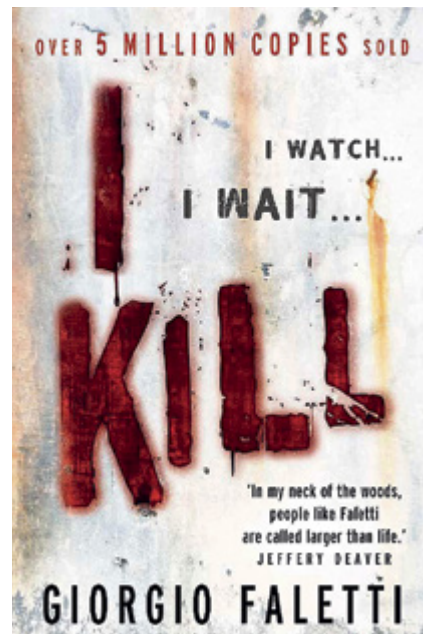


writer who causes a lot of controversies, here in Italy. Many people believe that he is not good at writing and basically say that all his books are not more than trash. However, he is very popular as a writer and keeps publishing one bestseller after another.

He mainly writes romantic comedies, which are not my kind of books, but I believe that he should be respected for his success. Moreover, the stories in his books are quite simple, making them a great tool for improving your reading skills – if you want to try reading them in Italian. This book I've chosen tells the story of a guy who has a lot of success with women and eventually falls in love for the first time.

Giorgio Faletti – I Kill

Another comedian turned writer, Giorgio Faletti caught everybody by surprise when his first book was published. He showed amazing talent as a writer, crafting a suspenseful



thriller with a plot that keeps you hooked from beginning to end.

Set in Monte Carlo, the book tells the story of a detective and an FBI agent who have to

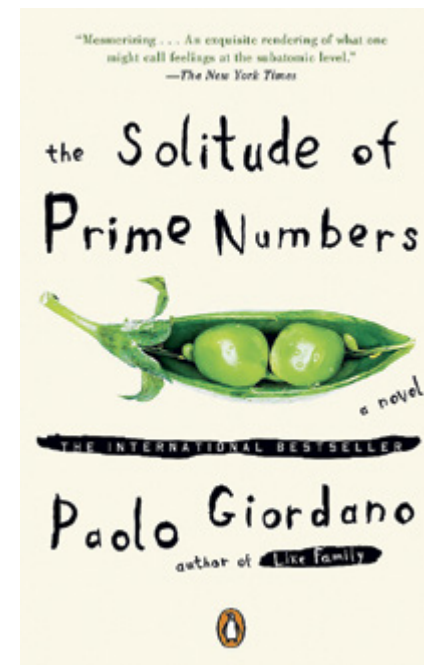
success with this book, which was his debut as a writer. I have read it a long time ago, but I still very clearly remember how much I loved it, so I have no doubts recommending it.

The title of the book comes from the fact that prime numbers can only

great gangster story but it is also useful to learn more about an important period of Italian life. It has been made into a great movie and a TV series as well – which I absolutely recommend you if you get the chance to see them.

Paolo Giordano – The Solitude of Prime Numbers

Paolo Giordano, a physician with a PhD in theoretical particle physics, had an amazing



be divided by themselves or by one – so they do not truly fit with others. Alice and Mattia, the main characters of the book, are both “prime numbers” as they are some kind of misfits who are destined to be alone. But this will make them be really close to each other.

Roberto Saviano – Gomorrah

I am quite sure you have already heard about this book. A nonfiction account of Naples' camorra, it is by far the most famous Italian book of the time and, even if it's been written a while ago, it still is tremendously – and sadly – up-to-date.

When the book came out, in 2006, it caused a real shock in most of Italy – everywhere but Naples, I'd say – as it told the shocking reality of camorra, an organized crime network that is based in Naples but has connections with the whole world. It was shocking because the tales told by Saviano seemed to come directly from a gangster



movie, yet they were a sad reality. What is even sadder is that nowadays things probably haven't changed, we just got used to them.

Carlo Lucarelli – Almost Blue

The last book I selected is by one of my favorite writers, Carlo

Lucarelli, one of the best Italian crime novelists. The book is a noir that tells the story of Simone, who is blind and spends much of his time listening to radio scanners. By doing so, he hears everything from police radio calls to telephone conversations. There have been a series of murders of students in Bologna, Simone overhears the voice of the murderer and eventually becomes a vital part of the police investigation – but because he's blind he can only identify the murderer by his voice.



FILMS

13 MOVIES TO WATCH WITHOUT VISITING ITALY

RAPHAELE VARLEY

Italian cinema has produced some of the 20th century's finest films and Italy – its grand cities, its beautiful countryside, its Latin culture – continues to inspire writers and directors around the world. In the following list, some of the movies are pure travel inspiration, others shed light on the country's fascinating history and culture. Grab some popcorn and get stuck in.

Roman Holiday (1953) *Language: English*

A light-hearted love story between American reporter Joe Bradley (Gregory Peck) stationed in Rome and stifled Princess Ann (Audrey Hepburn), who wants to escape the boredom of her royal tour. It was the film that put Hepburn on the map and arguably the Vespa scooter as

well. Bradley, the princess and the Vespa make for a dashing trio zipping through the chaotic streets of Rome until Ann's inevitable return to her regal duties. In this film, you see the wonders of the city and Italian charm through the romantic lense of a first time visitor.

Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli (Rocco and His Brothers) (1960) *Language: Italian*

Five brothers from Southern Italy move to the industrial North in search of prosperity. Director Luchino Visconti expertly weaves the individual narratives of each brother into a tense and emotionally charged story about love, family and the reality of migrant life in postwar Milan. The city appears both gritty and beautiful – brutality set against the facade

of bleak cinderblock apartments, but also romance on top of the Duomo. 1960s sex symbol Alain Delon received critical acclaim for his portrayal as Rocco.

La Dolce Vita (1960) *Language: Italian*

Federico Fellini is one of Italian cinema's most acclaimed directors and this film marks a transition from his neo-realist style to a more experimental phase. La Dolce Vita recounts the exploits of the womanising lothario and photojournalist, Marcello Rubini and his quest for 'the sweet life' and love during one week in Rome. This film is a prophetic analysis of fame, the cult of celebrity and the power of image. When it was released a headline-hunting newspaper referred to the film as 'papparazzo', fa-

mously coining the term that would go on to define 21st century media. It takes place in post-war Italy that is a nation rebuilding itself on the fragile foundations of emergent mass-consumerism and is a critique of the morality and cultures associated with it. Shot in black and white, this film captures the grandeur and eternal splendour of Rome and its leading stars, Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg, epitomise classic Hollywood beauty.

The Leopard (1963) *Language: Italian*

This is based on the 1958 novel The Leopard, by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, which is considered one of the most important novels in modern Italian literature. It follows a Sicilian nobleman who lives through the social and political turmoil brought on by civil war in Italy and the subsequent difficulties of Italian unification in the early 1800s. Tomasi himself was the last in a line of minor princes in Sicily and wrote the historical novel after the Sicilian island of Lampedusa was bombed by Allied forces in World War II. It explores the decline of the aristocracy, societal changes and our mo-

reality. The 19th-century costumes are as beautiful and romantic as the Sicilian backdrop.

The Italian Job (1969) *Language: English*



"You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!" is just one of Michael Cane's perfectly delivered lines in this British comedy classic. Cane, playing cocky and charming Charlie Crokers who has just been released from Worm-

wood Scrubs prison, stars alongside Noel Coward and Benny Hill in a caper plot in which they plan to use a traffic jam in Turin to steal a weighty gold shipment. The film begins and ends on the stunning Great Saint Bernard Pass – a high altitude pass of hairpin bends that connects Valais in Switzerland with the Aosta Vallery in Italy. In between, Turin's architectural landmarks provide the backdrop for the films iconic car chase that sees two minis drive down the grand stairway inside Baroque Palazzo Madama and speed around the rooftop race track of the old Fiat factory (1923–1982).

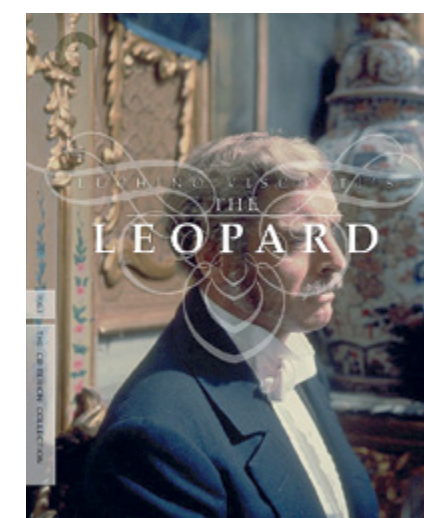
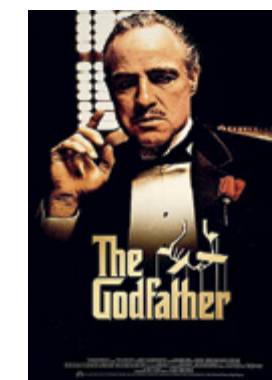
The Godfather (1972) *Language: English*

The most famous mafia movie of all time focuses on the transfer of power within the family of ageing, Italian-American mobster, Don Vito Corleone, played by Marlon Brando, in what was arguably the performance of his career. Don Vito's youngest and brightest son, Michael (Al Pacino), reluctantly agrees to lead

the family's activities and finds himself embroiled in the unavoidable cycle of violence, manipulation and betrayal associated with the Corleone line of work. The story, which is based on Mario Puzo's 1969 novel, is set in the 1950s and takes place between New York and the rural village of Corleone, south of Palermo. By the time of filming, the real-life Corleone had been modernised and therefore two other locations just a few miles north were used – Forza d'Agro and Savoca. Both show stunning views of the Sicilian hinterland and the typical architecture of small hillside towns.

A Room with a View (1985) *Language: English*

This adaptation of E. M. Forster's iconic 1908 novel, A Room with a View, will make you fall in love with the city of Florence: the Arno River, Santa Croce, Piazza Signoria and Fiesole all feature prominently in the story. It is set in Italy and England and is both a romance and critique of English society at the turn of the century. It follows protagonist Lucy Honeychurch, a young upper-middle-class



woman who struggles against the social hierarchy of England and experiences a different way of life in Italy – one that is more liberating, with more fluid social boundaries. Forster himself had experienced a similar epiphany during a previous trip to Italy and this served as inspiration for his highly lauded novel. The all start cast includes Simon Callows, Helena Bonham Carter, Daniel Day-Lewis, Dame Judy Dench, and Dame Maggie Smith.

Tea with Mussolini (1999) *Language: English*

English eccentricity comes to the fore in the comic tale of a dark time in Italian history. It tells the story of adolescent Luca, a motherless English boy who is under the guardianship of a collective of privileged, elderly British and American women (Dame Maggie Smith, Dame Judi Dench, Joan Playwright, Lily Tomlin, Cher) who are living in Florence to feed their love of Italian art and culture. It begins in 1935 and life is full of afternoon, society gossip and medieval frescos until the hostility of Mussolini's Fascist regime extends into their expatriate idyll. As the title suggests, the tone of this film is



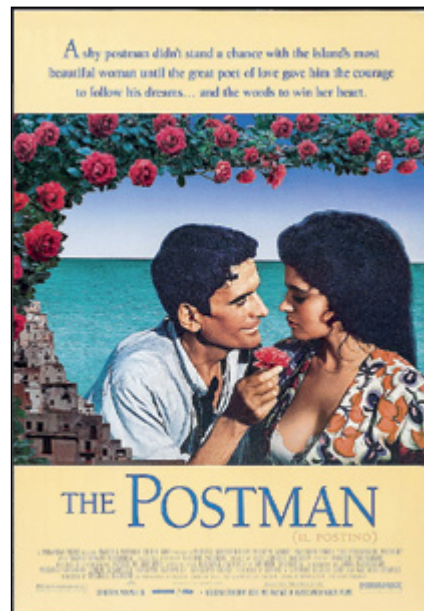
Cinema Paradiso (Paradise Cinema) (1988) *Language: Italian*

Often credited as the beginning of the revival of Italian cinema, this is director Giuseppe Tornatore's ode to origins of the art form. It is a sentimental but historically astute analysis of the power and innocent joy of cinema in its infancy. It is the late 1980s in Rome when prominent filmmaker Salvatore Di Vita (Jacques Perrin) hears news of the death of his beloved childhood father figure and former picture house projectionist Alfredo (Philippe Noiret). He begins a journey back to his small hometown in Sicily and the film then unfolds as a series of flashbacks to his boyhood and adolescence that coincide with the ascent of the silver screen in the local theatre. For young Di Vita, and fellow residents of the town, cinema

comes to represent a means of escape from the graft of life in post-war Italy.

Il Postino (The Postman) (1994) *Language: Italian*

In the 1950s on the small island of Procida in the Gulf of Naples, Mario Ruoppolo is a humble fisherman who has forever been in love with enchanting barmaid Beatrice Russo, but is ill-equipped to express and act on his feelings. The real-life Chilean poet Pablo Neruda arrives in Procida after facing political exile in his homeland for holding communist views, and Ruoppolo is hired to be his personal postman. After many weeks of hand delivering mail to Neruda, he and the postman develop a friendship from which Ruoppolo learns to love poetry. Poetry ultimately gives him the means to express his emotions and pursue Beatrice. This seemingly propels the film to a happy ending. Alas, the final chapter of the film overshadows an otherwise heartwarming tale, rendering Il Postino a true tearjerker.



The story fast-forwards and Neruda returns to the island several years later to find a tragic turn of events born from the tumultuous political climate in Italy at the time. Aside from the central narrative, directors Massimo Troisi and Michael Radford create a charming, often comical portrait of the slow pace and rustic charm of mid-century Mediterranean island life.

The Talented Mr Ripley (1999) *Language: English*

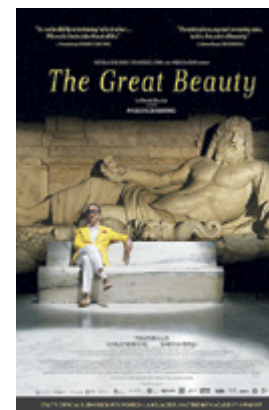
This is a psychological thriller about power, wealth and obsession set in the fictitious town of Mongibello, inspired by luxurious Positano on the Amalfi Coast. The protagonist and anti-hero, Tom Ripley (Matt Damon), is a master manipulator and minor con artist. It is the early 1950s, and Tom is a poor graduate living in New York City when he takes advantage of an opportunity that crosses his path: he must persuade Dickie Greenleaf (Jude Law), the son of a rich shipping magnate, to return to America from Italy, where he is currently leading a hedonistic, unfocused lifestyle that disappoints his father. The stylish and charming Dickie is in Mongibello with his glamorous girl-



friend Marge Sherwood (Gwyneth Paltrow). After an initial period of revelry on the sunny shores of the charming port town, Marge becomes suspicious of Tom's behaviour, and his apparent obsession with Dickie. Things quickly unravel resulting in a murder in San Remo and Tom living a fraught and deceitful existence in Rome. The tense story climaxes in the shadows of Venice's narrow streets. The film is based on Patricia Highsmith's seductive, intelligent page-turner of the same title.

La Grande Bellezza (The Great Beauty) (2013) *Language: Italian*

The hedonistic but wistful retired writer, Jep Gambardella, (Toni Servillo) is the protagonist of Paolo Sorrentino's 2013 film, but Rome is the real star. From the cloisters and sacred chambers of the city's churches to the grand palazzos of its wealthy residents, the beauty and magnificence of Rome is used to highlight the disparity between the empty culture of contemporary high society and the high culture of Italy's past. There is no clear narrative in the film, rather it follows Jep taking stock of his life, analysing what it means to have spent the best decades of his life amongst Rome's literary and creative circles, in its nightclubs and cafes, but without the great love of his youth. This all sounds trite and



Call Me by Your Name (2017) *Language: English*

In the small town of Crema in Lombardy, 17-year-old Elio's academic, bohemian family have a resplendent 17th-century villa for the summer. Elio's father is a professor of antiquities conducting research in the area and his doctoral student, 24-year-old Oliver arrives to assist him. Against a backdrop of Lombardy's countryside, intellectual dinner parties, provincial discos and early 1980s pop music, Elio and Oliver's friendship quickly develops into an intense, lustful romance with a difficult ending. Timothée Chalamet brilliantly portrays the exquisite rush and pain of a first love.





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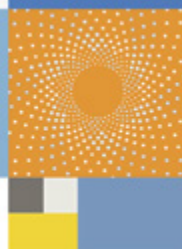


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MEMORY

YURI GAGARIN'S WIFE DIED. WHO WAS THE WOMAN BEHIND THE MAN?

BORIS EGOROV

Russia's space agency Roscosmos announced Valentina Gagarina's death in a short statement, offering condolences to her relatives. It didn't give any details about the cause or circumstances of her death.

Born Valentina Goryacheva, she married Gagarin in 1957. Despite being adored by millions of women, Yuri Gagarin only truly loved one.

"I loved everything about her: character, small height, brown eyes full of light, and braids, and a little, slightly freckled nose..." The world's most famous cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin said about his wife, Valentina.

They met for the first time when they were both in their twenties during a dance evening at the Orenburg aviation academy and immediately fell in love.

Yuri and Valentina were happily married for 11 years until Gagarin died in an air crash on March 27, 1968. The couple is survived by two daughters: Yelena and Galina.

"Much connected us with Valya (short for Valentina). Love for books, passion for skiing, infatuation of the theater..." Gagarin wrote.

They lived a modest life of a common family, until Gagarin's histor-



ical flight on April 12, 1961, which suddenly put them in the spotlight of global attention. Yuri and Valentina met world leaders, travelled a lot, participated in major events and got bags of letters daily.

This wasn't an easy time for Valentina. Millions of women worldwide fell in love with her Yuri. Among them was the first sex-symbol of those times, Gina Lollobrigida.

However, the Gagarins successfully passed the test of glory. Yuri always remained faithful to his girl "in the simple blue dress, shy and bashful".

So remained Valentina to her husband after his death. She never married again.

As Yuri, Valentina Gagarina tied her life to space. Until retirement,

she had been working in the Medical section laboratory of the Mission Control Center. Annually on her birthday, December 15, Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, paid her a visit with an obligatory huge bouquet of roses.

Valentina did much to keep the memory of Yuri Gagarin: she participated in memorable ceremonies, contributed to the establishment of the Gagarin museum, published a memorable book called '108 minutes and the whole life'. However, she never gave interviews.

"As a wife of the first cosmonaut she had a huge responsibility. Until her last days she carried this burden with dignity," cosmonaut Yelena Serova once stated.