

# OPENINGS

*Original Essays by Contemporary  
Soviet and American Writers*



## **History**

Geoffrey C. Ward  
Yuri Nagibin

## **Geography**

Barry Lopez  
Viktor Astafyev

## **Art**

Eleanor Munro  
Viktor Potanin

## **Literature**

Joyce Carol Oates  
Aleksandr Mulyarchik

## **Science**

Elting E. Morison  
Alla Melik-Pashaeva

## **Sports**

Gerald Early  
Teymuraz Mamaladze

## **Ways of Life**

Scott Russell Sanders  
Valeri Vinokurov

*Edited by* **Robert Atwan and Valeri Vinokurov**

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The story of how this volume was conceived, developed, and produced would make an interesting book in itself. A unique and pioneering publishing project, it involved the creative talents and cooperative efforts of many individuals and groups from both the Soviet Union and the United States.

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# Introduction

ROBERT ATWAN

When I was a boy growing up in Paterson, New Jersey, in the early 1950s, I took the Cold War quite literally. Night after night I'd go to bed dressed warmly and wearing thick wool socks. For who knew? I might suddenly be awakened in the middle of the night by Soviet troops—I vividly pictured their ruddy faces and furry earmuffed hats—ordering me out of bed and prodding me with rifle butts into a long forced march. I had seen movies where such things happened. At least I'd be prepared.

These nighttime fears were fueled by frequent daytime air raid drills. A siren would suddenly blast and—"Class, take cover!"—all of us sixth graders would crouch down on our knees and seek shelter beneath our desks. Another drill or the real thing? Hands clasped across my head, I waited for the explosion that would destroy my nation, my city, my school, my family, myself. I had seen the newsreels. I knew what rubble looked like.

No wonder at mass on that March morning in 1953, though I dutifully said a prayer for the soul of Joseph Stalin, I secretly rejoiced that he was finally gone. With a twelve-year-old's naivete I thought my Cold War would now be over.

These childhood memories all returned to me as I walked about Moscow in the exciting spring of 1988. For the first time in my life, despite all the thaws, detentes, and summit meetings, I thought that the awful tensions between our countries might be drawing to a close. Whoever was ultimately to blame for engineering the East-West

crisis and its frightening arms race—whether American hard-liners or Kremlin hard-liners—four decades of tension had surely taken their toll on the spirits of both peoples. I realized that political mistrust and suspicion may linger for a long time, but as I rambled through Moscow wearing my medal of a butterfly with Soviet and American wings, I also began to realize (though this is an unpopular thing to say at a time when we look for political solutions to every problem) that in the long run culture is a more powerful force than politics. This may be why so many twentieth-century political leaders have shown such hostility to culture. When they hear the word, do they always want to pull out their revolvers?

I grew up reading translations of Russian writers in cheap editions, novels and short stories mostly. I was flunked out ("gigged" we called it) of college military training when, having skipped drill one cold morning, I was caught hiding in the back of a friend's car reading *Crime and Punishment*. I was so engrossed I didn't even see the officers coming. A year before that, in Catholic high school, I had angered our pastor when he found me at Good Friday services deep into *The Brothers Karamazov*. I had taken the black cover off a prayer book and used it to disguise my paperback Dostoevsky. I don't know what tipped off the priest; it must have been my profound religious concentration. These books and many others over the years introduced me to the Russian people, their personalities, their culture, their soul. Walking the avenues of Moscow, I felt curiously at home. At

best, politics can make us allies; but culture—books, art, music, dance, games, sport—can make us friends.

Friendship is what this volume is about. When Donald Ellegood, the director of the University of Washington Press, and I went to Moscow for meetings with the publisher and editors of *Fizkultura i Sport*, our agenda was to work out the plans for a book commissioned by the Seattle Goodwill Games of 1990. *Openings*—one of the major undertakings of the Goodwill Arts Festival associated with the Seattle Games—represents a unique cultural endeavor. Though several excellent joint anthologies and specialized books of scholarship have by now appeared, this is the first time that Soviet and American publishers have cooperated so extensively to commission a book featuring original work by outstanding writers from each nation. I should add that, in its rich inclusion of fine art and photography, this may also be the most graphically ambitious of all U.S.–Soviet joint publications to date. At our meetings—both in Moscow and Seattle—we expressed our mutual hope that this book would open up a new intellectual dialogue between our countries.

Here is how the book works. We agreed in Moscow that we should cover seven main areas of culture and society—history, geography, the arts, literature, science, sport, and everyday life. We then invited writers to contribute essays on each of these topics. I should point out a few things. There were no ground rules other than topic and length requirements. Rather than list certain points each writer should cover, we decided to invite the writers to handle their topics—history, science, sport, and so on—however they saw fit. We cared less about uniformity than spontaneity; we wanted to see how some of the outstanding writers, jour-

nalists, and critics from our two countries currently assess their respective cultures. No contributor, I should add, knew how his or her topic was being handled by the other side.

*Openings* is therefore three books in one. And it can be read in three interesting ways: as a commentary by American writers on their present culture and society; as a separate commentary by Soviet writers on theirs; and, most significantly, as a series of parallel essays counterpointing the various ways Soviet and American writers view similar themes and topics. Though the writers worked without knowing how their foreign counterparts were proceeding, the essays nonetheless show many surprising juxtapositions. Both of us clearly share many of the same anxieties—we are worried about our endangered natural environments, the erosion of historical consciousness in our young people, the alienation of our ethnic populations, our uncontrolled technologies. Running beneath these parallel concerns we can see yet another theme, one that is harder to put a finger on but that is felt in the book's totality; our anxiety about the endurance of culture in a world of power. These fourteen essays, the entire 1990 Arts Festival in Seattle, and the overarching concept of the Goodwill Games are dedicated to the spirit of cultural exchange, to the grand opening of a new era of friendship and good will.

"You Russians and we Americans!" Walt Whitman once wrote. "Our countries so distant, so unlike at first glance—such a difference in social and political conditions . . . and yet in certain features, and vastest ones, so resembling each other." Whitman wrote those words over one hundred years ago and they seem as appropriate today as they did then. Perhaps even more so.

# Introduction

VALERI VINOKUROV

I write these lines several months before the publication of *Openings*, but already I imagine the book in my hands. It is so right, so logical that this book should appear on the eve of the Goodwill Games—nominally a sporting event, but in essence going far beyond sport; an event of singular social, cultural, political, and human significance. If by *goodwill* we mean all that—and how could it be otherwise?—then the publication of these essays at this time must seem right and logical.

True, the road from *Openings*' conception to the book you now hold was not as smooth as it might seem. The idea was indeed simple: to invite Soviet and American authors to appear together in a single volume, thereby demonstrating mutual understanding and goodwill; to have them tell readers about their countries, their cultures, traditions, interests, and everyday life. But what shape should this take? What historical periods should be included? And what should the two groups of authors write about: the interrelations of our two cultures, or different periods and approaches in our relations, or the similarities and differences in our traditions and views over—let us say—two centuries? One road had to be chosen from numerous possibilities.

I remember the hours of conversation on this topic, including many people, especially the Soviet and American editors: Jarlath Hume, vice-president of the Goodwill Games Organizing Committee; Vassily Zhiltsov, director of the publishing house Fizkultura i Sport; and Donald Ellegood, director of the University of Washington

Press. Everybody liked the idea right away, but it took a long time to find the single road we finally chose. By now, of course, it is impossible to reconstruct who first hit upon the precise formula.

In the end we decided to make self-examination the book's key idea—self-examination by society, but expressed in the perception of a particular theme by each author as an individual. How does today's society look at history, geography, art, literature, science, and sport? What is their place in the life of society? It was not by a sociological survey, I repeat, that we would seek the answers to these questions, but through the authors' individual perceptions. And then it was natural that the book's final, seventh chapter should look at the place that each of these six aspects of society occupies in the life of a single, more-or-less typical American and Soviet family. The answer to this last question was sought by an American author visiting with a Soviet family, and a Soviet visiting with an American family. And what they sought, of course, was not a sampling. Rather, they wanted genuine insight into a new reality. They wanted to understand, to serve as representatives for readers at home.

And now the book is in the hands of readers in America and Russia. It is not my intention to interpose as some sort of guide to what you will find here. There are a few things, however, that I think should be explained. First, the authors did not intend to write exhaustive accounts. Indeed, how could one essay take in the breadth and depth of the historical development, the scientific

achievements, or the geographical diversity of a great country? What account could be given of art or sport, both so multifaceted and limitless? And so the authors chose what was closest to them, what they saw as most important or typical. They went looking for the living soul of a society. And I think that through the branches so carefully sketched by these authors, readers will be able to make out the sky unaided, especially since our readers' acquaintance with one another certainly will not begin with this book. We have known each other a long while, and rather well at that. In the past few years, moreover, we have come to know each other better and better as we come closer together.

The individual and distinctive approach is also apparent in the illustrations to each chapter. The American essay on literature, for example, is illustrated with portraits of contemporary authors, while its Soviet counterpart features mostly portraits of our greatest authors from the past. Perhaps, too, that makes a kind of sense. In the last few years—and this is a major point made by Aleksandr Mulyarchik in his literature essay—we Russians have begun to regard our literature as an integral whole, not to be divided by historical or geographical borders, by political views, or by where the writers lived. The photographs illustrating the American essay on sport should probably be interpreted along the same lines. The subject there is baseball, America's most characteristic sport, but for us something totally new—although it bears some likeness to our Russian *lapta*.

Reading through the essays by American and Soviet authors, I cannot help feeling that the Americans convey greater well-being, self-confidence, and social calm, whereas the Soviets seem more critical, often sorely dissatisfied and uneasy about society's future. Let us ask openly, however: Is there anything surprising about that? From time to time, don't we wonder why, in various spheres of production and the life of society,

we are less well off than the Americans? And if our American colleagues have been silent about certain of their problems, might it not be because no one has ever kept them from speaking and writing about what is painful and bitter? It is only with the advent of *perestroika* and *glasnost*—words already needing no translation into English—that we have received the opportunity to speak out.

Let us also remember, by the way, that speaking or writing is not always the same as thinking. Among these Soviet authors, there is none who used to think otherwise than he or she does today. Our authors, perhaps, had no chance to say and write what they felt. They had to use whispers, shadings. This was not our fault, but our misfortune—a misfortune that has now, I believe, passed away from us forever.

The book is called *Openings*. To open is to discover, to disclose. In disclosing ourselves to ourselves, we also discover each other. Still, we do not want to claim to be first discoverers! That would be untrue. However impenetrable the iron curtains of different varieties seemed to the rulers and politicians, however low the mercury dropped in the Cold War, we always knew a good deal about America and Americans. And some of them, I feel sure, were not so ignorant about us. Think what we might about the rulers and politicians, in the nineteenth century—and even more so in the twentieth—our two great nations looked at each other with respect, interest, sympathy, and sometimes compassion, because we were able to distinguish the interests and character of ordinary people from those of the high and mighty. I am confident that, among the authors of this book, there is none who used to denigrate the other side because that was how the wind was blowing, and who has only now “seen the light” of *perestroika*. I mention this because I know many such among my fellow countrymen, just as I know many Americans I never trusted before, and do not now. I think of this book as an antidote to all the poison they have ever spread.



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*Edited by* ROBERT ATWAN  
*and* VALERI VINOKUROV

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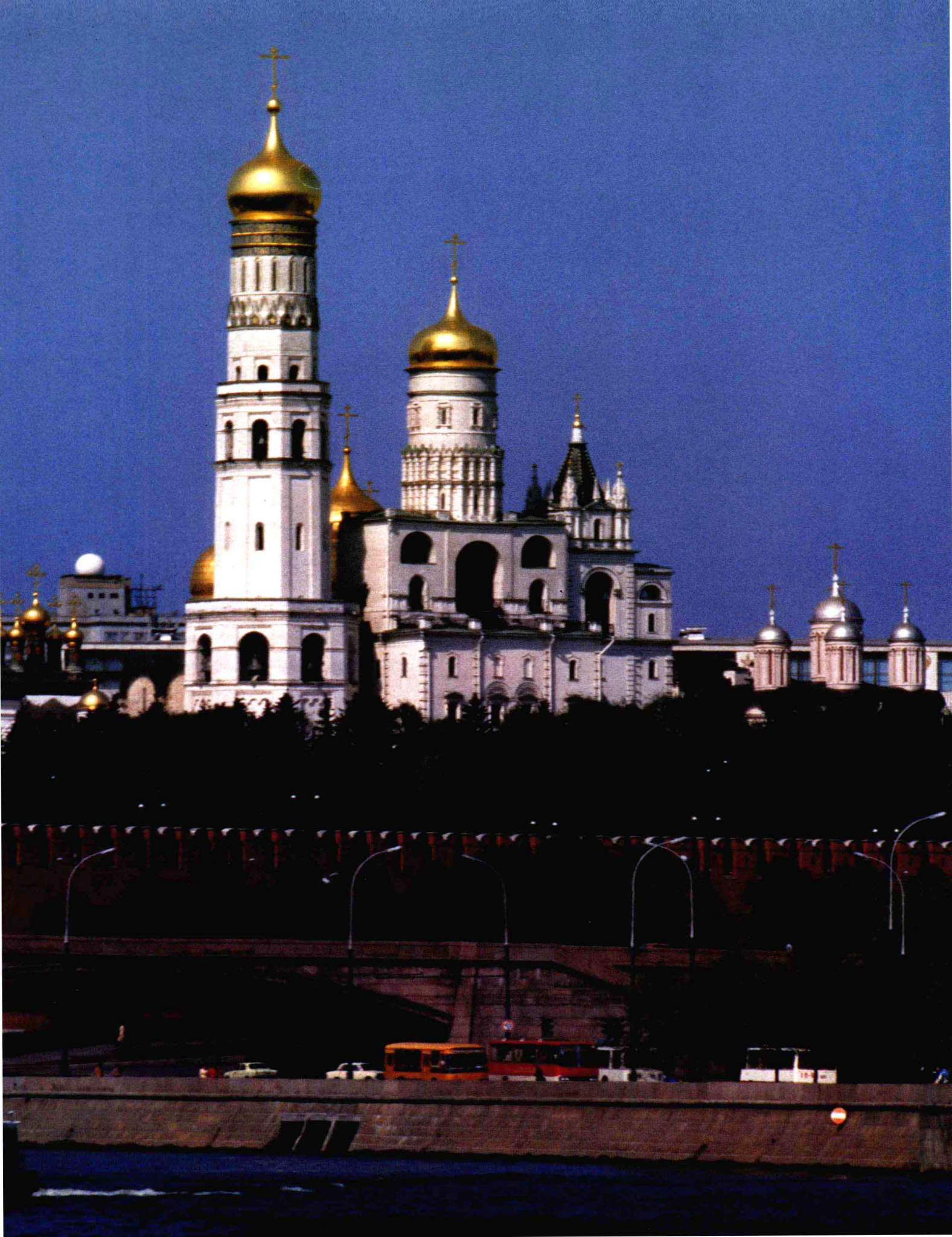


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