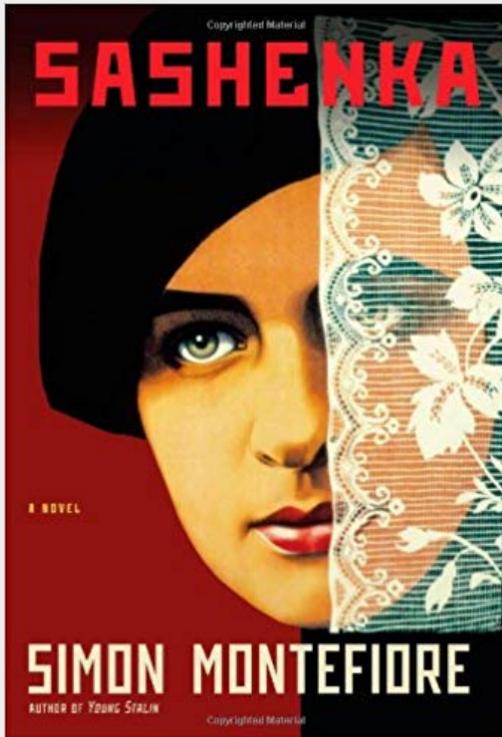


Sashenka: A Novel by Simon Sebag Montefiore



DOWNLOAD LINKS (Clickable)



ISBN: 1416595546

ISBN13: 978-1416595540

Author: Simon Sebag Montefiore

Book title: Sashenka: A Novel

Pages: 544

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; First Edition edition
(November 11, 2008)

Language: English

Category: Genre Fiction

Size PDF version: 1370 kb

Size ePUB version: 1201 kb

Size FB2 version: 1924 kb

Other formats: docx azw txt mbr

In early twentieth-century Russia, Sashenka Zeitlin becomes caught up in the revolutionary fervor destined to bring down the czar, as she deals with arrest and imprisonment by the czarist's secret police, the bloody battles that engulf the country under the brutal leadership of Stalin, marriage and motherhood, and a forbidden love affair. A first novel. 100,000 first printing.



Reviews of the *Sashenka: A Novel* by Simon Sebag Montefiore

1. I'm a Russian Occupant

I couldn't wait to read Sashenka. Simon Sebag Montefiore's prior

nonfiction works (Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar and Young Stalin) are, arguably, the last word on Stalin. He's better than Deutscher, Volkogonov, and Conquest--I doubt that Stalin will ever squirm under a more penetrating eye, and I hope Sebag Montefiore tackles Trotsky next.

At first glance, Sashenka is daunting to anyone who's ever contemplated writing a historical novel. Sashenka, the eponymously-titled story of a pampered young girl from St. Petersburg's Jewish aristocracy who becomes a rip-roarin' Red revolutionary, is jammed so full of precise historical details (right down to the peculiar vibrating chair that her father the Baron uses to aid his digestion) that any prospective historical novelist might well figure, "What's the use? No one'll ever do it better," and quit in despair.

But on second reading, Sashenka isn't nearly as threatening. Sebag Montefiore has peopled his heroine's family with stock images from the Russian Jewish Stereotype Store--the Idealistic Young Girl, the Parvenu Moneybags, the Grim Revolutionary, the Saintly Old Rebbe and his Equally Saintly Old Rebbetzin, the Gladhanding Bon Vivant (hey, Mr. Sebag Montefiore? Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Family Moskat* called. It wants its character back) and most offensively, the Bored and Debauched Rich Housewife, a type already used to better effect by Sholem Asch and Isaak Babel. It's tough to believe that one family could contain all these stereotypes, but this one manages.

Sadly, Sebag Montefiore has substituted rich detail for actual character development, because none of these stereotypes ever really comes alive. Including, sadly, Sashenka herself. Which is too bad. Because I think if I got to know her better, I'd have had a real crush on her. She's pretty hot, in a Red sort of way.

The second part of the book, though, not all the rich detail in the world can save from sheer implausibility and a mawkish ending where everyone in the world is reunited more or less happily. Except for (spoilers deleted), because she croaked years ago. Oh well. Too bad, because she was pretty hot. In a Red sort of way.

Sashenka is great as worm's eye view history. To read it is to learn gobs about 20th century Russia. As a novel, it's shlocky. The literary devices are just a leetle too well-worn (Sashenka's actions, quel horreur, echo her detested mother's!), and the story, once it leaps to the present day, kind of lurches aimlessly off into silliness. Apparently, once he could no longer use all the rich historical details at his command, Sebag Montefiore sort of lost interest.

Mr. Sebag Montefiore, if we ever meet, please don't punch me in the face. I don't mean to be a shmuck, but I like you a heck of a lot better as an

historian than a novelist. Now, can we talk about that biography of Trotsky? Because I'd climb mountains to read that.

2. Hrguig

Found this for only \$1 [thankfully] at a library sale; looked at Amazon reviews before buying and oh, my, were any above 2 generous stars wrong. A dollar thrown away. Must admit my fault re decision to purchase as, on the Amazon page for the book there was a tip off: "In the bestselling tradition of Doctor Zhivago and Sophie's Choice, a sweeping epic of Russia from the last days of the Tsars to today's age of oligarchs -- by the prizewinning author of..." "Bestselling" and "sweeping tradition" plus "prizewinning author" should have been neon light alerts to drop the book and walk away. I noted the warnings, did not heed [as in watching a thriller and wanting to yell at the young woman, "Don't you hear the change in background music? Don't open that door!"]. Shame on me. Ditto for noting that Amazon had lumped "Doctor Zhivago" and "Sophie's Choice" together into a single genre. Shame on me, again. Enough mea culpas. This book is just awful. After about two pages that read okeydokey, I began the rest of the book. And I had two thoughts: [1] that this was just a hideous translation from the Russian [of course not, silly] or [2] that I had mysteriously gotten a book with the same title and by the same author that was not the one that the 4-5 star Amazon reviewers had read [of course not, silly]. Then, I got to thought #3: it was written as a send-up/take-off/parody of a "great" Russian novel. Tolstoy & Co. rolling in their graves. The language, descriptors, style, pace, dialogue are abysmal, at best. I am a certified bookaholic and rarely even donate books to the library. Have thrown away a few in my life, which I will do in this case - I want to save someone else from forking out \$1.

3. Lanadrta

This novel has everything - story, history (true), plot (several), suspense, love, hate, violence and so many unforgettable characters that only the greatest director could use it to make either a memorable miniseries or

the splendid movie it richly deserves (think of David Lean's Doctor Zhivago.) It is a first novel by an eminent historian whose specialty has been Josef Vissarionovich Stalin and his times; and it is a superb first novel.

Written in three sections or parts - St. Petersburg 1916, Moscow 1939 and then the Caucasus, London and Moscow in 1994 - it covers The Revolution of 1916-17, the Stalin Era and, finally, in that third section it looks back over the shoulder to contrast the taken-for-granted world of Communism of 1939 with that of the world in 1994. It is a superb story superimposed on what is at bottom an historical indictment of the absolute but well meaning evil which the Bolsheviks imposed on the Russian people in the name of The Communist Party and everything it represented. Death and dishonor were always present. Nothing was what it seemed.

As Montefiore has one of his characters put it "One shouldn't think of those Bolsheviks as modern politicians. They were religious fanatics. Their Marxism was fanatical; their fervor was semi-Islamic; and they saw themselves as members of a secret military-religious order like the medieval Crusaders or the Knights Templar. They were ruthless, amoral and paranoid. They believed that millions would have to die to create their perfect world. Family, love and friendship were nothing compared to the holy grail, People died of gossip in Stalin's court...Secrecy was everything" (Page 399 And so it was. Millions did die; and some of them were the people of this book.

Now to the book:

Were I going to put this sweeping book to the screen I would open with a scene in 1994 in which a most attractive young woman in a small village in the North Caucasus opens a letter to find that she has been selected from among many other young historians by Academician Boris Beliakov, Director of the Department of Modern Studies at the School of /Humanities in Moscow University to fill a six month job - all expenses paid - researching family history (lost persons) in London and Moscow. She is Katinka (Ekaterina Valentinovna) Kinsky, the lovely daughter of Valentin Kinsky the respected town doctor.

Then I would show her meeting in an exclusive hotel in London with Pasha Getman, a Russian oligarch, from Odessa, and his mother Roza Getman, an attractive widow from Odessa in her late fifties, and where Roza tells Katinka that she was adopted child of the Revolution and wants to find her true family. Pasha says expense is no object; and Katinka goes back to Moscow to see what she can find in the old files

Next scene: Katinka is in Moscow in the stacks of the old records of the Stalin era and she is reading a report of an Okrana Captain of Gendarmes

named Peter de Sagan, dated November 1916, and having to do with his meeting with a beautiful young revolutionary in St. Petersburg carrying the name of Comrade Snowfox. And now the camera does a "resolve" and it is.....

St Petersburg. Deep winter. 1916. The Neva is frozen. There are breadlines. People are hungry. The war is going badly. The Tsar is at the front, but the Empress in Pitir is engrossed by Rasputin the mad monk and living as she always has, surrounded by dissolute, craven courtiers, one of whom is Baroness Ariadna (Finkel Abramovna) Zeitlin, wife of Baron Samuil Moiseivich Zeitlin, a wealthy banker and industrialist, and mother of school girl Sashenka (Alexandra Sanuilovna) Zeitlin a lovely teenager who is by day a student at the exclusive Smolny Institute but who by night is a loyal revolutionary known to her fellows (including Stalin, Vinoviev and Molotov - Comrade Lenin not yet having arrived at the Finland Station) as Comrade Snowflake.

On the surface St. Petersburg society is as luxurious as always. There are balls, bright lights, great restaurants; but Sashenka and her loyal friends are doing their work. Soon there are shots at night and then the Revolution begins. Sashenka by now is working in the office, typing articles for Comrade Lenin. She has been arrested by Captain de Sagan but released and is now protected by Comrades Hercules Satinov and a young man named Ivan "Vanya" Politsyn. - Both of whom we will meet later.

Skiping along. Book Two - Moscow 1939. Sashenka is married to Vanya and is a loyal Party worker. She's the editor of what in America would be the Ladies Home Journal. Vanya is in the Directorate of Security (one of it's operatives - forcing confessions?). They have two beautiful children - Volya (Snowy) five and Karlmarx (Carlo) three and a half. They are among the Party elite - a dacha, car with chauffeur, best schools. There's a tea where Sashenka entertains the party elite, including Stalin.

Then Sashenka, who has always been a Party Faithful and faithful to her husband falls head over heels in love with Benjamin (Benya) Goldman, a writer who has a sense of gaiety, a sense of humor which is so completely lacking in the Party Faithful; and there is an affair. However, there is a slight problem. In his capacity with the Commissariat Vanya had suspected the affair and has taped a meeting between Sashenka and Benya. The taping alone would not involve State Security but there's an accidental glitch which brings the matter to the attention of State Security and both Vanya and Sashenko, always loyal Party members are under immediate suspicion with the near certainty of arrest and the horror which always follows. But what will they do with the children? The common policy is that children of "enemies of the state" are either killed along with their parents or split up and sent to adoption agencies in far

parts of the country.

Enter their friend Comrade Hercules Satinov who arranges for the children to be adopted through better means into better homes and saves them. But no one can save Vanya and Sashenka. We know Vanya is shot. Sashenka, however, is brutalized and at the close of book two eventually confesses to being a spy.

(An aside: Montefiore is particularly expert in Stalin's methods and his description of the Lubyanka prison and the means used to extort confessions is great reading - if you like that sort of thing - but one can't help wondering why these people confessed as they did.)

Now back to third book: Describing everything with a wealth of detail Montefiore takes us inside the archives of the Stalinist era where Katinka is examining documents in her attempt to find the parents of Roza. What she finds and how she finds it, who she meets from the past - particularly the 93 year old now-Marshal Hercules Satinov - makes this part of the book an exciting story and a literary detective story of the first magnitude and provides a great, surprising and satisfying ending. I won't tell you about it here. You have to read the book.

A great book, great story; and it will be - or should be - a great movie!
Read it!

Related PDF to **Sashenka: A Novel** by Simon Sebag Montefiore

4. [Russia 1917: The Kornilov Affair](#)
5. [The House of Special Purpose](#)
6. [The State and Revolution in the Twentieth-Century: Major Social Transformations of Our Time](#)
7. [Don't Ask Forever: My Love Affair With Elvis: A Washington Woman's Secret Years With Elvis Presley](#)
8. [The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia](#)
9. [Death of a Tyrant \(Stalin's Terror\)](#)
10. [Twentieth Century Russia \(Rand McNally history series\)](#)
11. [The End of the Affair \(Twentieth Century Classics\)](#)
12. [Citizen's Arrest: The Law of Arrest, Search, and Seizure for Private Citizens and Private Police](#)
13. [Relic of Empire \(Forbidden Borders #2\)](#)