



Molotov's Magic Lantern: Travels in Russian History

Rachel Polonsky

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When the British journalist Rachel Polonsky moves to Moscow, she discovers an apartment on Romanov Street that was once home to the Soviet elite. One of the most infamous neighbors was the ruthless apparatchik Vyacheslav Molotov, a henchman for Stalin who was a participant in the collectivizations and the Great Purge—and also an ardent bibliophile. In what was formerly Molotov's apartment, Polonsky uncovers an extensive library and an old magic lantern—two things that lead her on an extraordinary journey throughout Russia and ultimately renew her vision of the country and its people.

In *Molotov's Magic Lantern*, Polonsky visits the haunted cities and vivid landscapes of the books from Molotov's library: works by Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Akhmatova, and others, some of whom were sent to the Gulag by the very man who collected their books. With exceptional insight and beautiful prose, Polonsky writes about the longings and aspirations of these Russian writers and others in the course of her travels from the Arctic to Siberia and from the forests around Moscow to the vast steppes. A singular homage to Russian history and culture, *Molotov's Magic Lantern* evokes the spirit of the great artists and the haunted past of a country ravaged by war, famine, and totalitarianism.

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