

Robert Conquest, 1917–2015

Robert Conquest, a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, died on August 3, 2015, at the age of ninety-eight. His accomplished wife Elizabeth Neece Conquest, whom he married in 1979, was a rock of support for Conquest and took care of him as his health deteriorated over the last decade or so of his life. Typically, he was finishing another book—in this case his memoirs, *Two Muses*—when he passed away. His astonishingly prolific output included twenty-one books on Soviet and international affairs, eight volumes of poetry, scores of essays, reviews, translations, and commentary, and several edited anthologies of verse.

Conquest was one of the most widely acclaimed and honored historians and writers of our times, with a host of awards, including the 1993 Jefferson Lectureship, the highest award given to a humanist by the United States government, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in 2005. The Polish, Estonian, and Ukrainian governments gratefully awarded him national medals of honor.

He was an advisor to Henry Martin “Scoop” Jackson and Daniel Moynihan on Soviet affairs; his counsel was particularly important to Margaret Thatcher (he was responsible for parts of her famous February 1976 “Iron Lady” speech) and Ronald Reagan. He later noted that he was less interested in the left or right of the political spectrum than in getting the story straight about the Soviet Union and especially its Stalinist period.

For nearly two decades, Conquest worked in his cluttered, book-crammed office located on the second floor of Hoover’s Lou Henry Hoover Building. Not surprisingly, he was an extremely disciplined writer, allotting himself a daily quota of at least one thousand publishable words or four typed pages, double-spaced. Once he had met this quota, he then happily moved on to other pursuits. He did most of his writing at home in the morning. In the afternoon, he was in his office in the Lou Henry building, taking notes on the unending supply of mainly Russian-language books that his diligent research assistants delivered to him, chatting with colleagues, talking on the phone with editors, or dealing with problems affecting the Russian and Eastern European Collection of the Hoover Library and Archives, for which he served as scholar-curator.

Conquest treated his colleagues the same way he did his staff; he was infallibly polite, ready to engage, modest, and cordial. He also had, as Robert Service observed, “an impish sense of humor,” which was much appreciated by all. He loved a good laugh. Broadly read and learned, Conquest was fascinated by such diverse subjects as science fiction and Roman Britain, about which he knew a great deal.

Conquest’s scholarly work was extraordinary in a number of ways. He was an indefatigable “truth seeker,” someone who chased down new materials in the most diverse and sometimes obscure Soviet journals and memoirs. He assiduously read footnotes and sought out the sources that others had cited. He was a passionate advocate of using émigré memoirs and accounts, making the case in response to periodic critiques of his method that one could compare their insights with other materials and find ways to verify that what seemed like unlikely facts and events were devastatingly true. He frequently wrote about the crucial importance of “imagination” in dealing with Soviet historical reality, and he was blessed with that quality as very few others were.

This gift of insight came in part, no doubt, from Conquest’s 1937–38 flirtation with communism and the Communist Party at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he gradu-

ated with degrees in politics, philosophy, and economics. More crucially, it came from encounters with the brutal realities of the communist takeover of Bulgaria at the end of the war and beginning of the peace, when he was a member of the British Foreign Office after having served in the infantry. After the Bulgarian experience, he returned to London to work in the Foreign Office's Information Research Department, where he honed his skills as a Soviet analyst until he entered academia in 1956.

The list of his seminal works certainly starts with *Power and Policy in the U.S.S.R.: The Study of Soviet Dynasties* (St. Martin's Press, 1961), one of the first systematic attempts to think about Soviet politics in the context of the struggle for succession behind the Kremlin dictatorship. In this book, Conquest was among the first (and best) practitioners of the art of historical Kremlinology. Long before documents on the period were published, Conquest was able to discern the character of the political struggle over Iosif Stalin's mantle, which resulted in the trial and execution of Lavrentii Beria and the ascendancy of Nikita Khrushchev.

The most widely acclaimed of his works was the remarkable *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*, initially published by Macmillan in 1968 and then reissued by Oxford University Press as *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* in 1990 and 1998. This classic of Soviet history was the first and is still the best account of the fearsome Stalinist repressions, trials, killings, and torture of the 1930s that permanently disfigured Soviet society, politics, and culture. It was widely read in dissident circles and later serialized in *Neva* during glasnost, when Conquest made frequent visits to the Soviet Union. We call the period the Great Terror because of his work.

Conquest's study of the Ukrainian terror-famine (Holodomor) of 1932–33, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (Oxford, 1986), continues to exert a profound influence on Soviet and Ukrainian history and historiography. In this work, Conquest created another masterpiece of modern historical writing by carefully reconstructing the story of the Ukrainian tragedy from émigré memoirs, scattered articles in the Soviet press, and accounts of foreign diplomats and visitors.

Russian and east European studies owes a huge debt to Robert Conquest for pioneering avenues of research that others were hesitant to tread. But more than that, he was able to write about the Soviet experience—especially the Stalinist period—in splendid prose that both engaged his readers and taught them about a world that initially seemed distant and alien. He will be dearly missed.

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Ekaterina Iur'evna Genieva, 1946–2015

Ekaterina Iur'evna Genieva died on July 9, 2015, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Her many friends worldwide called her Katia, and that is how I shall remember her, simply as Katia, my friend and colleague.

The Foreign Literature Library in Moscow, founded in 1923 by Margarita Ivanovna Rudomino, served the Soviet state in both protecting and controlling foreign literature. The library was a wonderful workplace for students of foreign literatures and languages, a legitimate Soviet institution where they could conduct research on often-forbidden subjects, and a destination for students, scholars, and the general public