Q&A with Paullina Simons
Author of THE SUMMER GARDEN

***The Summer Garden* is the final book in your trilogy that started with *The Bronze Horseman* and *Tatiana and Alexander*. Did you set out to write the story in three parts, or did it morph into a trilogy at a certain point?**

I would say that I was drawn to Russia and World War II and Leningrad because of my own personal history. I haven't so far written books about any other period in history. The story was too large for one book, but I didn't know that until I wrote the first book. I set out to write just one. When I had finished, it was my husband who said, you cannot leave it like this, you must write another book. He wanted the sequel. And then my publishers wanted the trilogy. Now that all three have been written, it's almost impossible to imagine a time in which only the first one existed.

You were born in Russia but have lived in the United States since you were ten. How do both cultures factor into these books?

In these three books, the contrast between the worlds of Russia and the US is stark, and there is much made of the differences not just in culture but in all things pertaining to human life—procreation, home-building, nation-building, the function of the military, daily existence, and the development of romantic love.

You're a mother of four children, and in *The Summer Garden*, Tatiana and Alexander have a son. Did motherhood affect your decision to have your characters start a family?

My motherhood didn't really affect my decision for my characters. It did allow me to write about it as if I knew what it was. But for Tatiana and Alexander, it seemed like a natural progression for them, pregnancy was a logical continuation of what was happening to them in the first book, *The Bronze Horseman*. The same was true for *Tully*, my first novel. Her life choices naturally resulted in the consequences of those choices (i.e. pregnancy).

How would you categorize the three books, *The Bronze Horseman*, *Tatiana and Alexander*, and *The Summer Garden*?

I think of these three books as one story about a Great Love rooted in history. The first one ends in tragedy, the second one is action-adventure, the third one is like the Odyssey, with all the conflict and drama and intermittent comedy of a fully lived life. All three novels depict war in real-time painful detail. One of them deals graphically with the starvation and blockade of a major European city. One of them takes a profound look at the workings of a passionate, troubled marriage. But what interested me then in writing them and what continues to fascinate me as I think of stories for the future is the depiction of an intensely personal journey of people we get to intimately know against the backdrop of transformative cataclysmic political and historical world events.

What writers are you inspired by? What are some of your favorite books?

I'm inspired by true stories written well; I really like reading biographies and memoirs. Steve Martin, Mia Farrow, Marianne Faithful, and Truman Capote are some celebrity standouts. I'm also in awe of Dostoyevsky as a writer because he's got a fantastic ability to make his deeply flawed characters come to three-dimensional life and make the most profound of themes (the tortured arrival of a doubting human being to faith) accessible, thought-provoking, and thrilling. Some of the books I loved reading include: *Les Miserables* a long time ago, *Queen Margot, The Three Musketeers, East of Eden, The Godfather, Shopgirl, In Cold Blood, 1984, Triumph of Justice, Witness, The Choirboys, Portrait of a Lady, Brothers Karamazov,* and *Ordinary People*, to name a few.