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Russian Gay and Lesbian Literature

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The history of gay and lesbian literature in Russia is closely tied to the troubled evolution of Russian erotic culture as a whole. Erotic literature developed relatively late in Russia, hampered by the absence of a broad-based secular culture before the eighteenth century. Influential cultural movements, such as the Renaissance with its celebration of the human form, had largely passed Russia by, and it was in fact illegal for Russian artists to paint nudes well into the eighteenth century. As Alexei Lalo argues in his study of libertinage in Russia, "nineteenth-century and modern Russian literature and culture are characterized by an almost complete absence of vocabulary for dealing with erotic life within social contexts" (1). This discursive silence had an understandably profound effect on the evolution of gay and lesbian literature.

The enormous gap between the literary culture of Russia's educated elite and the oral culture of the folk also shaped the evolution of gay literature in fundamental ways. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the two traditions developed along largely separate paths. The language of the Russian folk as reflected in oral tales and anecdotes was often sexually explicit, but crude, reflecting a preoccupation with what Mikhail Bakhtin referred to as "the lower bodily strata." Moreover, the sexual freedom of the Russian peasantry and, in particular, the widespread practice of sodomy as documented by foreign observers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had no corollary in Russian elite literature, which remained for most of its history silent on the topic of sex. These general characteristics help to explain some of the unique features of Russian literary representations of homosexuality, specifically the persistent association of homosexuality with spirituality, aestheticism, and asexuality. They also help to explain the significant role translation played in introducing depictions of same-sex desire into modern Russian literature.

This discursive silence, reinforced in the twentieth century by the Soviet regime, placed enormous barriers in the path of development of Russian gay and lesbian culture. Homosexual references were extracted from or altered

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in literary works, and the homosexuality of famous historical and cultural figures was denied or dismissed. Many Russian scholars and writers still reject the very idea of gay literature and of homosexuality as a viable interpretive lens through which to study literature. As literary critic Mikhail Zolotonosov expressed it in his review of Kostya Rotikov's "gay" history of St. Petersburg, which appeared in 1997: "There is no such thing as homosexual literature, neither fiction nor folklore, nor any other type, and there cannot be. . . . [T]here are no means available for the construction of some particular literary form on the part of homosexual authors" (186). Because homosexuality continues to be seen by many as non-Russian, gay and lesbian writers have had to struggle, not only for the right to speak as gay and lesbian individuals, but also for the right to speak as *Russian* gays and lesbians. The relationship of homosexuality to Russian cultural citizenship is a theme that runs throughout the history of Russian gay and lesbian literature.

In the face of this discursive silence, the enormous contribution Western scholars have made to our understanding of Russian gay and lesbian literature over the past thirty-five years cannot be underestimated – Simon Karlinsky's groundbreaking work stands out in this regard. That scholarship, however, was shaped to some degree by the polarized antinomies of Cold War politics and the rigid identity categories promoted by the early gay rights movement. The lifting of censorship restrictions, the opening of archives, and the decentralization of publishing following the fall of the Soviet Union, combined with the growing sophistication of global queer studies, have allowed scholars in both Russia and the West to reevaluate the history of Russian gay and lesbian literature and its contribution to Russian erotic culture.

Gay Poetry in the Golden Age

Simon Karlinsky and others have located the origins of Russian gay literature in the Middle Ages based on accounts of male-male love depicted in the lives of the Orthodox saints, Boris and Gleb, and Moses of Hungary ("Russia's" 1). This brand of historiography, based largely on the unsubstantiated claims of journalist and philosopher Vasilii Rozanov (1856–1919), assumes a willingness to read intense homosocial bonds of another time as homosexual. More reliable evidence suggests that gay literature in Russia has its roots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, among the Western-looking Russian elite of the two capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The first work of gay literature in the Russian language was very likely the translation of Sappho's second ode by Gavril Derzhavin in 1780. Although

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many translators erased the lesbian thematics of the poem by redefining the lyric voice as masculine, the translations by Derzhavin (1780), Kornei Zhukovskii (1806), and Aleksei Merzliakov (1826) preserved the female gender markers. Original gay-themed literary works appeared in the early nineteenth century during the period commonly referred to as the Golden Age of Russian literature, but these works, largely adaptations, still relied heavily on foreign models. The popularity of ancient Greek culture and contemporary Arabic culture(s) at the time made visible the practice of man-boy love through the lyric poetry it inspired. The first complete edition of the *Greek Anthology*, containing the homoerotic poems collected by Strato of Sardis, was published in 1764, and a collection of Arabic poetry, including several homoerotic works, appeared in French translation in 1819 under the title *Anthologie Arabe: Ou, Choix de poésies arabes inédites, traduites pour la première fois en français* (*Arabic Anthologie: Or, an Unedited Selection of Arabic Poems Translated for the First Time into French*); it was republished in 1828.

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), influenced by the vogue for ancient Greek and Arabic poetry, became one of the first Russian writers to experiment with homosexual thematics. Most notable in this regard are his "Podrazhenie Arabskomu" ("An Imitation of the Arabic" [1835]) and the epigrams published in 1836, clearly patterned after ancient Greek verse in both form and content. Pushkin addresses "An Imitation of the Arabic" to a "Sweet lad, tender lad," with whom the lyric subject shares "a sole insurgent fire" (29). That Pushkin is speaking here of homosexuality and not simply of strong homosocial bonds is revealed in the second stanza: "I do not fear the gibes of men." In his Greek-style epigram "On the Statue of a Player at Svaika" Pushkin extols the physical beauty of Russian peasant athletes and does not shy away from physicality, as in the final two lines of the poem: "Here's a fitting companion for you, O Discobulus! Worthy, by my oath, / When sporting's done with, to rest beside you, locked in amicable embrace" (Green 32).

Another source of gay-themed literature was the creation of all-male institutions for the education and training of young boys and men in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This created a situation that fostered homosexual relations. It also increased awareness of homosexuality among the Russian elite. Overall, these factors produced a rather tolerant attitude toward homosexuality in elite circles – indeed, several prominent homosexuals in Russian high society of the time led lives that were semi-open, such as Minister of Education Sergei Uvarov (1786–1855), memoirist Filip Vigel' (1786–1856), and Prince M.A. Dondukov-Korsakov (1794–1869), vice president of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Pushkin's humorous references to the

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homosexuality of his Russian friends and contemporaries reveal an attitude of bemused tolerance.

Those all-male establishments are also responsible for the homoerotic poems of Russia's great Romantic writer Mikhail Iurevich Lermontov (1814–41). Two verses referred to as his Hussar poems, "Ode to the John" ("Oda k nuzhniku" [1834]) and "To Tiessenhausen" ("Tizengauzenu" [1834]), date from his time in the St. Petersburg School of Cavalry Cadets but were first published only in 1879 in Geneva, in a volume entitled *Eros Russe: Russian Erotica Is not for Ladies* (*Eros Russe. Russkii eros ne dlia dam*). Lightly pornographic, the first poem recounts how the young cadets would congregate in the lavatory, where they would smoke pipes and have sex with one another: "a kiss resounds through the silence, / And a reddening cock has risen like a hungry tiger; / Now it is being groped by an immodest hand" (Lermontov 37). In the second poem, the poet cautions a charming and popular schoolmate not to make such free use of his powers of sexual attraction for there will come a time when

All of those who now are begging
At your feet, stretched on the ground,
Will not quench your melancholy
With the sweet dew of a kiss –
Although then just for a cock's tip
You would gladly give your life. (37)

Translation at the time continued to provide a protected venue for the expression of homosexual desire, and it was a venue open to the many members of Russia's elite who were fluent in French and German. Ivan Dmitriev (1760–1837), minister of justice under Alexander I, for example, *queered* his translations of two fables by Lafontaine, while in his original poetry he wore "a heterosexual mask" (Tyulenev 260). In an adaptation based on the poetry of Greek court poet Anacreon entitled "The Pigeon. An Imitation of Anacreon" ("Golubchik. Podrazenie Anakreonu"), the bird (gendered as male in Russian) explains that he is carrying letters from Anacreon to his boy Bathylos, "who attracts all hearts." Not only does he allude to an amorous relationship between the poet and the boy, the bird expresses his own intense feelings for his master (Tyulenev 262). In his translation of two fables by Lafontaine, "Les deux pigeons" ("Two Pigeons") and "Les deux amis" ("Two Friends"), Dmitriev queers the homosocial bonds celebrated in the tales. Dmitriev translates the formal French *vous* with the more familiar Russian *tu*, and where the two pigeons bid each other adieu "in tears" in the French source text,

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they exchange loving pecks in Dmitriev's version. Similarly, in "Two Friends" Dmitriev introduces physical contact between the two men that is not present in the source (Tyulenev 268). With the tightening of censorship restrictions in the 1840s, however, depictions of sensuality of any kind became more difficult to publish, and "the theme of carnal love disappeared from Russian poetry after Yazykov's and Pushkin's time" (Karlinsky, *Sexual* 213).

Homosexuality and Russian Realism

Although nineteenth-century Russian literature has a reputation for being "chaste," with its authors unwilling and, according to Lalo, unable to render erotic sexual content, homosexuality appears in interesting ways in the works of Russia's three greatest prose authors of that century: Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. In *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol* (1976), his revisionist take on Gogol's oeuvre, Karlinsky interpreted the major themes of his fiction against the backdrop of his personal writings and biographical facts as indicating the writer's closeted homosexuality: "An examination of Gogol's homosexual orientation within the context of his biography and writings may provide the missing key to the riddle of his personality" (vii). Among the evidence Karlinsky presented is the fact that Gogol's male characters often express a horror of marriage; his female characters are typically underdeveloped; and all of Gogol's most intense relationships appear to be with male friends. The unmarried Gogol died at the early age of forty-three from the effects of a strict ascetic regime intended to rid him of an unnamed "sin." Through his reinterpretation of Gogol's life and works, Karlinsky was able to place homosexuality at the very center of the Russian literary canon.

The theme of homosexuality in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky has been explored by a number of Western Slavists. Michael Katz lists eight characters in Dostoevsky's oeuvre whose depiction largely reflects contemporary stereotypes of homosexuals and who express either an attraction to a man or an aversion to women: Petrov and Aley in *Notes from the House of the Dead*, Netochka and Katya in the unfinished novel *Netochka Nezvanova*, Myshkin and Rogozhin in *The Idiot*, Apollon in *Notes from Underground*, and Smerdyakov in *Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's ambivalence toward homosexuality is suggested by the fact that some of these characters are portrayed in a distinctly positive light and others in a distinctly negative one. American Slavist Susanne Fusso argues in *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* that homosexuality assumes a compositional function only in *A Raw Youth* (*Podrostok* [1875]) through the main character Arkadii's interaction with male prostitute Petr Trishatov, "a 'pretty boy'

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dependent on male admirers for nice clothes and pocket money" (43). Most probably based on Dostoevsky's fellow prison inmate Sirotkin, mentioned in his quasi-autobiographical *Notes from the House of the Dead* (*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* [1862]), Trishatov is treated with compassion by Arkadii, the character "with whom the reader feels the greatest sympathy" (Fusso 53).

Dostoevsky's most famous contemporary, Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), also treated homosexuality in his writings. In his early autobiographical work, *Childhood* (*Detstvo* [1852]), he recounts the intense attraction he felt as a boy toward his friend Seryozha Ivin. That this intense physical and emotional bond was something akin to homosexual desire Tolstoy himself admitted in a diary entry: "I fell in love very often with men. . . . I was falling in love with men before I had a concept of pederasty; but even learning of it, the idea of the possibility of intercourse never entered my head" (Tolstoy 47). Later in life, however, he took a more "jaundiced view of all sexuality" (Moss 42) and of homosexuality in particular. His novel *Anna Karenina* (1874–77) features a homosexual couple whose appearance in the officer's mess inspires the heterosexual Vronsky with disgust.

One of the most overt depictions of homosexuality appeared in the story "Khamid and Manoli: A Cretan Greek Woman's Story about True Events of 1858" ("Khami i Manoli" [1869]) by Konstantin Leontiev (1831–91). Like many other prominent Russian gays of the nineteenth century, Leontiev was religious and politically conservative. By placing his story in a foreign country, Leontiev practiced a common strategy of the time that allowed allusions to homosexuality provided they were disguised in euphemism and Aesopian language and were situated in a far-off land. Leontiev's story takes place on the multicultural island of Crete, where a young and impoverished Greek boy, Manoli, enters into a relationship with a well-off Turk, Hamid, described in rather negative terms as crazy. Told from the point of view of his sister, the story offers little insight into their homosexual relationship, suggesting that Manoli's motivation was material. Moreover, the tale ends tragically for the two homosexual characters. Manoli is executed following his murder of Hamid.

Arguably the greatest contribution to Russian gay literature at the time was the publication in 1879 of the collection *Eros Russe: Russian Erotica Is not for Ladies* in Geneva in a limited print run of only 100. (The phrase "not for ladies" [ne dlia dam] may have been not only a play on the expression "ne dlia pechati" [not for publication] but also an allusion to the volume's homosexual content.) The volume, which included several gay-themed works – Lermontov's three Hussar poems as well as a lengthy pastiche of eighteenth-century French

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erotica, "The Passage of the Page: A Poem in Two Parts" ("Pokhozhdenie pazha. Poema v dvukh chastiakh" [1879]) – acquired great notoriety. "The Passage of the Page" was attributed to Aleksandr Shenin (1802–55), a librarian and then inspector of classes at the Pavlovsky Cadet Corps who was expelled from the school in 1854 for pederasty and died soon after, bedridden and blind. Based on accounts of Shenin, who is described in the memoirs of his contemporaries as bowlegged and ornery, it may be that he is not the real author of this light, witty, and thoroughly obscene poem. In any case, the poem, which has a total of twenty-four stanzas and is written in unrelenting iambic tetrameter, is a very humorous first-person account of one cadet's initiation into the culture of pederasty at the Cadet Corps. In the opening stanza the lyric subject proclaims:

> I'm sad to leave
> This pink house on Garden Street
> Where every form of vice did grow,
> Which housed our Sodom. (*Eros* 45)

The poem is accompanied by a short preface in which the author presents Russia as a country particularly accepting of homosexuality: "Pederasty has flourished in Russia from the earliest times. It is well known that Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Peter II had a propensity for this sin, not to mention the many historical figures and society people who were suspected of it" (154). The author goes on to explain that Russia enforced its antisodomy law less severely than its Western European counterparts and ends the preface with the statement: "Our finest poets – Pushkin, Griboedov, and Lermontov – have written pederastic verse" (154).

Another important event in the development of erotic literature in Russia was the publication of a collection of obscene Russian folk tales collected by A.N. Afanas'ev. Originally censored in Russia, the tales were eventually published in Geneva in 1872, with the help of Alexander Herzen, under the title *Russian Secret Fairy Tales* (*Russkie zavetnye skazki*). The bawdy tales included homosexual motifs, but the presentation of sex was crude and tended to separate body and soul, and so made little contribution to the development of high erotic literature. This reflects the findings of scholars, such as Igor Kon and Alexei Lalo, which suggest that Russian elite and folk cultures followed largely separate paths of development, especially where issues of sex were concerned.

In the latter years of the nineteenth century, Russian culture began to turn away from the serious, socially engaged realism of the previous decades. A

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sophisticated art-for-art's sake aesthetic emerged, presaging the explosion of artistic innovation in the first two decades of the twentieth century, referred to as the Silver Age of Russian literature. The poetry of Aleksei Apukhtin (1840–93) is typical of this time. A friend of composer Pytor Tchaikovsky, Apukhtin did not address gay themes overtly but often left his poems provocatively open to queer readings. For example, the poem "Son" ("The Dream") was about a Petersburg restaurant, "Medved" ("The Bear"), which was a hangout for gays, and the title of his poem "Dorogoi," dedicated to his one-time lover Tchaikovsky, could be pronounced either *dorógoi* (along the road) or *dorogói* (dear; masc.). The following verses can easily be read as a defiant statement of his choice to live as a gay man:

> I do not fear the anger of fate
> Nor the heavy chains, nor the vulgar judgment of people . . .
> I would give my whole life for a tender word.
> For a sweet, kind look from pensive eyes! (poem 252)

In this 1876 epigram, as in other lyric poems, such as "In the Theater," Apukhtin goes to rather great lengths to avoid specifying the sex of the addressee. Tchaikovsky set several of Apukhtin's lyrics to music, which became very popular romances.

Homosexuality in the Silver Age

Already by the end of the nineteenth century, almost all the conditions were in place for the emergence of a modern gay and lesbian literary tradition. Rapid industrialization moved masses of Russians from the countryside to the cities, where they lived beyond the supervision of their families and neighbors; in turn, boarding houses for young, single workers appeared in these cities, and features of a gay subculture began to emerge (see Healey 29–49). Moreover, many prominent members of Russian high society, including several grand dukes, carried on rather openly homosexual liaisons and, for the most part, avoided prosecution. In 1905, following the failed workers' revolt, restrictive censorship laws were lifted and questions of gender, sex, and sexuality were for the first time in Russian history discussed with relative freedom in the public sphere (see Engelstein).

The sources underpinning Russian discourse on homosexuality in the Silver Age were many and varied; some of them were borrowed and adapted from the West while others were more homegrown. Western decadent literature was one important foreign source, as was the emerging field of

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sexology, as it was developing in Germany, France, and England. Works by leading sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hershfeld, Otto Weininger, and, of course, Sigmund Freud were either translated or read in the original, bringing scientific views of gender and sexuality into the Russian public sphere. But there were Russian sources fueling contemporary discourse on sex, as well, such as the Russian religious sects known as the Khlysty, or "Flagellants," and the Skoptsy. Members of the former group were purported to engage in mass orgies and to practice homosexuality, while the latter group promoted self-castration. Moreover, these decades saw a resurgence in religious and mystical philosophy, as exemplified in the writings of Vladimir Soloviev, in which androgyny and homosexuality were used as spiritual tropes. These competing, and to some degree contradictory, models tended to overlap in the popular imagination, and this was reflected in many of the literary representations of homosexuality at that time.

One of the greatest events in the history of Russian gay literature was the publication in 1906 of the novel *Wings*, written by Russian poet and prose writer Mikhail Kuzmin (1872–1936), who was known as the "Russian Wilde." The novel recounts in the form of a bildungsroman the main character Ivan (Vanya) Smurov's symbolic journey toward acceptance of his homosexuality, taking him from St. Petersburg in part one to the Russian countryside in part two and to Italy in part three. And while Kuzmin creates a homosexual character who is largely free of shame, he also follows some of the stereotypes of his day by associating homosexuality with foreignness, as represented by the enigmatic Mr. Stroup, and by the fact that Vanya accepts his homosexuality in Italy, and with aesthetic refinement, as expressed in the "We are Helenes" speech overheard by Vanya in part one. Moreover, the aesthetic focus serves to attenuate any erotic tension in the novel. A *succès-de-scandale* in its time, Kuzmin's novel was only one of many novels that offered new, frank portrayals of sexual desire, such as Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin* (1907), Evdokia Nagrodskaia's *The Wrath of Dionysus* (1910), and Anastasiia Verbitskaia's *The Keys to Happiness* (1910–13). Kuzmin also wrote gay-themed short stories, such as "Aunt Sofiia's Sofa" ("Kushetka Teti Soni" [1907]) and "Virginal Victor" ("Devstvennyi Viktor" [1914]). But perhaps Kuzmin's greater contribution to Russian gay and lesbian literature was his poetry.

Kuzmin's poetry is marked by a formal sophistication combined with unabashed sensuality, as in the famous opening lines of his artistic manifesto "The Summer Affair" (1906): "Where shall I find a style to catch a stroll, Chablis on ice, a crisply toasted roll, / The agate succulence of cherries ripe?"

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(89). Most of Kuzmin's poetic cycles were inspired by his lover at the time, and, like contemporary homosexual activists in the West, he sought to dignify homosexuality through references to high culture and to ancient Greece and Rome. Antinous, the beautiful companion of the Roman emperor Hadrian, appears throughout Kuzmin's poetic cycle *Alexandrian Songs* (1905–08). Even contemporaries who frowned on the erotic content could not deny the formal sophistication of Kuzmin's verse. The influence of French erotic literature is evident in Kuzmin's most sexually explicit poems contained in the volume *Zanaveshennyi kartinki* (*Covered Pictures*). The slim volume of poems, accompanied by the erotic drawings of Vladimir Somov, was published in Amsterdam in 1920 in a circulation of only 307.

One of Russia's leading Symbolist poets, Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1945), together with his wife, Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal (1866–1907), hosted an artistic salon in their apartment, which was referred to as "the tower." Open-minded sexually, they were close friends with Kuzmin, who lived with them for several years. A bisexual, Ivanov produced several poems about his homosexual experiences, which were published in his 1911 book of verse, *Cors Ardens*, under the title "Eros." Zinovieva-Annibal made her own contribution to Russian gay literature with her novel *Thirty-Three Freaks* (1907) and her collection of stories *The Tragic Zoo* (1907). But as the titles suggest, these works presented lesbianism in an unflattering light as decadent and perverse. Equally unflattering was the depiction of homosexuality in Fiodor Sologub's novel *Petty Demon* (1907), which features a sadistic schoolmaster who sublimates his pederastic urges by whipping the young boys in his charge. Gay writer Riurik Ivniev's collection of poetry, *Self-Immolation* (1913), also presents homosexual desire in a decadent light.

So central were sexual issues to the public discourse of the time that leading writer and philosopher Vasilii Rozanov (1856–1919) published a treatise devoted exclusively to homosexuality, entitled *People of the Moonlight* (1911). In this work, Rozanov courageously exposes and condemns the sexophobia of Russian Orthodox culture, which was reflected in Tolstoy's promotion of abstinence, even in marriage, and in the bizarre beliefs of the Skoptsy, who practiced self-castration. This disgust with sex, Rozanov argues, is reflected in a loss of virility that is embodied in what he refers to as "spiritual homosexuals." These are men defined not by their attraction to other men but rather by their lack of attraction to women. While he acknowledges the existence of "real" homosexuals, most homosexuals, he suggests, are the products of Russia's sexophobic religious culture. In an attempt to prove that, he makes the

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argument that the medieval Russian saints Boris, Gleb, and Moses of Hungary were homosexual, based on the expression of mutual love in their vitae. For Rozanov, spiritual homosexuals were a symptom of the decadence of Russian civilization. Despite that, Western scholars have used Rozanov's assertions to suggest that Russia was more gay friendly than the West.

Rozanov's ideas on homosexuality were not as unique as they might at first appear. Evdokia Nagrodskaia (1866–1930), for example, in her sensational novel *The Wrath of Dionysus* (1910), suggests that women with masculine traits are "natural" lesbians while men with feminine traits are "natural" homosexuals. The solution proposed, however, is not that the women should pair up with women and the men with men, but that these natural lesbians should unite with natural homosexuals, which is precisely what happens with the heterosexual couple featured in the novel, Tanya and Ilya. But the passionless union leads Tanya to have an affair with the businessman Stark. Ilya forgives Tanya in the end, admitting that he had taken all the poetry out of her life. Like Rozanov, Nagrodskaia imagines homosexuality in strictly gendered terms, associating it essentially with asexuality.

Two of the most colorful figures of the Silver Age period were undoubtedly Nikolai Kliuev (1884–1937) and Zinaida Gippius (1869–1945). Both were striking examples of life creation, that is, the attempt of artists to merge their life and work. Married to philosopher and writer Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Gippius was a true gender-bender, often dressing as a man and adopting a male persona in some of her lyric poems. Diana Lewis Burgin contends that Gippius used a male persona "to mask the Lesbian desire of her female self" (185). Unlike the cosmopolitan Gippius, Kliuev came from the provinces from a family that belonged to the Khlysty sect. Even when he moved to St. Petersburg, he continued to dress in peasant garb as a kind of drag. Kliuev was one of several "peasant" poets of the time, but his work was also influenced by the more refined Symbolist poets. Imbued with a robust sensuality, Kliuev's poetry mixes high culture references with peasant motifs, as in the poem "That Fellow with the Green Eyes Smells of Ginger and Mint" (1924). His celebrated collection *Brotherly Songs* (1912) contains a number of homoerotic lyrics. He was the friend, mentor, and probable lover of Sergei Esenin, who dedicated poems to Kliuev. Both Kliuev and Esenin died tragic deaths in the Soviet Union. Esenin committed suicide, leaving a note written in his own blood. Kliuev was exiled to Siberia, where he eventually died. All of Kliuev's unpublished writings, which he had left with an ex-lover, Nikolai Arkhipov, were lost when Arkhipov himself was arrested and sent to the gulag.

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The Soviet Period and the Russian Diaspora

Despite the lifting of antisodomy laws following the October Revolution and the anticlerical position of the new Soviet leaders, the cause of homosexual liberation was not embraced by the regime. The last hurrah of gay-themed literature in Soviet Russia was the miraculous publication in 1929 of Kuzmin's collection *The Trout Breaks the Ice*. This was one year after the publication of Konstantin Vaginov's novel *Goat's Song* (1928), which featured the gay character Kostya Rotikov. Lesbian poet and one time lover of Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941), Sophia Parnok (1885–1933), also found it increasingly difficult to publish her work in the 1920s. Her first collection of verse, *Poems* (1916), written during her affair with Tsvetaeva, was a positive, nondecadent expression of lesbian desire. She was unable to publish her original work after 1928. Marina Tsvetaeva's poem "Podruga" ("Girlfriend"), inspired by her affair with Parnok, was not published until 1979, in the United States. Poet Riurik Ivniev (1891–1981), too, ceased publishing homoerotic verse in the Soviet period, and his pre-Revolutionary poetry was never republished.

With Stalin's consolidation of power in the late 1920s, the regime began to regulate more strictly what it considered to be "nonnormative" behavior. In 1934, homosexuality was criminalized at the same time that abortion was made illegal. But homosexuality had already disappeared from Russian literature by this time. It would also disappear from the Soviet press and as an object of academic study. Homoerotic references in classical poetry were excised or changed, and Kuzmin's final public reading of his poetry in Leningrad in 1928 was the "last demonstration of Leningrad's homosexuals" (Malmsted and Bogomolov 349).

Unable to publish their own work, writers like Kuzmin and Parnok turned to translation to support themselves, often choosing works through which they might continue to express their aesthetic and thematic concerns. Kuzmin translated Shakespeare's sonnets and Apulieus's *Golden Ass*. One of Kuzmin's intimates, translator Ivan Likhachev (1902–72), who was imprisoned after Kuzmin's death, translated Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* from memory while in the gulag. The two best-known gay writers of the Soviet period, Evgenii Kharitonov (1941–81) and Gennadii Trifonov (1945–2011), began to write during the Thaw period under Khrushchev. Nevertheless, they were able to circulate their work only in *samizdat*. (The translation of James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* by Gennadii Shmakov [1944–88] suffered a similar fate in the 1970s.) Kharitonov's unpublished collection of gay-themed stories, *Under House Arrest*, includes "One Boy's Story: How I Got Like That" and "The Stove,"

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two of his most popular works. Trifonov was arrested and sent to Siberia for his unpublished collection of homoerotic verse entitled *Tblisi by Candlelight*; in 1978 Trifonov sent a courageous letter from prison to the journal *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, defending Italian gay activist Angelo Pezzano and advocating for gay rights. The letter was first published in the United States.

Many other gay, lesbian, and bisexual Russians fled the Soviet Union after the October Revolution and took up residence in various metropolitan centers around the world. Marina Tsvetaeva emigrated to Paris, as did poet Anatolii Steiger (1907–44); poet Valery Pereleshin (1913–92) emigrated first to China, then to Brazil, where he spent the rest of his life. Although the Russian diaspora was only nominally less sexophobic than the Soviet regime, these poets were able to continue working and to find venues in which to publish their work. Pereleshin's magnum opus, *Ariel*, which consists of 169 classical sonnets documenting an epistolary romance Pereleshin had with a man in Moscow, was published in Germany in 1976. Gennadii Shmakov, a translator and balletomane, emigrated to New York City. Shmakov also brought new scholarly attention to the work of Mikhail Kuzmin, who had been all but forgotten in Soviet Russia.

Post-Soviet Russia

The lifting of censorship restrictions, the decriminalization of homosexuality, and the influx of Western NGOs in the early 1990s resulted in new visibility for Russia's sexual minorities and the promise of an LGBT activist movement. All the trappings of an open gay and lesbian subculture appeared in Russia's largest cities: clubs, magazines, publishing houses, and activist organizations. Moreover, the founding of Russia's first gay Web site, gay.ru, gave provincial gays and lesbians access to gay-themed books and journals. Although most of these venues were short-lived and depended on financial support from the West, they nevertheless made possible the publication of works by new Russian gay and lesbian writers and of translations of Western gay literature, as well as the republication of works by Soviet and pre-Revolutionary writers that had been repressed by the regime. Some of the most striking events in post-Soviet publishing involved the publication of overtly gay-themed works, such as Kuzmin's frank and witty diaries (1998, 2000) and Kostya Rotikov's gay "history" of St. Petersburg, *Drugoi Peterburg* (*The Other Petersburg* [1997]). (Kostya Rotikov is the pseudonym of Iurii Piriutko [1946–].) Russia's first anthology of gay literature, *Liubov' bez granits* (*Love without Borders* [1997]) also appeared at this time; it featured Russian writers – Lermontov, Kuzmin,

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Zinovieva-Annibal, Ivnev, Esenin, Limonov, and Kharitonov, several of whom were not in fact gay – alongside canonical gay writers of the West, such as Proust, and Michelangelo. Kharitonov's "Listochek" and Rozanov's "Tretii pol" ("The Third Sex") served as introductory essays, while the cover featured a black-and-white reproduction of Russian artist Aleksandr Ivanov's 1822 painting *Two Models*, portraying two provocatively posed male nudes. These works, which were lauded by some and violently denounced by others, represent early attempts by post-Soviet gays and lesbians to reclaim, or queer, their Russian and Soviet past.

As the introductory essays to *Love without Borders* suggest, post-Soviet discourse on homosexuality produced both in the mainstream press and in more restricted gay and lesbian venues was often contradictory and confused. Pre-Revolutionary Russian works appeared alongside new Russian writing and translations of Western works from various periods. Introductions from pre-Revolutionary editions were often republished without dates or commentary. An example of the confusion perpetuated by post-Soviet publishing practices was the translation of American psychologist Alexander Lowen's *Love and Orgasm* that appeared in 1998 in the series Classics of Foreign Psychology. The edition includes no explanatory introduction or any mention of the fact that Lowen's book was originally published in 1965 and reflects now thoroughly discredited views of homosexuality. Similarly, reeditions of the works of Sappho contain essays from the early twentieth century, without the dates, that insist the poet was heterosexual. The critical writings on Kharitonov contained in the historic two-volume Russian edition of his works, *Slezy na tvetakh* (*Tears on Flowers* [1992]), by Glagol Press reflected the Russian intelligentsia's views on homosexuality, which continued to associate homosexuality with suffering, asexuality, and artistic refinement. Writer Viktor Erofeev went so far as to suggest that Kharitonov's homosexuality was just a literary pose.

With the exception of Igor Kon, there were few authoritative scholarly voices in Russia who could make sense of the cacophony of views on homosexuality presented in Russia at that time. To make matters worse, homosexuality became a popular theme in writing by non-gay authors, where it was often used to symbolize the chaos of post-Soviet life. In addition, works of popular psychiatry, such as Dilia Enikeeva's *Sexual Pathology* and *Gays and Lesbians*, presented "nontraditional" love as a trendy, Western-inspired phenomenon and warned of the danger to Russia's youth from semi-hidden gay cabals in the Russian entertainment industry and in the highest political circles.

Early post-Soviet gay and lesbian fiction reflected an enduring ambivalence on the part of Russian gays and lesbians themselves toward homosexuality as

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a native phenomenon. One of the earliest editions of post-Soviet gay fiction was the collection *Drugoi* (*The Other* [1993]). As the title suggests, all the stories involve romantic encounters with foreign men, reinforcing the popular view that homosexuality was essentially un-Russian. Works by Russian gay writers, such as the novels *Na kogo pokhozh arlekin* (*Who Resembles the Harlequin* [1997]) by Dmitrii Bushuev (1969–) and *I finn* (*And a Finn* [1997]) by Aleksandr Il'ianen, and the drama *Rogatka* (Slingshot, 1989) by Nikolai Koliada (1957–), staged in Russia and the West by openly gay director Roman Viktiuk (1936–), differed little from works by non-gay writers, such as Vasilii Aksyonov's "V raione ploshchadi Diupon" ("Around Dupont Circle" [1996]), Liudmila Ulitskaia's "Golubchik" ("Darling" [2001]), and Ekaterina Kovaleva's *Moi goluboi drug* (*My Gay Friend* [2003]). All of them perpetuated the long-standing association of homosexuality with spirituality, aestheticism, and tragedy. Best-selling author Grigorii Chkhartishvili (pseud. Boris Akunin) published a lengthy work of nonfiction, *The Writer and Suicide*, that included a separate chapter on gay writers because, he asserted, "same sex love, unlike 'normal' love does not hold the promise of a 'happy ending' of the 'they lived happily ever after' variety" (356).

The stereotype of the "spiritual homosexual" has not, however, gone unchallenged. Some very high-profile Russian gay and lesbian writers have rejected the traditional association of homosexuality with spirituality and effete aestheticism. The most visible of these writers is undoubtedly Yaroslav (Slava) Mogutin (1974–), who fashions himself in public and in his poetry collections – *Uprazhneniia dlia iazyika* (*Exercises for the Tongue* [1997]), and *Roman c nemtsem* (*A Romance with a German* [2000]), and *Deklaratsiia nezavisimosti* (*Declaration of Independence* [2004]) – as a defiant, masculine, profoundly sexual rebel. His collection *Termoiadernyi muskul* (*A Thermonuclear Muscle* [2001]) won the prestigious Andrei Bely Prize. Attracted to the poetry and lifestyle of American beat poets, he has translated the works of Alan Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Dennis Cooper into Russian. He was forced to leave Russia in 1995 and was granted asylum in the United States. He now lives in New York. Poet and translator Dmitrii Volchek (1964–), the editor of the influential avant-garde literary magazine *Mitin Zhurnal* (*Mitia's Journal*), has produced several collections of neomodernist poetry, such as *The Talking Tulip* (1992) and *Midday Demon* (1995). Volchek, who shares Mogutin's love of such gay iconoclasts as William S. Burroughs and Jean Genet, was a translator of Burroughs's *Wild Boys* (*Dikie mal'chiki* [2000]), as well as works by Guy Davenport and Paul Bowles, for his publishing house Kolonna. Like Mogutin, Volchek left Russia in the 1990s; he now lives in Prague. Some non-gay-identified writers, like postmodernists

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Vladmir Sorokin and Vladmir Pelevin, also introduce an aggressive, unrepentant vision of homosexuality in their works. For them, homosexuality as a motif was part of a broader post-Soviet aesthetic stance that rejected the heteronormativity and sexophobia of official Soviet literature while celebrating a resolutely unedifying form of aesthetic play.

The deep ambivalence toward homosexuality within Russian culture today is reflected in the government's refusal to allow gay pride parades and in new laws to outlaw public discussion of homosexuality, described in legislation as "propaganda." This has made the role of gay writers and publishers, such as Dmitrii Volchek, especially important in circulating gay literature. As a writer, translator, and founder of both Glagol press and the glossy monthly magazine *Kvir* (*Queer*), Aleksandr Shatalov (1957–) has also played a very important role in resurrecting Russia's gay past and in making the works of new Russian gay authors and more established foreign gay authors available to Russian readers. Thanks to these publishers, gay writers and translators continue to have a venue for the dissemination of their work.

Despite the general homophobia, gay and lesbian literature in today's Russia is alive and well, as evidenced by a number of talented gay poets who are currently living and writing in Russia. Aleksei Purin (1955–), Aleksandr Anashevich, and Vasilii Chepelev are accomplished poets with very different aesthetics. Dmitry Kuz'min (1968–), grandson of famous literary translator Nina Gul', is one of the most respected poets of his generation, with a reputation that goes well beyond the confines of gay literature. Winner of the Andrei Bely Prize, Kuz'min has been active not only as a poet but also, like Volchek and Shatalov, as a publisher, translator, and promoter of young poets. He founded the journal of young writers *Vavilon* and the gay literary journal *Risk*. Lesbian poets who live and write in Russia include Yashka Kazanova and Faina Grimberg. Queer-friendly women authors who have offered sympathetic portrayals of gays and lesbians include poet Elena Fanailova and prose writer Sonia Adler, whose novel *Ia tebia liubliu, i tozhe net* (*I Love You, and I Don't* [2004]) offers a touching portrayal of a young Moscow lesbian in a defiant search for love in chat rooms and Internet cafés.

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