

Rumi's attitude toward homosexual behavior was probably not different from that of his contemporaries. Dislike of passive homosexual behavior of adult men is reflected in his excoriation of the **mukhannath** as models of unreliability, who are bound to worldly pleasures, caught up in "forms" as women are, and not in "meanings" like real men. Loving boys was understandable because of their divine beauty, but Rumi warned against indulgence. Real love had to be spiritual, because love of forms was only relative to the love of God: "Human beauty is a gilt-gingerbread phenomenon, or else why does your beloved become an old ass? He was formerly an angel, but now seems to be a demon. The beauty he had was merely ephemeral."

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## RUSSIA AND USSR

As an entity with links first to Byzantine and then to Western European culture, the Russian state may be said to have begun with the conversion to Christianity in 988. This development, which provided the foundation of a vast territorial expansion over the course of the centuries, brought much with it of cultural significance, including the characteristic Judeo-Christian ambivalence toward male homosexuality.

*The Middle Ages.* Male homosexual love appears in one of the earliest extant works of Russian literature, the *Legend of Boris and Gleb*, written by an anonymous but, one suspects, homophile monk at the beginning of the eleventh century. Combining history, hagiography, and poetry, this work enjoyed a remarkably wide circulation in subsequent centuries. It tells of the assassination in 1015, for

dynastic reasons, of two young Kievan princes by minions of their half-brother Sviatopolk the Accursed. Describing the murder of prince Boris, the author of *The Legend* brings up the favorite squire of Boris, "Hungarian by birth, George by name" (Hungarians and Kievan Russians had a common border at the time). Boris had a magnificent golden necklace made for George the Hungarian, for "he was loved by Boris beyond reckoning." When the four assassins pierced Boris with their swords, George flung himself on the body of his prince, exclaiming "I will not be left behind, my precious lord! Ere the beauty of thy body begins to wilt, let it be granted that my life may end." The assassins tore Boris out of George's embrace, stabbed George, and flung him out of the tent, bleeding and dying. While the *Legend of Boris and Gleb* is couched in the standard life-of-saint format that was imported from Byzantium, the author's sympathy for the mutual love of Boris and George comes clearly through as does his realization that the gratuitous murder of George resulted from his open admission of the nature of this love.

George's brother Moses, later canonized by the Orthodox church as St. Moses the Hungarian, was the only member of Boris' retinue to have escaped the massacre. His fate is told in *The Life of St. Moses the Hungarian*. Moses was captured by the troops of Sviatopolk the Accursed and sold as a slave to a Polish noblewoman who became enamored of his powerful physique. He spent the next year resisting this woman's efforts to get him to marry her, preferring the company of his Russian fellow prisoners. At the end of the year, exasperated by his refusals and taunts, the noblewoman ordered that Moses be given one hundred lashes and that his sex organs be amputated. Eventually, Moses found his way to the Kievan Crypt Monastery, where he lived as a monk for ten more years, constantly admonishing other monks against the temptations of women and sin. *The Life of St. Moses*

was obviously influenced by the biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Its text is permeated with the hatred of women and all sexuality that is typical of the medieval monastic tradition. Yet, as the modern scholar Vasiliĭ **Rozanov** maintained, the legend of St. Moses is clearly the story of a male homosexual punished because he is unable to enter a conventional heterosexual marriage.

*Muscovite Russia.* The culturally rich Kievan period (eleventh to thirteenth centuries) was followed by 250 years of Mongol invasions and occupation by nomadic warrior tribes. The Russia that regained its independence, with a new capital in Moscow, had taken over many of the ways and customs of the Mongol occupiers. Women were now segregated, kept in special quarters, and received virtually no education. Marriages in Muscovite Russia were arranged by the families and the two spouses were usually strangers who met for the first time only during their wedding ceremony. Romantic attachments between men and women, if there were any in sixteenth-century Russia, remain unrecorded. What one finds instead, all foreign and domestic observers agree, is that male homosexuality was astoundingly widespread.

Grand Prince Vasily II of Moscow, who ruled from 1505 to 1533, seems to have been totally homosexual. For reasons of state he married Princess Helen Glinsky, but he was able to carry out his conjugal duties with her only if one of the officers of the guard joined them in bed in the nude. His wife strongly resented this behavior, not (as one might have supposed) on moralistic ground, but because she was afraid that this practice would expose her children to the charge of being illegitimate. The domestic life of Vasily and Helen was hell on earth, with no quarter given on either side. One of their sons was born mentally retarded; their other son ruled Russia as Ivan IV, better known as Ivan the Terrible.

As bloody and sociopathic a ruler as his reputation credits him with being, Ivan married almost as many times as Henry VIII of England, but he was also attracted to young men in drag. One of the most ruthless chieftains of Ivan's political police, Feodor Basmanov ("with the smile of a maiden and the soul of a snake," as a later poet described him) rose to his high position through performing seductive dances in female attire at Ivan's court.

But Muscovite homosexuality was by no means limited to royalty. Sigmund of Herberstein, who visited Russia during the reign of Vasily III as the ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire, states in his *Rerum moscovitarum commentarii* that male homosexuality was prevalent among all social classes. The minor English poet George Turberville came to Moscow with a diplomatic mission in 1568 during one of the bloodiest phases of Ivan IV's regime. Turberville, however, was shocked not by the carnage but by the open homosexuality of the Russian peasants.

Apparently neither laws nor customs restrained homosexual practices among the men of Muscovite Russia (there is no record of what went on among the women). The only recorded objections came from the church. Archpriest Avvakum, the leader of the Old Believers during the religious schism of the seventeenth century, considered every man who shaved his beard a homosexual. "Sermon No. 12" by Metropolitan Daniel, a popular Moscow preacher of the 1530s, is almost entirely dedicated to denouncing the gay blades of the day. These young men, Daniel thundered, behaved like whores: they shaved off their beards, used lotions and ointments to make their skins softer, rouged their cheeks and perfumed their bodies, plucked out their body hair with tweezers, changed their clothes several times a day, and wore scarlet boots several sizes too small for them. Daniel likened these young men's elaborate preparations before going out of their houses to a cook

preparing a spectacularly decorated dish and ironically asked to whom the finished dish was to be served.

*The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Peter the Great, who pulled Russia into the modern world at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was one of those heterosexuals who dabble in bisexuality when the occasion is suitable. Peter's relationship with his protégé Alexander Menshikov, the baker boy whom the tsar made his orderly, then a generalissimo, and finally a prince, apparently had its sexual aspects. In battle conditions, Peter used soldiers as bed companions, preferring those with big, flabby bellies on which he liked to rest his head.

Another ruler of the Romanov dynasty with a bisexual streak was Peter's niece, Anna Ioannovna, who was empress of Russia from 1730 to 1740 and who, according to some memoirists, had intimate relations with some of her ladies-in-waiting. The German-born Catherine II (the Great) may have had a brief lesbian fling with Princess Dashkova, the noblewoman who helped Catherine overthrow her husband Peter III and to seize the throne. But Catherine's overpowering yen for well-endowed males prevented her from forming any emotional ties with other women.

Among the western ideas that were imported into Russia after Peter's reforms was homophobia. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the visible male homosexuality of the Muscovite period went largely underground. Among the poorer classes and in remote northern regions, tolerance and acceptance of homosexual behavior survived the peasant eschatological dissenters that separated from the Old Believers. Two of these sects, the Khlysty (distorted plural of "Christ") and the Skoptsy (Castrates) had recognizable homosexual, bisexual, and sadomasochistic strains in their culture, folklore, and religious rituals. The Skoptsy who engaged in commerce had an institutionalized practice of an older merchant

adopting a younger assistant-lover as his son and heir. After the older man's death this heir would repeat the process with a still younger man, thus giving rise to a mercantile dynasty.

At the opposite end of the social spectrum, we find a succession of ultra-conservative gay statesmen-writers, who moved in the highest echelons of tsarist Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ivan Dmitriev (1760-1837), the leading Russian sentimentalist poet and an author of witty satires, saccharine love songs, and didactic fables, was Minister of Justice under Alexander I. In his government career Dmitriev was noted for his nepotism, surrounding himself with handsome male assistants, some of whom owed their advancement to the fact that they were his lovers. In his poetry, however, he wore a heterosexual mask.

Equally nepotistic was count Sergei Uvarov (1786-1855), Minister of Education under Nicholas I. To improve his financial situation, Uvarov married a wealthy heiress and had several children by her. His great love, however, was the handsome but not-too-bright prince Mikhail Dondukov-Korsakov. Other prominent and politically conservative nineteenth-century Russian gays were Filip Vigel (1786-1836), Konstantin Leont'ev (1831-1914), and prince Vladimir Meshchersky (1839-1914).

Not all the gay people of pre-Revolutionary Russia were reactionary or conservative. There was, for example, the marvelously anarchic figure of Nadezhda Durova (1783-1866), a woman who today would probably be classified as a transsexual. Forced by her parents to marry a government official, Durova left her husband and child three years later, and donning a cossack uniform, joined the army to take part in the Napoleonic wars.

Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) is one of the most harrowing cases of sexual self-repression to be found in the annals of literature. Exclusively gay, Gogol spent his whole life denying this fact to himself

and others, primarily for religious reasons. His stories and plays are permeated with fear of marriage and other forms of sexual contact with women, but Gogol developed this theme in such a cloud of symbols and surrealist fantasies that his contemporary readers failed to discern its presence. Gogol's personal involvements consisted mostly of falling in love with straight men unable to respond.

Contemporaries of Gogol were already enriching Russian literature with explicitly gay poetry. One collection of these poems in a classical Russian, which had originated in the exclusive educational institutions of St. Petersburg in the late 1830s and 1840s, was published in Geneva in 1879 (*Eros russe*); the longest piece is entitled "Pokhozheniia pazha" (The Adventures of a Page).

The theme of homosexuality in the life of Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) deserves a special study which will undoubtedly be written one day. In his childhood, Tolstoy kept falling in love with boys and girls. In Tolstoy's later writings homosexuality is portrayed in a negative light and in only a few instances. *Resurrection* (1899), is the aged Tolstoy's great indictment of the inequities and corruption of tsarist Russia; tolerant treatment of homosexuals and of those who advocate equal rights for them figure in this novel as one of the many symptoms of the country's moral decay.

One of the greatest Russian celebrities of the 1870s and 80s, both nationally and internationally, was the explorer and naturalist Nikolaï Przhevalsky (1839–1888). Each of Przhevalsky's expeditions was planned to include a male lover-companion between the ages of 16 and 22. His renown was so great that he could require the Russian government to pay for the education of each new lover and to commission the youth as a lieutenant in the army.

*Reform and Cultural Flowering.* The abolition of serfdom, the replacement of a corrupt judiciary system with trials by

jury, the reduction of military service from 25 years to 4, and other liberal reforms initiated by Alexander II in 1861 did not make Russia a democracy, but they did set the stage for change. In this new atmosphere homosexuality became far more visible in both Russian life and literature.

Prominent on the Russian literary scene during the last two decades of the nineteenth century were two lesbian couples. Anna Yevreinova (1844–1919) was highly active in the feminist movement. She was the founder of the literary journal *The Northern Herald*, which she edited jointly with her lover-companion Maria Feodorova. Polyxena Soloviova (1867–1924), a Symbolist poet, shared her life with Natalia Maneseina. Among the notable and overt gay male figures of the period were the popular poet Alexei Apukhin (a classmate and one-time friend of Peter Tchaikovsky); the previously mentioned prince Vladimir Meshchersky, and of course the famous Sergei Diaghilev, who headed the World of Art (Mir iskusstva) Group, before achieving international fame in the West as a ballet impresario. During this period there were at least seven gay grand dukes—uncles, nephews, and cousins of the last two tsars. The antihomosexual articles 995 and 996 of the penal code of the 1830s (and their successor, article 516 of the 1903 code) were hardly ever enforced. For this reason—and others—the legend that the great composer Peter Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) was forced to commit suicide is untenable.

The uprising of 1905 forced Nicholas II to issue his October Manifesto, authorizing a parliamentary system and virtually abolishing preliminary censorship of printed material. In 1906 the sexual reform movement reached Russia, and in its wake there appeared gay and lesbian poets, fiction writers, and artists who saw in the new freedom of expression a chance to depict their lifestyle affirmatively. Mikhail Kuzmin (1872–1936), the most outspoken of Russia's gay writers, made his literary debut in 1906, when he pub-

lished his autobiographical novel *Wings*, the story of a young man who slowly realizes that he is homosexual. Frequently reprinted, this book became the catechism of Russian gay men. Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal's (1866-1907) novel *Thirty-Three Freaks* (1907) and her collection of short stories *The Tragic Zoo* (1907) did for Russian lesbians what *Wings* had done for gay men: they showed the reading public that lesbian love could be serious, deep, and moving.

About 1910 there appeared in Russia a group of poets called peasant—not only because of their origin, but because the fate and survival of the peasant way of life was their central theme. The undisputed leader of this group was the homosexual Nikolai Kliuev (1887-1937), who was born into a peasant family belonging to the Khlysty sect. The great love of his life was Sergei Esenin (1895-1925), who was a remarkable poet in his own right. Although successively married to three women (including the dancer Isadora Duncan), Esenin could write meaningful love poetry only when it was addressed to other men.

*The Post-Revolutionary Situation.* The provisional government, formed after the abdication of Nicholas II in February 1917, lasted for only eight months. Constantly harassed by the monarchists on the right and the Bolsheviks on the left, the regime managed to promote human rights and freedoms on a scale not experienced in Russia before or since. That was when women and minorities were given full civil and political rights including the vote. The seizure of power by Lenin and Trotsky in October 1917 was hailed by many then (and is still often regarded) as an enhancement of the rights gained by the revolutions of 1905 and February 1917. But as far as rights (including gay rights) and personal freedoms are concerned, the October Revolution was actually a reversal and a negation of the two earlier revolutions rather than their continuation. To

be sure, article 516 disappeared, but this was simply part of the abolition of the entire Criminal Code of the Russian Empire.

When the civil war ended, a new Soviet criminal code was promulgated in 1922 and amended in 1926. In the sexual sphere, this code prohibited sex with minors under the age of 16, male and female prostitution, and pandering. It did not mention sexual contacts between consenting adults, which meant that adult male homosexuality was legal. The provisions of this code extended only to the Russian and the Ukrainian republics of the USSR. But the previously widespread homosexual practices in the Caucasus and the Muslim areas of Central Asia were persecuted and punished during the 1920s as "survivals of the old way of life."

In Central Russia, including Moscow and Leningrad, two forms of the Soviet government's negative attitude to homosexuality became evident after the end of the civil war: morbidizing it by treating it as a mental disorder; and dismissing or ignoring its manifestations in literary works that appeared in the 1920s. If the nineteenth century considered homosexuality as a crime to be punished, the Soviet regime in the 1920s saw it as an illness to be cured. It is significant that although the Soviets reject psychoanalysis on ideological grounds, they are willing to use arguments purloined from depth psychology to justify their condemnation of homosexuality.

The growing hostility of the Soviet government and press to homosexuality, observable in the 1920s, culminated in the new Stalinist law, article 121 of the Soviet Penal Code. This law, announced on December 17, 1933 and made compulsory for all the republics of the Soviet Union on March 7, 1934—the first anniversary of the National Socialist seizure of power in Germany—outlawed sexual relations between men and prescribed 5 years of hard labor for voluntary sexual acts and

8 years for using force or threats and for sex with a consenting minor. However, just as in Nazi Germany, lesbian relations went unpunished throughout the Stalin era. The opinion that homosexuality equaled opposition to the Soviet system became entrenched in the minds of the bureaucracy. In 1936 the Commissar of Justice Nikolai Krylenko proclaimed that there was no reason for anyone to be homosexual after two decades of socialism; no one from the working class could possibly be homosexual so that the people who hang out "in their vile secret dens are often engaged in another kind of work, the work of counter-revolution."

Nonetheless, during the Stalinist era, Soviet persecution of gay men was neither continuous nor total. In the case of well-known personalities, such as the great director Sergei Eisenstein, the operatic tenor Sergei Lemeshev, the pianist Sviatoslav Richter, and numerous ballet dancers, the authorities were willing to look the other way—provided the man was married and kept his homosexuality out of public view.

*The Post-Stalin Decades.* During the decades that followed Stalin's death in 1953, foreign scholars and tourists were again able to come to the USSR for extended stays. Homosexuality was—and still is—a state crime. But foreign visitors were able to find clandestine gay communities in all major cities. As they had done under Stalin, the Soviet political police still used homosexuals as informers and for recruiting foreign gay men for espionage. In a police state, the existence of a sexual outlaw was necessarily precarious; his "weakness" constantly put him at the mercy of the authorities.

Still, the post-Stalin years were a time of slow social change. The decade of the 1970s witnessed the emergence of gay and lesbian writers, the first under the Soviet regime (writers who treated gay and lesbian themes in the 1920s had all come out before the October Revolution). Unable to publish their work, they had to

resort to *samizdat* ("self-publishing") or *tamizdat* ("publishing over there," i.e., abroad). Well documented is the case of Gennady Trifonov, who served a hard-labor sentence in 1976–80 for privately circulating his gay poems and who since 1986 has been allowed to publish essays and reviews in Soviet periodicals, provided he makes no reference to gay topics. More light has been shed on the situation of lesbians in the Soviet Union in recent years in memoirs published abroad by women who had served time in Gulag camps and were able to observe lesbian behavior there, and in works of fiction by Soviet writers expelled from the USSR.

Under Gorbachev the situation remained uncertain. The glasnost campaign made homosexuality a mentionable topic in the Soviet press, but initiatives dating back to the early 1970s that evinced a tentative approach to change with regard to gay rights do not seem to have been followed up. As the historical record shows, Russia's past gives indications both of hope and despair.

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## RUSTIN, BAYARD (1912–1987)

American black civil rights leader. Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, the illegitimate son of an immigrant from the West Indies, Rustin was reared by a grandfather who worked as a caterer. In the 1930s he joined the Young Communist League, which he regarded as the youth group of the only party then truly dedicated to civil rights. In 1941 he became