

An Englishman in the Russian Bathhouse: Kuzmin's *Wings* and the Russian Tradition of Homoerotic Writing

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Published just over a century ago, Mikhail Kuzmin's novel *Wings* (*Kryl'ia*; 1906) marked the first attempt in Russian literature to create an extensive and sympathetic portrayal of same-sex love. It is well documented that Kuzmin's contemporaries noticed the novel's radicalism—a few with approval, others with opprobrium (Malmstad 2000, 85–88). Some Russian modernist critics saw Kuzmin's social daring as unparalleled even in Europe, and this evaluation may have motivated Valery Briusov's unprecedented decision to devote an entire issue of the leading Symbolist journal *Vesy* to the novel (see Kuzmin 2000a, 54–55). The subsequent scandal propelled Kuzmin to fame, earning him a reputation as “the Russian Oscar Wilde,” a title Kuzmin disliked. But retrospectively, we can agree with the intuition of Kuzmin's contemporaries; just like Wilde in Britain, Kuzmin stood in Russia at the origin of a larger cultural movement seeking to emancipate and legitimize homosexuality (see Bershtein 2000).

In *Wings*, Kuzmin presents the story of Vanya Smurov, a middle-class teenage boy who befriends an older man named Larion Dmitrievich Shtrup. Throughout the novel, Shtrup is referred to as either English or half-English or a British subject, and he is portrayed as the central figure within a St. Petersburg circle of homosexual aesthetes. At their gatherings, Vanya learns about the program for the aesthetic transformation of life that these new “Hellenes” (*elliny*) are attempting to implement (Kuzmin 1972, 33). Vanya begins to fall in love with Shtrup, but he soon discovers that the Englishman has hired a young bathhouse attendant (*banshchik*), Fyodor, as a live-in servant. From the same overheard conversation, Vanya finds out about bathhouse attendants' practice of “fooling around” with their clients for a fee. It becomes clear to him that Fyodor is paid to provide sexual services to Shtrup. Vanya is jealous and bitterly disappointed by the apparent contradiction between Shtrup's lofty ideals regarding life and his practice of keeping a lower-class lover. Additionally, Vanya finds it difficult to accept the physical side of sexuality in general. Through many twists of the plot and philosophical dialogues Vanya gradually learns to embrace his love for Shtrup, with the implication that he is also accepting the physical component of sexual desire. The book ends on an ecstatically optimistic note: having decided to join Shtrup in travel

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and evidently in a life together, Vanya “threw open the window onto a street flooded with sunlight” (Kuzmin 1972, 110).

The program for the aesthetic transformation of life formulated by Shtrup and his friends, and eventually adopted by Vanya, has three central elements. First, this new life is based on sensual intensification of experience; second, it is a Hellenic life, shaped by classical patterns of beauty; and third, it incorporates the classical paederastic Eros that links a man to a boy, a teacher to a disciple, wisdom to beauty. In Shtrup’s salon, Vanya hears a speech that encapsulates this ideal:

И когда вам скажут: «Противоестественно», — вы только посмотрите на сказавшего слепца и проходите мимо.... Люди ходят как слепые, как мертвые, когда они могли бы создать пламеннейшую жизнь, где все наслаждение было бы так обострено, будто вы только что родились и сейчас умрете.... Чудеса вокруг нас на каждом шагу: есть мускулы, связки в человеческом теле, которые невозможно без трепета видеть! И связывающие понятие о красоте с красотой женщин для мужчины являют только пошлую похоть, и дальше, дальше всего от истинной идеи красоты. Мы — элины, любовники прекрасного, вакханты грядущей жизни. (Kuzmin 2000b, 62)

And when they say to you “this is unnatural,” just take a look at the blind fool who said it and go on your way.... People go about like the blind, like the dead, when they might create for themselves a life burning with intensity in every moment, a life in which pleasure would be as poignant as if you have just come into the world and might die before the day were done.... Miracles crowd upon us at every step: there are muscles, sinews in the human body which one cannot look upon without a tremor! And those who bind the idea of beauty to the beauty of a woman seen through the eyes of a man—they reveal only vulgar lust and are furthest of all from the true idea of beauty. We are Hellenes, lovers of the beautiful, the bacchants of the coming day. (Kuzmin 1972, 33)

From Kuzmin’s diary, one gets the sense that the aesthetic and erotic philosophy formulated in *Wings* corresponded very closely to Kuzmin’s personal quest. He exclaimed once:

Как я хотел бы передать людям все, что меня восторгает, чтобы и они так же интенсивно, плотью, пили малейшую красоту и через это были бы счастливы, как никто не смеет мечтать быть. (27 August 1905; Kuzmin 2000a, 32)

How much I would like to pass to people all that delights me, so that they could drink the smallest bit of beauty with the same intensity, with their flesh, and, through that, be as happy as none of them dares be.

Kuzmin continues this entry by daydreaming about finding a male friend with whom he could share physical love as well as the delights of artistic life, a friend who could be both his comrade and disciple. They would travel in Italy together, “bathe in beauty,” enjoy music and so forth—in this long list of delights, the sensual and sexual intertwine with the aesthetic.

Kuzmin envisions a new Renaissance, and the “new man” (*novyi chelovek*) of *Wings* is also the “Renaissance-Mensch” (Renaissance man), the term employed by his close friend Georgy Chicherin in a letter to him written in November 1904, just as Kuzmin was working on *Wings* (Bogomolov and Malmstad 1996, 105). It is worth noting that Chicherin uses the German word to gloss the Russian expression *novyi chelovek*. To the first readers of *Wings*, Kuzmin’s use of this loaded notion triggered memories of the socialist utopia depicted in Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s influential 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?* (Blok 1962, 185). While the new men of Kuzmin’s novel are certainly no socialists, they nevertheless share an important trait with Chernyshevsky’s revolutionaries: they are people of the future, who not only embody the ideal but also proselytize in order to create more like-minded individuals. Thus in *Wings*, both Shtrup and the Greek teacher Daniil Ivanovich, a member of Shtrup’s circle, help enlighten Vanya largely through classical culture and Socratic dialogues.

Following Kuzmin scholars John Malmstad and Nikolay Bogomolov, I believe that Eros and beauty are inseparable in Kuzmin’s utopian vision. The question of what ideological sources Kuzmin had for this vision has long interested scholars. In their seminal biography of Kuzmin, Malmstad and Bogomolov find a number of striking parallels between Kuzmin’s thinking and early German Romanticism, specifically in the works of the German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann and the writer and critic Johann Jacob Wilhelm Heinse (Malmstad and Bogomolov 1999, 73–79). These parallels, however persuasive, do not answer the question of why Kuzmin makes Larion Dmitrievich Shtrup, the hero who most fully embodies the principles of new Hellenism and the artistically transformed life, an Englishman. I believe that addressing this question will shed light on certain structural and ideological features of *Wings*. The consideration of these features will lead me to consider the place of Kuzmin’s novel in Russian literary history and, more specifically, in the history of homoerotic writing in Russia.

Why is Shtrup an Englishman?

The first and most general point I would like to make concerns the status of English culture in early Russian modernism. As the influential critic Zinaida

Vengerova declared in 1905, “An aesthetic Renaissance, observed in Europe in the last ten or fifteen years, has as its source England, the birthplace of the most refined art and the most sublime poetry of our century” (Vengerova 1905, 267). England’s association with a new Renaissance is reflected in Kuzmin’s diary as he reports reading the English-language work on the topic: “In the library I was reading [Lewis Einstein’s] *Italian Renaissance in England*, precisely that which inspires me [literally: that which gives me wings (*imenno to, chto menia okryliaet*)]” (13 September 1905; Kuzmin 2000a, 41). It is worth noting that in the sunlit ending of *Wings*, Vanya joins the Englishman Shtrup for a travel in Italy.

Oscar Wilde, the best known representative of English aestheticism, was a familiar character not only to Kuzmin, but also to Grigory Murav’ev—Kuzmin’s lover at the time—despite the fact that the eighteen-year-old Murav’ev had no education whatsoever (in all likelihood, he was a bathhouse attendant, and Kuzmin certainly paid him for their intimate time together). In September 1905, when Kuzmin shaved off his Russian beard and adopted a European look, Murav’ev immediately suggested that Kuzmin had done so “in order to resemble that Englishman who was exiled” (*chtoby pokhodit’ na togo anglichanina, kotorogo soslali*; Kuzmin 2000a, 45). “That is, Wilde,” explains Kuzmin in his diary. The irony of this situation, as Kuzmin describes it, lies in the fact that it links Kuzmin to both Wilde and the constructed Englishman Shtrup who keeps a *banshchik* as a lover. After the publication of *Wings* a year later, everyone would see in Kuzmin “the Russian Wilde.” But for himself, as the above-quoted diary entry makes obvious, this parallel had rather unwelcome relevance much earlier.

So, is Shtrup actually a Wilde figure? Certainly not in any direct way. Kuzmin’s fleeting reference to Wilde in his diary reflects the English poet’s reputation in Russia, where his notoriety largely began in 1895, when major Russian newspapers reported his trials in great detail (Bershtein 2000, 170–75). For the Russian public, knowledge of Wilde’s disgrace and downfall preceded any serious acquaintance with his literary works. The Wilde scandal was so widely known that it became common in Russian journalism to refer to homosexuality with euphemisms like “Oscar Wilde’s crime,” or “Wilde’s amusements.” Beginning with Konstantin Balmont, the Russian Symbolists found tragic poetry in Wilde’s life story and proclaimed him a martyr, almost a saint (Viacheslav Ivanov put Wilde “next to Christ”).¹ However, this mythology of mystical suffering, applied to Wilde and by extension to the entire phenomenon of same-sex love, was alien to Kuzmin. In *Wings*, he provides a scenario for finding ecstatic happiness. How could the tragic prisoner Wilde fit in Kuzmin’s utopian universe of unbounded sensual and aesthetic bliss?

In his aesthetic thinking, Wilde was much indebted to the critic Walter Pater. The British Slavist Rachel Polonsky has suggested that “Shtrup is a

¹ Kuzmin cites Ivanov’s words in his diary (Kuzmin 2000a, 166).

Paterian figure, a Russian transposition of the Oxonian tutor, as conceived by Victorian Hellenism" (Polonsky 1998, 176). This insight may be slightly overstated, but the programmatic statements made by the St. Petersburg aesthetes in *Wings* indeed closely resemble certain passages from Pater's celebrated and controversial study of the Italian Renaissance, especially its conclusion—a proto-Decadent manifesto much admired by Wilde. In his book, Pater calls for a new Renaissance, a reproduction of Hellenic culture characterized by "the care for physical beauty, the worship of the body, the breaking down of those limits which the religious system of the middle age imposed on the heart and imagination" (Pater 1986, xxxii). Pater hinted that this Hellenic ideal included paederastic love; specifically, he holds up the figure of the German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann as an example of the embodiment of the Hellenic spirit. He writes: "That his affinity with Hellenism was not merely intellectual, that the subtler threads of temperament were inwoven in it, is proven by his romantic, fervent friendships with young men. He has known, he says, many young men more beautiful than Guido's archangel" (*ibid.*, 122–13).

Pater's ideal is the passionate experience of artistically transformed life:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life ... To burn with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.... While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend ... we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under the sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve ... we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more.... Our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into given time.... (*ibid.*, 152–53)

The similarities between Pater's program and that of Kuzmin rest at the intersection of three areas: the sensuous intensification of life that reproduces Hellenic experience, including paederastic love. Both in spirit and in detail, the principles of Kuzmin's Hellenic utopia resemble those of Pater's Oxford Hellenism. Even the epigraph of Pater's Renaissance—"Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove" (Psalms 68: 13)—sounds Kuzminian.

Although Zinaida Vengerova had begun introducing Pater to the Russian public as early as 1896 (Vengerova 1896), Pater's work was not well known in Russia in the 1900s. But one can imagine multiple ways in which this particular set of ideas could come to Kuzmin. One route would be through Wilde's fiction: in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry paraphrases Pater's "Conclu-

sion" with wording very close to the original. From the works of Pater, John Addington Symonds, and, to some extent, Wilde, it is obvious that Oxford Hellenism had a strong and not terribly subtle homosexual subtext. Didier Eribon argues that Pater "was implicitly calling for the creation of a specifically homosexual subculture whose goal would be to revivify the ideals of ancient Greece and the Renaissance" (Eribon 2004, 171).² I believe that this intention, implicit in the Oxford Aesthetic school, is revealed and fictionalized in the English theme of *Wings*.

It is important to remember that both Pater and Symonds, central figures in the Aesthetic School, worked and died before Wilde's tragic downfall. Wilde's much-publicized trials drastically changed the terms of the discussion of homosexuality: Wilde's aesthetic defense against the moral and legal charges filed against him failed spectacularly in the courtroom (Hyde 1973; Foldy 1997). In subsequent decades, scientific and legal approaches to homosexuality came to the fore. Even the emerging gay emancipation movement adopted the dual conceptual frameworks of science and law. In his novel, Kuzmin turned the English aesthetes' abstract intellectual constructions into a social utopia. This certainly was a radical step, but in Europe aesthetically based advocacy of homosexuality had already had its day. By 1906 it could appear archaic and somewhat quaint.

I would argue, however, that Kuzmin is thoroughly original in transplanting a primarily English aesthetic ideology into a tradition of social utopia very familiar to Russian readers.³ In the spirit of this tradition, he describes (albeit obliquely) a sect-like group of the new ideal's devotees and provides a naturalist's perspective into the seedy side of life in St. Petersburg: in this case, the seedy side of gay life. The passage in which the bathhouse attendant Fyodor talks about "fooling around" with his customers takes up as little as a single page in the novel, but it deeply shocked many readers and was much discussed and parodied (Malmstad 2000, 89–104). Vasily Rozanov, for one, expressed outrage. In his 1907 review, he disparaged *Wings* for mixing incongruously high and low discourses, Antinous and *banchshiki*:

Адриана и Антиноя вероятно стошнило бы от омерзительного банщика Бориса и банных приключений: неужели древние *это* любили?!! (Maestro 1907, 56)

Hadrian and Antinous would probably throw up from the disgusting bathhouse attendant Boris and his bathhouse adventures, can it be that the ancients liked *that*?!!

² Scholars' interpretations of Pater's eroticism are surveyed in Shutter 1994.

³ See Olga Matich's recent book for an analysis of the utopian erotic element in Russian Decadence (Matich 2005).

Rozanov was particularly offended by an olfactory detail: the stale odor of sour cabbage soup (*prelyi zapakh kislykh shchei*) that accompanies Fyodor's tale of his bathhouse trade. Rozanov quipped that *Wings* was an inappropriate title for the novel; instead, it should have been "Around the Sour Cabbage Soup" (*Vokrug kislykh shchei*; *ibid.*). Obviously, Rozanov missed Kuzmin's point here. To use Pater's language, "curious odours" "stirring the senses" added to the variegation of life and therefore could be experienced aesthetically. The malodorous smell of the cabbage soup did not taint Fyodor's story, just as the association with Fyodor did not compromise Shtrup.

Vasily Rozanov Goes to the Baths

While in 1907 Rozanov condemned Kuzmin's mix of bathhouse reporting and erotic utopia as bad taste, in *The Final Leaves. 1916 (Poslednie list'ia. 1916 god)*, never published during his lifetime, Rozanov included an account of his own trip to the public baths (Rozanov 2000, 177–79). He went to the bathhouse on Basseinaia Street, once favored by Kuzmin, where he was served by a seventeen-year-old bathhouse attendant, Ivan. Ivan was distinguished by a powerful youthful physique and an unusually large sexual organ ("on byl utroenno velik protiv obyknovennogo"; *ibid.*, 178). With much fascination, Rozanov reports that as Ivan was washing him (*viz.*, massaging his prostrate body with soap), Ivan's enormous member was touching his body, hanging over his eyes, and capturing all his attention. Almost obsessively, Rozanov describes the boy's penis in the finest of detail: it was slightly engorged and nearly touched on Rozanov's cheek, causing both excitement and fantasies of how this penis could bring "seven maidens" great joy. "I ... saw all-all of such exceptional beauty and size that, I must admit, I, too, became excited" (*ia ... uvidel vse-vse takoi iskliuchitel'noi krasoty i velichiny, chto, priznaius', i sam vzvolnovalsia*; *ibid.*). Combining pornographic description and metaphysical reflection, Rozanov suggests that a penis of such size is not only utterly beautiful but also a thing of great value. A futuristic idea came to him: some day society will identify and protect youngsters of such exceptional beauty and use them for human breeding. Before the writer ordered a second washing, he recited to himself a line from "The Song of Songs": "Oh, my beloved!" (*O, moi vozliublennyi*).

Rozanov's entry exceeds by far the social and physiological explicitness of Kuzmin's bathhouse passage that so outraged him a decade earlier. In addition, Rozanov's bathhouse scene shows even less stylistic unity than Kuzmin's: in describing his experience, Rozanov blends pornographic, ethnographic, futuristic, and poetic discourses. Making his excursion to the baths, Rozanov clearly invades Kuzmin's thematic territory, and I would argue that by doing so, he concedes, at the very least, the value of Kuzmin's literary experiment. It is hard not to see in Rozanov's miniature a belated response to Kuzmin, who was the first to place utopian ideas in the context of homosexual practices native to Russian bathhouses.

However, there was another important aspect of Rozanov's prurient depiction of the young bathhouse attendant. As Rozanov tells us, Ivan was nearing the conscription age; Rozanov draws our attention to the fact that the young man was about to be sent to the battlefields of World War I and almost certainly killed. The wave of amorous feeling that overwhelmed the bathing writer had to do with his gendered political philosophy: the shrewd reader would recall that in the fall of 1914, at the beginning of the world war, Rozanov reported experiencing a similar attack of erotic feeling at the site of mounted soldiers in the streets of St. Petersburg. He then described his emotion as a "girl's infatuation" and concluded that "the essence of the army is that it turns us all into women—weak, trembling, air-embracing women. Some experience it more, some less, but everyone does to some degree" (Rozanov 2000, 340). The bathhouse scene reaffirms and illustrates Rozanov's gender model, according to which, the eternally bi-sexual (*dvupolyi*) subject possesses fluctuating proportions of feminine and masculine in his or her psyche—and possibly body. It also demonstrates the feminine element taking over at the moment of patriotic ecstasy.

Rozanov's notion of the erotic (and feminine) roots of patriotic feeling met an immediate scathing response from Nikolai Berdyaev. Reacting to Rozanov's war writing, Berdyaev suggested a particular quality of the Russian national psyche—*vechno bab'e*—a disturbing expression of which he found in Rozanov (Berdiaev 1995, 41–51). According to Berdyaev, Rozanov had always been marked by the *bab'e*, that is, the evil femininity that deprived him of an autonomous self and tied him down to the instinctual, biological, and intuitive at the expense of the intellectual, individual, and active. Berdyaev accused Rozanov of always being irresistibly attracted to and aroused by power, be it the power of the state, revolution, decadence, political reaction, or war. Rozanov's shifting opinions, claimed Berdyaev, were merely the infatuations of his feminine soul, which was devoid of a firm core. Most importantly, Berdyaev argued this feature of Rozanov's sexual constitution directly reflected a particular defect of the Russian national psyche: it lacked masculinity, and this lack threatened catastrophic consequences for the Russian people, who needed to forge "masculinity" and "active spirit" in order to "create life in a manly way" (*muzhestvenno tvorit' zhizn'*; *ibid.*, 51). Here as well as in his other works, Berdyaev embraced Otto Weininger's understanding of the feminine element as completely sexual, biological, and, in its submissiveness, opposed to creativity.⁴ It is precisely this Weiningerian concept of the feminine that he applied to his analysis of Russian patriotic frenzy, expressed by Rozanov's text and manifest in society as a whole. In his analysis,

⁴Eric Naiman explores the Weiningerian layer in Berdyaev's philosophy of sex in Naiman 1997, 27–45. Some elements of Weininger's theory also influenced Rozanov: see Laura Engelstein's comparative analysis of the two thinkers' sexual theories (Engelstein 1992, 310–33).

he finds the forms of Russian wartime patriotism to be feminine and therefore entirely sexual and biological; as such, they receive Berdyaev's unambiguous condemnation.

I believe that Rozanov's bathhouse episode in *The Final Leaves*. 1916 was meant to be a polemic directed against Berdyaev. Not only did it clearly develop the very motifs from Rozanov's earlier army essay that so outraged Berdyaev, but it was preceded in the book by a passage devoted to Berdyaev (dated a day earlier, 16 July). In this entry, Rozanov ridiculed Berdyaev as "a Frenchman from Algeria" who is understandably "out of place" (*ne na meste*) among the Russian public (Rozanov 2000, 176). Placed next to each other, the two entries linked Rozanov's infatuation with the soon-to-be soldier's powerful masculinity to his ironic contempt for Berdyaev's awkward lack of connection to Russia's national spirit. Thus the Kuzminian theme of a public bathhouse as a site for same-sex attraction received a surprisingly rich further literary development in this wartime political and philosophical debate.

Kuzmin, Rozanov, and Gay Writing in Russia

It is remarkable that it took the happily married procreationist Rozanov to provide the reader with juicy specifics of the homosexual commerce that was common at Russian bathhouses, while in *Wings*, Kuzmin referred to it only cursorily.⁵ More generally, to compare Kuzmin's treatment of homoerotic themes to Rozanov's is highly instructive from the perspective of literary history. As I have argued elsewhere, Kuzmin's *Wings* and Rozanov's writings on sex, especially those in the uncertain genre of *rozanovshchina* (existentialist fragments, "fallen leaves") correspond to two paradigmatic ways for writing about homosexuality (Bershtein 2006). The genre of *Wings* anticipated the "coming-out novel," a gay take on the Bildungsroman, which was to become essential to English-language gay literatures, although it remained marginal in Russian letters.⁶ Within this genre, the problem of homosexuality is addressed largely as a social and developmental issue, and it is resolved through the protagonist's forging or accepting of a new, more accommodating identity. By contrast, Rozanov treats homosexuality as an existential problem that is not and cannot be resolved. While in his *Final Leaves* (as well as in *Fallen Leaves* [*Opavshie list'ia*] and *People of the Moonlight* [*Liudi lunnogo sveta*]) Rozanov borrowed some of Kuzmin's themes and material, he differed sharply with Kuzmin in providing no solution for the problem of "moonlight" love. For him, "the third sex" is excluded from the natural procreative

⁵ See Healey (2001) on the history of same-sex prostitution in Russia. The fact that St. Petersburg's bathhouses served as places of male homosexual prostitution was well known to medical authorities (Merzheevskii 1878, 208–09; Tarnovskii 1886, 70–71).

⁶ E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Edmund White's *Boy's Own Story*, and Paul Monette's *Becoming a Man* are but a few classic examples of this genre.

cycle and therefore ontologically tainted. Claiming homosexuals' existential marginality, Rozanov rejected what he saw as superficial and hopeless attempts to normalize homosexuality.

I would like to argue that despite the great respect afforded in Russian gay literature to Kuzmin and his *Wings*, it is Rozanov's metaphysical interpretation of homosexuality that has had a decisive philosophical and ideological impact on most Russian gay authors. Rooted in the scientific and philosophical theories of the late nineteenth century and read only clandestinely in the Soviet period, Rozanov's work on homosexuality was reprinted in mass editions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It has been read widely since then, and even today, one finds the echoes of Rozanov's ideas and tropes in almost any discussion of homosexuality in Russia that aspires to intellectual seriousness. Even more importantly, this line of thinking about homosexuality has merged in Russia with another exceptionally influential part of Rozanov's literary legacy, to wit, his innovative genre of existentialist fragment, *rozanovshchina* (Siniavskii 1999; Bershtein 2006). Developed in his *Solitaria (Uedinennoe)* and *Fallen Leaves* (1912–15), Rozanov's type of fragmentary writing has widened the scope of material admissible in high-brow literature and suggested a perfect literary vehicle for an irrationalist, disjointed, refined, and sex-obsessed modern consciousness. Looking at the later Russian literary treatments of homosexuality as found in the writings of Evgeny Kharitonov, Eduard Limonov, Aleksandr Il'ianen, and Aleksandr Markin, one is struck by how the Rozanovian genre of fragmentary, marginal, semi-confessional poetics has become associated in these works with Rozanov's way of thinking, that is, stressing the ontological otherness of gay people and their existential marginality.⁷ This Rozanovian way of conceptualizing homosexuality has contributed to the formation in Russia of an idiosyncratic genre of gay writing that rejects the normalizing pedagogical approach associated with the Western Bildungsroman. More often than not, Russian writers who adopted both the Rozanovian genre and Rozanovian intellectual tradition defined themselves and their writing against what they saw as the Western way of approaching gay themes, leaving the literary search for finding social solutions to the problem of homosexuality, figuratively speaking, to "the English."

Philosophically, the Bildungsroman and the fragment represent two different approaches to the notion of becoming, central to both genres. The Bildungsroman views the act of "becoming" as a goal-oriented process that results in achieving a harmonious stasis. As a variation of the Bildung narrative, the coming-out story reaches a definite and triumphant climax in the

⁷ This list of significant Russian texts exploring gay themes includes Kharitonov's collection *Pod domashnim arestom*, Il'ianen's *I finn...* and *Butik Vanity*, Limonov's *Dnevnik neudachnika*, and Aleksandr Markin's *Dnevnik 2002–06*. The question of how Lidia Ginzburg's fragmentary texts relate to this generic pattern of Russian gay writing awaits a special examination.

hero's liberating embrace of both his desire and an identity that allows him to act on this desire openly. (See the sun-drenched ekphrasis in the finale of *Wings*: having decided to join his beloved in a life together, the young protagonist "threw open the window onto a street flooded with sunlight." End of novel.) Conversely, the fragment bears the memory of being "the Romantic genre par excellence" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988, 40) As such, the Romantic text "is always becoming and it can never be completed" (Schlegel 1968, 141). Comparing the fragment to a seed, German Romantics saw in it the open-ended process of generation. Completion, inherent in *Bildung*, has no place in the dynamic and infinite fragment. The fragment as the process of gestation is a characteristically Romantic idea, and it appears to reverberate in Rozanov's famous claim that "all my writings are mixed ... with human semen/seed" (*vse moi sochineniia zameshany ... na semeni chelovecheskom*; Rozanov 1990, 294). However, the addition of the attribute "human" to the Romantic "seed" moves the Rozanovian fragment away from the Romantic line of thinking, because for the Romantic fragment, an important principle was "to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world," as Friedrich Schlegel wrote of the genre of fragment (Schlegel 1968, 143). For Rozanov, the fragment is an extension not simply of "the world" but of its author's own grotesquely material body.

Rooted in the rationalist Enlightenment tradition, the *Bildungsroman* follows the individual's search for a place in a community. It is within the community that the stasis is reached. The opposite is true of the fragment, for which the isolation from the surrounding world is a crucial characteristic. Genealogically and philosophically, Rozanov's whispering borrows a great deal from the "Notes" of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, as in *Zapiski iz podpol'ia*. It is therefore unsurprising to find the valorization of the "underground" isolation in Russian gay literature which, I believe, has been dramatically influenced by "rozanovshchina." Behind the fragmentary poetics and their subterranean connotations stands a Romantic rejection of the Enlightenment rationalist impulse that animates the key trope of Western gay movement—"coming out of the closet." After all, this "closet" is but an alias of the mental and social underground, the age-old *podpol'e*.

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