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Introduction

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Introduction

■ "Russians have their own, particular erotic culture; it's just that we don't know much about it."[1] With these words, the contemporary Russian sexologist and psychologist Igor Kon sums up both the premise and purpose of this volume: to demonstrate that there is a distinct and complex subject matter to be found under the heading *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, to explore why comparatively little is felt to be known about it, and to begin to explore what in fact we do know with some confidence. While sexuality, its practices and discourses, are now more commonly studied by Western scholars, we know far less about sexual life and sexual representations in Russia's past and present, as Kon suggests. The papers collected here make a valuable contribution to a subject that has received little scholarly attention inside or outside Russia, though media attention to the profusion of sexual discourses in contemporary Russia is notable.

We take the terms "sexuality" and "the body" principally to mean not biologically precise events or objects in the physical world, but (following Foucault) rather discursively constituted and changing entities that people have imagined and lived with in various ways throughout Russian history. Sexuality thus includes "the array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity formations, and knowledges in both men and women, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations but is not adequately defined by them."[2] Foucault's work has stimulated the

thinking of many of the contributors as well as our own, and it was Foucault's implicit principle—that sexuality would be both symptomatic of and constructed by a culture—that motivated us to organize the Amherst conference and to publish this book. We felt that there were aspects of Russian culture that have been invisible to us because we know little about the culture's ideas of sex. As we explore below, there has also been considerable denial of sex as a valid subject of research until very recently. We take the scantiness of that research itself to be a feature of sexuality in Russian culture and of Slavic studies in the U.S.; following Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," we conclude that the existence in Russia of "an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know" means that for Russian culture sex and the body are phenomena that can tell us a great deal rather than phenomena that can tell us "nothing."[3] The essays in this volume demonstrate that the repressions and expressions of "bodies and pleasures" (in Foucault's terms) have motivated writers as different as the Church fathers, foreign visitors to Russia, Leo Tolstoy, Lidia Avilova, Anna Barykova, Anton Chekhov, Marina Tsvetaeva, Maria Shkapskaya, and Tatiana Tolstaya; the reception of the *Petrushka* puppet plays and the plays as popular spectacle; criticism of Sophia Parnok's poems and Natalia Goncharova's paintings; a rhetoric of purity to justify control of prostitutes after the revolution; and the metaphysics of some of Russia's most distinguished philosophers.

Why sex *and the body*? In part, we suspected that whatever was specific to Russian ideas about sex might have to do with how Russian bodies are imagined. The images that come to Western (but not just Western) minds are telling: they might include bulky and enduring peasant bodies, a mother's fertile body, and, as a grotesque result of the famines, the labor camps, the wars, and the purges of this century, probably also dead bodies.[4] Participants at the Amherst symposium discussed several instances of pictorial or narrative representation of a body quite apart from its eroticism.[5] But the most intense discussion came when we talked about myths of the mother's body in Russian culture. We asked how particular historical bodies live out and resist the mythification of the maternal, and how this mythification has shaped the problematic imagination of the erotic body for Russia.

Crucial to the discussion of sex and the body is the question *whose body*. The papers amply show that there is a volatile and inevitable relationship between sexual experience and gender difference. As others have noted, it is a weakness of Foucault's arguments that he rarely considers gender difference, and his idea of "the body" is in fact a man's body. In writing this introduction, we found the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, particularly her recent study *The Epistemology of the Closet,* a useful and provocative corrective, for she is able to work with Foucault's insights in order to untangle the relationship between sex and gender with compelling clarity, and to study the power relations between women and men and the injunctions to secrecy that especially coalesce around gay men and lesbians.[6] Sedgwick's lucid analysis of willed ignorances that create complex systems of knowledge and power has reinforced our own commitment to understanding some of the silences that seem to substitute for well-formed questions of sex and the body in Russian culture.

The essays in this volume vastly expand our knowledge of sexuality in Russian culture, while they also suggest areas of ignorance that remain. For this reason we felt that any attempt to place these essays in a comprehensive and connecting narrative or to sketch a history of sexual discourse in Russia would be premature. The essays display a variety of approaches and make differing theoretical assumptions, divergences that produced much lively discussion at the symposium. Rather than risk distorting the particular insights of each essay in an attempt to reconcile these differences, we have tried to provide a framework in this introduction within which to read the essays in all their variety. That framework draws on recurrent themes from the essays, and adds historical background for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

We begin with a brief discussion of Russia's relation to the West. When it comes to ideas about sex and the body, assumptions about what is foreign and what is native are charged with a host of expectations about morality, privacy, and pleasure. We follow with a reading of several attempts at an overview of sexuality in Russia as a way of drawing out and testing the common underlying assumptions about sexuality and the body. These assumptions are not always explicit, and they include the processes by which sex has been coded as transgressive or liberatory, the establishment of heterosexual sex as a norm, and a frequently

expressed desire to transcend the body, a desire connected in important ways with the image of the maternal body. We subject the images of the maternal identified by the philosophical and literary traditions to detailed analysis, asking how the discourse of motherhood is consolidated at given historical moments, and how various expectations and taboos make themselves felt in daily life. We discuss a short narrative about a sexual encounter between a man and a pregnant woman to clarify the conflicting but also mutually constitutive patterns of thought about the maternal body and the erotic body. We then consider the interactions between gender and sexuality, specifying how they are fundamentally different but importantly connected categories. We take our examples of cross-gender masquerade from the memoir and popular cartoon traditions.

We conclude the introduction with something that might well have been our starting point—the explosion of curiosity and discourses about sex in the contemporary period. Our survey of the contemporary period is somewhat more detailed than other parts of the introduction, since there is only one essay on the period in this volume (Helena Goscilo's reading of Tatiana Tolstaya), and since a great deal of this new material is little known. We do more, though, than survey this material: to understand how *glasnost* was made to seem "sexy," we ask whether the bodies represented in recent fiction are only or even principally erotic. We also describe how a rhetoric of sexual liberation, particularly movement toward gay and lesbian liberation, has met with resistance. These topics, then, will organize our introduction, and within this structure we refer to the essays in this volume as they create and debate the contexts we are elucidating.

How Does "Russian" Sexuality Differ from that of the "West"?

In 1767 the great libertine adventurer and authority on matters erotic Count Giacoma Girolama Casanova de Seingalt paid a brief visit to Russia in hopes of repairing his fortunes at Catherine II's court. Casanova enjoyed his customary pleasures and adventures in Russia, in these respects finding the country little different from the many others he visited (with the exception of openly displayed male homosexuality in Russia). His descriptions of public balls, masquerades, dinners, and other social gatherings remind us of Peter I's success in Westernizing Russia, and more particularly in transforming the relations between the sexes.[7] The eighteenth century saw a decisive shift in sexual manners, a shift away from the mores of the pre-Petrine period described by Eve Levin. Peter brought noble women out of the seclusion of the *terem* and obliged men and women to associate with one another in ways long established in Western countries.[8] This policy reflected social and economic theories widely accepted in the West. Broadly speaking, these theories averred that the progress and development of civilizations could be gauged by relations between men and women: primitive societies were characterized by violent, rapacious, and promiscuous male tyranny over women, while in more civilized societies women were treated respectfully, and ideals of mutual love and pleasure were cultivated.[9]

Alongside these Western manners, Casanova found very un-Western customs. Nowhere was this more noticeable than at the baths, that peculiarly Russian institution.[10] Casanova took his beautiful serf mistress Zaira to the baths, "where thirty or forty naked men and women were bathing together without the slightest constraint. This absence of shame must arise, I should imagine, from native innocence; but I wondered that none looked at Zaira, who seemed to me the original of the statue of Psyche I had seen at the Villa Borghese at Rome."[11]

In the face of Russian indifference, Casanova himself documents Zaira's beauty, displaying not only her body but his Western standards of erotic pleasure. His comparison to the famed statue of Psyche in the Villa Borghese suggests the extent to which his views are embedded in a long history of Western culture, one that established standards for the erotic and the beautiful, replete with notions of innocence and corruption, exposure and concealment of the body. Judith Vowles's paper has an extended account of how foreigners saw eighteenth-century Russian society through the prisms of their own cultures.

Casanova's account suggests the tensions and contradictions of Russia's relation to the West. At the Amherst symposium, participants repeatedly returned to this subject, trying to specify what was different about the history of sexuality and the body in Rus-

sia. We hardly solved the problem of Russia and the West, but we agreed that this very issue has been central to Russian images of sexual and bodily presence in the world since at least the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century is similarly a crucial period for Western culture: many modern institutions and ways of thinking about sexuality and the body were founded at this time. While Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* focuses on the nineteenth century's repressive hypothesis, his writings on the way in which the body became the object of attention in numerous disciplines, including the medical and legal professions, push back into the eighteenth century.[12] Thomas Laqueur summarizes the importance of eighteenth-century changes when he notes, "human sexual nature changed"; his claim is supported by historians and scholars in other disciplines.[13]

Many eighteenth-century Russian writers of love and sex also anticipated and framed the ways in which later writers would treat the subject. The poet Vasily Trediakovsky introduced Western literary erotic texts and genres (the novel and the love song) as a civilizing influence; however his critics perceived his work as corrupting and profane.[14] These dual attitudes persisted throughout the eighteenth century; Western literary models of love and romance were imitated approvingly, but also attacked and satirized for being Western, the male and female dandy (*shchegol'* and *shchegolikha*) being especially vilified as the bearers of new sexual manners.[15] Some writers, like Alexander Sumarokov, advanced both positions, producing numerous charming love songs and successful satires. One of the most severe critiques of how the West had brought sexual corruption and decay to Russian society was Prince M. M. Shcherbatov's *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia* (*O povrezhdenii nravov v Rossii*, 1786–89).[16] His harsh view of Russia's relation to the West finds many echoes in later writers; perhaps one of the best known among contemporary figures is Valentin Rasputin, whose attitudes we explicate at the end of this essay. These two writers from very different times share the assumptions that Russia is pure, unlike the West, which is preoccupied with sex, and thus a source of corruption.[17]

Such assumptions have often taken the form of a claim that the Russian language lacks a vocabulary of the erotic because it lacks the thing itself.[18] Trediakovsky, for example, said that he was obliged to invent a vocabulary that included Western forms for his *Journey to the Island of Love* (*Ezda v ostrov Liubvi*, 2nd ed. 1778).[19] More recently the Russian philosopher Georgy Gachev noted that until the word *seks* ("sex") appeared in common Russian usage, the language was limited to terms that strictly connoted only biological phenomena, only emotional intensity, or only obscene and forbidden acts.[20] The contemporary explosion of published material about sexuality has taken account of a perceived paucity of Russian terms and Russian unfamiliarity with Western vocabularies by including lists of new terms at the conclusion of various books.[21]

We ignore the complaint of language's inadequacy at our peril, since it bespeaks a "nonexistence," in Foucault's terms, beneath which an extensive fund of material about the culture is hiding. But we also should resist taking the claims at equal or face value. Some are dubious: Eve Levin's paper in this volume gives an extensive sampling of the words and locutions used in Church writings during the Middle Ages, and there are many texts attesting to the existence of a rich vocabulary in the eighteenth century.[22] There is a long history of anxiety about importing foreign words, something Russian has long done and intellectuals have long debated. Words like *seks*, *erotika*, *gomoseksualist*, *lesbianka* are becoming more rooted in Russian daily use, and one wonders if, in time, they will grow to seem no more apparently foreign than *teatr* or *akter*.[23]

Any discussion of sexuality and the body in Russian culture must therefore take account of how distinctions between Russia and the West are used to structure arguments and shape narratives on the subject. Mikhail Bakhtin's colleague V. Voloshinov declared in his account of Freudianism that interest in sexuality is a Western phenomenon, characteristic of the development of individualism in Western societies, a decadent sign of a corrupt society. "All periods of social decline and disintegration," he writes, "are characterized by overestimation of the sexual in life and in ideology."[24] Viewed in this light, the essays collected here become a peculiarly Western phenomenon, and a decadent one at that (given the controversial nature of the subject, a point of view with which some Western critics might sympathize).[25]

Against the insistence that sexuality is a Western, not a Rus-

sian, phenomenon, one might set Western accounts that claim the opposite. Eighteenth-century foreign travelers, for example, frequently voiced shock at Russian depravity, as Judith Vowles's paper documents. Catherine II's court and her lovers were often cited by foreigners to exemplify Russian decadence; even Casanova called her the most dissolute woman he had ever met.[26] Throughout the nineteenth century Western writers saw Russia as a locus of exotic sexuality, as numerous examples from Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* attest.[27] Such attitudes turn up in Russian literature, for example in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, where Vronsky obliges a foreign prince by entertaining him with the expected round of Russian orgies. Similar views persist into the twentieth century; an American sexologist of the 1930s who considered Russia a hotbed of vice, a "country of sexual vices and excesses," was not atypical.[28] In many ways the accusations flung by Russians and Westerners at each other are similar in form and moralistic outrage; the American sexologist's diatribes are little different from, say, Rasputin's attacks on the West. The same distrust and horror of sexuality and the body are shared by American and Russian alike, although each projects the source of corruption and decadence onto the other country (and both reserve particular vilification for homosexuality).

Voloshinov can also be said to represent a strand of Russian thought that seeks to evade the problem of sexuality by defining it as Western. The supposition that sex is *not* a central theme in Russian literature is not self-evident, but rather a key argument in Russian discussions about sexuality. It owes a great deal to attempts to define the nature of Russian culture by defining the difference between Russia and the West, that is, by defining (and rejecting) the nature of the Other, just as definitions of Man have been made in contrast to the Other, Woman.[29]

Versions of Russian Sexuality

Having called into question the Russian idea that sexuality per se is a Western preoccupation, we now offer several accounts of sexuality in Russian culture. We begin with two narratives, one by Nikolai Berdyaev, one by Simon Karlinsky. We will consider a third perspective, that of Georgy Gachev, in a moment, and others

will be used as counterpoints to these three, including Vasili Rozanov, Alexandra Kollontai, and a growing group of contemporary Russian feminists who critically engage traditions of writing about sex in Russian culture. Berdyaev and Karlinsky recommend themselves initially, however, because they attempt comprehensive views of their subject, because they embody important oppositions in Russian culture, and because the objects of their discourse (sublimation and heterosexuality for Berdyaev, homosexuality and liberation for Karlinsky) enable interrogation of fundamental categories of Russian thought.[30] Both men address Russia but write out of specifically Western traditions (Parisian emigration of the 1920s and 1930s, contemporary American academic life); both speak from political contexts that, while sometimes submerged in their work, nonetheless inform it (the anti-Sovietism of Russian intellectuals in emigration, the struggles for gay rights in the U.S.); each represents an intellectual tradition that has roots in modern Russian history (Berdyaev, the appeal to Russian spirituality also found in the Slavophiles' hostility toward Westernization; Karlinsky, the commitment to secular, pluralist values associated with figures like Alexander Herzen, and in our century, Andrei Sakharov and Andrei Sinyavsky). Finally, the two writers stand out for their quite different fates among readers, a difference that again enacts the paradoxical status of sexuality as a legitimate question for Russian culture: while Karlinsky appears to have affected a limited audience even among American Slavists, Berdyaev has emerged as a frequently reprinted and powerfully influential thinker in Russia's contemporary cultural revival. In terms of influence, Berdyaev is comparable to Rozanov (in fact, the recent spate of republications from Rozanov's vast legacy has edited out his endorsements of male homosexuality and made him seem even more like Berdyaev).[31]

Nikolai Berdyaev, widely known as a religious philosopher, spoke of himself in a late, semiautobiographical essay as belonging "in all probability, to the *genus* of philosophers of the erotic" (Berdyaev, *Self Knowledge*, p. 449); but in the same pages, he also insisted that sex should not be spoken about. Eric Naiman's paper in this volume explicates well the consequences of this paradoxical attitude. Writing in emigration in Paris, Berdyaev is one of several philosopher-theologians responsible for a twentieth-century re-

naissance of interest in Russian Orthodoxy; he is self-consciously indebted in his thinking on eros to Jacob Boehme, and propelled more negatively by opposition to Freud. Berdyaev's narrative plots a history of heroic spiritual denial, finding in Russian culture an eschatological essence that grants no legitimacy to the pleasures of world and body. Berdyaev urges us to keep sex private, to cover it up. His is a story that depicts and celebrates the triumph of morality and sublimation over the temptations of the flesh. Ironically, Berdyaev comes to a position not unlike the late Freud's, in his insistence on the values of personality and culture constructed through sublimation of bodily drives.

Simon Karlinsky, on the other hand, is an American scholar who has virtually inaugurated academic discourse on sexuality in Russia.[32] In "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture," he foregrounds a history of homosexuality in Russia, militating against any assumptions that the history of sexuality is linked only (or primarily) to relations *between* genders. Karlinsky could not be further from the quasi-religious urgings toward repression and sublimation found in Berdyaev; he sees nothing to be gained by hiding sexual pleasure or preference. Indeed, in his earlier landmark study of Nikolai Gogol's homosexuality, he charts the tragic path of one who starved himself to death rather than acknowledge his body and its desires. In *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, Karlinsky reads the entire oeuvre of a major Russian writer on the basis of an extended and rich understanding of what kinds of sexual expressions were possible at a particular historical moment (Russia in approximately the first half of the nineteenth century) and what kinds of emotional and physical connections to others a particular person, Gogol, sought, valued, and feared.[33]

Karlinsky's keen sense of historical change, particularly in his essays about Russia's gay literary tradition, provides a view of sexuality quite different from Berdyaev's. Rather than Berdyaev's transcendent and essentializing categories of body and spirit, Karlinsky sees distinct periods in Russian history, and observes the nearly cyclical changes in attitudes brought by time's passage. Periods of relative tolerance for homosexuality include the pre-Petrine era and the nearly 60 years starting just after 1861 (the emancipation of the serfs), the greatest tolerance occurring in the *fin de siècle* period known as Russia's Silver Age. Karlinsky's history moves between prohibition (in the eighteenth century and under Nicholas I) and celebration. His is a plot not of denial and sublimation, then, as in Berdyaev, but of liberation, brought to a tragic dénouement with the October Revolution and the "return of the repressors"—Lenin and his cohort, who inherited a "Victorian, puritanical ethic devised in the 1860's by the utilitarian positivists of that period" ("Russia's Gay Literature," p. 352). One might quarrel with this scheme, particularly if one tried to use the repression or acceptance of male homosexuality as a basis for conclusions about sexual repression and liberation more generally. The Silver Age, as we discuss below, is particularly resistant to categorization: the essays by Diana Lewis Burgin and Jane A. Sharp in this volume suggest that, as far as both lesbian and heterosexual women were concerned, the period was not so liberatory.

The accounts of Karlinsky and Berdyaev shape familiar oppositions (familiar, one notes, not only in Russia): of body versus spirit, of celebration versus repression, of homosexual versus heterosexual love. To some extent these are the oppositions that shape traditional histories of Russian culture, particularly as it moves from the culture of the mid-nineteenth century (characterized by prose, satire, politics, materialism, the *literal* in all its forms and tyrannies) to the 1890s (marked by poetry, metaphor, decadence, play, elusive identity, and flirtation with other worlds). Silver Age culture, for most students of Russia, is marked by the *repudiation* of the materialist ethos of the 1860s, and by the advent of unprecedented freedoms.[34] Partly for this reason, the Silver Age has become a period to which a great number of contemporary Russian thinkers and artists look for inspiration and models—hence a period that may prove pivotal in the renovation of various forms of discourse and creativity. Five essays in this volume (by Svetlana Boym, Diana Lewis Burgin, Barbara Heldt, Eric Naiman, and Jane A. Sharp) attest its importance and document the complexity of the position of women during the Silver Age. A sixth essay, by Cathy Popkin, treats a writer who stood in unusually complex relation to the age (Anton Chekhov). Its more liberal atmosphere facilitated the work of Natalia Goncharova and Sophia Parnok, for example, but Jane A. Sharp's and Diana Lewis Burgin's essays also show that opposition to, or incompre-

hension of, their achievements was significant. And Cathy Popkin, by reading the narrative strategies in a single Chekhov story, calls into question the separateness of prohibitions on sexuality from celebrations of sexual pleasure; indeed she finds the two to be mutually constitutive and finally inseparable. These essays, among others, remind us how the intricacies of gender and sexuality might temper apparently stark opposition between repression and liberation.

A similar convergence of patterns of repression and liberation characterizes the period of reform after 1861. A description of those years suggests almost immediately why they, too, are important to any study of sexuality in Russian culture. The reform inaugurated in 1861 marks a fundamental redrawing of the class configuration and economic structure of Russia, one that hastened the decay of an agrarian society and the institution of a more urbanized, industrialized country. These changes directly affected the history of sexuality. One paper in this volume, as well as much work elsewhere, focuses specifically on this period: Jane T. Costlow, in her essay on nineteenth-century representations of the maternal breast, suggests connections among anxiety over maternal roles, women's growing place in the workforce, the growth of prostitution, and literary/sexual appropriations of women's bodies.[35] Elizabeth A. Wood's essay in this volume contributes to a growing body of work on prostitution in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russian culture. Catriona Kelly's paper, which discusses developments before and after the period of reform, observes that the misogyny of the *Petrushka* puppet plays intensified during and perhaps because of this period's urbanization. Eric Naiman and Jane A. Sharp both note that the "woman question" motivated subsequent protest against women's involvement in culture.

Most of the work on sexual representations during the 1860s has been anchored by the "woman question"—that is, the question of women's proper role in society, which arose during this time as women's concerns emerged in public discussions. Topics like women in the family, women's physiological role and/or limitations, women's desire for love, and women's rights to education made issues of sexuality part of a broad range of discourses (legal, medical, moral, publicistic, literary).[36] Nikolai Chernyshevsky

both condensed many of these troubling issues and expressed the anxiety they produced in his exclamation "Away with these erotic questions!"[37]

Among the most provocative readings of this period, particularly of Chernyshevsky, is Nikolai Berdyaev's *Russian Idea* (*Russkaia ideia*, 1946). Berdyaev's focus on the legacy of Russian Orthodoxy and its impact on the "justification of culture" shapes his surprisingly positive response to Chernyshevsky.[38] Berdyaev reads Russia's nineteenth-century political radicals as faithful sons of Russian Orthodoxy; the nihilists were the monk-ascetics of a new order, governed by the law of castration, as Rozanov put it.[39] For Berdyaev, the great radical movements of the nineteenth century were infused with the same essence of transcendence, or what we might now call repression and sublimation, directed by men for whom the eschatological ends of social transformation negated all justifications of this-worldly pleasure. Berdyaev's narrative produces a picture of Russia in which male brotherhood plays a central role.

Chernyshevsky's portrait of the ideal revolutionary, in his novel *What Is to Be Done?* (*Chto delat'?*, 1863), provides a telling instance of both the sublimations Berdyaev describes and the bonds of love that were sublimated.[40] In chapter 29 ("An Extraordinary Man"), Chernyshevsky recounts a narrative of sanctity that focuses on the denial of bodily pleasures ("I shall not drink one drop of wine. I shall not touch any women," p. 280) and their sublimation in forms of manual labor.[41] Rakhmetov, Chernyshevsky's extraordinary man, becomes a kind of folk hero of labor, endowed with herculean strength and endurance and legitimated by his ability to share the work and material existence of the people, despite his own noble birth. In his sole concession to bodily desire, Rakhmetov smokes expensive cigars. Even without stressing the striking substitution of one form of oral pleasure (cigars) for those Rakhmetov has denied (wine and women), one recognizes in this figure of radical asceticism and power a virulently masculine image. In a novel that seems more centrally about *women's* work (the plot turns on Vera Pavlovna's founding of a sewing collective to help women of all classes gain economic and emotional autonomy), this chapter glorifies masculinity and male labor. The physical bond of men at work displaces the emasculating and

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Chernyshevsky's portrait of the ideal revolutionary, in his novel *What Is to Be Done?* (*Chto delat'?*, 1863), provides a telling instance of both the sublimations Berdyaev describes and the bonds of love that were sublimated.[40] In chapter 29 ("An Extraordinary Man"), Chernyshevsky recounts a narrative of sanctity that focuses on the denial of bodily pleasures ("I shall not drink one drop of wine. I shall not touch any women," p. 280) and their sublimation in forms of manual labor.[41] Rakhmetov, Chernyshevsky's extraordinary man, becomes a kind of folk hero of labor, endowed with herculean strength and endurance and legitimated by his ability to share the work and material existence of the people, despite his own noble birth. In his sole concession to bodily desire, Rakhmetov smokes expensive cigars. Even without stressing the striking substitution of one form of oral pleasure (cigars) for those Rakhmetov has denied (wine and women), one recognizes in this figure of radical asceticism and power a virulently masculine image. In a novel that seems more centrally about *women's* work (the plot turns on Vera Pavlovna's founding of a sewing collective to help women of all classes gain economic and emotional autonomy), this chapter glorifies masculinity and male labor. The physical bond of men at work displaces the emasculating and

decadent association with women. It seems hardly surprising that Rakhmetov's first interaction with Vera Pavlovna involves a refusal: Vera does not ask Rakhmetov to perform the labor with which she needs help (sorting women's garments), an omission that underscores the revolutionary's distance from the tactile, bodily, feminine realm still faintly represented in Vera. It is in fact Vera who succumbs to the oral, gustatory pleasure Rakhmetov denies himself: she's a sucker for clotted cream. The possibility of political radicalism coupled with bodily delight fades, however: it is the radical ascetic Rakhmetov who served as model for future revolutionaries.[42] What Chernyshevsky adumbrates in this portrait of a revolutionary is a rhetoric of revolutionary labor and discipline that will control and discipline (in Foucault's terms) the impetuous, apolitical body.

It is more than a little ironic, then, to find a rhetoric of sublimation and work that uncannily resembles that of the radicals of the 1860s in a contemporary commentator on "Russian Eros," one who owes much of his philosophical allegiance to the "antimaterialist" Russian Silver Age.[43] Georgy Gachev, like Berdyaev, insists on a distinction between sex (narrowly physical) and eros (a broader and more spiritual category).[44] Work, writes Gachev, can be seen as a "form of eros."[45] Gachev might find an association of his essay with Chernyshevsky's views rather unlikely: his elaboration of work and love envisions a deeply idyllic (rather than revolutionary) connection between tiller and soil. Yet he shares both Chernyshevsky's turn from the sexual body to the body at work and his insistent masculinity. Both men inscribe visionary teleologies that erase sexual pleasure as illegitimate; Gachev dissolves the woman's body in a mythology of feminine earth. Chernyshevsky moves toward an ideology of virility and class solidarity in labor; Gachev envisions the maternal as the site of redeemed work. Both men refuse what Berdyaev has called the "justification of the flesh"—something Berdyaev associated with the more decadent aspects of Silver Age culture, but which we might take more broadly to signify an attitude of joy and justice associated with the body and its pleasures.[46]

Gachev's reading of Russian culture stresses the spirit of renunciation that Berdyaev finds essentially Russian and claims as a common thread linking the nineteenth-century materialists with

both the medieval religious period and figures as disparate as Tolstoy and Berdyaev himself. But this reading of Russian culture, both of the nineteenth century and more broadly, excises those historical phenomena that Karlinsky draws to our attention: phenomena in which the bodily and the sexual are both individually affirmed and tolerated by society at large. We might return to the lessons of Foucault's study of the institutions and discourses of sexuality for a moment. It becomes clear how risky it would be for us to agree too quickly that one historical period was a time of liberation, another a time of sexual repression, or to see the two as mutually exclusive; Foucault persuades us that liberation and repression often go paradoxically and inextricably hand in hand.

This is in fact what a more diverse reading of the nineteenth century might suggest. Chernyshevsky's portrait of Rakhmetov is only one aspect of the ethos of this era. Legislative mandates notwithstanding, Karlinsky notes, the latter half of the nineteenth century was marked by a tolerance of homosexual practice ("Russia's Gay Literature," pp. 350–53). Chernyshevsky insisted on granting his wife the freedom of sexuality and emotion that had traditionally been men's prerogative.[47] Chernyshevsky also participated in one of the numerous triangular relationships among radicals and nihilists in the period, relationships that are strikingly similar to those studied by Eve Sedgwick in the English literary tradition (the similarity includes the way that a deep but dangerous bond between two men is strengthened, indeed facilitated, by the presence of a mediating woman).[48] *What Is to Be Done?* became a powerful force in initiating and legitimating companionate marriage, as well as strong relationships of affection and economic support among women. Such practices raise important questions about the nature and languages of friendship and sexuality for radicals in this era. Companionate marriage, recognition of sexual desire, tolerance for maternity outside marriage, openly homosexual relationships between men and between women—these all existed alongside Chernyshevsky's intensely masculine ideal of sublimating physical labor. The quasi-official rhetoric of Russian radicalism that increasingly disdained attention to matters of intimate life and personal relations existed in paradoxical tension with these other practices.[49]

Chernyshevsky's novel might stand, then, as containing all the

complicated and occasionally contradictory strands of thought of a period that aspired to fundamental liberation in matters personal, even as it held more repressive potential. The precise configuration of the interactions among these practices, and their relationships to official religious and legal discourse, remains to be mapped. What seems unquestionable is the dangerous linkage of an insistence on Russia as essentially spiritual, hence asexual, that we find in Berdyaev and Gachev, with the privileging of certain moments and phenomena from Russian history as proof of that essence. This is a powerful philosophical and cultural construct that needs to be named as such, and not taken as a "given" or as something natural.

Karlinsky argues against this spiritualization and virtual renunciation of sexuality, and we want to end this part of the introduction with thinkers who share his project of affirming sexual expression and describing the realities of sexual experience. Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952) was a contemporary of Berdyaev, and a thinker who is also drawing new attention from Russians in the 1990s (in her case, from contemporary feminists). She became a figure of some infamy for the last three decades of her life, in large part because she sought the political and social liberation of women, which could not have been more at odds with the repressions urged by Stalin.[50] Kollontai devoted much of her energy to trying to improve the lives of Russian women; she wrote, "women and their fate have been the preoccupation of my entire life, and it is women's lot that drew me to Socialism."[51] Within her larger agenda of social programs for women and children, Kollontai also offered an analysis of women's second-class status that went beyond the Marxist theory of class oppression: she saw the oppression of women as complexly buttressed by women's sexual vulnerability.[52] She assumed the importance of individuality and self-expression in ways that resemble Berdyaev's and Rozanov's arguments for a spiritual value in sexual experience. But she did not lose sight of the material base of sexual experience, principally because of her strong intellectual debts to the Marxist tradition.[53] Kollontai is most insightful, in fact, when she writes of the complex interworkings of cultural paradigms with an individual's experience of intimate relationship. It is no surprise that she wrote fiction and autobiography in addition to her vast output in journalism, political analysis, and public speaking. The fiction has been scorned even by those who take Kollontai's political writing seriously.[54] Tales like *The Love of Worker Bees* (*Liubov' pchel trudovykh*, 1923), *A Great Love* (*Bol'shaia liubov'*, originally titled *Zhenshchina na perelome*, 1923) offer valuable alternative accounts of sexuality and desire in Russian culture. Kollontai's insights and discoveries are mentioned in some of the essays in this volume, in studies as different as Elizabeth A. Wood's essay on prostitution after the revolution (where Kollontai's views of prostitution are criticized) and Jane A. Sharp's account of Natalia Goncharova's trial for pornography.

Kollontai was never fully forgotten in or after her lifetime.[55] But her feminism has been virtually ignored in Russia, at least until very recently.[56] Kollontai and more recent feminists remind us that the sexual adventures of heterosexual men have, in Russia as elsewhere, sometimes involved violent repression of women. Kollontai's keenest insights are on relations between men and women; when she says sex she means heterosexual sex. She never, for example, lets her fictional heroines who are fed up with selfish and dominating men imagine intimacy with other women, which, as Diana Lewis Burgin and others have shown, was in fact a way of life for some women of this age. Kollontai's views of motherhood as women's most fulfilling emotional experience could also use some critical distance;[57] in fact she participates in the mythic elevation of the maternal so typical of Russian culture, to which we will turn in a moment.

Contemporary Russian feminists, who have in a sense picked up where Kollontai left off after an interval of 60 years, also exhibit a complex set of views about motherhood. The first generation of these feminist activists, of whom Tatiana Mamonova is the best known, often glorified the maternal and identified women with an instinctual desire to create and preserve life.[58] But these feminist writers contextualized women's reproductive capacities rather differently from what we shall see in male writers in a moment: their essays attack inadequate medical and child care, they see women's sexual pleasure as not in conflict with the biological reality of women's capacity to bear children, and in their affirmation of lesbian existence they do not limit women's sexual pleasure to heterosexual (or monogamous) settings.[59] Though there are ob-

vious differences among these writers, there is a strong sense of continuity within this alternative feminist tradition: Mamonova as well as Kollontai are cited in a 1988 essay by Olga Lipovskaya, a feminist activist and journalist living in St. Petersburg.[60] As in Kollontai's writing, the strength of this work is its placement of women at the center of analysis, and the insistent awareness of the material realities that underlie sexual experience for women as well as men. This feminist impulse motivates much of the thinking in this volume.

Sexuality and the Myths of Mother Russia

The importance of the myth of the maternal has most recently been documented by Joanna Hubbs in her book *Mother Russia*; she identifies many Russian writers who draw on these myths, as well as those who claim that the myth of the Mother is the key to Russian culture.[61] The philosopher Georgy Fedotov, for example, writes: "in Mother Earth, who remains the core of Russian religion, converge the most secret and deep religious feelings of the folk." He goes on to describe how pagan cults of Mother Earth are retained but spiritualized in Russian Orthodoxy; the erotic element, says Fedotov, was "obliterated."[62] The importance of understanding how ideas about the maternal function in Russian culture was acknowledged at the conference—indeed, this was perhaps the topic most hotly debated.[63] Essays here by Jane T. Costlow, Barbara Heldt, and Eric Naiman consider the intertwinings of the maternal and the sexual. Each views the veneration of the mother and the maternal as problematic, not axiomatic; beneath and intertwined with idolatry of the maternal they uncover considerable anxiety about the body and sexuality.

Alongside the veneration of the mother in Russia exists a feeling of revulsion toward the maternal body. Writers like Berdyaev could speak reverently of motherhood while being repelled by every aspect of reproduction and pregnancy. Berdyaev's idolatry and repugnance are thoroughly documented here by Eric Naiman, and strongly resemble attitudes found in Tolstoy, whose views Jane T. Costlow's paper discusses and contrasts to women writers who were Tolstoy's contemporaries. What is problematic for Tolstoy is the combination of maternity and sexuality, which should

not, in his eyes, coexist in the same body.[64] In *What Is Art?* (*Chto takoe iskusstvo?*, 1898), though the context is a discussion of art, Tolstoy's attitudes toward the maternal body are stated vividly: "Strange as the comparison may sound, what has happened to the art of our circle and time is what happens to a woman who sells her womanly attractiveness, intended for maternity, for the pleasure of those who desire such pleasures. The Art of our time and of our circle has become a prostitute."[65] Tolstoy sees this ruinous situation as the "tragedy of the bedroom" (Gachev, "Russkii eros," pp. 226–27),[66] tragic because what should be limited to the domestic safety of bedroom and family is opened out to spaces of the public, specifically the market.

This juxtaposition of approval for women whose sexuality produces children with disgust for those whose orientation is toward pleasure is hardly unique to Tolstoy, or to Berdyaev, or even to Russian culture. Its stark and disputable opposition is familiar from Victorian culture, for example, and has been critiqued well by feminist scholars.[67] Where Russian examples offer new insight is in the effect this idealization of the maternal has on sexual fantasy. Once again, the philosopher Georgy Gachev offers a peculiarly condensed version of this adult male fantasy.[68] Here is his description of early-twentieth-century writers (Gachev mentions two by name—Ivan Bunin and Mikhail Artsybashev) who were exploring more adventurous erotic motivations and sexual plots:[69] "The Eros that began to raise its head and get up on its hind legs in Russian literature at the beginning of the twentieth century was entirely the eros of the sneaking, voyeuristic adolescent, and not the eros of the confidently male" (p. 241). The sex scenes of this branch of literature move Gachev to still more extreme metaphors. He calls them "an impulse to stick out one's tongue" and goes on: "that is exactly how an adolescent stands behind a door and spies through a crack or a keyhole, his tongue hanging out, licking his lips, breathing heavily—drooling now and then, he spies on the woman as temple [*baba-khram*] reclining naked and keeping unto herself in the next room, like something out of Kustodiev.[70] Nowhere is there powerful possession of a woman, only groping her" (p. 241).[71] Is the position of woman in all this only that of a viewed (or "groped") object? We seem to be in the presence of the familiar dichotomy of sainted motherhood versus

despised whore, but as we suggested above its effect is unexpected. Evoking the familial bond substitutes pity for love,[72] purging the erotic of sexual desire; indeed one might argue that the function of this evocation is precisely to create and enforce a taboo. Consequently any representation of sexual desire is likely to be surrounded by shame and horror—it is as if all sex were incest. What results are the attempts (catalogued above) to escape the body and desire by redefining sex as transcendence.

If Gachev rejects certain "adolescent" writers, it is perhaps because they do not evade what they see in the Russian tradition, and because they bring together elements that should be kept apart. What Gachev dismisses as peeping through a keyhole might in fact be a refusal to avert the gaze, an insistence on confronting the taboo. This will to confront a taboo emerges vividly in two papers in this volume that seek out previously ignored points of view about maternal representations in their erotic and bodily contexts. Barbara Heldt finds in Maria Shkapskaya "a sexually empowered motherhood centered in the female body," and Jane Costlow concludes her essay on the maternal breast with three lesser-known women writers who uncover "the economic and erotic exploitation of women's bodies" in the practice of wet nursing.

A narrative that addresses these kinds of conflict as inherent in the images associated with the maternal in Russian culture is Ivan Bunin's "Mordvinian Sarafan" ("Mordovskii sarafan," 1925).[73] Bunin's three-page tale of a man's liaison with a pregnant woman has both characters repeat the myths and clichés about motherhood that they have absorbed from their culture. The mainspring of the affair is their sexual desire, and the rather tawdry circumstances might indeed make it a sordid adolescent tale. What transforms this rather commonplace relationship is the fact of her pregnancy, which makes the affair, at least to him, peculiarly horrible. From the beginning, when he asks, "Why do I go to her, this strange and, what's more, pregnant woman? Why have I formed this connection and why do I keep up this unnecessary and even repellant acquaintance?" (p. 379), to the end, when he can think only of flight, the atmosphere of the story is one of shame, disgust, and horror.

Her pregnancy is initially a problem of description. On first

looking her over the man observes her hair, her full breasts, and her stockings, but entirely omits to mention her belly, the most telling part of her body and that which obviously both attracts and repels him. His ambivalence is symbolized by the sarafan from which the tale takes its title: she displays "something strange and terrible" (p. 381), a Mordvinian sarafan, which evokes for the narrator the horror of the encounter and perhaps of sexual desire itself. The sarafan is a coarse peasant dress that contrasts oddly with her rich velvet gown; she holds it up to herself, to her breasts and to her belly, drawing attention to the very part of her body that he has tried not to see. He feigns interest and pretends to admire the garment, but thinking all the while, "there was something gloomy, ancient and funereal, as it were, in that shapeless garment; it evoked something terrifying and very unpleasant for me in connection with her pregnancy and her uneasy merriment. Probably she will die in childbirth" (p. 381). These are his fantasies however; when *she* speaks, it is not of fear of dying in childbirth but fear that her child will die.

As their sexual encounter begins, he now fixates on her belly, a change presumably enabled by his pity for her likely death, her talk of children, and thus Bunin's reconceptualization of their relation as that between a parent and child. Compassion has been substituted for desire (in Gachev's terms, *zhalet'* for *zhelat'*). When the moment he has been waiting for comes, a scene of passion is replaced by a scene of comfort, in which he draws her to him with the words "Calm yourself," and she sinks weeping on his breast. The ensuing sexual activity is elided, perhaps because it has come to seem like incest. By the end, the compassion, the tenderness are gone, leaving the image of bodies whose embrace is imbued with shame.

Bunin's story helps us to make concrete Berdyaev's construction of a history of Russian sexuality marked by denial and spirituality, specifically his (and Gachev's) claims for a redemptive ethos in Russia's maternal asexuality.[74] Nothing is redeemed in this story, for the narrator has no access to the transcendence of the body that the idea of the maternal, rather than the physical presence of a pregnant woman, would seem to have promised. Bunin shows us instead how tightly sexual desire has been trapped in the myth of the maternal, and he links both to death with the deeply sym-

bolic and "horrible" peasant dress. The story has the air of death about it because it belongs to the age of Russian decadence; but Bunin also seeks to create a rarified atmosphere of entrapment and decay, as if to say that if this is the conceptual framework within which Russians imagine sexual desire they will always associate it with taboo and death and, as the story's ending suggests with its fantasy of flight, they will inevitably seek escape.

Gender, Masquerade, and Desire

What, though, if the flight were to be fiercely desired by the woman? Would she seek to escape the myth of the maternal that so powerfully imposes on Gachev, Berdyaev, and Bunin? We want to turn here to two quite different scenarios of sexual desire and bodily presence. They involve a foregrounding not of the maternal but of gender difference itself, and allow us to note some of the patterns of enforcement and anxiety that social norms of gender produce about sexuality. But they are perhaps most useful in specifying how gender and sex are not the same thing.[75] They do so by "making strange" the assumptions we might have about femininity and masculinity. Our readings are meant to contextualize the essays in this volume. In her discussion of a Tolstaya story, Helena Goscilo describes a male poet as a "transgendered Clarissa," whom she links to the more general way Tolstaya challenges the limits of gender. Diana Lewis Burgin's analysis of critical writing about Sophia Parnok reveals a rhetorical slippage between the categories of gender and sexuality, as critics who refuse to be forthright about Parnok's lesbianism place her voice in a no-man's-land between the "masculine" and the "feminine." And Svetlana Boym's essay, on Marina Tsvetaeva, identifies the figure of the "poetess" as an impossible combination of feminine excess and feminine lack, both impinging on the kind of love story Tsvetaeva's prose can narrate. As her essay shows, one solution to the resulting narrative problem is the adoption of an exaggerated femininity as masquerade.

We turn, then, to two examples of "women" dressed as "men."[76] The first of these masquerades comes from the memoirs of Nadezhda Durova, *The Cavalry Maiden* (*Kavalerist-devitsa*, 1836), initially published by Alexander Pushkin when he was editor of

The Contemporary (*Sovremennik*). In 1807, Nadezhda Durova sets off to become a cavalry soldier in the Russian army. She leaves behind a mother whose cruelty she emblematized in the tale of how her mother threw her out the door of a moving carriage when she was an infant. Her horrible memories of how she was coaxed and forced toward feminine stillness, meekness, and submissiveness create fully adequate motivation for Durova's decision to emulate instead the adventurous life of her father. When Durova departs, she is dressed in a Cossack uniform and accompanied only by her beloved horse, Alcides.[77] Thanks to wit, some luck, and the help of strangers (including the Emperor Alexander), Durova leaves behind the world of boredom and enclosure that would have been hers as a woman. She marches off to Poland and battle, accepted as a male soldier and only occasionally shadowed by stories of a mysterious woman granted the right to serve as an officer. She is anxious in the company of women, who are more shrewd in suspecting her sex. One pleasure of Durova's text derives from our possession of a knowledge her fellow soldiers do not have. Durova's rejection of gender brings with it liberation, the liberation of movement and adventure. Her freedom depends, though, on the capacities of dress to cloak the body; on her skill at the soldierly gestures that confirm "identity"; on others' persistent reading of her *surface*, rather than her "depth."

Durova inhabits a world in which bodily appearances create a kind of opacity; she provokes little anxiety (that we can read). If anything, there is slimly veiled attraction, an eroticism between women that Durova's male dress both initiates and makes safe. Women pursue Durova; at least one woman is eager to marry her, and Durova's own intense feelings for some of these women emerge fleetingly in the memoir. A mixture of opacity and recognition thus enables the acting out of what may be Durova's longing to be desired by members of her own sex. We suggest, then, that rather than just reading Durova's memoirs as an exciting tale of a woman who gets to experience the adventures of a man during the Napoleonic wars, we might focus on the way that masquerade facilitated a military man's life in public and a woman's encounters with other women in private. If we recall Karlinsky's contrast of sexual liberation versus sexual repression, Durova's memoirs offer a case study in which the reaction against the re-

pressive norms of gender lead to a life experience of at least partial liberation (Durova did not enter into an enduring relationship with any of the women whom she attracted, as was the case for some other women who fought in European or American wars disguised as men).[78] There is indeed some irony in the fact that it is the army that provides Durova with an institutional framework for her liberation, and not just because of the regimentation we associate with the military: Karlinsky notes that laws penalizing consensual male homosexuality were instituted in 1706 and 1716, which means that the very army that facilitated Durova's own closeness to women would have been a site of greater impediments to men's seeking intimacy with other men. Her memoirs thus point to an asymmetry between the ways that men might have lived homosexual lives and the ways that women might have done so, an asymmetry that the Russian legal system has long codified by prohibiting male homosexuality but passing over lesbianism in silence. Durova's memoirs also provide another case where repression and liberation exist side by side.

In our second example of masquerade, the situation is more political. The time is 30 years later, with the advent of the "woman question" and the growing articulation of women's desire to break with traditional categories of existence. The ambiguity of gender and sexuality now seems to worry Russians more; it first surfaces around the figure of George Sand. Elena Shtakenshneider writes in her diary that George Sand is neither man nor woman, a refusal echoed by the editor of a liberal journal, who wrote, "[the new woman] is not a woman, no, and it is not a man either—it is an entirely new sex, a new organism, which we can legally only consider a transition type."[79] The visual representation of such a "new organism" was essayed in 1859 in *The Spark* (*Iskra*), the satirical supplement to the left-wing journal *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*). The cartoon (Fig. 1) depicts a figure of apparently feminine form (her hips and bosom both generously shaped), who wears a simple, light-colored dress and a man's dark hat. She lifts a tumbler in one hand and holds a cigar in the other; her facial features seem neither masculine nor feminine, her hair tucked behind her neck is of ambiguous length, while the broad neck and shadow of an adam's apple suggest, perhaps, masculine strength. Her gesture is accompanied by the following text: "Dear Ladies!

Fig. 1. A cartoon from the journal *The Spark* (*Iskra*), 1859, depicting an ambiguously gendered "new organism." Courtesy of the Hoover Institution Library.

This toast is for our emancipation! The time for the rule [*vladichestvo*] of women has arrived; the men are under our heels. Hurrah! May men's power [*vlast'*] be destroyed, like this empty tumbler! (She throws the tumbler. An outburst of applause.)"[80]

The Spark and *The Contemporary* both represent that wing of the Russian intelligentsia that most adamantly supported women's

emancipation (an issue still tied, we note, to the emancipation of the serfs, and not yet dismissed as irrelevant in the more radicalized world of post-reform Russia). So, for example, Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, perhaps the fullest and most radical articulation of the midcentury feminist program, was published in *The Contemporary* four years after the appearance of this cartoon. What the 1859 image illustrates, however, is a level of anxiety that is only accentuated by the impossibility of dismissing the image as parody. The parodic association of "emancipated women" and "George Sandistes" with masculine attire had become a staple of the conservative (and not only the conservative) press in Russia.[81] But the full weight of the journalist's anxiety is felt less in the woman's attire (both her dress and hat) than in the representation of the body itself. The powerful neck and dark facial features hint at masculinity, while the wine bottle that stands directly in front of the woman casts a phallic shadow along her otherwise curvaceous form. (She seems, in fact, to discard the supposed emptiness of women's genitals in the empty tumbler, in order to take up the more aggressive phallic stance.) All "essence" of gender is lost in this shadow play of sexuality and power. In the disappearance of gender as essence, the cartoon recalls Durova, but the context is insistently political, which means that gender difference is fundamentally a difference in power: the accompanying script alludes to *political* power (*vladichestvo*, *vlast'*), while the image itself conveys male sexual prowess. The image's unresolvability (is this a woman "masquerading" as a man, or a man dressed up in corset and hoop skirt?) also marks its difference from Durova, as well as its powerful unsettling of categories that were, even for radicals, crucial.[82] Jane A. Sharp's essay in this volume provides important evidence of the various ways that Russians tried to keep in place the categories and prohibitions resisted by masquerades such as Durova's or more organized efforts like the women's movement. Her account of Natalia Goncharova's later trial for obscenity shows how the legal system tried to punish a woman painter's intrusion into the historically male preserve of nude painting. Goncharova's reworking of the conventions of nude painting were profoundly disturbing to her contemporaries.

This volume includes other essays in which the controlling of sexuality and gender norms is studied in specific historic contexts:

Eve Levin documents the Orthodox church's language of sexual prohibition during the medieval period, and Elizabeth Wood's study of the discourse around prostitution during the early Soviet period shows how metaphors of purity and contamination were mobilized to control women's sexuality. These essays contribute to a history of sexual repression in Russian culture, which is one important aspect of a history of sexuality in Russia, as elsewhere.

Sexual Discourse in Contemporary Russia

For all the talk about greater sexual freedom in contemporary Russia, we have found as much impetus to regulate and discipline the body and its desires in the contemporary period. To be sure, one impulse behind our symposium on sexuality and the body in Russian culture was an impression of richer, more varied, and perhaps freer sexual expression in today's Russia. This is certainly the story told by reports here and there on Russian cultural life since the advent of *glasnost*, and it is a further narrative about sexuality and the body in Russian culture that requires examination, one that shows important contrasts and continuities with what we have already noted. As we examine the ideas of sex and the body that have emerged since 1985 or so, we will consider some that seem explicitly erotic, with particular attention to the figure of the prostitute; others that refuse to idealize or even eroticize the body, instead representing it as ill or dead; and still others expressed in a group of texts and artistic events that flee (in some cases, by magic) the norms of gender and the constraints of heterosexuality.

Contemporary Russian culture seems to have found not so much a wholly new concern for sexuality, as more places where references to sex are possible and useful: criticism of culture and politics increasingly includes analysis of sexual behavior and relies on sexual metaphor; sexual behavior itself merits more explicit description and seems to need more regulation. A *New York Times* op-ed piece urged exporting condoms rather than computers to the USSR, a scholar has suggested the prostitute as an appropriate icon for this age of transition to a market economy, an Astrakhan entrepreneur has proposed a hotel with hourly rates for couples seeking privacy, and one Soviet cultural critic has noted the "eroticization of the entire country."[83] The proliferation of

ways of thinking and talking about sex has not passed without some consternation, as one could guess from the exaggerated, alarmed claim that an entire country could be "eroticized" (and the Astrakhan businessman met with such resistance that his hotel plans were stalled). Igor Kon vividly describes the paradoxes of permission and reprisal that govern this proliferation of sexual discourses and commercial activities:

> Now we have everything. Pornography. Erotic art. You can get an appointment with a sex therapist as simply as with a stomach specialist. You can exchange a book about Russian sexology for French detective fiction or for knitting instructions. We have a league to defend sexual minorities. Attacks on pederasts. Nudist beaches on the Baltic coast. Fines for appearing in public in shorts in the height of the tourist season in a southern town. Exhibits of erotic photography in the best exhibition spaces of one major cultural center. The refusal of permission for a similar exhibit in a different, no less major cultural center. A discussion in the press and in government bodies of opening a brothel.[84]

Kon's examples are chosen to highlight the variety of views about sexuality and the body in Russian culture today. But it has seemed wildly inappropriate to some that public figures would discuss these supposedly private matters at all while the Soviet economy is collapsing. Don't send condoms, these people would urge, send us food and clothing.[85]

Yet the claim that the discourses of sexuality and of daily life are separate makes sense only if one holds a narrow and quite specific notion of what sexuality entails, and only if one believes that sexual activities performed behind closed doors are not influenced by the desires, prohibitions, and fears that have been formed elsewhere. One view of sexuality that emerged in the first years of *glasnost* echoes age-old Russian views of sex as a Western (and decadent) phenomenon, views we discussed above. This was particularly true in the campaign against prostitution (an early Gorbachev effort to get people to take work more seriously, like the trials of bureaucrats for corruption and the anti-alcohol measures). As Elizabeth Waters has argued, this campaign targeted women who had foreign clientele; not only did this strategy create the false impression that it was not Soviet men who were paying for sex, but it also surrounded the prostitute with an aura of costly and of course imported clothing, as if sex could exist only in luxurious and foreign circumstances.[86] A popular 1988 literary and cinematic treatment of prostitution used the same images, with the added moral twist of the heroine's eventual death in her shiny Volvo.[87]

Other treatments of prostitution have put aside the glamour to show the seamier side of a prostitute's life. Alexander Galin's drama *Stars in the Morning Sky* (*Zvezdy utrennego sveta*) was a hit in Leningrad and Moscow in 1987 that played New York in 1988. Its gritty, frightening quality was expressed in both the superb acting and in the very language of the play—intensely profane, in a way that at the time felt quite shocking.[88] More recently, the documentary filmmaker Tofik Shakhverdiev has completed *To Die for Love* (*Umeret' ot liubvi*, 1991), which contrasts two Moscow prostitutes, one who works in a hotel for foreigners and earns hard currency, another whose ruble trade provides badly needed income to sustain her husband (a writer) and their three sons. Neither woman is idealized visually; in fact they are contextualized by images of Gypsy women and children begging on the streets and tales of women who have killed their lovers.[89] This more disturbing view of exploitation, desire, and violence provides an important answer to the glossy visual representations of women's bodies that have also proliferated recently—they appear on items from keychains to postcards, in journals (like *Ogonek*, where what one Amherst conference participant called "tit shots" have become a remarkably regular feature), and in beauty contests.[90]

The less idealized image of women's bodies has also begun to emerge in literature, for example in the plays and stories of Lyudmila Petrushevskaya.[91] Here one finds references to any and every bodily function and blithe evocations of body parts.[92] Petrushevskaya's recent story, "Down the Road of the God Eros" ("Po doroge Boga Erosa," 1991), features two aging women and contrasts the cosmetic surgery of one to the sagging skin of the other—yet this is a love story, where the two women compete for the same man.[93] But it is less her representation of the body than what seems to some her loveless world that has drawn so much attention to Petrushevskaya: her distanced descriptions of horrifying actions or feelings still seem to unnerve Russian readers, who are not yet estranged from the didacticism of socialist realism

(shouldn't the prostitute be killed in the end?). Some of this same anger at apparent indifference to violence has been directed at other contemporary cultural figures, notably women (the filmmaker Kira Muratova, for example, and to a lesser extent Tatiana Tolstaya). They have seemed "cruel," an epithet that echoes A. N. Mikhailovsky's famous description of Dostoevsky as a "cruel talent," and with good reason: Dostoevsky foreshadowed much of the "dark literature" (*chernukha*) in recent Soviet writing, and his novels explored the psychological complexities of sexual desire and sexual dread a generation before the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis.

What is remarkable about the conception of sex in Petrushevskaya's writing is its lack of difference from the other numbly performed acts of desperation in her stories: a woman comes home and throws herself out a window; a woman meets a man and sleeps with him; a woman tells the woman whom her son has left pregnant that she'll have to move out, knowing that the woman has nowhere to live; still another pregnant woman routinely feigns illness to get herself into a hospital because she, too, has nowhere to live. One critic has aptly defined Petrushevskaya's great theme as "the fate of woman in a cruel world"; he suggests that it is something about the world these characters inhabit that makes horrifying forms of behavior seem inevitable and routine.[94] Indeed, Petrushevskaya seems to have her finger on the pulse of the times: the literary critic Natalia Ivanova has written that unmasking the violence in everyday life is contemporary culture's primary task.[95]

A writer who would seem a likely confederate here for Petrushevskaya is Viktor Erofeev; Ivanova concludes another, similarly pointed essay with a discussion of his fiction.[96] Erofeev would have a place in this introduction even without his fiction since he is also an important literary critic who, among other things, has written an impressive essay on the place of the Marquis de Sade in twentieth-century European culture. His stories include explicit descriptions of sexual activities that are not all that far from Sade, and his grounding of some forms of sexual pleasure in the destruction of the human body will certainly discomfit readers in ways that Sade's writings do.[97] Erofeev is not unique in his sexual explicitness nor in the objections raised to his work: among others,

Eduard Limonov, writing in the West, has long elicited condemnation from intelligentsia reviewers, and one could guess that in Limonov's case the exploration of gay male and bisexual sensibilities has increased the provocation.[98] Yet to place Petrushevskaya in this context, where attention has been paid principally to sexual explicitness, is to risk quick devolution into a discussion of pornography, especially since the writing of Limonov, Erofeev, and others often depicts the violent sexual abuse of women.[99] As Catriona Kelly suggests in the conclusion of her essay, the sexually explicit pictures marketed in Russia today appeal to a very broad male audience; they ought to be viewed on a continuum with the "high culture" productions endorsed by a writer like Erofeev.

Instead, we suggest juxtaposing Petrushevskaya to Elena Makarova, a prose writer who has drawn far less critical attention, although she has published five volumes of stories. Like Petrushevskaya, and unlike Limonov or Erofeev, Makarova centers narrative attention on women. Compared to the extreme actions of Petrushevskaya's heroines, human conduct seems harmless or mild in her work, but only at a first glance; Makarova's narratives are typically told by a sympathetic, believable woman, as opposed to Petrushevskaya's more suspect women narrators, like the blind, dying woman who abuses her child in "Our Crowd" ("Svoi krug," 1988), to cite a famous example. Makarova frequently shows us the body during illness, the handicapped or malformed body, the body at moments of vulnerability and exposure. She is unflinching in her chronicling of illness and deformity (a striking example is her tale of a sanatorium for adolescent girls with orthopedic problems, "After Six Days Comes Sunday" ["Cherez kazhdye shest' dnei—voskresen'e," 1968]).[100] In this she resembles Petrushevskaya, from whose plays one literary critic cited seventeen illnesses—and the list seemed rather off the top of his head.[101]

One of Makarova's darkest stories is "Preserving Life" ("Na sokhranenii," written in 1974, published in 1989). It takes place in a maternity ward (and cannot help but remind one of Julia Voznesenskaya's *Women's Decameron* [*Zhenskii dekameron*, 1985]).[102] The pregnant heroine has come here because she is hemorrhaging. But the story is less about her experiences, fearful and estranged though they are, than about the appalling indifference to life that reigns in this hospital. The lack of medical treatment and even

cleanliness is not shocking (these are all too well known realities of ordinary Soviet medical care). What is stunning is how much the scene reminds one of prison memoirs: the women have as little privacy and control over their fates as those in Evgenia Ginzburg's *Journey into the Whirlwind* (*Krutoi marshrut*, 1967), and the hospital staff are certainly as abusive as prison guards.[103] Here, where the society has supposedly built an institution to preserve and protect life (note the story's title), one finds instead an atmosphere of punishment and denunciation. This is Foucault's nightmare of surveillance come true, prison and hospital in one.

It is also something more, a nightmare of near death. Next to the maternity hospital is a morgue, and when the women go to the window to shout down to visitors (no one is allowed into the hospital), they also glimpse bodies being carried into the morgue. That juxtaposition might be taken as nothing more than a paradox in Makarova's story, like the paradox of women waiting in line for their abortions while one woman has come to the hospital for fertility treatment. But dead bodies appear in too many recent Soviet fictions, particularly those that have something important to say about sexuality and the body, for Makarova's morgue to be taken as a trivial detail. In "The Meaning of Life" ("Smysl zhizni," 1990), Petrushevskaya writes of a doctor kept alive by machines, a condition she ironically labels "complete immortality."[104] In *Polina*, a novella by Nina Katerli that shocked its first audience by telling of a sexually adventurous woman who avoided both marriage and motherhood, readers might now be struck by Polina's recurring memory of dragging her former lover, Boria, from a forest. She gets him to a doctor only to be told that Boria is dead, that he died back there in the forest.[105] This image, of a woman dragging a dead man on her back, is barely visualized in the story, but it is haunting in a more than figurative sense: Polina is also called on to identify the body of her dead father (whom she had never seen previously), as if the story will not let her avoid this physical encounter with the tangibly dead body.

One way to read the recurrence of corpses is as a sign of something in a culture's memories that cannot be repressed; one would not have to look far to conjecture the historical and political reasons why the body that emerges in many Russian texts might be damaged, wounded, aching, dead, decayed.[106] Referring to death

became a way to talk about the deadness of various forms of public life in the former Soviet Union; thus Viktor Erofeev wrote a wake for Soviet literature two years before the Soviet government collapsed.[107] A recent essay partly about Stalin's terror (which is also the historical ground for the 1984–86 Georgian film *Repentance*, where a woman insistently digs up a corpse), Mikhail Rykhlin's "Bodies of Terror," is another example of a powerful judgment about Soviet culture's disdain for the body.[108]

Given the complexities of Russia's myth of the maternal discussed above, we might ask whether there are not examples from the *glasnost* period that try to reanimate the dead body without resorting to the mystifying rhetoric of reproduction. A story that does precisely this is Valeria Narbikova's "Around Environ . . ." ("Okolo ekolo . . . ," 1990), in which two men go through elaborate magical preparations to hatch a baby, an android, tenderly named in Russian an "andriusha."[109] In another of her stories there is birth by telephone conversation.[110] Narbikova has commented negatively on the omnipresence of the maternal figure ("such a robust country . . . so many forests, fields, meadows, and everywhere there is mama, you can't go anywhere that there is no mama").[111] We have seen writers who reject any glorification of the mother, like Durova or, among contemporary writers, Tolstaya, as Helena Goscilo's paper demonstrates, but Narbikova sidesteps the maternal trap entirely by reimagining enchanted ways of reproducing. This theme of magic is felt as well in Narbikova's energetic linguistic world, where words spring up out of other words, and the Russian language, which seemed so dead in daily Soviet life, is exuberantly at play (the titles of her stories are all fine examples).

Folk magic plays a surprising and creative role in other recent narratives about erotic desire. Elena Makarova, for example, brings both whimsy and fear to many of her stories when she resorts to folk magic. A splendid example of a story that builds this contrast (and it is a contrast, since the story includes a dying man, a mentally ill woman, and interpolated images of frighteningly red women's bodies in the public baths) is "Herbs from Odessa" ("Travy iz Odessy," 1982), where a young woman seeks a magic potion to cure her grandfather's cancer.[112] And in Makarova's "Preserving Life," the women patients advise each other about

folk cures that promise better results than the doctors' medicine (in view of the quality of medical care they receive, one begins to share their optimism about wonder-working concoctions purchased from wise old women). A more sinister example would be Tolstaya's story "Date with a Bird" ("Svidanie s ptitsei," 1983), wherein exotic Tamila lures the young hero with enchanted trinkets, but the experience proves a harsh introduction to the adult world of sex and death. Magic also moves the plots of the extraordinarily creepy tales recently published by Nina Sadur. Sadur brilliantly draws together the workings of folk magic and sexual desire when she writes of the quest for love potions, or of the urge to avenge rejection.[113]

Sadur, Makarova, Tolstaya, and Narbikova are showing us something overlooked by the more sensational accounts of "the eroticization of an entire country"—and their resort to age-old Russian forms of folk magic keeps these writers very far from an anxiety about the West. They tell of a desire to be able to cure the body's ills with which institutionalized medicine certainly has not come to terms; they tell (in Narbikova's android story and in other writers' frequent recourse to images of androgyny) of a wish to have babies outside the norms of childbirth, to have sex outside the norms of gender; they imagine a world of sexual pleasure where black magic makes possible things that grim, daily reality withholds.[114]

Recent writing offers hope, then, in ways that can counter even the most overwhelming fantasies of death. Another encouraging sign has been the flourishing of both feminist and specifically lesbian and gay journalistic and artistic work. These are new and important, if still marginalized, possibilities that challenge the norms of gender and sexuality still dominating in Russian culture. Olga Lipovskaya has produced six issues of *Women's Reader* (*Zhenskoe chtenie*), one devoted entirely to lesbian writing, all including translated and original writings that promote sexual awareness, curiosity, and liberation.[115] A first issue of *Sappho's Lyre* (*Lira Safo*), edited by Anna Vetrova, was circulated in Moscow in 1990. A gay and lesbian newspaper, *The Theme* (*Tema*), has appeared in Moscow, and the summer of 1991 saw not only an international conference but also a gay and lesbian film festival, to which 20,000 tickets were sold and during which a Moscow gay rights demonstration was held (its motto: Turn Red Squares into Pink Triangles).[116] Gay activists distributed condoms to those emerging from the 1990 Communist party conference—and probably not simply, as they claimed, to discourage party members from reproducing.[117] *Ogonek* gave a brief account of the warm reception San Francisco mayor Art Agnos accorded to Roman Kalinin, editor of *The Theme*: a rare example—rare even for such a "liberal" periodical as *Ogonek*—of a mainstream Soviet journal's reporting without condemnation on gay activism.[118]

Has this political activity tangibly affected the production of writers, directors, filmmakers, and artists? It is hard to generalize so soon (and in the face of such intense and volatile change in Russia, perhaps unwise), but individual breakthroughs, especially in the visual arts, should be noted.[119] One exhibit (installed in the Marble Palace, then still a museum of Lenin's life) celebrated "the classical ideal of the male physique—for fun": "All the pieces by the five young artists dealt with male physicality and sexuality. Some were frankly homoerotic. A male performance artist, video crew in tow, swirled through the rooms gleefully impersonating Marilyn Monroe and ridiculing Soviet television clichés. No less campy, the last page of the photocopied catalogue showed a ballerina in a tutu perched atop Lenin's armored car."[120] At least one Petersburg gallery (named after Salvador Dali) that plans to focus on gay and lesbian art has opened as well. Among literary innovations, one could cite the increased publication of poetry by people who identify themselves as feminist activists (for example, the Moscow collection *Seventeenth Echo* [*Semnadtsatoe ekho*, 1990], collected by Olga Tatarinova and showcasing the results of poetry-writing workshops sponsored by the Transfiguration club). Lipovskaya's *Women's Reader* is also notable for its prominent inclusion of poetry and fiction by contributors.

There has been a backlash, of course, which has been reported well by Masha Gessen in *Out/Look*. When homosexuality was thought not to exist, when it was invisible, she argues, it was also safer, and the dawning awareness of AIDS in Soviet society has had homophobic effects similar to what we have witnessed in the last few years in the U.S. (although, as Gessen correctly points out, AIDS is spreading in the former Soviet Union principally in hospitals, where disposable syringes are unavailable and sterilization

procedures are inadequate).[121] Conservative Russian writers like Valentin Rasputin continue to legitimate a widely held view that homosexual sex is sick: Rasputin is said to have told a British television reporter: "If you legalize homosexuality the necrophiliacs will clamor for their rights—after all they're a sexual minority too. When it comes to homosexuals let's keep Russia clean. We have our own traditions."[122]

Rasputin's reference to necrophiliacs instantiates once again the recurring corpse of contemporary culture, but his words also return us full circle to the question with which we began our Introduction—just how different is sexuality in Russia from sexuality in the West? Rasputin makes the dangers of this comparison all too painfully felt: the desire to keep Russia "clean" because it has its "own traditions" suggests that "Russian tradition" is itself "clean." This rhetoric can become a slogan on which to build a campaign of persecution and injustice—the Third Reich's desire to purify the Aryan race may be the most famous example and the most murderous, but it is hardly the only one in a history linking national purity and sexuality.[123] The easy alliance between Rasputin (and other conservative writers) and the Russian nationalist, virulently anti-Semitic group Pamyat ought to be kept well in mind here. This is not to single him out, for Rasputin's views unfortunately have a substantial following. But it is the case that Rasputin's writings offer brutally clear statements against sexual liberation and against the more general, political liberation of women as well.[124]

Conclusion

Similar demands for moral reform and a national purity campaign were heard during the Emergency Committee's speech during the attempted coup to overthrow Gorbachev's government in August 1991. To justify their coup, the committee drew a grim picture of the deterioration of society. The violence that some writers have identified as characteristic of Soviet society for 70 years was reconceived as a product of *perestroika*. Among a long list of ills, the committee cited the decline of law and order: "The country is sinking into a quagmire of violence and lawlessness. Never before

in national history has the propaganda of sex and violence assumed such a scale, threatening the health and lives of future generations. Millions of people are demanding measures against the octopus of crime and glaring immorality."[125] Among the coup's promises, then, was the eradication of "shameful phenomena discrediting our society and degrading Soviet citizens."[126] Their words augured the "return of the repressors," to use Karlinsky's description of the effects of the October Revolution, and it is not difficult to imagine who the targets of repression and eradication would have been and what kind of social reconstruction would have taken place. The Emergency Committee's representation of themselves as guardians of public morality, their criminalization of "shameful phenomena," their defense of national purity in the name of preserving future generations, and their repeated evocations of the Motherland all reflect a hardy tradition of thinking about sexuality and the body deeply embedded in Russian culture long before 1917.

Yet many representations of the body, especially the female body, since the advent of *glasnost* reflect similar ways of thinking about sexuality and share the same traditions, demonstrating once again that the distinction between liberation and repression is far more problematic than it might first appear. Writers and thinkers trying to create a present and imagine a future look to the past. They turn to writers like Berdyaev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky for inspiration and guidance, but, as so many of the papers in this volume demonstrate, there was never a clear break between Soviet and prerevolutionary (or émigré) attitudes toward sexuality and the body.

One such continuity can be found in the claim that Russia, as compared to the West, is "sexless" or uninterested in the erotic. Chernyshevsky's exclamation "Away with these erotic questions!" and his relegation of all sexual activity to the plushly discreet rooms of the Crystal Palace in *What Is to Be Done?* is not unlike the Soviet critic's recent comment that the entire Soviet Union has been "eroticized": both reflect the view that sexuality can be compartmentalized and discrete, that it is something that can be neatly tucked away, or something that has its particular, appropriate place but is now on the loose, flooding the entire country. The

papers in this volume demonstrate that the "erotic questions" have always been present in the history of Russian culture, even when they have been most vehemently denied.

The range of subjects covered by the papers in this volume points to some of the many areas one might investigate to document the history of sexuality and the body in Russian culture. Let us turn, then, to the papers for their analyses of particular moments in a history we have only begun to write, that of sexuality and the body in Russian culture.

PART I

The Cultural History of Sexual Representation