

Queer Identity and Socialist Realism:  
The Censorship of Queer Art and Life Under Stalin and  
Beyond

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*For 410 and B  
Even if you weren't always there  
we made it through*

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of queerness in Russia, particularly under Josef Stalin, is shrouded in a cloud of rhetoric, propaganda and censorship. In fact, the entire concept of queer identities when viewed through the lens of Stalinist era history is often lost in the revisionist collective memory of the time. Under a doctrine known as Socialist Realism, Stalin used a combination of censorship, blacklisting and complete erasure of individuals, organizations and policies to obscure the lives and identities of queer figures such as Peter Tchaikovsky, Nikolai Gogol, Sergei Eisenstein and scores of others.<sup>1</sup> Fueled by his own paranoia and his desire to ensure the future of the Soviet Union – a perfect future, for a perfect society – he illegalized homosexuality, punished those who were discovered or accused, and wiped from the historical record almost any trace of what he considered a major imperfection. This censorship has made scholarly endeavors into the concept of queerness under Stalin all but impossible, and has resulted in a reliance on Western scholars and historians to understand the phenomenon. Few historians have attempted to delve into the limited sources that illuminate the systematic elimination of nearly an entire demographic from twenty years of the Soviet record. Yet, it is this absence of history that fuels this project.

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<sup>1</sup> In this work, I will use the blanket term “queer” to refer to and discuss a number of mental and sexual identities ranging from same-sex inclinations to cross-dressing to psycho-sexual mentalities. As Dan Healey outlines in *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, (University of Chicago Press, 2001), there is a marked difference between the official and psychological recognition of homosexuality and the concept of same-sex love and relationships. Even though the term homosexual was used by the Twentieth Century, most who experienced same-sex love or attraction did not self-identify as homosexuals. Thus, the term queer will be used to apply to both those who self-identify and who simply experience or partake in same-sex relations.

Throughout this introduction I will rely on secondary works by authors such as Dan Healey, Simon Karlinsky and Lilya Kaganovsky to illustrate the history of queerness in Russia and the Soviet Union, and the climate in which Socialist Realism was born. The former two remain the most important authors on queerness and homosexuality in Russia, both on political and literary fronts, and form a significant foundation for this work. Kaganovsky, is one of the first to combine theoretical analysis of Soviet cultural production with the subject of masculinity and its ties to hetero, versus homo, sexuality. It is pertinent to outline the cultural, political and legal temperament in Russia from Imperialism through Stalinism as it plays heavily into why and how the Soviet regime, particularly under Stalin, suppressed and even attempted to eliminate homosexuality from society. So much is unknown about Soviet era politics regarding queer identities because of the secrecy that shrouded the Soviet regime, and the fact that if Stalin or his cronies didn't like a particular individual or their lifestyle they would simply censor or even purge them, simultaneously eliminating them from most of the historical record. In discussing specific case studies of prominent figures in Russian culture before the Soviets came to power, we can see how the Soviets re-imagined Russian greats to conform to the doctrine of Socialist Realism. And, by looking at the culture under the Soviets – the art, the film, the literature – we can see how the Soviets used their influence to shape their own history by both creating new art and re-shaping what came before. In either case, there is a

plethora of information that is missing, censored, erased or simply not recorded in the first place, that must be inferred from what little information is available.

The fundamental aim of this endeavor is to illustrate thoroughly and precisely that there was rampant censorship of queer themes and identities in the Soviet Union under Stalin and his Socialist Realist doctrine. Most prominently, this period of suppression has resulted in an absence of queerness from Russian history that has only been uncovered by Western scholars. Specifically, this thesis will demonstrate the importance of Socialist Realism in shaping the cultural climate of Stalinist Russia, in which homosexuality was illegalized and rebuked, and the reimagining of queer themes, individuals and culture in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this introduction I will provide historical context by outlining the progression of laws and cultural norms regarding queerness and homosexuality from Imperial Russia through the end of the Stalinist Era in order to illustrate the impact of legal policy and enforcement on the personal lives and culture of queer individuals. Fundamental to this cultural analysis is the progression of pre-revolutionary to post-revolutionary literature and Stalinist attempts to establish the ideal of the “New Soviet Man”.<sup>3</sup> In Chapter One, I will thoroughly explore the concept and doctrine of Socialist Realism and its impact on art, film and literature during the Stalinist Era. I will then use two case studies

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<sup>2</sup> Igor S. Kon, *Russia*, in *Sociolegal Control of Homosexuality: A Multi-Nation Comparison*, ed. Donald J. West, Richard Green, (University of Cambridge, Cambridge 1997), 222-225.

<sup>3</sup> Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies – ed. Jonathan Harris, (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2008).

of prominent Russian figures, Nikolai Gogol and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, who are widely recognized as queer in one way or another, to illustrate precisely how Socialist Realism censored and re-imagined the history of queerness in Russia. In Chapter Two, I will discuss Gogol's extraordinary works of fiction and iconic literary status as they were reimagined under the Stalinist regime in order to conform to the imagery of Socialist Realism.<sup>4 5</sup> In Chapter Three, I will explore the memory of one of the most prominent Russian figures in music: Tchaikovsky, whose sexuality and life have been questioned and re-questioned by historians since his death.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, in an epilogue, I will address the impact of, and similarities to, Soviet censorship in modern Russian issues, particularly after the legalization of homosexuality in Nineteen Ninety-Three and under the rule of Vladimir Putin.

The Russian state has, since its formation, been heavily influenced by the Orthodoxy of the Russian church, which before any development of legislation regarding homosexuality held a negative view of any sexual interaction between members of the same sex and regulated social and cultural interactions based on religious rites.<sup>7</sup> The male gender role within Orthodox societies was coveted and thus sexual relations between men, putting one man in a more submissive role,

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<sup>4</sup>Simon Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976.) 284-289.

<sup>5</sup> Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Healey, *The Russian revolution and the decriminalisation of homosexuality*, *Revolutionary Russia*, 6:1, p27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546549308575594>

could be penalized as harshly as offenses such as heterosexual adultery.<sup>8</sup> It wasn't until 1716 that the Russian state officially and legally began to condemn sexual relations between men: in Peter the Great's 1716 military code, part of his sweeping western influenced reforms, sodomy in the military, and the military only, became punishable by corporal punishment, hard labor, or the death penalty in the most severe cases.<sup>9 10</sup> In 1832, Nicholas I expanded this law to apply to the population at large, formally banning anal sex between men with Article 995 of the Legal Code of 1832; those convicted of the crime were sentenced to hard labor in Siberia.<sup>11</sup> In 1861 with the reforms of Alexander II "homosexuality became far more visible in both Russian life and literature" though it remained illegal in the penal code.<sup>12</sup> There were many individuals in the Nineteenth century who were understood to be of a queer persuasion, amongst them the two figures whom I will be discussing later in this work, as well as other important personalities such as Mikhail Kuzmin, Alexander Apukhtin, Anna Yevreinova, Maria Feodorova and Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii.<sup>13 14</sup> The last of which went so far as to become embroiled in numerous scandals including an

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<sup>8</sup> Healey, *Decriminalisation of Homosexuality*, referencing Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs 900-1700*, (Cornell University Press 1995) 9, 13, 46, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Healey, *Decriminalisation of Homosexuality*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-siècle Russia*, (Cornell University Press, 1992), 58.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture: The Impact of the October Revolution" in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past* ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey Jr (Penguin Books, 1989), 349-350.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Игорь Семенович Кон (1995). *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today*. Simon and Schuster. p. 35.

incident involving “a trumpet-boy of the Guards infantry battalion” from which he was redeemed by his close ties to Tsar Alexander III.<sup>15</sup> In essence, amongst the aristocratic elite it was not necessarily uncommon to find those who indulged in same-sex relations, though amongst the general population being discovered often resulted in punishment, usually hard labor.<sup>16</sup>

After the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the striking of the Imperial Legal Code in 1922 homosexuality became legalized through omission.<sup>17</sup> Whether this legalization was an intentional step toward liberalizing the newfound government of the Russian state and demonstrating an effort to support the rights of the people no matter how marginalized, or if it was an accidental side-effect of the elimination of any vestige of the Imperial hold on Russia is highly contested. Masha Gessen, a prominent and outspoken proponent of LGBT rights in Russia, and Simon Karlinsky, one of the first to write on homosexuality in Russia, believe that this step was not a deliberate attempt to liberalize the nation citing the Bolshevik reclassification of homosexuality as a mental illness and the slowly diminishing number of references to homosexuality in literature through the early 1930s.<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> Dan Healey, perhaps the most prominent author on the issue of

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander Poznansky, “Tchaikovsky’s Suicide: Myth and Reality” in *Studies in Homosexuality Vol. 4: Homosexuality and Homosexuals in the Arts* ed. Dynes Donaldson (Garland Publishing, 1992), 237.

<sup>16</sup> Karlinsky, “Russia’s Gay Literature and Culture”, referencing Alexander Amfiteatrov’s, *People of the 1890s*.

<sup>17</sup> Healey, *Decriminalisation of Homosexuality*, 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Annabelle Quince, *The history of homosexuality in Russia: from Soviet sex changes to gay gulags*, published on abc.net.au’s Rear Vision, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/the-history-of-homosexuality-in-russia/5134412>.

<sup>19</sup> Karlinsky, “Russia’s Gay Literature and Culture”, 349-350.

homosexuality in Russian history, believes that perhaps there was some merit to the efforts of the Bolshevik government as he views the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness as a compassionate and progressive trend, as there was improvement in a number of other aspects of society such as rights for women.<sup>20</sup> Whatever the intention, the legalization of same-sex relations did little to fuel the flowering of the queer subculture which had been forming since the turn of the century. In fact, after the revolution a number of queer authors such as Georgy Ivanov and Valery Pereleshin left Russia for Western Europe, or even China in order to continue writing with queer themes.<sup>21</sup> In Chapter One I will explore this in greater detail by looking at a number of works that exemplify queer literature up to the revolution, and the subsequent decline until the consolidation of power by Stalin when any productivity was brought to an abrupt halt. Following Stalin's rise, legislation almost immediately took a conservative turn in order to promote his ideal of "compulsory heterosexuality."<sup>22</sup> Announced on December 17 1933, and put into effect on March 7, 1934, Article 154a of the Soviet Penal Code, which would later be changed to Article 121 of the Russian Federation penal code, outlawed sexual relations between two men, penalizing the act with five years of hard labor.<sup>23 24</sup> Some historians claim that Stalin was trying to

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<sup>20</sup> Healey, *Decriminalisation of Homosexuality*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin Moss, *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature*, (Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 1997), 159-234.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 221.

<sup>23</sup> Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture", 349-350.

<sup>24</sup> Kon, *Russia*, in *Sociolegal Control of Homosexuality*, 222-225.

improve birthrate, some say this was an anti-fascist move – punishing homosexuals like any other political or social dissident and taking a clear stance against Nazi Germany.<sup>25</sup> Some, as I will explore in the next section and throughout this work, believe that Stalin’s anti-queer agenda stems from his cultural ideals for the Soviet Union and his push to conform the nation and its artistic productivity to a set of specific standards under Socialist Realism.<sup>26</sup> No matter his reasoning, for the next twenty years thousands of men were punished for partaking in same-sex relations, and it wasn’t until long after Stalin’s death that that number even began to diminish.<sup>27</sup>

Despite imperial aristocratic tolerance of certain sexual proclivities, queerness was far from widely accepted in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Tchaikovsky did not often, if at all, mention his sexuality. One can find scant reference to potential same-sex relations in Tchaikovsky’s diaries, and it is his brother Modest who gives the most insight into his character.<sup>28</sup> Though there are a number of individuals who we now know to have had same-sex trysts, few and far between willingly and openly spoke of their sexuality. One exception to this is Mikhail Kuzmin. Up until the 1905 revolution the discussion of homosexuality and other queer themes in literature was unofficially forbidden.<sup>29</sup> However, in 1906 Kuzmin was one of the first to publish a

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<sup>25</sup> Karlinsky, “Russia’s Gay Literature and Culture”, 362

<sup>26</sup> Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*.

<sup>27</sup> Resource Information Center - <http://www.uscis.gov/tools/asylum-resources/resource-information-center-79>

<sup>28</sup> Russian Gay History - <http://community.middlebury.edu/~moss/RGC2.html>

<sup>29</sup> Karlinsky, “Russia’s Gay Literature and Culture” 358.

successful coming out story in his novel *Wings*; he also spoke of his relations frequently in his diaries and was openly homosexual.<sup>30</sup> Unless one was a prominent enough figure to have connections within the aristocracy it was likely that you would be sentenced to hard labor. Thus, though certain individuals would turn a blind eye in special circumstances, most didn't allow their sexual nature to be known. When the Bolshevik's took power in 1917, and after the publishing of the 1922 Legal code, as I've stated, there was a flowering of a gay and lesbian sub-culture, particularly in literature and poetry. Yet, the state – and its state-owned public media – ignored this aspect of the works. For example, Leon Trotsky an infamous member of the Bolshevik regime, wrote in his book *Literature and Revolution* of a homoerotic poem by Nikolai Kliev, but rather than acknowledging the homoeroticism he essentially heterosexualized it, and focused on the classicism portrayed in the work.<sup>31</sup> This effort to ignore the homoerotic nature of work would make way for Stalin's attempts to impose "compulsory heterosexuality."<sup>32</sup>

In her work, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, Lilya Kaganovsky perfectly outlines the iconography and imagery of Socialist Realism, which Stalin was attempting to perpetuate in the new culture of the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> Kaganovsky describes an interesting duality between the ideal (the "New Soviet Man") – a

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<sup>30</sup> Healey, *Decriminalisation of Homosexuality*, 30-1.

<sup>31</sup> Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture" 359.

<sup>32</sup> Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*.

chiseled, handsome, young and virile man who does everything he does in the name of the communist party and to further the party's agenda – and the invalid – a broken, scarred individual, who is not ashamed of his invalidity, but rather embraces it and powers on instead of allowing himself to succumb to his wounds.<sup>34</sup> The work focuses primarily on cinema and the visual depiction of this strange dichotomy, but also incorporates some influence from art and literature, which will all feature prominently in Chapter One. Kaganovsky works to reveal the “dominant fiction” of Stalinist culture from 1933-1954 of Socialist Realism. The “socialist realist” experienced a lack of mobility and yet an insatiable drive to move forward, a prohibition against and a simultaneous demand for love, romance and heterosexual marriage which was complicated by his invalidity – which she posits allows him to leave the heterosexual sphere and potentially strengthen homoerotic bonds.<sup>35</sup> Kaganovsky writes of a phenomenon called heterosexual panic, in which, in Stalinist cinema, the male union, friendship and camaraderie is depicted as the truest form of love. Yet, for example, in films like *Barnet's By the Blue Sea* and *Lukov's Two Soldiers* there is a demand by the nation for heroism that requires the “new soviet man” to abandon his male union for a heteronormative lifestyle of procreation and marriage.<sup>36</sup> This line of thinking is complicated, and dense as it relies heavily on Queer and Film Theory, but it is an interesting approach to understanding the culture perpetuated by the doctrine

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<sup>34</sup> Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 2-7.

<sup>35</sup> Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 68-69.

of Socialist Realism. Heteronormativity was key, as Dan Healey describes it as “compulsory heterosexuality” Stalin’s laws – his family laws banning divorce and abortion, and Article 121 banning homosexual relations<sup>37</sup> – combined with his artistic and cinematic propaganda perpetuate this idea of subversion of homosexuality that is so key to my argument.

Throughout this thesis, I will use a combination of sources to demonstrate precisely the influence that Socialist Realism has had on the history of queerness in Russia. Though it is only one cog in the massive machine of the Soviet regime, Socialist Realism helped shape the foundation of the Stalinist cultural climate that nearly eliminated queer themes and identities from the Russian canon. It is only due to the efforts of Western scholars such as Karlinsky and Healey that we are even able to attempt to grasp the complexities of this phenomenon. But, we are now capable of seeing the absence and erasure of queerness from art and memory that has had such a lasting impact on the history of sexuality.

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<sup>37</sup> Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 221.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Socialist Realism: Revisionism and Censorship in Literature and Film**

Socialist Realism is the cultural doctrine that shaped and paved the way for how people and the things they created were received, understood and interpreted in Russia under the rule of Stalin. This was not just a doctrine put in place by law or dictated by Stalin himself, but was an amalgamation of cultural and social order and interpretation that arose under a new party rule in the Soviet Union. It took the decade between the October Revolution and the rise of Stalin for the doctrine to become what it was truly meant to be, though it wasn't enacted under the name of Socialist Realism until 1934. Socialist Realism not only provided a template for Soviet artistic production, but it also resulted in the revision and alteration of Imperial and Revolutionary material that could potentially have been seen as anti-Stalinist.

In this chapter, I will discuss precisely what Socialist Realism is. I will illustrate how Socialist Realism, a complex system of productivity, censorship, ideology and belief, came to be and examine its implementation under Stalin. I will also discuss the use of Socialist Realism to understand and redefine some of the greatest Russian icons of the Imperial age. From Pushkin to Tolstoy and Ivan the Terrible to Peter the Great, Socialist Realism reimagined nearly all of the most celebrated figures in Russian history to fit a certain narrative that conformed to the Soviet way of thinking that Socialist Realism helped create and cultivate. Next, I will discuss the particular influence Socialist Realism had on queer representation in film and literature. Film, as a new form of media, allowed for an

inventive form of artistic expression. However, under Stalin, homosexuality was not only outlawed, but was nearly completely erased from public consumption and purview, meaning it had no place in film. Yet, one of the most prolific film makers under Stalin, Sergei Eisenstein, was such a creative genius that he was able to portray homo-erotic and homosexual subtexts in his films until the dictator took notice and had his work banned. Finally, I will discuss the most interesting aspect of Socialist Realism's influence on queerness in the Soviet Union, literature. Before the 1917 Revolution, as I've discussed, there was a flowering of queer themed culture and media, however, with the rise of the Bolsheviks this productivity began to decline as queer authors left Russia or conformed to the party ideals. Following the official implementation of Socialist Realism in 1934 production of queer themed literature ceased almost entirely, and if authors wanted to continue to produce queer works it had to be in complete secrecy.<sup>38</sup> Cinema and literature were not the only mediums of Soviet cultural productivity affected by Socialist Realism's censorship and revisionism, as I'll discuss later with one of the greatest Russian composers, Tchaikovsky. But, they are two of the most visibly impacted when it comes to this revisionism and censorship.

In all, Socialist Realism was a complex and powerful force when it comes to Soviet cultural and social order and it had a major impact on the history of queerness in the Russian canon.

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<sup>38</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 159-234.

## What is Socialist Realism?

Socialist Realism is the official doctrine promoted by the Communist state of the Soviet Union from the early 1930s on. This doctrine allowed for the publication of, and only of, works that promoted the success of the state and the prominence and glory of its future. Socialist Realism is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that provided a template for cultural and artistic productivity throughout the Soviet Era. It has a number of opponents and proponents who view the doctrine as an oppressive force or an empowering one, respectively. One proponent of Socialist Realism, C. Vaughan James, an Englishman writing in 1973, believes that it is a world-wide phenomenon that grew out of the Marxist ideology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the social changes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> An opponent, Czeslaw Milosz, who experienced first-hand the influence of Socialist Realism under Stalin condemns it as a doctrine of oppression and an instrument of a murderous regime.<sup>40</sup> The influence of the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequently Stalin on the growth and expansion of Socialist Realism resulted in what would become not only a cultural movement but a way of life and productivity. In this section, I will discuss the complexities of Socialist Realism in its theorization, and I will also illustrate how Leninist and Stalinist revolutionary ideology helped shape Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union and ultimately the impact that this cultural phenomenon had on the arts.

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<sup>39</sup> C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, (St. Martin's Press, 1973), 85.

<sup>40</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, "Introduction" in Abram Tertz, *On Socialist Realism*, (Pantheon Books, 1960), 7-21.

The most basic and thorough definition of Socialist Realism can be found in Czeslaw Milosz' introduction to Abram Tertz' essay *On Socialist Realism*. Milosz boils the complex theoretical doctrine down to its main tenets, stating: "It is based on the glorification of the state by the writer and artist, whose task it is to portray the power of the state as the greatest good, and to scorn the sufferings of the individual."<sup>41</sup> Milosz' summary highlights the fact that Socialist Realism was a doctrine created for and fueled by the masses. Artistic productions under Socialist Realism were meant to glorify the workings of the Soviet Union and its new Communist leadership and ideology in order to convince the people to believing in the concept of the good of the many over the good of the few. In fact, Milosz also characterizes the doctrine of "sorealism", as he calls it, as an "effective anesthetic".<sup>42</sup> Despite being labelled Socialist *Realism*, in hindsight the doctrine resulted in the production of far from realistic works as it suppressed the publication of poetry, art and literature that demonstrated the true nature of life in the Soviet Union, and as Milosz states "reality... has to be passed over in silence in the name of an ideal, in the name of what *ought* to be."<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, Katerina Clark takes a more neutral, though no less critical point of view. In her work, *The Soviet Novel*, Clark outlines the creation of "Socialist Realism" as the official nomenclature associated with a concept that had been growing since the Revolution. Party officials in the late 1920s and early

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<sup>41</sup> Milosz, "Introduction", 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

1930s, such as Stalin, Gorky and Zhdanov, sought to consolidate control over literary and artistic production and in order to do so needed to define art under the Soviet regime. As a result, works that had been produced prior to the official doctrine of Socialist Realism, such as Gorky's *Mother*, were absorbed by the creed. "*Mother* of 1906 is not *Mother* of 1936; *Chapaev* of 1923 is not *Chapaev* of 1933."<sup>44</sup> Thus, works that seemingly followed the tenets of Socialist Realism by promoting the "Bolshevik cause" only gained the quality of being Socialist Realist after the term was coined in 1932.<sup>45</sup>

As I've stated, Socialist Realism is, in a sense, backlash to a number of artistic theories and practices that rose along with the Bolsheviks in 1917 and after, and was enacted under the leadership of Josef Stalin in an effort to further consolidate his power. It is not simply the official doctrine of the Soviet Union, but was created through a series of events that resulted in what would officially be known as Socialist Realism.<sup>46</sup> In 1917, when the Bolsheviks came to power, a man named Anatoly Lunacharsky came to lead the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, lending him much power in determining the future of art in Russia.<sup>47</sup> Lunacharsky would be the one to create the fundamental principle of Socialist Realism: the New Soviet Man. His direction for Soviet art was based on the human form, as he believed "the sight of a healthy body, intelligent face or

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<sup>44</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, (Indiana University Press, 2000), 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Vaughan, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, 84-86.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Ellis, *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920-1970* (Skira Editore, 2012) 17, 21.

friendly smile was essentially life-enhancing.”<sup>48</sup> This concept of the perfect person, as I’ve discussed, was central to the concept of a more perfect future for the state and its peoples. There were two main theories revolving around the future of Soviet art, futurism and traditionalism. The first affirmed that the new Communist state should make a clean break from the Imperial past and forge a new kind of art, and the second held that traditional artistic methods should be used and reimagined in order to solidify the state’s hold on artistic direction.<sup>49</sup> Under Lenin, the futurists and traditionalists were allowed to create art for private patrons, but by 1928 and the consolidation of power by Stalin, the state had enough control to take over artistic expression and limit production to state sponsored Socialist Realist works.<sup>50</sup> In 1932, meetings were held between high ranking politicians including Gorky and Stalin himself, in which the term “Socialist Realism” was officially settled on: “If the artist is going to depict our life correctly, he cannot fail to observe and point out what is leading it towards socialism. So this will be socialist art. It will be socialist realism’.”<sup>51</sup> At the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Stalin’s representative Andrei Zhdanov gave a speech in support of Socialist Realism and it became state policy.<sup>52</sup> The four defining tenets of works that could be considered Socialist Realism were put forth. A work must

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ellis, *Soviet Painting*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Vaughan, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, 86.

<sup>52</sup> Andrei Zhdanov, Andrei Zhdanov Defines Socialist Realism (1934), (Cengage Music History Resource Center)  
[http://www.cengage.com/music/book\\_content/049557273X\\_wrightSimms/assets/ITOW/7273X\\_74\\_ITOW\\_Zhdanov.pdf](http://www.cengage.com/music/book_content/049557273X_wrightSimms/assets/ITOW/7273X_74_ITOW_Zhdanov.pdf)

be Proletarian (of and for the workers), Typical (everyday life), Realistic (representational), and Partisan (in the image and ideals of the State and the Party).<sup>53</sup>

The implications that the creation and enforcement of Socialist Realism had on artistic expression and production are considered by some to be catastrophic for the Soviet people's freedom of expression. Art, literature, film, poetry and even music were all censored, reworked, re-envisioned, forced off the shelves of libraries and locked away in archives for decades, some until the fall of the Soviet Union itself, all in the name of Socialist Realism. During Stalin's rule, artists who refused to abide by the doctrine faced censorship, blacklisting, hard labour and even purging. Under the leadership of Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural affairs spokesman, a number of authors were persecuted:

“Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, and Mikhail Zoshchenko... were labeled ‘anti-Soviet, underminers of socialist realism, and unduly pessimistic.’ [Other] Individuals were expelled from the Union of Writers, and offending periodicals were either abolished or brought under direct party control.”<sup>54</sup>

During the purges, thousands of writers and artists were imprisoned and either died there or were executed, and prominent figures such as Sergei Eisenstein, Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich were all denounced and blacklisted.<sup>55</sup> Accused of anything from treason to spying to simply defending someone who

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<sup>53</sup> Dubravka Juraga, M. Keith Booker, *Socialist Cultures East and West*, (Praeger, 2002), 68.

<sup>54</sup> Library of Congress, *Revelations from the Russian Archives*, “Attacks on Intelligentsia: Renewed Attacks”, 2010. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/attr.html>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

was accused of treason themselves, artists were punished for refusing to follow the line of party doctrine and speaking out against the State.<sup>56</sup>

Czeslaw Milosz harshly condemns the ideals of Socialist Realism, both because he believes that it undermines the artistic integrity of works produced under the doctrine, and because “socialism is directly responsible for the deaths of millions of men and women... the battle against socialism is, therefore, a battle in defense of truth and consequently in defense of man himself.”<sup>57</sup>

According to Milosz, despite its realist nature, works produced under the limitations of Socialist Realism couldn’t represent the realities of life in the Soviet Union. Again, in contrast, Katerina Clark details the productivity of Socialist Realism and believes that the doctrine initially allowed for greater literary freedom and improved quality of works, but also resulted in closer state control of production and “a narrower range of literary approaches was allowed.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, this period of artistic production, which some scholars such as C. Vaughan James suggest still has an influence in Eastern European artistic expression, contributed greatly to the lack of visibility of those considered other, particularly queer members of the Russian intelligentsia.<sup>59</sup>

### **Socialist Revisionism, The Return of Tsarist Greats**

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Milosz, “Introduction”, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> Vaughan, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, 102.

One of the most important aspects of Socialist Realism's influence on Stalinist culture and society was the re-imagination and canonization of Imperial Era artists and authors in order to better fit the ideals of the doctrine. This concept was fundamental to the process of Socialist Realism coming to prominence in the Soviet Union, as figures that are today considered essential to Russia's historical artistic development were reimagined and re-envisioned with Communist and Socialist doctrine and ideology in mind. As I will demonstrate later in this work, this revision of important figures such as Tchaikovsky and Gogol is key to understanding the censorship of homosexuality and queerness in Russian history. Important historical and artistic figures such as Alexander Pushkin and Ivan the Terrible had their images revised in order to conform to this new doctrine of artistic expression. These figures became so important in the Soviet historical canon that some were close to deified, exemplifying and celebrated as the epitome of Socialist Realist, anti-Imperial nationalism, even though they themselves had never even heard of the concept. In this section, I will discuss a number of examples of Tsarist-era figures and their amendment and reclassification into the Soviet canon, in order to demonstrate precisely the success of the implementation of Socialist Realism.

Alexander Pushkin, considered by many the most important Russian literary figure, is a prime example of the ideological mechanism of Socialist Realism. The jubilee which celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the poet's death in 1937 is illustrative of this phenomenon as "the national poet was

seen anew, transformed into a hero to be admired and emulated.”<sup>60</sup> Though raised an aristocrat and espousing a number of European sensibilities, Pushkin proved the perfect test to see if changing the perception of a formerly Tsarist and noble figure could be successful. The poet’s most important characteristic, for those crafting him in the light of Socialist Realism, was that above all he identified as a Russian and was capable of seeing a new future for his nation. This trait was exploited by the Soviets who revitalized Pushkin’s image and made it seem as though his nationalistic tendencies outweighed any sense of obligation he had to the noble class. “Censors and party officials kept a tight watch on references to [his] political writings, ensuring that [they] could not be misread as anti-revolutionary.”<sup>61</sup> One of Pushkin’s most reprinted poems, “Bacchic Song”, whose last line is “Long live the sun; let darkness be hidden!” was reinterpreted as “praise for the light of reason as against the darkness of excessive emotion accorded with official discourse in the mid-1930s.”<sup>62</sup> Additionally, in an editorial eulogy published in Pravda in 1937 the author rails against Pushkin’s killer as a “foreign aristocratic scoundrel” and claims that Pushkin “is still alive and will live on in future generations... the glory and pride of the great Russian *people*, will never die.”<sup>63</sup> In his essay, “A Pushkin Puzzle”, Michael Green discusses the fact that though Pushkin himself was not queer, he was “queer-friendly” and had a

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<sup>60</sup> Kevin M. F. Platt and David Brandenberger, *Epic Revisionism: Russian history and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 194.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Platt and Brandenburg, *Epic Revisionism*, 215.

close relationship with a man, Wiegel, who was openly attracted to the same-sex. Green also illustrates that under the Soviet's treatment of Pushkin's biography these aspects of his life were all but forgotten.<sup>64</sup> Thus, though he could have been considered a queer-friendly aristocrat in his lifetime, Pushkin's memory was modified and reinterpreted in order to better fit the Socialist Realist doctrine of the 1930s. His works and his life were reimagined to fuel the grand ideals of the party and the state.

Ivan IV or Ivan the Terrible, one of the most infamous rulers of Russia and the first Tsar of all the Russias, was similarly reimagined and idealized under the guise of Socialist Realism. Throughout the 1940s, a number of plays, a three-part novel and the famous film directed by Sergei Eisenstein were all part of the canon put forth by Socialist Realist authors and artists. However, from the get-go the troubled Tsar proved a difficult subject to artistically represent. M.A. Bulgakov's play *Ivan Vasil'evich* was banned in 1936 presumably for comparing the despotism of sixteenth-century Russia with Stalin's dictatorial rule.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Eisenstein's attempt at a part two to his epic masterpiece was banned and abandoned by the director as it too was seen by Stalin as an affront to his leadership.<sup>66</sup> In general, however, scholars who have analyzed the emergence of Ivan the Terrible's reign as it was popularly depicted in Stalinist Russia believe

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Green, "A Pushkin Puzzle" in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 30-35.

<sup>65</sup> Maureen Perrie, "The Terrible Tsar as Comic Hero: Mikhail Bulgakov's *Ivan Vasil'evich*" as found in Platt and Brandenburg, *Epic Revisionism*, 143.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

that “the first Russian tsar and his Muscovite domain were represented as glorious antecedents to Stalin and Soviet society.”<sup>67</sup> As David Brandenburg and Kevin Platt demonstrate in their essay “Terribly Pragmatic”, the Soviet state published an official text on Ivan that was heavily censored by Stalin himself, reimagining the Tsar as a leader of the people. A.V. Shestakov’s *Short Course on the History of the USSR* had a painting by I.E. Repin, entitled *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* struck from its publication.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the following passage was modified by Soviet censors following Stalin’s lead: “As a child, Ivan grew up among despotic boyars, who insulted him and fostered all his character flaws. ~~As a youth, Ivan would ride through Moscow on horseback, scaring and running down peaceful residents for amusement.~~”<sup>69</sup> The work, clearly, eliminated any mention of potentially incriminating history, while advocating for the Tsar’s pragmatism and ability to unite the principalities of Muscovy under a single banner. Similar to Pushkin, though Ivan is inextricably tied to the creation and foundation of the Russian Empire, his memory and his history was reimagined to focus, rather, on his nationalism and unifying abilities as a leader. Yet, the majority of attempts at “idealizing” the Tsar resulted in confusion and further censorship. According to Brandenburg and Platt there were a number of issues with depicting the Tsar as a Socialist Realist hero stemming from a “fundamental

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<sup>67</sup> David Brandenburg and Kevin M. F. Platt, “Terribly Pragmatic: Rewriting the History of Ivan IV’s Reign, 1937-1956,” as found in Platt and Brandenburg, *Epic Revisionism*, 157.

<sup>68</sup> Brandenburg and Platt “Terribly Pragmatic”, *Epic Revisionism*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> A.V. Shestakov, *Short Course on the History of the USSR* as found in Platt and Brandenburg, *Epic Revisionism*, 158.

irreconcilability of efforts to advance the cause of Soviet state-building through positive references to the tsarist past.”<sup>70</sup> Stalin and his spokesman, Zhdanov, were attempting to incorporate Ivan the Terrible as a progressive figure, for his time, and a successful one despite his flaws, in order to create a sense of parallelism between the Tsar and Stalin himself.

In addition to Pushkin and Ivan the Terrible, a number of other figures were reincorporated and reimagined into the Soviet Socialist Realist canon. In an effort to mobilize popular support of the party and the state, Socialist Realism attempted to create a Russian nationalist image of the past. Aside from Ivan the Terrible, great heroes and figures such as Peter the Great and Alexander Nevsky were incorporated into the Soviet canon in order to justify the progression from Imperial Russia to the Soviet Union. Artists and authors such as Eisenstein and Alexander Tolstoy were instrumental in this incorporation, depicting these figures as the nationalist and purely Russian heroes that would make them so important to Soviet propaganda.<sup>71</sup> The greatest Russian literary figures like Pushkin, Lev Tolstoy and Mikhail Lermontov were also reimagined and revised in order to better fit the Socialist Realist mold. In all, the arts were transformed, unsurprisingly, by the drastic nature of Socialist Realism that both created a new ideology and a new sense of the future, while also modifying the history of the Russian past.

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<sup>70</sup>Brandenburg and Platt, “Terribly Pragmatic”, *Epic Revisionism*, 170.

<sup>71</sup> Platt and Brandenburg, *Epic Revisionism*.

## **Sergei Eisenstein: Censorship and Subversion in Soviet Film**

Sergei Eisenstein, whom I discussed in the section above, is one of the most well-known directors of Soviet Era film. He is known specifically for his depictions of historic moments in Russian history and his epic biopics that helped transform the image and memory of Russian icons such as Alexander Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible into Socialist Realist heroes. He is also the director of, perhaps, the most well-known and well-loved film in Russian history, *The Battleship Potemkin*. Eisenstein came to prominence in the 1930s and 1940s as the favorite of Josef Stalin, and was hand chosen to create films that not only celebrated the historic successes of Russia, but which toed the line of Socialist and Soviet propaganda and ideology. In 1946 he attempted to put out the second part in his trilogy about Ivan the Terrible, but was thwarted by Stalin and the party for straying too far from official doctrine, and subsequently was blacklisted. In this section, I will discuss the importance of Eisenstein's films, *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible* in particular, and will demonstrate how despite the censorship and erasure of homosexuality and queerness in Stalinist culture, Eisenstein, who was at the very least homo-erotically inclined, was able to inundate his works with a certain amount of queer libido.

Eisenstein was an important actor with regard to the concept of Socialist Realism and one of his works that had a major impact is his biopic of Alexander Nevsky. David Brandenburg's essay, "The Popular Reception of S.M. Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevskii*" takes an in-depth look at the impact that

Eisenstein's film had on the mobilization of the Soviet people, particularly with respect to World War II.<sup>72</sup> Eisenstein, amidst a scandal involving his work *Bezhin Meadow*, was seeking a way to rehabilitate his career.<sup>73</sup> In order to do so, he desired to create a politically charged piece that would appease the high ranking political officials who were hoping to "rally social support."<sup>74</sup> A recent theory among scholars, such as Barry Scherr, is that the film served to play into Stalin's cult of personality, and much like Eisenstein's portrayal of Ivan IV, Nevsky was deemed a character study of Stalin himself.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Eisenstein would have known that he had to redeem himself by creating a work that would fall in line with the doctrine of Socialist Realism and tell an epic tale of Russian heroism and mythos that would unite the Soviet people. The film was greeted with widespread praise, long lines at the cinemas and praise from those high up in the field, such as the director of Moscow's Art Cinema who stated: "not since the days of *Chapaev* has there been such an enormous flood of viewers."<sup>76</sup> The film fit the bill for a Socialist Realist work of propaganda perfectly and created a cultural movement that inspired and united the Soviet people in the face of the impending

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<sup>72</sup> David Brandenburg, "The Popular Reception of S.M. Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevskii*" in Platt and Brandenburg, *Epic Revisionism*, 233-252.

<sup>73</sup> Brandenburg, "The Popular Reception", 234.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Barry Scherr, "Alexander Nevsky: A Film without a Hero," in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*, ed. Al Lavalley and Barry Scherr (New Brunswick, N.J.; Rutgers University Press, 2001) 207-226.

<sup>76</sup> Brandenburg, "The Popular Reception", 236.

war against the Nazis, though it was removed from circulation after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty between the Russians and the Germans.<sup>77</sup>

Eisenstein himself, as I've said, was at the very least homo-erotically inclined. There is a collection of pornographic sketches by the director that "go a long way to accounting for a homosexual fixation."<sup>78</sup> There are also accounts that his diaries contain passages describing his attraction to other men, including his assistant, though he remained married to a woman until his death in 1948.<sup>79</sup> The most blatant manifestation of Eisenstein's queerness in his work can be seen in the second part of his work *Ivan the Terrible* where there are a number of scenes in which gender confusion and cross dressing play very important roles.<sup>80</sup>

Eisenstein's first part of his planned trilogy of Ivan films, was greeted with praise from Stalin and the high ranking officials of the party as it fulfilled its requirement of glorifying the party, and glorifying the nationalist history of Russia. Despite being a controversial depiction of Ivan as a complicated character, Eisenstein was able to sneak in innuendo and ambiguity, by displaying it more prominently. As he put it: "The most effective way of hiding something is to put it on display."<sup>81</sup> As Joan Neuberger illustrates, most people found *Ivan the Terrible* unobjectionable because it followed a stereotypical Socialist Realist plot involving

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<sup>77</sup> Brandenburg, "The Popular Reception", 243.

<sup>78</sup> Jeremi Szaniawski, *The Cinema of Alexander Sokurov: Figures of Paradox*, (Wallflower Press, 2014) 197.

<sup>79</sup> Channel 4, "Putin's Pride? Six Famous Gay Sons of Russia", (Channel 4 News, 2014) <http://www.channel4.com/news/sochi-2014-lgbt-gay-russia-winter-olympics-tchaikovsky>

<sup>80</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible Pt. 2*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RA9z3SfnSo>

<sup>81</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, as quoted in Joan Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible: The Film Companion*, (I.B. Tauris, 2003), 30.

a hero overcoming obstacles and triumphing despite all odds.<sup>82</sup> However, when Eisenstein attempted to release the second part of the film trilogy both Stalin and other high ranking officials blasted the film and banned it from release.<sup>83</sup> “In the Central Committee’s September 4, 1946 resolution ‘Concerning the Film ‘The Great Life’,’ Eisenstein was accused of: ‘ignorance in his depiction of historical facts, presenting Ivan the Terrible’s *oprichniki* as a band of degenerates.’”<sup>84</sup> Stalin was upset with the way that Eisenstein was portraying Ivan and the history of the sixteenth century, but the implication was that Stalin was upset with Eisenstein’s overt use of sexual imagery and gender confusion. There was a scene in the second part in which the character Fyodor, Ivan’s supposed lover, wears a mask and cross-dresses as Anastasiia, Ivan’s dead wife, while dancing.<sup>85</sup> In addition, Eisenstein undermines the Socialist Realist plot using gender reversals such as the manly aunt Efyrosiniia and effeminate Cousin Vladimir, as well as “distortions, mirrors, historical falsifications, [and] grotesque folk motifs.”<sup>86</sup> This symbolism for gender confusion and debauchery was purportedly not received well by the party, but was Eisenstein’s attempt at including some sense of queerness in his work, though it wasn’t released in any form until 1958, ten years after the director’s death.

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<sup>82</sup> Joan Neuberger, *Ivan*, 30.

<sup>83</sup> Brandenburg and Platt, “Terribly Pragmatic,” *Epic Revisionism*, 167.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Ivan the Terrible Part 2 1:02-1:05 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RA9z3SfnSo>

<sup>86</sup> Neuberger, *Ivan*, 31.

In all, Eisenstein was both a major part and a subtle subversive of the Socialist Realist culture and propaganda under Stalin. He both created important pieces of Socialist Realist cinema in order to preserve his career and made a social commentary on the power and control of the Soviet machine.

### **Literature Under Socialist Realism**

One of the most substantial aspects of Socialist Realism was the impact that it had on the literary world. Though after the Bolshevik Revolution queer literature began to decline, after the adoption of Socialist Realism as official party doctrine production of queer themed literature all but ceased. It was also in the literary world that queer publications were the most repressed. As I've discussed, from the 1905 revolution until the early 1920s there was a blossoming of queer art and literature. From Mikhail Kuzmin to Fyodor Sologub to Sergei Esenin, queer themed prose and poetry became more and more abundant until the Soviet government took full control of artistic production from 1928 onward.

Mikhail Kuzmin was perhaps the most obvious of these queer authors, notable for his publication of *Wings* in 1906, which was the first coming out story published in Russia. Michael Green, in his essay "Mikhail Kuzmin: Past and Present" discusses Kuzmin's work and the controversy that surrounded his queer themed poetry and novel. An entire volume of Kuzmin's poems was dedicated to an army officer. In addition, Kuzmin greeted the October Revolution with cautious excitement and was one of a few who stayed in Russia and was able to get

published in the pre-Stalinist 20s.<sup>87</sup> However, Kuzmin quickly became dependent on translation of others' works in order to earn a living, much like other authors after the revolution.<sup>88</sup> Another author, Fyodor Sologub's *Petty Demon* was published in 1907 and describes the sadomasochistic desires of a professor and his lust for his young male pupils. "It was particularly pleasant for him to see Sasha on his knees, like someone being punished... calm and erect, as though beneath someone's stern and observing eye... he looked completely like a girl."<sup>89</sup> The fact that such a blatantly homoerotic text could be published in the late Imperial Era is indicative of the laxness of Tsarist era censorship. Two other prominent authors active in this period, Nikolai Klyuev and Sergei Esenin were lovers. One of Esenin's poems, written to Klyuev, reads: "Now my love is not what it used to be... and the man for whom you waited in the night/again passed by the hospitable cover."<sup>90</sup> However, Esenin committed suicide in 1925 as he was increasingly at odds with the Soviet Regime.<sup>91</sup>

Esenin was not the only queer author who was at odds with the rising Soviet Regime after the October Revolution. Some authors fled the new Soviet Regime and moved West to Europe or East to China and the Americas, while some refrained from writing queer themed works, at least publically, and began

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Green, "Mikhail Kuzmin: Past and Present" as found in Kevin Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 116-117.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Fyodor Sologub, *Petty Demon* as found in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 128.

<sup>90</sup> Sergei Esenin, Poem as found in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 153.

work for the party. By 1928, however, with the consolidation of power by Stalin, queer themed literature all but disappeared.

Ryurik Ivnev, who was born in what is modern day Tbilisi, Georgia, was a queer poet, novelist and translator who was active throughout the revolution and into the 1980s. In fact, he served as secretary to Alexander Lunacharsky in the Soviet regime and was a prolific author of all genres, though his work was of questionable quality. Under the Soviets Ivnev worked as a translator of poetry and as a historical playwright in order to earn a living, he also had a marriage of convenience and maintained a low public profile.<sup>92</sup> However, his diaries from 1930 outline a number of clandestine meetings with men: “Kashira. Arrived here yesterday evening. Kolya met me at the arranged place.”<sup>93</sup> “I never thought I was so firmly and profoundly attached to Anatoly.”<sup>94</sup> Yet, none of these works saw the light of day until long after the death of Stalin, and his pre-Revolution poetry was considered too unorthodox to be reprinted.<sup>95</sup>

Two other prominent authors active during the Stalinist period, Georgy Ivanov and Valery Pereleshin were emigrés. Ivanov left Russia shortly after the October Revolution and continued to publish poems and prose in Paris that had queer themes. Though he wasn’t queer himself, Ivanov published *The Third Rome*, which was considered a quality image of life in St. Petersburg during the

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<sup>92</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 159.

<sup>93</sup> Ryurik Ivnev, Diary 29 September 1930, as found in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 160.

<sup>94</sup> Ivnev, Diary 3 October 1930, as found in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 161.

<sup>95</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 159.

revolutionary period in which his characters were queer.<sup>96</sup> Valery Pereleshin was an émigré born in Siberia who lived most of his life in Manchuria, China and Rio de Janeiro. He earned a degree at a Soviet institution and worked for the Soviet government for a period of time, but mostly lived his life abroad in order to write his queer themed poetry.<sup>97</sup>

Under the Stalinist doctrine of Socialist Realism there was no room for queer identities in literature. After 1933, when homosexuality was clearly and deliberately outlawed and Socialist Realism became the official doctrine any reference to queerness or homosexuality in writing was all but eliminated. There is little available, if anything, that was published between 1928 and the death of Stalin that indicates that queer themes were written anywhere other than the privacy of one's own home. However, after the death of Stalin a few queer authors began to come out of the woodwork.

Yevgeny Kharitonov was a prominent Russian poet, writer, playwright and director who was born and raised during the latter half of Stalin's reign. He is considered by some the most important writer when it comes to the foundation and shaping of queer literature after the Revolution, though he did not start writing until after the death of Stalin<sup>98</sup> His work and his sexuality are inextricably linked and as a result he was forced to work and produce his pieces in private. Kharitonov's work was particularly critical of the legal and cultural prohibitions

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<sup>96</sup> Georgy Ivanov, *The Third Rome*, as found in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 174.

<sup>97</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 183.

<sup>98</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 196.

against queerness and homosexuality in the Soviet Union, and thus often clashed with the KGB. When he died suddenly at the age of forty his friends attempted to save his works from the KGB who sealed off his apartment, but most were recovered by the authorities.<sup>99</sup>

These are just a few of the surviving accounts of authors and poets who were actively writing queer themed pieces under the Soviets, though few, if any were published under Stalinist Socialist Realism. Others, undoubtedly, were never discovered due to the surreptitious nature of their work, and others still were likely imprisoned or executed for subverting the party and the state. This was a dangerous time to be different, and it was an even more dangerous time to openly discuss or write about being different. Ultimately, Socialist Realism had a catastrophic impact on the availability of queer themed literature.

## **Conclusion**

Socialist Realism was an all controlling doctrine that shaped and molded the creation and expression of Stalinist Era cultural and artistic productivity. It was a doctrine that severely limited the freedom of expression of Soviet artists and authors and ultimately resulted in art and literature that was filled with barely-there innuendo, or written in utter secrecy and highly censored efforts to subvert the state and its control. Socialist Realism is a doctrine that re-envisioned the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

great figures of Russian history and created a mass cultural movement and propaganda that fueled the Soviet state and the Communist party. So far, in this chapter, I have demonstrated the impact that Socialist Realism had on the interpretation and reception of Russian History and on the legacies of significant artists and authors such as Sergei Eisenstein and Mikhail Kuzmin.

From here, I will discuss the two case studies of Nikolai Gogol, a queer author who much like Pushkin and Lermontov was reimagined through the doctrine of Socialist Realism in order to eliminate any psycho-sexual analysis of his works, and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, one of the most noteworthy composers whose life and death were reinterpreted and in some cases even erased in order to preserve the iconic and nationalist image of the Russian great. These two men are exemplary of the impact that Socialist Realism and Stalinist cultural repression and subversion had on the history of queerness in Russian society. Both of these men had queer tendencies, and both have had their legacies altered in order to preserve the integrity of Socialist Realist heroes, though they themselves had never even dreamed of the ideals and principles of the Soviet Union and its infamous leader.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Nikolai Gogol

In this chapter, I will use the case of Nikolai Gogol, one of the most creative and well-known writers in Russian history, to demonstrate precisely the impact of the historical revisionism of Socialist Realism on great Russian figures. In order to truly understand Gogol and, in particular, his sexuality and queerness, I attempted to look at his work, critical reviews and various biographical material ranging from Imperial to modern works. Unfortunately, the vast majority of works devoted to the author stray far from his sexuality, as can be understood for the time he was alive, and his work itself is so mysterious and surreal that I had to rely heavily on the work of Simon Karlinsky to unearth exactly how the author's psyche functioned regarding his sexual proclivities. Gogol is a particularly interesting character, as today he is widely recognized as an LGBT figure in Russian history, yet, unlike many before and after him he never acted on his sexuality.<sup>100</sup> Thus, it is particularly difficult to discern whether or not Gogol was in fact sexually attracted to men. There are a number of letters, as well as accounts of the author practicing cross-dressing that indicate that there was something queer about the author, and, to truly understand the author's inclinations one must look at his vast volumes of work.<sup>101</sup> Simon Karlinsky's work, *The Sexual*

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<sup>100</sup> Christopher Harrity, "22 Russians Who We Won't Let Vladimir Putin Forget Were LGBT", *The Advocate*, (August 6, 2013)  
<http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/people/2013/08/06/22-russians-who-we-wont-let-vladimir-putin-forget-were-gay>

<sup>101</sup> Simon Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1976), vii-ix.

*Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, involves intense critical review and examination of all of Gogol's major works and incorporates the findings into a critical analysis of the author's life and correspondence. What Karlinsky does is so thoroughly convincing that there is little doubt in my mind that Gogol was in fact attracted to men, but also, was queer far beyond simple attraction to men and, rather, had a particular mental framework regarding sexuality in general.<sup>102</sup> In this chapter, I will first give some background information on Gogol's life and some insight into his sexuality, then I will look at how his sexuality translates into his work as Karlinsky describes. Most importantly, though, I will discuss how Gogol's canon has been interpreted and re-interpreted by critics to ultimately fit the Socialist Realist canon under Stalin. Essentially, Karlinsky's work in the Nineteen-seventies exposed something (Gogol's psychosexuality's presence in his work) that was barely visible in Revolutionary Russia and then quickly hidden away under the guise of a Socialist Realist interpretation of some of the most influential and praised work in the Russian canon.

### **The Man and His Sexuality**

Nikolai Gogol, though a significant author in Russian literature, was actually born in 1809 in the Ukraine.<sup>103</sup> Even today, Russians and Ukrainian

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Janko Lavrin, *Gogol*, (George Routledge & Sons, London, 1926) 18-22.

scholars argue about whether or not Gogol should be considered a Ukrainian as he was ethnically Ukrainian but wrote most of his works in and about Russia.<sup>104</sup> The Gogol family was part of the “petty gentry” and spoke both languages, and Gogol’s father wrote both Ukrainian and Russian poetry and plays, passing the knowledge on to his son.<sup>105</sup> In 1820, Gogol began attending a school of art in Nezhin, in the Ukraine, where he would spend his formative years developing his acting and writing ability, and a few personal relationships that would last. For the most part though, Gogol was more or less ostracized by his fellow students. He was not the most attractive young man and he was especially sickly due to a slew of chronic ailments that marred his appearance.<sup>106</sup> It was at the school in Nezhin that Gogol began to act in a number of pieces, from “Oedipus in Athens” to “The Chatterbox”, but his most lauded roles were as old Russian women such as in “The Minor”.<sup>107</sup> This may have been the first manifestations of the author’s attraction to cross-dressing. In addition, the first signs of Gogol’s potentially homoerotic feelings for another student can be seen in his relationship with Gerasim Vysotsky. Vysotsky was an older student with a sharp wit, who had a seemingly profound influence on Gogol; as Karlinsky points out, a number of jokes in Gogol’s *Evenings on a Farm in Dikanka* were attributed to Vysotsky by former classmates at Nezhin.<sup>108</sup> In one specific letter to Vysotsky in 1827, just

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<sup>104</sup> Irina Vaag, “Gogol: russe et ukrainien en même temps” *l’express*, (2009).

<sup>105</sup> Edyta Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007).

<sup>106</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 14-17.

before leaving the school at Nezhin, Gogol writes almost erotically to his friend: “So you do love me after all, my kind, precious friend...I am there with you, in your room, we stroll together along the boulevards, admire the Neva and the sea. In a word, I *become* you. (Gogol’s Italics).”<sup>109</sup> Whether Gogol meant for this letter to portray a specifically erotic tone or not, it is impossible to miss the affection and perhaps even lust that Gogol has for Vysotsky. As I’ll discuss later, Karlinsky will use this same-sex affection to show that Gogol’s “erotic imagination” was distinctly homoerotic, and that not only would this be evident in a number of his relationships, but his fear and suppression of this imagination manifested itself in his work and his personal life.

When it came to Gogol’s writing, while at the School in Nezhin, Gogol began to practice his poetry, attempting to emulate Alexander Pushkin, but, shortly after leaving the school and moving to St. Petersburg in 1828, his poem *Hans Küchelgarten* was published and torn apart by critics. Gogol’s lyricism and verse were lacking at best and the poem was an utter failure, leading Gogol to swear to never write poetry again and instead focus on his prose works.<sup>110</sup> During the next eight years, Gogol swiftly rose to prominence amongst the literary circles. At first, he was well known and well-liked for implementing his Ukrainian roots in his works such as *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, *Mirgorod* and *Arabesques*. In these early works, Gogol not only sharpened and

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<sup>109</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 14-15.

<sup>110</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, (Editions Poetry London, 1947), 14-18.

honed the elements of Ukrainian writers and playwrights, but he was seen by some critics as a simply a Ukrainian writer, rather than a Russian one. The author acquired an interest in Ukrainian history and even attempted to join the History Department at Kyiv University, but was deemed unqualified for the job (which he was, as would be seen when he later became a professor at St. Petersburg University, where he not only failed to instruct his students effectively, but more often than not skipped his own lectures.)<sup>111</sup> It was during the period from 1832 to 1836 that Gogol was reclassified as a Russian writer, rather than a Ukrainian one, by Russian critics such as Belinsky, who was an important figure in both Russian literary circles and in shaping Gogol's legacy as a realist.<sup>112</sup>

In 1832, Gogol met a man named Mikhail Pogodin with whom he became close, and showed a certain level of infatuation. Shortly after their meeting the two began a correspondence in which Gogol repeatedly referred to Pogodin with intimate and emotional phrases such as in a letter from July 1832 where he referred to Mikhail as "priceless" and the "brother of [his] soul."<sup>113</sup> Also in July, Gogol wrote to Pogodin of a fantasy that he had of the two of them, but the letter has been censored in all published editions of Gogol's letters as there is a sentence that can be interpreted vaguely as: "I [do something to] you and the more [I do it?], the more incredible it becomes."<sup>114</sup> Despite the efforts of the

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<sup>111</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 52-3.

<sup>112</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 54-6.

<sup>113</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 54.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

censors, the intimate nature of the sentence and the fantasy can be gleaned quite clearly from the scraps that are left. Though this relationship is one of the few instances in which historians and scholars have seen, blatantly, Gogol's affection toward another man, there is another relationship that Gogol wrote extensively about that indicates quite a legitimate romantic attraction toward a man.

From 1836 to 1848, Gogol lived and travelled abroad. Exploring much of Western Europe and meeting with Russian expatriates and Polish authors, eventually settling in Rome. It was here that he would meet and fall in love with a young man named Iosef Vielhorskiy, the son of one of Gogol's patrons who brought him to the attention of Emperor Nicholas I.<sup>115</sup> It is likely that there was never any sexual relations between the two as Iosef was suffering from tuberculosis. Alexandra Smirnova writes of the two in her memoirs: "I learned at the time that [Gogol] was on terms of intimacy with the young Vielhorsky... I found their intimacy *comme il faut*, most natural and simple."<sup>116</sup> Though the budding romance between the two was cut short by Iosef's death, Gogol was profoundly influenced by the young man and wrote extensively of his time at Vielhorsky's villa, the story is often published in complete works of Gogol as *Nights at the Villa*, and was also featured in an anthology of gay and lesbian

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<sup>115</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 191-3.

<sup>116</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 193.

Russian literature, *Out of the Blue*, edited by Kevin Moss.<sup>117</sup> Moss considers Karlinsky's argument regarding Gogol's repressed sexuality to be accurate, and considers *Nights at the Villa* as a diary entry describing the author's affair with Vielhorskiy which the Soviet censors treated as a work of fiction.<sup>118</sup> "It was so sweet to sit near him, to look at him. For two nights now we have been saying 'thou' to each other. How much closer he has become to me since then!"<sup>119</sup> In this highly homoerotic and homo-romantic account of Gogol's time at the villa, he speaks endearingly and romantically of his ailing friend and confidant, even going so far as to wish the illness upon himself, if only his friend could recover.<sup>120</sup>

After Vielhorskiy, Gogol would have one other intensely close relationship with a man named Nikolai Yazykov who he got along well with, but likely had no romantic inclinations toward. Yazykov and Gogol knew each other from the Russian literary scene, and eventually lived and worked together in Rome.<sup>121</sup> Gogol also continued to remain close to the Vielhorskiy family and would accompany them to their home in France. As Karlinsky discusses, it is believed by some that Gogol's relationship with the Vielhorskiys was cut short only when he proposed to their daughter Anna and was rejected for his lack of standing in Imperial society.<sup>122</sup> Karlinsky, and other historians such as Victor Erlich, are

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<sup>117</sup> Kevin Moss, *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature*, (Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 1997) 38-41.

<sup>118</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 39.

<sup>119</sup> Nikolai Gogol, "Nights at the Villa", as found in Moss, *Out of the Blue*, 39.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 213-224.

<sup>122</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 263-269.

skeptical of this version of events, not because it was uncommon for men such as Gogol to marry women in order to appear relatively normal in Russian society, as Tchaikovsky would later attempt to do, but because there is little historical evidence that indicates that this was the case.<sup>123</sup>

Gogol's death, as many have noted, is one that only he could have imagined. Tutored by a fanatical priest named Father Matthew Konstantinovsky, Gogol began to force himself to eat almost nothing, and spent the majority of his final days praying and in deep contemplation. His friends begged him to eat. Count Tolstoy, with whom he was staying, called upon the church to get him to break his fast, and when that failed called upon doctors to aid him medically.<sup>124</sup> It was in these days that Gogol admitted to the physicians that he had never had any sexual relations with a woman.<sup>125</sup> The official prognosis was that Gogol was dying because he was starving himself and had developed gastroenteritis. He was bled with leeches in an attempt to cure him, but he continued to refuse to eat and eventually passed away.<sup>126</sup> As Simon Karlinsky notes, though Gogol was a participant in his death, and some have deemed it a suicide, the influence of the church and the medical science of the time was tearing the author apart and ultimately resulted in the inability to cure the author of his own mental and physical breakdown.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Nabokov, *Gogol*, 7-12.

<sup>125</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 277-280.

<sup>126</sup> Nabokov, *Gogol*, 7-12.

<sup>127</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 277-280.

## Sexuality in Gogol's Work

As I've illustrated, it is clear that certain aspects of Gogol's personal life that could be considered queer, particularly his refraining from having a relationship or sexual relations with women, and his deep and innate passion for other men such as Iosef Vielhorskiy and Gerasim Vysotsky. However, just as he never consummated a relationship with a woman, it is believed that he also never had any sexual relations with men. Rather, the primary manifestations of Gogol's sexuality were his letters and, subconsciously or consciously, through his works. In this section, I will, as Simon Karlinksy does, examine a selection of Gogol's works and discuss the importance of them with respect to the author's framework of sexuality. This will ultimately be vital to understanding how Gogol's works were perceived by Imperial, Revolutionary and Stalinist critics and scholars and in turn how Socialist Realism obscured Gogol's sexuality and queerness to a point of non-recognition.

A collection of some of Gogol's earliest works, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, is most notable for its Ukrainian setting and their clear adoration for the Ukrainian countryside. As I've stated, these stories are the main reason Gogol was initially perceived as a Ukrainian nationalist author, rather than Russian. Throughout these works there are a number of detailed descriptions of Ukrainian landscapes that more often than not consist of an erotic nature. (Throughout the

stories, the characters only profess their emotions through “chaste operatic arias.”)<sup>128</sup> In these descriptions, natural features are afforded a gender, usually the same as their gender in Russian, and erotic exchanges occur. However, as Julie Baker discusses these exchanges are often left unfinished as either the male part is “unable to perform” or the female is “too narcissistic... to respond.”<sup>129</sup>

“In the frequently cited description of a hot summer day in the Ukraine which opens ‘The Fair at Sorochintsy,’ an ‘immeasurable blue ocean’ (the sky) is voluptuously bending over the earth and ‘bathed in languor,’ is squeezing her in his ‘aerial arms.’ But in the midst of this embrace the sky has fallen asleep and the ‘amorous earth,’ serenaded by the song of the lark, adorned by the gold of dry leaves and the emeralds, topazes, and rubies of colorful insects does not seem to mind the passive inactivity of her celestial consort.”<sup>130</sup>

Though this relationship between nature and sexuality, does not show explicitly that Gogol preferred men to women, or vice versa, Karlinsky asserts that it does indicate that Gogol’s work, from the very beginning, was the product of a sexual imagination.<sup>131</sup> This imagination, however, was a stunted one in which men were more often than not impotent, and women, too narcissistic to seek the affection of men.

In another of the stories in *Evenings*, “Saint John’s Eve”, Gogol establishes what will become a recurring theme in his works regarding marriage and punishment. As a result of the characters’, Petro and Pidorka’s, desire to love one another two characters end up dying and another’s life is ruined.<sup>132</sup> This

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<sup>128</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 40.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 41.

<sup>132</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 35-36.

theme, that those who dare to love will be punished or have those around them punished for their actions, recurs in much of Gogol's work from *Mirgorod* (1835) to *Dead Souls* (1842).

“Andry Bulba is shot by his father [in ‘Taras Bulba’]; Homa Brut in ‘Viy’ is vanquished by demonic powers; ... Lieutenant Pirogov in ‘Nevsky Prospect’ is humiliated and flogged... and... Akaky Akakievich in ‘The Overcoat’... perishes for daring to desire a substitute wife in the form of a feminine-gender overcoat.”<sup>133</sup>

In fact, Gogol's idea of a happy ending does not conform to the traditional romantic ending of a wedding and a happy marriage, but rather of his male protagonists escaping marriage altogether. In “The Nose” Major Kovalyov escapes the prospect of marriage, while Podkolyosin in *Marriage* jumps from a balcony to escape matrimony, and Khlestakov in *The Inspector General* and Chichikov in *Dead Souls*, both save their reputations and escape punishment by avoiding the prospect of marriage and escaping the towns they are visiting.<sup>134</sup> In order for a man to truly be successful and happy in life, at least in Gogol's works, he must avoid the prospect of marriage, or even tying down to a woman, and remain a bachelor.

In what are perhaps Gogol's best-known and best-loved works of short story fiction, the St. Petersburg cycle, which consists of “The Nose”, “The Overcoat”, and “Diary of a Madman” inter alia, Gogol introduces his reader to three men, Kovalyov, Akakievich and Poprishchin, respectively. These three men

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

are all ridiculed, put-upon and meek, living their day to day lives in the same routine and same pattern, until something bizarre and surreal interrupts them.<sup>135</sup> With Akakievich, it is his relationship with an overcoat that mysteriously makes him confident and popular amongst his peers, but is ultimately stolen from him resulting in his death and haunting of St. Petersburg by his ghost who steals overcoats until he is ultimately satisfied.<sup>136</sup> As I've mentioned Akakievich's relationship with his overcoat is a substitute for marriage. He is too meek to even consider a relationship with a real woman, and as Gogol is want to do, he is punished for his adoration and even obsession with his coat, ultimately leading to his death.<sup>137</sup> In "The Nose", Gogol's premier work of surrealism, Kovalyov loses his nose, and appeals to a number of individuals in order to retrieve it. As Simon Karlinsky points out, the titular appendage, as well as a loaf of bread owned by a barber, are often interpreted by Freudian analysts as phallic symbols, in particular when the nose enters a church, a clear implication of intercourse.<sup>138</sup> Gogol's pseudo-sexual surrealism is matched by the concept of loss of masculinity, both in the removal of a phallic appendage, and in the obfuscation of gender between the barber and his wife, who calls him a female streetwalker, and claims he'll lose his ability to perform sexually.<sup>139</sup> In all, Gogol's most surreal works go hand in hand with his sexual imagination that Karlinsky so clearly

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<sup>135</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 117.

<sup>136</sup> Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat and Other Short Stories*, (Dover Thrift Editions, 1992).

<sup>137</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 135-144.

<sup>138</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 123-130.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

illustrates, and ultimately, gender-roles and the intricacies of sexual relationships are featured prominently in these stories of confusion and misperception.

Gogol's epic masterpiece, *Dead Souls*, a staple of any Russian literary portfolio, is in many ways similar to the stories that came before it, though on a much grander scale. In *Dead Souls*, Chichikov, the principal character who purchases dead serfs to grow his estate, is, much like Akakievich, wedded to an inanimate object – in this case his strongbox, which much like the overcoat is female gendered, but other than that, Chichikov maintains no interest in anything of a sexual nature, particularly with women.<sup>140</sup> When, for a brief moment, Chichikov does believe that he might have feelings for the Governor's daughter it is in one of the most misogynistic passages in Gogol's works: "A goodly wench...but what is her chief virtue? It lies in the fact... that there is nothing feminine about her, nothing of what makes all women so repulsive."<sup>141</sup> Eventually, he determines that only if the young woman's parents were to provide a substantial dowry would she be worth the hassle.<sup>142</sup> As Chichikov continues to contemplate his infatuation with the Governor's daughter and the prospect of marriage looms, the story of the purchasing of dead serfs begins to circulate and the likelihood of his exposure becomes greater and greater, until he decides to leave.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 225-235.

<sup>141</sup> Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 94.

<sup>142</sup> Gogol, *Dead Souls*, 95.

<sup>143</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 225-235.

In all, Gogol's works never explicitly state anything homosexual, however as Simon Karlinsky's work has shown, there is a definite nuance to the nature of Gogol's work that indicates a "sexual imagination."<sup>144</sup> Though the characters are often depicted as invalid, for one reason or another, the issues that seem to pervade Gogol's life also seem to be present in one form or another in his works. Gogol refrained from sexual intercourse during his lifetime, and rather than depicting his characters as sexual beings he relied on illustrating nature as a sexual being. Gogol shied away from relationships with women, and in his work he depicts relationships, particularly marriage, as futile and dangerous, and the life of a bachelor as successful. Gogol may have also been confused about his own gender or masculinity, as he was known to cross-dress, and clearly was drawn to other men, and this manifested itself in the surrealism of stories such as "The Nose", where masculinity and gender roles were often obscured by surrealist imagery and symbolism. This deep and innate manifestation of Gogol's sexuality in his work is something that can be seen and analyzed now because scholars such as Karlinsky are able to analyze his works in a different light. Yet, eighty years ago, when Stalin was in power, any such interpretations were met by the censors, and a different narrative was what came to light.

### **Gogolian Revisionism and Socialist Realism**

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<sup>144</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 41.

As can be seen, not only did Gogol have a number of queer propensities, but this queerness manifested itself through his sexual imagination and into his work. However, this concept was not always perceptible to critics who, for a period of time, took Gogol's work at face value. From nineteenth-century critics, to Bolshevik revisionists, to Socialist Realism, and to Karlinsky's analysis in the late twentieth century and on, Gogol's works have been interpreted, reinterpreted and reinterpreted again in order to conform to the cultural standards and norms of the times. This is instrumental in the role of Socialist Realism under Stalin in the recognition of homosexuality and queerness in Russian culture and its cover-up.

In the nineteenth century, Gogol was deemed a realist. He was considered perhaps the most influential realist in the Russian canon and had a profound influence on further efforts of Russian literature, particularly the Russian great, Dostoevsky, as his works, such as *Dead Souls*, were viewed as the ultimate representation of Russian life.<sup>145</sup> Nikolai Chernyshevsky published his essays, *Studies in the Gogolian Period of Russian Literature*, in 1855 and 56 and rejected the idea that Gogol possessed any form of imagination and rather "records verbatim either Ukrainian folk legends ('Viy') or well known anecdotes ('The Nose')." <sup>146</sup> This publication became vital in the Nineteenth century understanding of Gogol and solidified the opinion of another critic, Belinsky, who

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<sup>145</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 235.

<sup>146</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 281.

long asserted that Gogol was a “critical realist” and the foremost social critic in all of Russian literature.<sup>147</sup> Because Gogol was so extraordinarily revered in Russian literature as a social critic and a realist, he became something of an icon for Revolutionaries who believed that he was condemning the Imperial notions of serfdom and autocracy.<sup>148</sup>

By 1909, the centenary of Gogol’s birth, literary critics and analysts began to realize that Gogol’s works had been misinterpreted as simply realist, and were in fact the product of a much more complex and imaginative author. Alexander Blok wrote that Gogol had given up the love of women because he himself was with child, and his child was “a fantastic future Russia.”<sup>149</sup> Mikhail Gershenzon was adamant that nineteenth century critics were incorrect in their interpretation of Gogol and were unjustly overlaying their own ideals onto his work.<sup>150</sup> This reinterpretation and revision of Nineteenth Century criticism was instrumental in influencing a swath of authors who, like Dostoevsky, imitated the work of the “mad genius”, though this time in a true homage to his surrealist and imaginative psyche.<sup>151</sup> Authors such as Bely, Remizov and Sologub, and poets such as Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov “trace their literary lineage to Gogol.”<sup>152</sup> This revisionist wave did not mesh well with the ideals and propaganda of the Revolutionary leaders, Lenin and Trotsky, as their views were strongly influenced

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 280-285.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

by the socially critical ideals of critics such as Belinsky and Chernyshevsky. Despite this, the works of Gogol continued to be analyzed in a psychosexual light and this newfound interest was sustained for nearly fifteen years after the October Revolution, when works such as *Gogol* by Vasily Gippius, and essays by Ivan Yermakov “applied the Freudian method to Gogol, bringing into the open the sexual themes previously touched upon by... Blok.”<sup>153</sup>

It was in 1934, after the rise of Stalin and the Party’s implementation of Socialist Realism that this analysis of Gogol’s works came to an abrupt halt. Andrei Bely’s work, *Gogol’s Mastery*, published in the same year, paid respect to the analyses of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, yet, could only be published with the inclusion of an introduction by Lev Kamenev, one of the party triumvirate who would be purged by Stalin by the end of the year.<sup>154</sup> Nadezhda Mandelstam, in her work *Hope Against Hope*, describes Kamenev’s introduction as the Stalinist era’s definitive statement that the party would henceforth be in control of all literary thought and analysis.<sup>155</sup> According to Karlinsky, not only was Gogol part of this phenomenon, but he was central to the Soviet’s desire to reinterpret Tsarist Era icons, because he was both considered a traditional Russian realist and was read by Russian school children. As part of the Belinsky-Chernyshevsky philosophy of analysis Gogol, if reinterpreted as he was pre-revolution, could undermine these prominent critics and the legacies of party leaders such as

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<sup>153</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 285.

<sup>154</sup> Karlinsky, *Labyrinth*, 286-290.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

Lenin, who believed whole-heartedly in their analyses.<sup>156</sup> Rather than inform Soviet schoolchildren and university students of Gogol's imaginative and radical point of view, the Soviet system persisted to promulgate the idea that Gogol was a traditionalist realist, associated with "progress, truth and goodness" as socialist realism dictated.<sup>157</sup> Thus, forty years of analysis and interpretation of Gogol's work as surreal, psychosexual, Marxist and Freudian came to a conclusion and for the next twenty years any and all analysis of Gogol's work had to be in the vein of traditional realism ordained by the Soviet government and its censors.<sup>158</sup> As Karlinsky illustrates, the authors of Soviet textbooks such as Nikolai Stepanov and Vladimir Yermelov, had access to the vast amounts of information and analysis of Gogol that was produced between 1893 and 1934, and yet continued to suppress any and all indication that Gogol was anything but a "revolutionary democrat" and indicter of tsarist Russia.<sup>159</sup> In addition, in order for this image to be maintained, any reference to Gogol's religious or sexual nature, both in his life and in his works, had to be deemed irrelevant. Even in 1976, Karlinsky believes that his work would be torn apart by Muscovite literary journals and condemned as a Western reimagining of a traditional Russian realist and revolutionary ideologue, despite all the evidence to the contrary.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

The centenary of Gogol's death in 1952 is indicative of just how important the author was to the Soviet re-imagination of Tsarist Era figures. Millions of copies of the author's work were sold that year and a slew of films about the author were released as new productions of his plays were performed. In addition, biographies and critical reviews of the author began to circulate.<sup>161</sup> On March 4, there was a formal meeting held at the Bolshoi Theater in which the author was celebrated, including a "belaurelled portrait" at the head of the theater. A notable Gogol scholar, Professor Ermilov:

"declared that Marx, Lenin and Stalin all entertained a high opinion of Gogol and... after linking the author to all that is best and most progressive in mankind, Ermilov concluded: 'Gogol is our great ally in the struggle to oppose with ruthless satire all the forces of darkness and hatred, all the forces hostile to peace on earth.'"<sup>162</sup>

Thus, Gogol's legacy has been obscured, reinterpreted and redefined for nearly two hundred years, in large part because of the influence of Socialist Realism. The Soviet government under Stalin and its complete and total control over the cultural and literary atmosphere in the Soviet Union meant that decades of work analyzing the psycho-sexual nature of Gogol's work, and in turn his life, was forgotten. Even today, few works are willing to explore the sexual nature of the Russian icon leading to a heavy reliance on the few works that look at the sexual nature, imagination and psyche of Gogol. Simon Karlinsky does a masterful job of this, and of explaining the exact impact that the Socialist Realist nature of

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<sup>161</sup> Robert L. Strong Jr., "The Soviet Interpretation of Gogol", *The American Slavic and East European Review* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Dec., 1955), 528.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

culture and art under Stalin had on the memory and legacy of one of the greatest queer authors in Russian history.

## **Conclusion**

Nikolai Gogol is not only one of the most prominent and well-loved Russian authors, but he is also a prominent figure in the history of queerness and sexuality in Russia. This history, as I have shown, has been intentionally obscured and misinterpreted in order to preserve a more uniform image of Soviet camaraderie and a more perfect future for the Soviet Union and its citizens. However, recent scholarship and rediscovery of vital correspondence, analysis and biography of Gogol has shown that in reality, the man was queer on a number of levels, both in his life and in his work.

Gogol is a prime case of literary revisionism that simultaneously supported the concept of socialist realism and obfuscated the history of sexuality and queerness in the Russian canon. It has been disputed whether Gogol was in fact attracted to men or not, but the evidence available to us now clearly indicates that there was something queer about the author. However, this evidence was long suppressed and unavailable for public consumption, and much of it still remains in archives in Russia accessible to only a select few. The most important indicator of Gogol's sexual deviancy lies in the interpretation and analysis of his works and the impact of his psycho-sexual imagination and consciousness.

In all, it is clear that Socialist Realism had a major impact on the legacy of Gogol's sexuality and how we remember him today. Gogol is also not alone in this. As I have discussed, many other literary and cultural figures have had their sexual nature and queerness wiped away by the influence of Socialist Realism on their legacies and works. One such figure, who I will now discuss in-depth, is Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **Pyotr Tchaikovsky**

To understand the influence of Stalinist rhetoric, propaganda, and law on the history of homosexuality in the Russian record is a study in absence and re-imagining. Soviet Era theory regarding same-sex relations was, and still is, shrouded in mystery, myth, and misinterpretation and fell directly in line with the Stalinist cultural doctrine of Socialist Realism. Great figures such as Tchaikovsky and Gogol were redefined by this doctrine in order to more easily fit the mold of what a true 'socialist hero' should be, though they were both active during the Imperial Age and have both been considered to be of a queer mindset. When looking to uncover specific documents or information that showed a deliberate and methodical elimination of queer themes in the Russian record, there is scant to be found, precisely because information such as this was deliberately and methodically removed from the annals of history. Scholars such as Alexander Poznansky and Simon Karlinsky have done a marvelous job of uncovering information that had previously been censored or hidden from public purview, widening the scope of available resources significantly. However, the most fruitful and abundant resources are those which show this absence of same-sex love, by hiding it in plain sight. Much as Stalinist and Socialist Realist imagery portrayed heroes proudly with their ailments and their invalidity, as Kaganovsky explores in her work, so too were imperial figures such as Tchaikovsky and Gogol shown with their 'ailments' (i.e. queerness) easily seen, yet hidden from

discussion under the guise of mental instability and illness in order to reincorporate their works into the Socialist rhetoric.

In order to demonstrate this dual elimination and reinterpretation of sources and information during Stalin's reign, I will, as I've discussed, use the two case studies of Tchaikovsky and Gogol to show precisely how the histories of these two Imperial greats were rewritten to perpetuate soviet ideals and the culture of Socialist realism as well as the greater impact on the history of homosexuality in Russia.

### **The Composer**

First, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, perhaps the best-known and most recognizable Russian composer, a national icon and one of the most important figures in the history of music. Tchaikovsky is often cited as the pinnacle of Russian musical success and is well known not only for his prowess and beautiful compositions, but for his nationalistic tendencies relying heavily on the influence of Russian folk music.<sup>163</sup> In Western scholarship it is a well known fact that Tchaikovsky was involved in a number of same-sex relations, from other

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<sup>163</sup> Michel R. Hofmann, *Tchaikovsky*, trans. Angus Heriot (John Calder Ltd. 1962) 7-11.

The original biography was written in French in 1947, and was longer than this abridged translation, though it also less freely discussed the matter of Tchaikovsky's homosexuality. For instance, on page 91, Heriot writes "Homosexual relationships cost money, and Tchaikovsky had no hesitation in appealing to his friend's generosity, with a wealth of appalling Dostoyevskian circumlocution." Where the original French makes no mention of homosexuality, at all.

boys at the School of Jurisprudence to his manservant, Alexis, later in life.<sup>164</sup> Yet, for decades, and even still today, there are those in Russian society and scholarship that maintain that Tchaikovsky was not gay and perpetuate this fallacy in modern biographical content.<sup>165</sup> This divergence stems primarily from the issues I've already discussed: under the Bolsheviks, homosexuality was classified as a mental illness, under Stalin it was outright criminalized, and the lasting effect of these decisions was not only the vilification of homosexuality in Russian society, but the obfuscation of homosexual identities, that prior to 1933 were undisputed.<sup>166</sup>

When he was 10, Tchaikovsky's parents sent him to St. Petersburg where he was enrolled in the School of Jurisprudence. The next nine years of Tchaikovsky's life would be some of the most influential in shaping his lifelong depression and his sexual propensities, yet are also the least chronicled of Tchaikovsky's life.<sup>167</sup> During his time at the School, Tchaikovsky befriended Aleksei Apukhtin and Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii, both of whom would become

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<sup>164</sup> Alexander Poznansky, "Tchaikovsky's Suicide: Myth and Reality" in *Studies in Homosexuality Vol. 4: Homosexuality and Homosexuals in the Arts* ed. Dynes Donaldson (Garland Publishing, 1992), 231-246.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*, ed. And Trans. William Lakond (W.W. Norton, New York, 1945).

<sup>165</sup> Shaun Walker, "Tchaikovsky was not gay, according to Russian culture minister" (The Guardian Online, September 2013)

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/sep/18/tchaikovsky-not-gay-russian-minister>

Meredith Bennett-Smith, "Russia Reportedly Ignoring Pyotr Tchaikovsky's Homosexuality in Partly State-Funded Biopic", (The Huffington Post Online, August 2013)

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/28/tchaikovsky-biopic-homosexuality-russia\\_n\\_3825861.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/28/tchaikovsky-biopic-homosexuality-russia_n_3825861.html)

<sup>166</sup> Nina Berberova, *Tchaikovski : Biographie* (Actes Sud, 1987) 8.

<sup>167</sup> Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: Through Others' Eyes* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 1-8.

known as prominent homosexuals.<sup>168</sup> Tchaikovsky's brother Modest writes of an incident in which his twin Anatoly tells him "There exist debased persons called 'bougres' who do not engage in sexual relations with women, but only boys, and – o woe! – Pyotr is one of them!"<sup>169</sup> In 1877, the same year he married Antonina Miliukova, Pyotr wrote to his brother about a young student, Josef Kotek, whom he had fallen in love with. "I am in love, as I haven't been in love for a long time. Can you guess with whom? He is of middle height, fair with wonderful brown eyes (with a misty gleam characteristic of extremely nearsighted people.)"<sup>170</sup> Kotek suggested to his employer, Nadezhda Von Meck, that she commission pieces from Tchaikovsky and the two became frequent correspondents. Though his relationship with Kotek would soon come to an end, and Tchaikovsky would marry Antonina, a step that he would regret, "I have become too used to bachelor life, and cannot recall my loss of freedom without regret..." (Wiley 152)<sup>171</sup>, Von Meck would remain his patron and friend until 1890 when they had a falling out due to misconceptions and pressure from Von Meck's entourage.<sup>172</sup><sup>173</sup> Von Meck was one of the most important influences in Tchaikovsky's life and would even serve to fund his homosexual exploits, as silence did not come cheap.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" in *Homosexuality*, 236-237.

<sup>169</sup> Modest Tchaikovsky's unpublished autobiography as found in Poznansky, *Eyes*, 25.

<sup>170</sup> Tchaikovsky's Letter to Modest January 19, 1877 as found in Poznansky, *Eyes* 103.

<sup>171</sup> Tchaikovsky's Letter to his sister Alexandra as found in Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 152.

<sup>172</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Final Years 1885-1893* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 271.

<sup>173</sup> Hofmann, *Tchaikovsky*, 89-95.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite its illegality, homosexuality in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia became something of a secret hidden in plain sight. Prominent figures were capable of maintaining homosexual affairs in their private lives, and though it was generally well-known information it was not something discussed openly. Tchaikovsky, Aleksei Apukhtin and Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii were included in this sub-culture, the latter going so far as to become embroiled in numerous scandals including an incident involving “a trumpet-boy of the Guards infantry battalion” from which he was redeemed by his close ties to Tsar Alexander III.<sup>175</sup> Thus, even prior to the cultural repression of homosexuality under the Soviets, Imperial cultural repression is an important factor to consider when examining primary biographical sources such as Tchaikovsky’s personal diaries and the biography written by his brother Modest.

In all, the evidence of Tchaikovsky’s homosexual tendencies is present and easily interpreted, yet, most of this information was made available only after the Stalinist Era, and once scholars such as Alexander Poznansky took an interest in the composer’s sexuality.<sup>176</sup> Pre-revolutionary and pre-Stalinist sources, such as diaries and letters found in the Tchaikovsky museum, could be interpreted to understand that Tchaikovsky had homosexual inclinations, but were often vague or inaccurate. Modest Tchaikovsky’s biography of his brother

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<sup>175</sup> Poznansky, “Suicide” as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 237.

<sup>176</sup> Poznansky’s collection of works, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, *Tchaikovsky’s Suicide: Myth and Reality*, *Tchaikovsky: Through Others’ Eyes* and a number of other contributions were vital in uncovering sources regarding Tchaikovsky’s sexuality, and synthesizing information which has illuminated much of the composer’s personal and private life.

was plagued with these inaccuracies, and only alluded to the fact that he had homosexual tendencies.<sup>177</sup> It wasn't until portions of Modest's unpublished autobiography became available in Poznansky's work in the nineteen-nineties that the younger Tchaikovsky's understanding of his brother's sexuality became clear (Modest also had same-sex relationships and thus the two brothers felt a certain camaraderie with one another.)<sup>178</sup> Tchaikovsky's diary itself was published largely untouched by his brother Ippolit in 1923, and clearly alluded to the composer's sexuality, but only in vague snippets, "A Negro. He came in to me" etc..<sup>179</sup> An English translation of these diaries was made widely available during Stalin's regime, but likely contributed to the understanding that Tchaikovsky was mentally disabled by his sexuality, as the translator, William Lakond, believed that the composer was distraught.<sup>180</sup> Perhaps the most telling sources, though, are the critical reviews of the composer and his work. Reviews and essays written by pre-soviet figures were often laudatory of Tchaikovsky's emotional manipulation of melody and lyricism, while Stalinist Era figures would criticize his melodies for being influenced by his own personal inner turmoil (stemming from his homosexuality.)<sup>181</sup> Stalinist critics disliked this emotionality

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<sup>177</sup> Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. and trans. Rosa Newmarch (Project Gutenberg, 2014, orig. 1900). Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, xiii-xxi.

<sup>178</sup> Modest Tchaikovsky's unpublished autobiography as found in Poznansky, *Eyes*, 25.

<sup>179</sup> Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Dnevnik*, (Muzikalnii Sektor, Moskva, 1993.) Reprint of 1923 edition, 268.

<sup>180</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*.

<sup>181</sup> Malcolm Hamrick Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music in Anglo American Criticism*, as found in Sophie Fuller, *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity* (University of Illinois Press, 2002.) 134-146.

because it was in opposition to the heroic nature of Socialist Realism, which Tchaikovsky had been used to redefine the composer. These reviews show a clear correlation between Stalin era cultural rhetoric and socialist realism and transforming ideology regarding the composer and his personal life. With the classifying of homosexuality as a mental illness in the nineteen-twenties and the criminalization of same sex relations in thirty-three, Tchaikovsky was both revered as a national compositional icon, and criticized for his 'malady.'<sup>182</sup>

In this chapter, I will first discuss the letters and diaries of Tchaikovsky and the comparison between pre-Stalin, Stalinist and Post-Stalinist publications of these vital documents. The differences in wording, vagueness, and commentary is key to understanding how Stalinist cultural repression eliminated and obscured information regarding the composer's sexuality. Second, I will explore the critical analyses and reviews of the composer and his music, specifically comparing pre-Stalinist and Stalinist Era reviews to understand how precisely the cultural comprehension of Tchaikovsky shifted with the changing tide of Stalinist sentiment against homosexuality. Lastly, I will use the evidence above in combination with Stalinist imagery, and Soviet Era performances of Tchaikovsky's work, as well as Lilya Kaganovsky's work regarding Stalinist imagery to show how Tchaikovsky was re-imagined as a piece of the Socialist Realist future of the Soviet Union. This concept of Socialist Realist re-imagining of important Russian national figures is key to understanding the influence of

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

Stalinist rhetoric and propaganda on the history of same-sex love in Russia. Homosexual history in Russia is a complicated and often misconstrued subject, and the history and life of Tchaikovsky is just one example of the influence of Stalinist ideology.

### **Letters and Diaries**

As the critical reviews of Tchaikovsky's work are key to understanding the perpetual transformation of views on the composer's personal life and its influence on his work, the letters written by and to Tchaikovsky during his life are key to understanding his sexuality itself (and the editing of these letters illuminates the censoring of that sexuality after his death.) Despite the vast number of letters written by the composer, the majority were left unpublished in their unedited form until at least after the fall of Stalin, when archives were slowly re-opened to scholars. As Alexander Poznansky elucidates "within the particular conditions of the Soviet Union... access to data on the private lives of famous people, however long dead, is often deliberately restricted by authorities."<sup>183</sup> Prior to the rise of the Soviet Union it was not uncommon for the publications regarding the composer, in particular his sexuality, to be intentionally unclear. As I've discussed, to be gay in the Russian Empire was technically illegal, yet, important figures such as Tchaikovsky and his friends (Apukhtin, Meshcherskii, Kondrat'ev etc.) were capable of maintaining same-sex relations due to their

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<sup>183</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 232.

connections to the Empire and their aristocratic status.<sup>184</sup> Tchaikovsky himself had close ties to Emperor Alexander III who granted the composer a lifetime pension.<sup>185</sup>

One of the first publications of letters by and to Tchaikovsky was written by his brother, Modest, published in 1900, and translated into English by Rosa Newmarch.<sup>186</sup> This publication, a combined biography and collection of correspondence, was vague at best regarding the composers sexuality referring to people we now know to have been his lovers, such as Josef Kotek, as an “intimate friend”, or Alexis Safronov, as “an important part” of the composer’s life, and refraining from publishing any letters that explicitly mentioned the composers sexual relations.<sup>187</sup> It is recognized by modern biographers, such as Poznansky and Roland Wiley, why Modest would have been intentionally vague about his brothers sexuality as he himself had same-sex relations and was still an active member of Russian society.<sup>188</sup> It wasn’t until 1934, when the first volume of letters between Tchaikovsky and his long-time benefactress, Von Meck, were published that there was explicit mention of Tchaikovsky’s sexual tendencies.<sup>189</sup> “The editors, Vladimir Zhdanov and Nikolay Zhegin, made a simple reference to this in a note to one of the letters (see P.I. Tchaikovsky: *Perepiska s N. F. von*

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<sup>184</sup> Poznansky, “Suicide” as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 237.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> M. Tchaikovsky, *Life and Letters*.

<sup>187</sup> M. Tchaikovsky, *Life and Letters*, 415-16, 127.

<sup>188</sup> Poznansky, “Suicide” as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 231-232. Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, xiii-xxi.

<sup>189</sup> John Warrack, [*Review of Letters to His Family: An Autobiography*], *Music & Letters*, 63(1/2), (Oxford University Press, 1982) 138.

Meck, i. 570-71(correspondence)), as background to all the storm over Tchaikovsky's marriage."<sup>190</sup> Though this volume was published in 1934, shortly after the rise of Stalin and the re-criminalization of homosexuality, it wasn't until Zhdanov began work on a second volume, even more explicit than the first, that the authorities took action, pulling the book from library circulation and eliminating it from Soviet bibliographies.<sup>191</sup> This second volume, *Pisma k rodnym* (letters to family), would become an invaluable source for Alexander Poznansky's essay "Tchaikovsky's Suicide" where he quotes a letter from Tchaikovsky to his brother Anatolii: "Only now... have I finally begun to understand that there is nothing more fruitless than not wanting to be that which I am by nature."<sup>192</sup> In addition, this second volume's successor, a highly edited version published in 1955, would become the basis for Galina von Meck's compilation of translated *Letters to His Family*.<sup>193</sup> Subsequently, others were able to publish volumes of his works which were less closely regulated – in a fifth volume of letters, published in 1959, we even see letters by Tchaikovsky to his brother Modest wherein he uses female nicknames to insinuate a relationship between Modest (Modestina) and another boy (Lenina or Lenin): "To the Grand Duchess

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

*P.I. Tchaikovsky: Peregiska s N. F. von Meck, i. 570-71* as referenced in Warrack, *Review*, 138

<sup>191</sup> Warrack, *Review*, 138.

Alexander Poznansky, Post on [www.tchaikovsky-research.net](http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net), last updated Nov 5, 2013.

<http://www.tchaikovsky-research.org/en/forum/forum0028.html>

<sup>192</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 232-233.

<sup>193</sup> Warrack, *Review*, 138.

Modestina the Princess Lenina has been appointed lady-in-waiting.”<sup>194</sup> In all, the letters that were published during the Stalinist regime were often limited to those regarding music and business, the 1940 edition of Tchaikovsky on the Moscow Stage, publishing a selection of letters between Tchaikovsky and librettists and theater owners such as K.S. Shilovsky and Mikhail Lentovskii, respectively.<sup>195</sup>

It was long after the death of Stalin that the most important letters regarding the composer’s sexuality were ‘discovered’ in the archives at the Tchaikovsky museum in Kiln. In combination with the above volume by Zhdanov, Galina von Meck compiled a near complete and insightful collection of letters by Tchaikovsky to his family that tells the history of the composer in his own words, from early childhood to his death.<sup>196</sup> This compilation incorporated letters that clearly show Tchaikovsky’s close relationships with his brother Modest, his manservant and lover Alexis Sarontov, and his much admired nephew Vladimir ‘Bob’ Davydov who Tchaikovsky pined after.<sup>197</sup> Even still, it was Alexander Poznansky’s work, *Tchaikovsky: Through Others’ Eyes*, that published portions of Modest Tchaikovsky’s unpublished autobiography and other unpublished letters, which openly discussed both the Tchaikovsky brothers’ sexuality: “It

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<sup>194</sup> Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Letter 74*, as found on Tchaikovsky-Research.net, trans. Luis Sundkvist, originally found in P.I. Tchaikovskii. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Ed. Yefim Davydovich Gershovsky.

Alexander Poznansky, [Пётр Чайковский. Биография, том I](#) (2009), p. 188-189.

Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, (1993) 77.

<sup>195</sup> Gosudarstvennyi tsentral’nyi teatral’nyi muzei im. A.A. Bakhrushina, *Tchaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene*, (Moskva 1940). Text in original Russian with an index of Letters.

<sup>196</sup> Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Letters to His Family: An Autobiography*, ed. Galina von Meck, (First Cooper Square Press 2000).

<sup>197</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Letters*, 494-7, 507 et al.

never occurred to me that the delight that blazed up at the sight of the beauty of a boy or young man... had anything in common with [the matter of sexual relationships].”<sup>198</sup> It is here where letters such as the one regarding Josef Kotek were first published, and first uncovered the effectiveness of the Soviet censorship of previously published letters.<sup>199</sup>

In addition to the letters written by Tchaikovsky, another vital source regarding his personal life was his diary. Though extant in only portions, and covering only a few of the years of his life, it is noted by Modest that his brother was an avid diarist, indicating that much of the composer’s collection has been lost, or simply destroyed: “Life was precious to Tchaikovsky. This was noticeable in many ways, among others his passion for keeping a diary... Disillusioned by their contents, he destroyed all his early diaries.”<sup>200</sup> Perhaps the most important published version of Tchaikovsky’s diary is the 1923 Russian language version, published by his brother Ippolit.<sup>201</sup> This version was the most complete, and was left mostly uncensored as it was published in the transition period between the rise of the Bolsheviks and the rise of Stalin – the period in which literature and publication had a massive flowering, especially concerning formerly untouched subjects such as homosexuality.<sup>202</sup> Unfortunately, this edition had a number of

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<sup>198</sup> Poznansky, *Eyes*, 23.

<sup>199</sup> Poznansky, *Eyes*.

<sup>200</sup> M. Tchaikovsky, *Life and Letters*, 139.

<sup>201</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Dnevnik*.

<sup>202</sup> Daniel Healey, *The Russian revolution and the decriminalisation of homosexuality*, *Revolutionary Russia*, 6:1, p27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546549308575594>

other issues including the editor's unfamiliarity with his brother and his brother's personal life, and an unexplained omission of diaries between 1881 and 1885.<sup>203</sup> (Pyotr was much closer with his brothers Anatolii and Modest, and his sister Alexandra, than he was with his brother Ippolit, who was a naval officer.)<sup>204</sup> Still, this publication of the composer's diaries was used widely as a foundation for much, if not all, future biographical information.<sup>205</sup> In tandem with his letters and correspondence, Tchaikovsky's diaries illustrate an interesting and complex portrait of the composer. From his drive to create and his struggle with his own music and productivity, to his relationships with other composers and the rest of the aristocratic scene, to his personal relationships and even his sexual endeavors.<sup>206</sup> At numerous points in his diaries Tchaikovsky describes homoerotic incidents with short simple sentences that may or may not indicate homosexual activity. "Vanya. Hands Only."<sup>207</sup> "Nazar is worse. The rubdowns and massages have commenced."<sup>208</sup> The one aspect of Tchaikovsky's personal life that his diaries are quite clear about is his infatuation with his nephew "Bob". From 1886 onward there are a number of references to Bob: starting off sweet

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<sup>203</sup> Tchaikovsky Research, *Diaries*, <http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Diaries>.

<sup>204</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Letters*. Tchaikovsky often writes to members of his family, but mostly to his brothers Anatolii and Modest, his sister Alexandra, and his nephew Vladimir. Rarely, if ever, does Tchaikovsky write to his brother Ippolit, thus it is strange that Ippolit had the desire to work at the Tchaikovsky Museum in Kiln, let alone collect and publish his brother's diaries.

<sup>205</sup> Evidence of this can be found throughout the works cited in this chapter including biographies by Alexandra Orlova, Alexander Poznansky, David Brown, and Roland Wiley.

<sup>206</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*.

<sup>207</sup> Simon Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture: The Impact of the October Revolution" in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past* ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey Jr (Penguin Books, 1989), 352.

<sup>208</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 292, 268.

and adoring “How fascinating is Bob!” “What a darling is he!”<sup>209</sup>, and turning heated “Bob in the bath.”<sup>210</sup> “I am aroused.”<sup>211</sup>

However, it is the 1945 English translation of the 1923 diaries, by William Lakond, which can be pinpointed as a source of confusion for Western scholarship regarding the composer’s disposition. As it was published in New York and is an English translation of the diaries, it is less surprising that Lakond freely mentions Tchaikovsky’s homosexual tendencies, as he was likely not faced with threats of censorship or imprisonment. Lakond often points out men that the composer references in his entries as men that have caught Tchaikovsky’s eye: “Ivan A. Verinovsky, a young officer, captivated the composer.”<sup>212</sup> He also references the composer’s adoration of his nephew ‘Bob’ and how later in his life his feelings were likely more than platonic.<sup>213</sup> Yet, in line with the mentality of the 1940s regarding homosexuality as a mental illness, Lakond insinuates heavily that Tchaikovsky was perpetually conflicted by his sexuality and that it was a source of great mental distress for the composer.<sup>214</sup>

Lakond states:

“It is nothing less than tragic that such a precariously balanced nature as Tchaikovsky’s should have been aggravated by sexual maladjustment... He lived in constant dread of a scandal arising out of his homosexual life and the burden of living under such conditions colored his life intensely. For he, in contrast to others was unhappy about his erotic nature.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 29.

<sup>210</sup>Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 159.

<sup>211</sup>Tchaikovksy, *Diaries*, 282.

<sup>212</sup>Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 63.

<sup>213</sup>Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 26.

<sup>214</sup>Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 9-11.

<sup>215</sup>*Ibid.*

There is no question that Tchaikovsky was often afflicted by mental anguish. But, as scholars such as Poznansky and Karlinsky posit, it was often not because of his sexuality - after his disastrous marriage Tchaikovsky came to terms with his natural inclinations, but rather because of his constant drive to produce music that was both good and well-liked as well as emotional trauma after his mother's death.<sup>216217</sup> Lakond's insinuation that this mental instability stemmed from his struggle with his sexuality is an intriguing obfuscation coming from a Western source based on the information and sources available under Soviet control. This may have been the first source in which censorship and withholding of information on the part of the Soviets resulted in misinformation, but it certainly wasn't the last. In particular, Alexandra Orlova and David Brown's works which both argue that Tchaikovsky committed suicide rather than have his sexuality made public knowledge (though most of the Russian music scene already knew of his sexual proclivities.)<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 232-233.

<sup>217</sup> Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture" in *Hidden from History*, 352.

<sup>218</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 231-246.

D. Brown. *The Final Years*.

## Critical Reviews

There is a certain understanding with Stalinist rhetoric that Tchaikovsky, if he were a homosexual, would have to be suffering from a mental illness, because homosexuality was defined as a mental illness under Soviet propaganda. There was also a limited amount of information available about the composer and his personal life. Though the critical reviews that I will be discussing in this chapter all come from Western sources, their criticism of the composer was reliant on the scant information made available by the Soviets and was often tinged with a conflation of the composer's mental status (i.e. his potential disdain for his homosexual tendencies) and the nature of his work.<sup>219</sup> The scholar Malcolm Hamrick Brown, has written extensively on this dichotomy between pre-Stalinist criticism of Tchaikovsky's work and Stalinist Era criticism, going so far as to laud Alexander Poznansky for attempting to uncover and repair the reputation of Tchaikovsky which has been plagued by "flagrant homophobia [by] influential critics whose judgments betray the assumption of an essential identity between the artist and his work."<sup>220</sup> Brown's work, "Tchaikovsky and His Music in Anglo-American Criticism", gives a chronological transformation of Western criticism regarding the composer and his work, starting with criticism from the composer's last years of life.<sup>221</sup> One English critic in 1893 said this of

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<sup>219</sup> M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music*, as found in Fuller, 134-146.

<sup>220</sup> Malcolm Hamrick Brown, [Review of Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man] *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47 (2.). (University of California Press). 359.

<sup>221</sup> M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music*, as found in Fuller, 134-146.

Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony: "[The outer movements are] bustling, strenuous, and at times extravagant... more an appeal to the judgment than to the emotions."<sup>222</sup> George Bernard Shaw had this to say of the same work, also in 1893: "The notablest merit of the symphony is its freedom from the frightful effeminacy of most modern works of the romantic school."<sup>223</sup> When it came to reviewing Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony, the *Pathétique*, Shaw reviewed it with none of the "crypto-biograph[ical]" interpretation that had already enshrouded the work after the composer's death.<sup>224</sup> In addition, Brown draws upon two reviews from 1902 and 1907, after the publishing of Modest's biography of his brother which alluded to his homosexual tendencies, which still refrained from judging the composer's works on the merit of his sexuality rather than on their own.<sup>225</sup>

Ernest Newman, writing in 1902:

"The third and fourth symphonies... are in the main free from tragic suggestions of any kind. They are for the most part extremely impersonal, confining themselves to an expression of such generalized emotions as come more properly within the scope of the symphony pure and simple."<sup>226</sup>

While Sir Donald Francis Tovey states: "Little or nothing is to be gained by investigating it from a biographical point of view; there are no obscurities either in the musical forms or in the emotional contrasts."<sup>227</sup> In all, these critics are judging the music for the music itself, simply listening and critiquing based on the

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<sup>222</sup> M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music*, as found in Fuller, 140.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music*, as found in Fuller, 141.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music*, as found in Fuller, 135-136.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

melodies and the lyricism, rather than interpreting the music in a framework of the identity of the composer, as Brown argues.<sup>228</sup> Even still, critics who likely had knowledge of the composer's sexual inclinations, Newman and Tovey, did not consider him mentally ill or anything of the sort.

Brown posits that there was a shift in the 1930s, 40s and 50s regarding the understanding and sentiments toward homosexuality and those who were 'victims' of it.<sup>229</sup> Though Brown discusses the criticism of English critics, he correlates the shift in sentiment with harsher legal penalties for male homosexuality, as well as a societal psychological aversion to anything of an abnormal sexual nature.<sup>230</sup> This shift is very similar in nature to the shift made under Stalin in the Soviet Union. As I've discussed, after the revolution and before Stalin, homosexuality was made a mental illness in the Soviet Union, and with the rise of Stalin became harshly criminalized and outright vilified by Soviet society. Homosexuality was seen as an ailment that needed to be fixed. Brown argues that critics were taking this idea of homosexuality as an illness, and implying that the product of an ill individual, in this case Tchaikovsky, was also 'ill.'<sup>231</sup> By looking at two critical reviews of Tchaikovsky, published in Gerald Abraham's *The Music of Tchaikovsky* in 1946, it becomes clear that critics of the Stalinist Era viewed Tchaikovsky's works as erratic, hysterical and

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky and His Music*, as found in Fuller, 134-146.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

overpoweringly intense, in large part because they are equating the music to the mental stability and nature of the composer himself.<sup>232</sup>

The first critical piece which Brown looks at, Edward Lockspeiser's "Tchaikovsky the Man," attacks the composer and his music:

"The tragedy of Tchaikovsky was the denial, forced upon him, of normal love... the neurotic elements are inseparable from his development as a composer... Beginning with the Fourth Symphony,... Tchaikovsky's music now reflects all the indulgent yearning and the garish exteriorization of a composer who can never refrain from wearing his heart on his sleeve."<sup>233</sup>

The second, Michael Cooper's "The Symphonies", reacts in much the same way:

"Such passages... do more than tear the heart... but also affect the nerves like an exhibition of hysteria... This man is ill, we feel: must we be shown all his sores without exception? Will he insist on our not merely witnessing, but sharing, one of his nervous attacks?"<sup>234</sup>

These two criticisms, particularly the latter, are clearly insinuating that the character of the composer himself is present in the music that the composer has produced, and they both go one step further to insinuate that not only is he insane, but that he also imbibes his music with this insanity. Lockspeiser even alludes to the fact that his homosexuality is the reason he is mentally unstable and thus so too is his music. In essence, it would seem that Brown is correct in

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<sup>232</sup> Gerald Abraham, *The Music of Tchaikovsky*, (W.W. Norton, 1946). A collection of essays and critical reviews of Tchaikovsky.

<sup>233</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Tchaikovsky the Man*, as found in Abraham, *Music*, as discussed in M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, found in Fuller, *Queer*. 134-135. Brown used an earlier publication of these essays published in 1945, while I'm referring to the one published in 1946, I don't believe there are any differences in the publication.

<sup>234</sup> Martin Cooper, *The Symphonies*, as found in Abraham, *Music*, as discussed in M. Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, found in Fuller, *Queer*. 134-135.

his argument that these critics of the 40s have been heavily influenced by the shifting nature and understanding of homosexuality as a psycho-sexual ailment rather than a simple form of being, and that the Stalinist, and global, rhetoric and propaganda against homosexuality has tinged the supposedly objective critical review of a composer who is also considered to be a national icon.<sup>235</sup>

### **Socialist Realism**

This concept that Tchaikovsky was simultaneously a Russian national icon and criticized heavily for his sexual proclivities is instrumental in understanding the idea that he fits perfectly into the mold of a Socialist Realist figure under Stalin. Socialist Realism is a style of art that embodies the values and ideals of a socialist society, it was perpetuated by the Soviet Union in order to depict a more perfect socialist future and ensure the masses that socialism was the proper path to success and happiness.<sup>236</sup> However, as Lilya Kaganovsky has demonstrated, this perfect future was often achieved through intense dedication to the socialist and communist cause, and this was shown through figures that were once strong and powerful, but who had been injured or maimed, and who worked through their invalidity to champion the tenants of a socialist society despite all odds.<sup>237</sup> In her essay, "Soviet Identity: Socialist realism and Imperial Traditions", Cadra

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<sup>235</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Diaries*, 9-11.

<sup>236</sup> Pavel Korain, "Thoughts on Art", *Socialist Realism in Literature and Art*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow 1971) 95.

<sup>237</sup> Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies – ed. Jonathan Harris, (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2008).

Peterson McDaniel argues that Tchaikovsky, though an Imperial icon was accepted into the Soviet canon of Socialist Realism as his music, particularly his ballets, “embodied democratic and therefore Communist ideals,” and that the works were easily understood and “glorified” the Revolutionary ideals of the Soviets.<sup>238</sup> McDaniel discusses a number of critics, both Western and Soviet, who agree that Tchaikovsky’s dedication to “realistic depictions of individuals’ triumphs and sufferings, [allowed] Soviet composers [to rely] on Tchaikovsky as a model for their creations.”<sup>239</sup> This realism found within Tchaikovsky’s music meant that his status as a Russian National Icon remained intact, and his music continued to be listened to rather than lost to the annals of history.

Additionally, we have the other aspect of Tchaikovsky’s legacy, that of the ailing homosexual composer who is overly emotional and hysterical in his melodies and lyricism, presented by mid-century Western critics such as Cooper and Lockspeiser. This image of Tchaikovsky, at odds with the overall concept of the Stalinist culture surrounding sexual deviance, seems to have had no lasting impact on the celebration of the composer as a national icon and one of the most important figures in music. I argue, that this is because of the aforementioned elimination and obfuscation of Tchaikovsky’s sexuality, hidden in plain sight. As much as he and his contemporaries diminished public knowledge of his own

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<sup>238</sup> Cadra Peterson McDaniel, *Soviet Identity: Socialist Realism and Imperial Traditions*, (University of Nebraska Omaha, 2011).

<http://www.unomaha.edu/esc/2011Proceedings/McDanielPaper.pdf>

<sup>239</sup> McDaniel, *Soviet Identity*, 21.

sexual inclinations, and as much as the Soviet censors eliminated important documentation by removing certain letters from circulation, Tchaikovsky's homosexuality was far from a secret. As Nina Berberova describes in her biography of the composer, "dans quelques pages de son journal des années quatre-vingts, dominait un secret... depuis longtemps n'était plus ni secret ni mystérieux mais qu'on ne pouvait aborder à la légère." (Some pages of his diary of the 80s were dominated by a secret... which was neither a secret nor a mystery but which one cannot approach lightly.)<sup>240</sup> Yet, after his legacy had been amended under the doctrine of Socialist Realism, Tchaikovsky's sexuality seemingly disappeared from the Russian canon. It wasn't until years later when Alexandra Orlova and Alexander Poznansky brought up the question of his death and his sexuality that historians and scholars began to discuss the issue again. In fact, there are still those in Russian scholarship that believe that Tchaikovsky was not queer, and refuse to accept any proof otherwise.

## Conclusion

Tchaikovsky's history is a difficult and often debated one, but for the majority of the Twentieth century historians and biographers argued that the composer was overcome by his sexuality. Some even believe that he committed suicide rather than be exposed as a homosexual.<sup>241</sup> This, stems from the fact

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<sup>240</sup> Nina Berberova, *Tchaikovski : Biographie* (Actes Sud, 1987) 8.

<sup>241</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 231-246.

that his image was so misconstrued under the Stalinist mentality of Socialist Realism. As Poznansky explores, though Tchaikovsky may have initially been overwhelmed by his sexuality, even so far as to marry a woman to quell the gossip regarding his same sex relations, after the disaster of his marriage he came to terms with his natural inclinations.<sup>242</sup> It is a result of the re-imagining of the composer under Socialist Realism, and the omission and lack of pertinent information that has resulted in confusion and misunderstanding regarding the composer's sexuality.

In all, Tchaikovsky is just one example in the history of same sex relations in Russia and the Soviet Union, that demonstrates how Stalinist Era rhetoric, propaganda and law resulted in a shift that obscured homosexuality in the eyes of the Russian people. Tchaikovsky's sexual inclinations were well known in the circles of Russian musical society, yet after his death, with the censorship of letters and the misinterpretation of his diaries, the criticism under Stalin and the re-imagining of the musical genius as a Soviet hero, Tchaikovsky's homosexuality was slowly forgotten. There are still those today who believe that the great Russian composer could never have been a homosexual. Rather than simply wiping away homosexuality within the history of great icons, Stalinist cultural ideology accomplished an intricate and multi-faceted maneuver to redefine their history and use them to support a great Socialist Soviet future, and Tchaikovsky was not alone in being redefined.

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<sup>242</sup> Poznansky, "Suicide" as found in Donaldson, *Homosexuality*, 232-233.

## CONCLUSION

Socialist Realism had a lasting and powerful impact on the history of queerness in Russian and the Soviet Union. Not only was this doctrine of art created for and by the party detrimental to freedom of expression, but it resulted in the loss of swaths of creative geniuses and powerful forms of art and literature that could have left an indelible imprint on the formation and future of Russian artistic productivity, but were quashed beneath the massive force of Soviet artistic control.

Though queer themes and identities never played a truly visible role in the creation of society and culture, and was in fact heavily suppressed throughout the formation and building of the nation and the Empire, it did play a major role in artistic development and even government. Under the Tsars, homosexuality was never plainly legal. It was repressed initially by religious rites and cultural dismissal, though it continued to pervade society unacknowledged. A number of important political and noble figures throughout the era of the Russian Empire were known to have queer, if not blatantly homosexual, tendencies. Even when homosexual relations were outlawed in the military, and subsequently in all of society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, queer figures maintained prominent positions in the government and throughout cultural development. Prominent authors, such as Pushkin and Tolstoy, treated homosexuality quite lightly in their writings, indicating that perhaps it was not as stigmatized as many

once believed.<sup>243</sup> Artists such as Tchaikovsky, despite wide knowledge of his queer disposition and occasional incidents of outrage directed against him, were even monetarily aided by the government in the creation of their artistic masterpieces. In the last years of Imperial rule and when the Empire fell and the Bolsheviks revolted, there was an eruption of queer themed literature and art that indicated a turn for the better when it came to freedom of expression, but was quickly staunches by the Soviet machine. Queerness was, clearly, an instrumental part of the development of Russian artistic expression and productivity, however, it was suppressed, censored and nearly wiped from the annals of Russian history by the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

Socialist Realism revised and reimagined Imperial figures to fit the vision of the party of a perfect Socialist future for Russians and created by Russians. The important figures mentioned above, from Pushkin to Tolstoy and beyond were censored, re-worked and limited in their publishing in order to ensure that their legacies and their mythos conformed to the party doctrine. Kevin Moss, in his anthology of queer themed literature, discusses the systematic marginalization of queer themed works and shows that the works that are most accepting of queerness and queer themes were also the ones least well-known and least published.<sup>244</sup> In addition, cinema and literature that was created under Socialist Realism was so closely monitored and regulated that it had to obey the

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<sup>243</sup> Moss, *Out of the Blue*.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

requirements of the doctrine if it ever wanted to see the light of day. Directors such as Eisenstein were forced to work for the party, or at the very least in the image of the party, in order to get their works distributed, and even they were subject to harsh criticism and strictures which occasionally resulted in their blacklisting. Those who desired to continue working on queer themed literature were forced to do so in secrecy, and their works did not see the light of day until after the dictator's death. In all, Socialist Realism created a veil over the history of queerness in literature and art in Russia which was left untouched for decades until modern historians and critics, such as Simon Karlinsky, Alexander Poznansky and Daniel Healey, began to unearth the vital sources and information that let us know today just how deep this censorship delved, and where it failed to reach, even in the darkest days of Stalinism.

Simon Karlinsky's work on Nikolai Gogol was the first of its kind. He uncovered a massive amount of correspondence and information that allowed him to rework and re-envision Gogol's massive portfolio with a psychosexual and queer point of view. The author, who was clearly attracted to men as he expressed in his correspondence and even in some of his works, inundated his works with subtle suggestions that he was not only not attracted to, but opposed to women and the workings of marriage. Throughout his most well-known works, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, *Dead Souls*, *The Nose*, *The Overcoat* and on and on, Gogol infused his works with implications regarding sexuality, marriage and bachelor status. Though he likely never consummated a relationship with

either a man or a woman he was most definitely queer in his psycho-sexual nature. He had an interest in cross-dressing and had a number of infatuations with other men including classmates, colleagues and one of his best friends, for however a brief amount of time, Iosef Vielhorskiy. By examining his works, Karlinsky was able to uncover just how under Socialist Realism Gogol was redefined. Writing as a surrealist with a number of sexual and imaginative themes in his works, Gogol was redefined by Socialist Realism as, exactly that, a realist. His works were interpreted as nationalist representations of real life in Imperial Russia. He was imagined to have been railing against the Imperial nature and suppression of the Russian Tsars and as an advocate of the people and the proletariat. Most importantly, though, the sexual nature of his works, and in turn his life, were suppressed and forgotten by Soviet Era critics serving to contribute to the erasure of queerness in literature.

In another form of artistic expression, music, Socialist Realism also had an impact on the influence of queerness in Russian history. Tchaikovsky, one of the most important composers in Russia, was often accused of incorporating his emotional instability into his music. However, long after his death he was reincorporated into the Soviet Canon as a major nationalist and anti-Imperial figure, despite having been employed and sponsored by a number of aristocratic and Imperial figures. Alexander Poznansky's work takes an in-depth look at the life and legacy of Tchaikovsky, and exhaustingly advocates that not only was the composer of a homosexual persuasion, but that his sexuality was well-known

and widely accepted in Imperial artistic circles. When scandals did threaten to break, Tchaikovsky was often protected by his closeness to the Tsar and the rest of the royal family. However, in his reimagining, books and information that disclosed the composer's penchants were censored heavily and even locked away in archives and the Tchaikovsky museum where they were left untouched until decades later. One of the biggest controversies involves the composer's death and whether or not he was forced to commit suicide because of a scandal involving his sexuality, as proposed by Alexandra Orlova, or if he simply died of cholera. Essentially, more-so than the composer's works, his legacy was edited and revised by the censors of the Soviet Union and the doctrine of Socialist Realism which longed to envision the composer as a Socialist Realist hero.

In all, Socialist Realism had a massive impact on the history of queerness in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. It resulted in not only the censorship, but even the imprisonment and death of authors and artists who refused to follow the doctrine. It caused a massive lack of information and understanding of queer and homosexual lifestyles, which, for a brief period at the start of the Revolution, seemed likely to be more freely expressed and even accepted. In the end, Socialist Realism was an important factor in the creation of a major stigma against queer identities and lifestyles that persists even until today.

## EPILOGUE

The importance of Stalinist Era repression and censorship has rarely, if ever, been disputed by historians and scholars. Though some aspects of this repression, such as its impact on queer history throughout the world, were left untouched and unexamined for decades, their importance still remains relevant. Notably, the impact of Socialist Realism on the history of queerness in Soviet and Russian society can still be seen today. For decades, even after the death of Stalin, Socialist Realism continued to dictate the creation of art and literature in the USSR. Though regulations lightened and strictures relaxed after the death of the infamous dictator there was still a major suppression of information and public knowledge of identities and lifestyles that were considered “other.” Homosexuality itself wasn’t legalized until 1993 when Boris Yeltsin’s restructuring of the law abolished Stalin’s Article 121.<sup>245</sup>

This brings us to the modern day. Socialist Realism’s key themes rely on the use of art to project a future for the Soviet Union based on its Communist ideals and its dependence on the people and their ability to prosper and thrive. Some of these same themes can be found in modern Russian forms of propaganda and expression which are used by the government to almost force the people to believe in a better future for their country. Strikingly, Vladimir Putin is even using the image of Josef Stalin to revamp the national mood within the

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<sup>245</sup> Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Russia: Update to RUS13194 of 16 February 1993 on the treatment of homosexuals*, 29 February 2000, RUS33940.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ad788c.html> [accessed 4 April 2016]

country and influence his people into trusting in their leadership and their country. In her essay, "For Putin, For Stalin", Hannah Thoburn critiques Putin's use of the memory and image of the former dictator, accusing Stalin of revitalizing the cult of personality that was so detrimental to Russia sixty years before.<sup>246</sup>

In addition, Putin has rehabilitated a number of pacts and policies of the former dictator. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which formed an alliance between Stalin and his German counterpart, Adolf Hitler, was unequivocally supported by the President.<sup>247</sup> Russian textbooks were reproduced and edited to gloss over the negative impact of Stalin's repression and purges.<sup>248</sup> Even the memorial center for the Gulags was closed and re-opened with a focus on how the camps served to help win World War II.<sup>249</sup> In essence, Putin re-Stalinized the nation in order to gain the Russian people's support with regard to his ever increasing military presence in the Ukraine and elsewhere. Much like under Stalin, this social repression and misinformation is put forth all in the name of Russia and for the good of the country and its people.

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<sup>246</sup> Hannah Thoburn, "For Putin, For Stalin", *Foreign Policy*, (Jan. 25, 2016)  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/25/for-putin-for-stalin-russia-propaganda/>

<sup>247</sup> Tom Parfitt, "Vladimir Putin says there was nothing wrong with Soviet Union's pact with Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany", *The Telegraph*, 2014.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/11213255/Vladimir-Putin-says-there-was-nothing-wrong-with-Soviet-Unions-pact-with-Adolf-Hitlers-Nazi-Germany.html>

<sup>248</sup> Vladimir Ryzhkov, "Putin's Distorted History", *The Moscow Times*, 2013.

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/putins-distorted-history/489799.html>

<sup>249</sup> Carol J. Williams, "Putin, once critical of Stalin, now embraces Soviet dictator's tactics", *LA Times*, 2015.

<http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-russia-stalin-model-20150611-story.html>

More in line with the issues in this thesis, the recent events involving LGBT rights in the Russian Federation bear striking resemblance to the legal and cultural censorship and suppression under Stalin. Vladimir Putin's policies and propaganda are, similar to the influence of Socialist Realism, using nationalism and Russian pride to subjugate and repress those who identify as LGBT or any other form of queer.

For instance, with decreasing approval for the President's consolidation of power, Putin began to vilify protestors by insinuating interference by the West and "with the help of the state-controlled media, the Kremlin found and vilified an ever growing list of fifth columnists: homosexuals, foreigners, NGOs, and activists."<sup>250</sup>

One of the most important, and most often mentioned, steps that Putin has taken in recent years is his ban on pro-LGBT propaganda. Falling directly in line with the Stalinist rhetoric that Putin is putting forth, this law and agenda are promulgated as for the good of the country and the good of Russia's children. The law, which was passed and signed by the President in June of 2013, is a law "For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values." Under the law, the publication or distribution of any and all information or propaganda that could be considered to identify same-sex

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<sup>250</sup> Thoburn, "For Putin, For Stalin".

relationship as a norm of society is punishable by fines.<sup>251</sup> The democratic world took offense to the passing of the law almost immediately, and global media condemned Putin and the Russian government for allowing such a poorly worded and potentially hazardous law to be enacted. Perhaps the most important impact of the law, however, was its influence in supporting homophobic violence. A number of anti-gay groups rose up and began beating, kidnapping, torturing and even killing individuals who identified as or seemed to identify as homosexuals.<sup>252</sup>

The work that I have done has clearly shown that Stalin and his cultural elite attempted to suppress queer identities and themes through the implementation of Socialist Realism. I would argue further that Stalinist Era rhetoric and censorship and the modern day legal prohibition of pro-gay propaganda are inextricably linked. Socialist Realism and its massive impact on the cultural atmosphere in Russia left a void that has yet to be filled in Russian culture and society. Homosexuality was not merely outlawed and repressed, but the people of Russia in the Twentieth Century were unable to and ultimately unwilling to accept and understand that queer identities did exist. For decades, gay men and women were punished, imprisoned and even executed simply for

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<sup>251</sup> Russia: Federal Laws Introducing Ban of Propaganda of Non-traditional Sexual Relationships, June 2013. <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/37129/13-06-27-russia-LA.pdf>

<sup>252</sup> Paul Gallagher and Vanessa Thorpe, "Shocking Footage of Anti-Gay Groups" 2014. <http://www.independent.ie/world-news/europe/shocking-footage-of-antigay-groups-29971549.html>

being gay all in the name of the Soviet Union. Even after the death of Stalin and the beginning of de-Stalinization by Nikita Khrushchev, hundreds of men were imprisoned for their sexuality under the Article enacted by Stalin in 1933. Both the legalization of homosexuality in 1922 with the Bolshevik eradication of Imperial law, and the legalization of homosexuality in 1993 with Yeltsin's eradication of Soviet law could be seen as unintentional byproducts of the eradication of earlier legal systems. Putin is using this seemingly accidental legalization and the popular opinion against homosexuality to enact and enforce anti-gay laws that could lead down a dark path for Russia.

Socialist Realism's influence on history is clear, as is its influence on the history of queerness in Russia. This doctrine of censorship and revision in the name of the greater good has had a lasting impact on the culture and society of Russia and we must be aware that the impact of Socialist Realism and Stalinism is still relevant today. If we are not careful, in watching Vladimir Putin's reign we may be seeing history repeat itself.

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