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THE DIARY OF MIXAIL KUZMIN, 1905-1906.

The diary of the poet Mixail Kuzmin (1872-1936), as presented here, covers an important period in his life, namely, from August 26, 1905 to June 11, 1906. It was during this time that Kuzmin turned to writing prose and poetry, while gradually abandoning his earlier musical aspirations.[1] The year 1905 saw his literary debut in The Green Miscellany of Poetry and Prose (Zelenyj sbornik stixov i prozy) with the publication of two "musical" works without the accompanying music,[2] which his friends found inferior to the texts themselves. In addition, that same year Kuzmin finished writing his "notorious" homosexual novel "Wings" (Kryl'ja) and the ever popular "Alexandrian Songs" (Aleksandrijskie pesni). Although these two works stirred up quite a bit of controversy and discussion, they also provided Kuzmin with a "passport" into the literary world of St.Petersburg. If before, Kuzmin's intellectual contacts were limited to musical (Večera sovremennoj muzyki)[3] and artistic circles (Mir Iskusstva),[4] Kuzmin now found himself a welcome guest at the famous literary salon of Vjačeslav Ivanov, "The Tower" (Bašnja), where he made the acquaintance of numerous literati, among them Valerij Brjusov.[5]

Beginning in 1905 the Russian Symbolist poet Vjačeslav Ivanov (1866-1949) held weekly receptions at his top floor tower-like apartment near the Tauris Palace (the future meeting place of the Russian Dumas). These meetings, which occurred on Wednesdays,[6] in time established "The Tower" as a true salon worthy of the great salons of earlier times.[7] Poets, writers, philosophers, artists and politicians would assemble each Wednesday to recite poetry, discuss philosophical questions or listen to lectures by various guests of "The Tower". Kuzmin was introduced to Ivanov's salon by his musical friends, Walter Nouvel[8] and Vjačeslav Karatygin.[9] Kuzmin would often perform his "Alexandrian Songs" here with great pleasure or read from his latest works. One member of Ivanov's entourage describes Kuzmin's partici-

pation at these Wednesday get-togethers: *Особенно знаменательны те среды, когда Кузмин, одновременно и композитор, и поэт, пел сначала свои "Александрийские песни", а после "Куранты Любви", или когда читал он своей своеобразной ритмической скороговоркой "Любовь этого лета". Отсюда пошла его известность.*[10] Having become a very close and dear friend of Vjačeslav Ivanov, Kuzmin quickly became a permanent member of his most inner circle, the "Hafiz-schenke" or "Kabačok Gafiza".[11] This semi-literary, semi-homosexual club functioned as a retreat from the more formal Wednesday meetings where its members could relax and occupy themselves with other than literary matters.[12]

It is against this fabric that Kuzmin in his diary weaves a narrative of important events as they occurred in his personal and intellectual life over a period of ten months. The diary has been characterized "as an extraordinary document, a day-to-day account of his own life and more importantly a very careful description of the literary and cultural life of St.Petersburg".[13] However, Kuzmin's diary is more than a simple literary chronicle - it is a true work of art. Vjačeslav Ivanov heard Kuzmin read portions of his diary, the very same ones that are being published here,[14] and singled out its artistic subtlety and perception for praise:

> *Но прежде всего, дневник - художественное отражение текущей где-то по затаенным руслам жизни, причудливой и необычайной по контрасту между усладой, как объектом восприятия, и воспринимающим субъектом, - отражение, дающее иногда разительный рельеф. И притом автор дневника знает почти забытый теперь секрет приятного стиля.*[15]

The history and availability of Kuzmin's diary is a convoluted and depressing story. In 1933 Kuzmin, destitute and sick, sold his archive to V. Bonč-Bruevič for the newly-formed Literary Museum in Moscow.[16] The holdings of this museum were transferred to the Central State Archive of Literature and Art (CGALI) in 1941. Included among Kuzmin's vast archival holdings at CGALI is his diary covering the years 1905 to 1933, with several gaps between years.[17] Initially access to Kuzmin's diary for researchers was relatively easy, but in the late 1960's access to the diary became next to impossible. One researcher has described the situation: *Дневники Кузмина в ЦГАЛИ долгое время были доступны, но когда среди любителей литературной "клубники" возник ажиотаж вокруг них, начальство спохватилось и закрыло эту часть архива.*[18] The present author had an interview with the director of CGALI, N.B. Volkova, concerning access to Kuzmin's

diary in August 1978. I was told by Volkova that the diary was restricted because of "moral reasons" and she compared it to the pornographic writings of the eighteenth century versifier and translator Ivan Barkov.[19] Of course, the problem here lies in Kuzmin's homosexuality, a favorite topic permeating much of his work as well as his diary. It is because of it that Kuzmin, one of Russia's most novel and talented poets of this century, has been relegated to the status of a nonentity in his own country. A mirror of this official attitude towards Kuzmin is found in the hysterical pronouncements uttered by Kuzmin's contemporary, Anna Achmatova. She labelled the diary "terrible" (strašnyj)[20] and likened it to the diary of Vigel'[21] At one time Kuzmin had plans of publishing his diary and made several transcripts of portions of it.[22] (One such transcript served as the basis of this publication.) But, with the tightening of Soviet censorship, Kuzmin managed to publish only a few skimpy selections, totalling no more than thirteen pages,[23] in a bowdlerized format in 1922.[24] Since that sad publictaion, there have been three other notable publications of portions of Kuzmin's diary;[25] unfortunately, even here the extracts were too few, lacking any type of chronological cohesiveness and appearing to be arbitrary, with many editorial omissions. It is hoped that the present publication will inspire fuller publications of this important literary document in the future.

N o t e s

1. Kuzmin in a 1927 autobiography noted: "Načal stixi pozdno, predpolagal byt' muzykantom" (Gor'kij Institute of World Literature of the Academy of Sciences (IMLI), in Moscow, manuscript section, fond 192, opis'1, No.18). This statement was echoed by Kuzmin's first biographer, E. Znosko-Borovskij: "Celyx 3o let on ničego ne pečatal, pisal teksty k svoim romansam, i tol'ko ukazanija Verxovskix [friends of Kuzmin] o tom, čto stixi ego xoroši sami po sebe, nezavisimo ot muzyki, pobudili ego zanjat'sja literaturoj, [...]. See: "O tvorčestve M.Kuzmina", *Apollon*, No. 4-5. 1917. 29.

2. The two works are "XIII Sonetov" (Il Canzoniere) and a play (in fact an opera) - "Istorija Rycarja d'Alessio" (Zelenyj sbornik stixov i prozy, St.Peterburg 19o5, 59-128).

3. In 19o1 Kuzmin was introduced to a group of young music lovers. Together they established the St.Petersburg musical circle of

"Evenings of Contemporary Music" (Večera sovremennoj muzyki). This musical grouping evolved as a logical outgrowth of the "World of Art" (Mir Iskusstva) art movement. In fact, several of the founding members of "Mir iskusstva" participated in the formation of "Evenings of Contemporary Music". The primary goal of the "Evenings", which lasted from 1901 till 1912, was to introduce to the Russian public the latest Western and Russian music available: an analogous function was performed by the "World of Art" movement in art. Other important functions of this musical society were the performances of old forgotten music and making the musical public aware of old and new vocal music. For more information see: I. NEST'EV, Muzykal'nye kružki, in: *Russkaja chudožestvennaja kul'tura konca XIX - načala XX veka (1908-1917)* book three, Moscow 1977, 474-481.

4. On a biographical, aesthetic and artistic level the "Mir Iskusstva" art movement is of great importance in any study of Kuzmin. Beginning in 1901 Kuzmin was actively involved with this group. Personal friendship with the circle's mentor Djagilev, for whom Kuzmin felt "respectful adoration" (počtitel'noe obožanie), as well as with other members directly involved him in the production of the journal, *Mir Iskusstva*. To some extent Kuzmin's aesthetic views were shaped by his contacts with the "Mir Iskusstva" circle: "'Miriskusničeskaja atmosfera' vo mnogom vospitala v Kuzmine prenebreženie graždanskimi, religiozno-učitel'nymi i nravstvennymi zadačami russkoj literatury i opredelila ego otnošenie k iskusstvu kak k igre" (G.G. ŠMAKOV, Blok i Kuzmin (novye materialy), in: *Blokovskij sbornik II*. Tartu 1972, 344).

5. Lateron in his life Kuzmin recalled the people most supportive of his early literary endeavors: *Первое одобрение как музыкант и поэт встретил со стороны общества "Вечера Современной Музыки" (Каратыгин, Нурок), группы "Мира Искусства" (Дягилев, Сомов), Вячеслава Иванова и Валерия Брюсова* (IMLI, fond 192, opis'1, No. 18).

6. The first Wednesday occurred on September 21, 1905; cf. V. ORLOV, *Poet i gorod: Aleksandr Blok i Peterburg*. Leningrad 1980, 223.

7. Andrej Belyj once characterized Ivanov's "Tower" as the most interesting salon in all of St.Peterburg. See: A. BELYJ, Vjačeslav Ivanov, in: *Arabeski*. Moscow 1911, 471.

8. Val'ter Fedorovič Nuvel' (Nouvel), 1871-1949, a musical dilettante who headed up the "Evenings of Contemporary Music" till 1907. He served as Sergej Djagilev's secretary throughout the "Mir Iskusstva" period and later on in the "Ballets Russes" period. Along with the English theatrical critic Arnold Haskell, Nuvel' wrote one of the first biographies of Djagilev (1935).

9. Vjačeslav Gavrilovič Karatygin, 1875-1925, composer, pianist and musical critic; he took over as the director of "Evenings of Contemporary Music" after the departure of Nuvel'.

10. E. ANIČKOV, *Novaja russkaja poèzija*. Berlin 1923, 47. Numerous

memoirists mention Kuzmin as an intimate of Vjačeslav Ivanov's circle at his "Tower": G. ČULKOV, *Gody stranstvij*, Moscow 1930, 166; M. DOBUŽINSKIJ, *Vospominanija*. Vol. 1. New York 1976, 376; G. IVANOV, *Peterburgskie zimy*, Paris 1928, 124-128; V. PJAST, *Vstreči*, Moscow 1929, 113, 166; J. Von GUENTHER, *Ein Leben im Ostwind: Zwischen Petersburg und München*, Munich 1969, 205-206. The most detailed description of Kuzmin's stay at "The Tower" is to be found in the reminiscences of Andrej Belyj, "Vospominanija o A.A. Bloke", *Epopeja*. No. 4, 1923, 154-160.

11. In time, Kuzmin eventually moved into "The Tower" and became a permanent resident. For five years (1907-1912) Kuzmin was to occupy two rooms down the hall from the Ivanov family quarters. On a literary level, both poets dedicated several poems to each other; Ivanov to Kuzmin: the poem "Anaxronizm" (Cor Ardens 1911) and the poetic cycle "Sosedstvo" (Nežnaja tajna 1912); Kuzmin to Ivanov: the poetic cycle "Mudraja vstreča" (Seti 1908) and the poem "Pevcu li rozu prinesu" (Osennie ozera 1912). Furthermore, Ivanov wrote a highly laudatory article on Kuzmin's prose, see: V. IVANOV, O proze M. Kuzmina, *Apollon*, No. 7, 1910, 46-51. Kuzmin was no less forthcoming in his praise for Ivanov's art. He referred to Ivanov as a "wonderful poet" (zamečatel'nyj poet): M. KUZMIN, *Uslovnosti: stat'i ob iskusstve*, Petrograd 1923, 173. Similarly, Kuzmin gave a very positive review to Ivanov's poetry (*Trudy i Dni*, No. 1, 1912, 49-51), his epistolary polemic with M. Geršenzon, Perepiska iz dvux uglov (KUZMIN, *Uslovnosti*. 156) as well as to his translation undertakings (*Petrogradskie večera*, book three 1914, 234-235). In 1909 both Ivanov and Kuzmin participated in the poetic workshops (Obščestvo Revnitelej Chudožestvennogo Slova) held initially at Ivanov's apartment, then later on at the editorial offices of the journal *Apollon*. For an in depth discussion of Kuzmin's relationship with Ivanov, see Malmstad's first-rate biography of Kuzmin: J. MALMSTAD, Mixail Kuzmin: a chronicle of his life and times, in: M.A. KUZMIN, *Gesammelte Gedichte III*, Munich 1977, 119-123; 125-126; 132; 146-149; 172-178.

12. "Hafiz-Schenke" is discussed by J. Malmstad in his biography of Kuzmin (MALMSTAD, ibid. 96-97). Mention of this private "club" is also to be found in the correspondence of the "World of Art" painter Konstantin Somov: K. SOMOV, *Pis'ma, dnevniki, suždenija sovremennikov*. Moscow 1979, 95, 525. Vjačeslav Ivanov wrote a poem dedicated to members of "Kabačok Gafiza"; cf. "Palatka Gafiza" in V. IVANOV, *Sobranie sočinenij*, vol. II. Brussels 1974, 342-343. In addition, activities of the "Hafiz Club" are reflected in Ivanov's diary of 1906; see: IVANOV, ibid., 744-754. Kuzmin also wrote a poem about the Hafiz circle, "Druz'jam Gafiza" (KUZMIN, op.cit., vol. 3, 446-447).

13. MALMSTAD, op.cit., 306.

14. IVANOV, op.cit., 749.

15. IVANOV, ibid.,750.

16. Bonč-Bruevič approached many writers in the hope of obtaining their archives, among them Mandel'stam (O.MANDEL'ŠTAM, *Sobranie sočinenij*, vol.4, Paris 1981, 139; 188-189).

17. The CGALI handbook incorrectly lists the years for Kuzmin's diary in its archival collection as 1903-1929; cf. Central'nyj gosudarstvennyj arxiv literatury i iskusstva SSSR, putevoditel' - literatura, Moscow 1963, 251. A more trustworthy description of the diary is found in: K.N. SUVOROVA, Pis'ma M.A. Kuzmina k Bloku i otryvki iz dnevnika M.A. Kuzmina, in: *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 92, book two. Moscow 1981, 146-147.

18. Personal letter from L. Tchertkov, July 10, 1978.

19. An almost similar episode was recorded by V. Švejcer when she requested to see Kuzmin's diary during the course of her research on Marina Cvetaeva: V. ŠVEJCER, Bratskaja mogila, in: *Sintaksis* , No.4. Paris 1979, 139-145.

20. V. VILENKIN, *Vospominanija s kommentarijami* , Moscow 1982, 431.

21. L. ČUKOVSKAJA, *Zapiski ob Anne Axmatovoj*, vol.1. Paris 1976, 150.
F.F. Vigel' (1786-1856) - a homosexual writer of Pushkinian times whose memoirs do much to illuminate the era; see Pushkin's famous poem "Iz pis'ma k Vigelju".

22. One plan was to have the well-known publisher Z.I. Gržebin publish it; cf. Vilenkin, op.cit., 431-432.

23. M. KUZMIN, Češuja v nevode, in: *Strelec*, No.3. St.Peterburg 1922, 96-109.

24. An uncensored copy is located in the Majakovskij Museum in Moscow.

25. ŠMAKOV, op.cit., 341-364; MALMSTAD, op.cit., 6-319; SUVOROVA, op. cit., 143-174. The most lamentable publication is Suvorova's where she has suppressed much and expressly played down the diary's significance in her introduction.