

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I feel that I must take strong exception to some of the things which Professor Karlinsky says in his review of the excellent Malmstad-Markov three-volume edition of Mikhail Kuzmin's *Works* (*Slavic Review*, March 1979).

In speaking of Gumilev's review of Kuzmin's *Osennie ozera* in *Apollon* in 1912, Professor Karlinsky says that Gumilev was "the only major poet of that period who chose to make an issue in print of Kuzmin's homosexuality." While it is true that Gumilev mentioned—though he was not the only one to do so then—homosexual love as one of the important themes of Kuzmin's poetry, in what way did he "make an issue" of it? Professor Karlinsky neither explains nor illustrates this. What is even worse, in quoting in a footnote the concluding passage of Gumilev's review, Karlinsky asserts, in the body of his article, that Gumilev "complimented" [?] Kuzmin on being "a spokesman for the views and emotions of a whole array of people, *united by a common culture, who have quite justly risen to the crest of life's wave*" (my italics). He makes it quite clear that for him "a whole array of people" means homosexuals and even transposes, rather vulgarly, Gumilev's statement into "the parlance of the 1970s."

Whatever may be one's attitude to homosexuality (with which Gumilev himself had nothing to do), what right does Professor Karlinsky have to put such an interpretation on Gumilev's words? It is obvious that by people "united by a common culture" Gumilev meant the poets and other writers grouped, like Kuzmin and himself, around *Apollon*, the militant mouthpiece of Russian modernism in those days, if not modern Russian writers and artists in general. And does Professor Karlinsky seriously think that Gumilev could have, in 1912, spoken of homosexuals in Russia as being "on the crest of life's wave"?

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PROFESSOR KARLINSKY REPLIES:

Since Gumilev devoted most of his review of Kuzmin's *Autumnal Lakes* to explaining to the readers that the book dealt predominantly with erotic feelings aroused in the poet's *persona* by other men, it is hard to imagine that Gumilev thought that the book expressed "the views and emotions" of "the poets and other writers grouped around *Apollon*" (including Gumilev himself), who were, as far as I know, mostly heterosexual.

And since the years around 1912 were a time when Russian novels on homosexual themes were being published, plays staged, and poets of the stature of Viacheslav Ivanov, Kuzmin, Kliuev, Riurik Ivnev, and Marina Tsvetaeva (see her cycle "Po-druga," 1914–15, in *Neizdannoe* [Paris, 1976], pp. 61–77) felt free to describe their homosexual experiences in their poetry, and when numerous other prominent personalities in literature and the arts who were bisexual or homosexual (Zinovieva-Annibal, Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Filosofov, and the painters Sudeikin and Somov, to name a few) achieved success without bothering to hide their orientation—a situation unthinkable prior to 1906 (cf. the fears and anxieties of the homosexuals of Tchaikovsky's generation) or after 1917—Gumilev's phrase "risen to the crest of life's wave" does not seem misplaced.