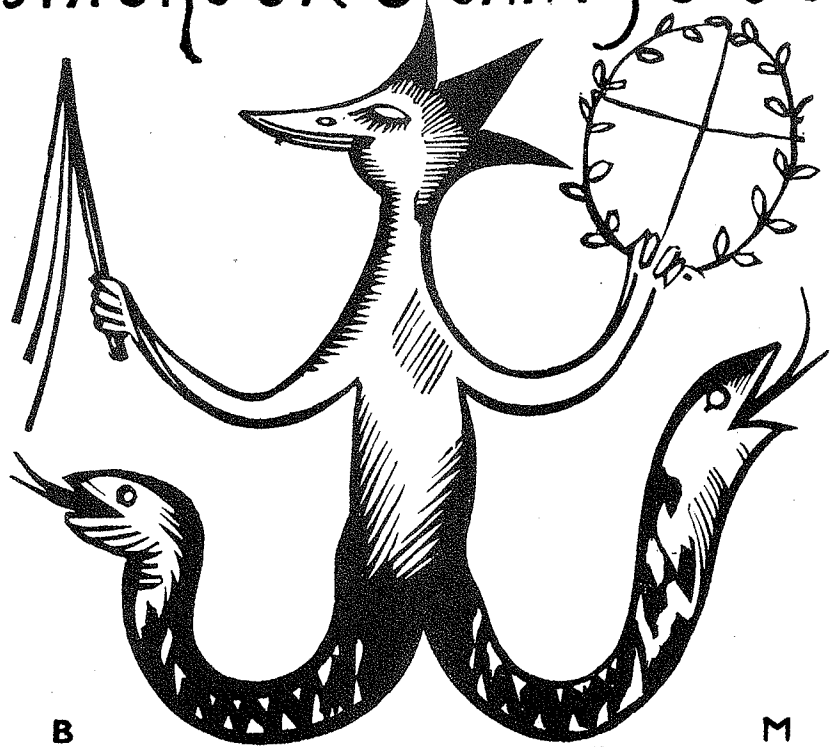


Thomas R. Beyer Jr., Gottfried Kratz, Xenia Werner

Russian Berlin: Publishers and Writers

Александр Ремизовъ



В М
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ОБЕЗЬЯНЬЯГО ЦАРЯ
АСЫКИ

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Vorbemerkung von Dr. Franz Görner 7

*Thomas R. Beyer Jr.***The House of the Arts and the Writers' Club.****Berlin 1921 - 1923 9**

Appendix I: House of the Arts 1921 - 1923 35

Appendix II: Writers' Club 1922 - 1923 37

*Gottfried Kratz***Russische Verlage in Berlin nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg 39**

1. Einleitung 41

2. Die bibliographischen Verzeichnisse 45

3. Liste der in den bibliographischen Verzeichnissen
erfaßten Verlage 59

Register der Personen-, Orts- und Straßennamen 142

*Jürgen Plähn***Signets Russischer Verlage in Berlin 151**

Russian Publishers' Signets 152

*Xenia Werner*Vasilij Masjutin's Book Illustrations in the "Russian
Berlin", an Abstract 187Vasilij Masjutins Buchillustrationen im "Russischen
Berlin" 188

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ist nach diesem Titel gefragt worden, da in den letzten Jahren das Interesse aus den Bereichen Wissenschaft, Forschung und Publizistik an dem Thema "Russen in Berlin" ständig gestiegen ist. G. Kratz hat in seiner Arbeit grundlegende Daten zu den russischen Verlagen in Berlin erarbeitet und damit einer zukünftigen Verlagsgeschichte auf diesem Sektor den Weg bereitet.

Band 7 und 8 der von der Osteuropa-Abteilung herausgegebenen Reihe sind dem Thema "Russen in Berlin" gewidmet. Ein weiterer Band, herausgegeben von Xenia Werner, soll noch in diesem Jahr erscheinen und Materialien zu V. Masjutin, der als Künstler und Buchillustrator über Jahrzehnte in Berlin gewirkt hat, enthalten. Verlag und Herausgeber der Reihe verstehen dies auch als Beitrag zur 750-Jahrfeier der Stadt Berlin.

Als Leiter der Osteuropa-Abteilung der Staatsbibliothek und Herausgeber der Reihe hoffe ich gleichzeitig, daß das rege Interesse an Berlin als ehemaligem Zentrum russischer Kultur weiterhin im Blickpunkt wissenschaftlichen Interesses bleibt. Ob die Staatsbibliothek allerdings diesen Interessen durch einen erweiterten Ausbau ihrer Bestände dienen kann, ist zur Zeit leider sehr fraglich, da den Mitteln hierfür in den letzten Jahren sehr enge Grenzen gesetzt waren.

Ich danke den an der Herausgabe dieses Bandes Beteiligten, daß sie ihre Beiträge, ohne kommerzielle Interessen zu verfolgen, zur Verfügung gestellt haben, ferner dem Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz für die Bereitschaft, den Titel in das Verlagsprogramm aufzunehmen.

F. Görner

The House of the Arts and the Writers' Club Berlin 1921-1923¹

by

Thomas R. Beyer, Jr.

For two brief years, from November 1921 until October 1923, Berlin was the literary showplace of the Russian speaking world, or as Gleb Struve recalls, the "literary capital."² A number of factors combined to give birth to this brilliant, albeit shortlived phenomenon. Germany and Berlin, in particular, had a long tradition and history of tolerance for political refugees. Strained relations with the victorious Western powers after the First World War were somewhat offset by friendlier relations with the young Soviet Russia. Germany would become, with the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo in April 1922, the first major European nation to recognize officially the Soviet government. In late 1921, after the tragic death of Aleksandr Blok, and then in 1922 especially after the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo, travel restrictions were eased and Berlin became a stopping point for many of the major literary figures of the day. A major reason for the prominence of Berlin in literary circles was its central role in publishing. A wide array of Russian language publishing houses resumed production or opened their doors in the German capital, among them "Ėpoxa," "Gelikon," "Skify" and the houses of Gržebin and Ladyžnikov. So it was that several writers who found themselves

1 Research on this paper was made possible by the generous support of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung of the Federal Republic of Germany. As a Humboldt Fellow from February to September 1984 at the University of Heidelberg I was able to visit libraries and consult with colleagues in several European cities and to speak with Vera Lur'e in Berlin and Aleksandr Baxrax in Paris, both of whom participated in the House of the Arts.

2 *Russkaja literatura v izgnanii*, (New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1965), p. 24.

outside of Russia after 1917, such as Count Aleksej Tolstoj, would come into contact with those permitted to depart in the spring and fall of 1921, including Il'ja Ėrenburg, Aleksej Remizov and Andrej Belyj.

One of the few German scholars who has dealt with this theme summarizes the situation thus:

Hier [in Berlin] agierte nicht nur die politische Führung der Russen, auch als kulturelles Zentrum war es für sie von größter Bedeutung. In Berlin fanden sich aber nicht nur erklärte Emigranten ein, sondern auch solche, die sich noch nicht für oder gegen den Sowjetstaat entscheiden konnten (z.T. auch gar nicht brauchten, mußte man hinzufügen), und auch Anhänger der Sowjetmacht. Ja es gab nur wenige bedeutende Vertreter des russischen Geisteslebens, die sich in den Jahren 1921-1923 nicht wenigstens für kürzere Zeit in Berlin hätten blicken lassen. Zeitweilig finden wir hier sogar die Blüte der russischen Literatur versammelt, von den Symbolisten bis hin zu den Vertretern der verschiedenen Avantgardeströmungen.³

Almost all of these writers sooner or later would make an appearance at the Berlin House of the Arts (*Dom Iskusstv*), and later at the rival Writers' Club (*Klub Pisatelej*). Because these institutions were at the very center of Russian literary life in Berlin, a closer examination of them can provide an overview of the literary scene as well as a framework to study the evolution of the political and literary climate in that city from 1921-1923. In addition, the clubs and their activities supply valuable literary and biographical data on a number of figures in Berlin during those years – a period often passed over summarily in Soviet sources.

In late 1921 there already existed one major professional organization of writers in Berlin, The Union of Russian Journalists and Writers in Berlin (*Sojuz russkix žurnalistov i literatorov v Berline*) headed by I.V. Gessen. Gessen, the editor of *Rul'*, also provided assistance to needy Russian writers through the Amerikanischer Hilfsfonds für Russische Schriftsteller und Gelehrte (Abteilung für Deutschland in Berlin).⁴ Mostly concerned with professional matters such as copyright, the Union did sponsor at least one literary evening on September 17, 1921 in memory of Aleksandr Blok who had died the pre-

3 Peter Drews, "Russische Schriftsteller am Scheideweg – Berlin 1921-1923," *Anzeiger für Slavische Philologie*, XII (1981), 119.

4 See Jaščenko Nachlaß 149, Carton 1, three letters dated July 4, 1920, August 25, 1920 and May 4, 1922 in the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

vious month. M.A. Aldanov and V.D. Nabokov (father of Vladimir Nabokov) one of the leading pillars of the Russian emigré community attended an evening at which the "young poets Sirin [pen name of Vladimir Nabokov] and Rosimov read poems dedicated to the prematurely deceased poet."⁵ Several days later the same paper carried an announcement for the Society "Russil" (*Russkoe Iskusstvo i Literatura*) with weekly meetings scheduled to begin on Thursday evening, September 29. These cultural evenings were to consist of literary readings as well as performances of opera and ballet.⁶ At least one musical evening was held in the first half of October,⁷ and a new announcement on a flyer called for the first literary evening on October 20, 1921 and a second evening including visiting members of the Moscow Art Theater for November 17.

Berlin also witnessed a marked increase in literary ventures during October and November. The first issue of the collection *Spoloxi* edited by Aleksandr Drozdov was scheduled for mid October. The Moscow literary and artistic publishing house "Gelikon" revived its activity in Berlin under the editorship of A.G. Višnjak.⁸ "A new publishing venture 'The Argonauts' has been formed in Berlin ..."⁹ The literary section was to be headed by N.M. Minskij and his wife Z.A. Vengerova.

Several brief announcements between September and November 1921 signaled the beginning of a more liberal attitude toward travel to the West for members of the Soviet artistic and literary community. Two events probably influenced the official response. The death of Aleksandr Blok in August raised concern among some Soviets for the health of their writers. The arrest and execution of the poet Nikolaj Gumilev coming almost at the same time put an end to the "hands-off" policy toward writers. *Golos Rossii* mentions permission granted to V.G. Korolenko (September 23) and on October 4 they noted that Fedor Sologub and his wife A. Čebotarevskaja had

5 *Golos Rossii*, 767 (September 20, 1921), 3. For an account of the activities of the Union see Z. Arbatov, "Nollendorfplatzcafe," *Grani*, XLI (1959), 106-122.

6 *Golos Rossii*, 772 (September 25, 1921), 2.

7 *Rul'*, 280 (October 18, 1921), 5.

8 *Rul'*, 302 (November 13, 1921), 9.

9 *Golos Rossii*, 819 (November 20, 1921), 6.

been granted permission to depart. Unfortunately she was suffering from a nervous disorder and committed suicide.¹⁰ Neither Korolenko who died later that year or Sologub would make it to the West. Several prominent figures, however, were successful in departing and their arrivals in Berlin were duly noted in *Golos Rossii*: A.M. Remizov (September 27), Maksim Gor'kij (September 29). (Gor'kij would return to Petrograd once more before leaving Russia to take up residence in Western Europe.)

On November 22 *Golos Rossii* announced "The well known Russian writer Andrej Belyj has arrived in Berlin."¹¹ Belyj had actually arrived from Kowno (Kaunas) on November 19 after having spent several weeks awaiting permission to enter Germany. Whether coincidental or not Belyj had been in the city just two days before a gathering was held to organize the Russian House of the Arts in Berlin. Belyj did in fact later claim that one of his responsibilities was to "organizovyvat' 'DOM ISKUSSTV'."¹² *Golos Rossii* reported the following:

On Monday, November 21, an organizational meeting to establish a "Russian House of the Arts" in Berlin was held. Its aim is the creation of an apolitical organization, uniting figures of Russian literature and culture, the establishment of a club, lectures, concerts, etc. The founders of the "House of the Arts" are Andrej Belyj, K.L. Boguslavskaja, Z.A. Vengerova, S.G. Kaplun-Sumskij, N.M. Minskij, N.D. Miljuti, Iv.A. Puni, S.M. Petrax, [sic] A.M. Remizov, S.P. Remizov, I.S. Sokolov-Mikitov, Count A.N. Tolstoj, A.S. Jaščenko. The clubhouse of the "House of the Arts" is located at the Cafe Landrof [sic], Kurfürstenstraße 75 and is temporarily open on Saturday from 6 o'clock in the evening.¹³

A somewhat refined version of the aims of the group was printed in the notice in A.S. Jaščenko's journal, *Novaja Russkaja Kniga*: The "House of the Arts" is supposed to become an apolitical organization pursuing only cultural aims, the defense of legal and material interests of literary and artistic figures both abroad, as well as inside Russia, and contact with writers living in Russia. In addition, the House of the Arts set as one of its tasks the establishment of weekly evenings at which not only members

10 *Golos Rossii*, 779 (October 4, 1921), 1.

11 820, p.3.

12 *Pocemu ja stal simvolistom*, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), p.115.

13 822 (November 24, 1921), 3. An article in *Voskresen'e*, 7 (November 27, 1921), 3, gave the meeting place as the Cafe Landrat. Actually it was the Landgraf Cafe.

and guests of the "house" can meet, but at which new works of writers can be read, musical compositions can be performed, etc.¹⁴

The article further notes that the group had chosen the name based on analogy with the Petrograd organization of the same name. The reference to the Petrograd group is significant for in many ways the Berlin "House" could look upon itself as the offspring and heir of the Petrograd version. The Petrograd "House of the Arts" had been established in December 1919 under the leadership of Maksim Gor'kij and began a series of Friday evening gatherings. This organization attempted to provide for young writers some of the benefits of the previously established "Writers' House" (*Dom literatorov*) which had come into existence in the fall of 1918 to assist with food and shelter needy writers.¹⁵ A committee of twenty, including Aleksandr Blok, Nikolaj Gumilev and Aleksej Remizov, coordinated the distribution of meals and provided living space for writers during the harsh days of fuel and food shortages brought on by the revolution and ensuing civil war. Later in June and July 1920 two additional organizations came into being, the Union of Poets under Blok, Belyj and Gumilev and the Union of Writers headed by Blok, Gor'kij and Evgenij Zamjatin.

The apolitical nature of the group insisted upon by the founding fathers was a crucial one for the existence of the House of the Arts in Berlin. Most of the members were well-established figures in Russian intellectual and cultural circles, and they represented a variety of fields and aesthetic views. Puni and Miljuti were well established artists. Belyj and Remizov had long ago established their reputations and place in the history of Russian letters. Minskij, now largely forgotten, was at the time a highly respected and well known poet. His wife, Vengerova, was a leading critic and translator. Jaščenko was the editor of the bibliographic journals *Russkaja Kniga* and then *Novaja Russkaja Kniga*. Kaplun-Sumskij was the publisher of *Epoxa*. Their decision to unite in a common artistic effort came in spite of their different political views and vision of Russia. The fact that they could

14 1 (January, 1922), 34.

15 For an excellent discussion of the Petrograd Houses see Barry Scherr, "Notes on Literary Life in Petrograd, 1918-1922: A Tale of Three Houses," *Slavic Review*, XXXVI, 2 (June 1977), 256-267.

ignore their political differences for other interests appeared years later incredible even to one who had participated. Il'ja Ėrenburg wrote in his memoirs:

In Berlin there existed a place which reminded one of Noah's ark, where the clean and unclean could meet in peace; it was called the "House of the Arts"...

Now all of this seems to me unreal (*nepravdopodobno*). Two or three years later the poet Xodasevič (I won't even mention Ćirikov) would never have entered a building where Majakovskij could be found. Evidently, not all the die had been cast.¹⁶

As history would later show, the sympathies of many were as widely divergent as their future residences. Remizov, Puni and Kaplun-Sumskij would go to Paris. Belyj and Tolstoj returned to Soviet Russia. Jaščenko would be one of the few to remain in Berlin after the 1923 economic crisis. Indeed, it was the increasing politicization of the Russian community in Berlin, including the club members, which caused the decline and eventual disintegration of the House of the Arts. But in the fall of 1921 there still reigned a spirit of optimism and the prevailing civility and tolerance promoted cultural and intellectual contacts.

On November 29, 1921 a constitution was adopted and elections were held at a general meeting. Minskij was elected president, Remizov – vice-president, Kaplun-Sumskij as secretary and Vengero-va as treasurer. The advisory board was composed of Belyj, Miljuti, F.A. Gartman, Tolstoj, Puni, Pistrak and Professor Jaščenko. A "control commission" included V.B. Stankevič, R.M. Blank and K.L. Boguslavskaja.¹⁷

December 1921 was a busy month for the fledgling organization. The first regular meeting was held on Saturday evening, December 3. A. Belyj read excerpts from his *Ėpopeja*, Remizov read one of his "tales," Ėrenburg read from his "Razdum'ja" and Minskij delivered a paper on the art of Kuzmin and Gumilev. Saturday, De-

16 *Ljudi, gody, žizn'*, in *Sobranie sočinenij v devjati tomov, VIII* (Moscow: 1966), 409, 410. The reference to the ark echoes a similar comparison made by Ol'ga Forš about the Petrograd House in *Sumasšedšij korabl'* (Leningrad, 1931). See also Struve, pp.26, 27.

17 *Novaja Russkaja Kniga*, I (January 1922), 34. Note Ėrenburg's kind words on Minskij, pp.410-411.

cember 19, another regular meeting was scheduled with readings by A. Tolstoj, Remizov and Minskij. The first public lecture of the group was given by Andrej Belyj on Wednesday, December 14 in the Logenhaus (Kleiststraße 10); the title of his talk was the "Kul'tura sovremennoj Rossii."¹⁸

Some days later the House announced a competition for an emblem or design for the club, with a prize of four hundred German marks. Contestants were asked to send their submissions to Dr. S. Kaplan at Ansbacher Straße 20/21. The same announcement took notice of a new agreement with the Landgraf Cafe, recently acquired by a group of Russians, now permitting meetings in the larger hall of the casino, a move necessary to accommodate the larger number of guests.¹⁹ Roman Gul' recalled in his memoirs the atmosphere and setting at the Landgraf Cafe:

An enormous hall, waiters served food, coffee and an assortment of beverages. There was a good stage in the hall, from which the participants would read... We young people weren't seated in the part of the hall where food was served (it was a bit expensive for our friend), but were seated closer to the stage where you could get by with a mug of beer.²⁰

At the December 17 meeting the heads of the respective sections within the House were chosen: A. Tolstoj – literature, N.D. Miljuti – art, and F.A. Gartman – music. Two other literary evenings were sponsored in December. On the 24th Andrej Belyj read to an overflowing crowd excerpts from his poem "Pervoe Svidanie," Remizov read one of the Tibetan "Zajašnye skazki," Minskij read some Christmas verses and Sokolov-Mikitin a new tale. A.D. Mejčik sang and Gartman played improvisations. The hall was filled to capacity. The regular Saturday meeting day was then moved to Fridays and on December 30, 1921 Il'ja Ėrenburg spoke on the "Novoe isskustvo." The popularity of the weekly meetings and the size of the audience forced the club to limit attendance in the future to members and ticket holders, with each member being allotted only two guest tickets.

18 See the report by Mix. Švarc, "Andrej Belyj o grjaduščej Rossii" in *Golos Rossii*, 845 (Dec. 21, 1921), 2. The full lecture was published in *Novaja Russkaja Kniga*, I (January 1922), 2-6.

19 *Golos Rossii*, 846 (December 22, 1921), 3.

20 *Ja unes Rossiju*, I (New York: 1981), 151.

Sometime in December the group forwarded a letter to the Petrograd House of the Arts, Writers' House and Union of Writers:

Our thoughts are with you and our love goes out to you. We wish you courage and energy. Sitting here abroad, we see clearly, that what you are doing is something real, authentic, essential for Russian culture. We know it's difficult for you – most of us have recently arrived from Russia. You have no place to write and publish, but even the little bit which you give is so valuable, because it is prompted by Russia, by those who have experienced every deprivation, and by the difficult experience and deep love for Russia.²¹

In January of 1922 the group met on the 13th to commemorate the deceased V.G. Korolenko, who had passed away on Christmas Day. After introductory remarks by Minskij, E.G. Lundberg read a paper. At the regularly scheduled meeting of January 20 there was a discussion of the journal of the Petrograd "House of the Arts."²² A regular (9th) meeting was also announced for the 27th. In summing up the activities of the new organization through January, Jaščenko listed the following active participants: Belyj, Remizov, Tolstoj, Minskij, Sokolov-Mikitov, Vengerova, Ėrenburg and a host of minor poets and writers such as Kal'ma, Tatida, Ocup, Illison, Istelinov, M. Lur'e, Gl. Alekseev, and others. Anna Mejčik, F.A. Gartman, Prof. Graudan and I. Vesterman among others had performed. There had also been two closed sessions at which papers on the new art were delivered by Ėrenburg and about the Petersburg poets by M. Lur'e.²³

The next two months saw the publication of the *Bjulleteni Doma Iskusstv* intended as a weekly, but in fact only two issues ever appeared under the Gelikon publishing house.²⁴ The publication of the *Bulletins* was one more indication of the close ties between the Ber-

21 See *Letopis' Doma Literatorov*, VII (February 1, 1922), 7, and *Golos Rossii*, 932 (April 2, 1922), 8.

22 *Rul'*, 356 (January 18, 1922), 5.

23 *Novaja Russkaja Kniga*, I (January 1922), 34. M. Lur'e is possibly a misprint. Vera Osipovna Lur'e, who had been associated with Gumilev's studio in Petrograd, *Zvučščaja Rakovina*, had recently arrived in Berlin. In an interview with me (June 13, 1984) she recalled speaking about the Petersburg poets at the Berlin House of the Arts. See her article, "Berlinskie vospominanija," *Russkaja mysl'*, 969 (October 25, 1956), 4, 5.

24 Actually there were three numbers of the bulletin. The first issue numbered 1-2 and a second one numbered 3. I am indebted to Aleksandr Baxrax who was able to supply me with a photocopy of this very rare third number, presented to him personally by one of the authors, Aleksej Remizov.



Exilliteraten in Berlin 1922: der Verleger A.S. Jaščenko, die Schriftsteller Boris Pil'njak, Aleksej Tolstoj (sitzend), Ivan Sokolov-Mikitov, Andrej Belyj, Aleksej Remizov (stehend, von links nach rechts).
Bildarchiv der Staatsbibliothek Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

lin and Petrograd groups. The first issue numbered 1-2 was dated February 17, 1922. The thirty-eight page document (actually nineteen double-columned pages) was clearly indebted in inspiration and for much of its material to the *Letopis' Doma Literatorov* which had begun appearing in November 1921. Some of the material was directly reprinted from articles which had appeared in the *Letopis'*. For example, the appeal from the "Committee for the Preservation of the Memory of A. Blok" to send manuscripts, letters and artifacts to the deceased poet's wife or mother to serve as the basis for the *Dom-muzej A. Blok*. (pp. 1-2). The second article (pp. 3-6) was a report of the August, 28, 1921 meeting of the *Vol'naja Filosofskaja Asociacija* dedicated to the memory of Aleksandr Blok, at which the main speaker had been Belyj, one of the founders of *Vol'fila* and president of all three sections – in Petrograd, Moscow and Berlin.²⁵ The article is followed by two poems dedicated to the memory of Blok: Anna Axmatova's, "A Smolenskaja nynče imenica," and Marija Škapskaja's, "Čto ty tam delaješ', staraja mat'?" (pp. 5, 6).

A report on the first six issues of the *Letopis'* (pp. 5-10) praises the call for "freedom of the press" and notes that the journal "bears witness to the fact that in Russia independent thought is alive, independent literature, in spite of all the restrictions and tribulations, has earned for itself a right to exist, and we can do no more than send our sincerest regards and sincere sympathy to it over there." A news item follows with information on writers living in the Crimea, including M.A. Vološin and P.S. Solov'eva (Allegro) (pp. 10-11), and there is more news of writers still in Petrograd and Moscow including bibliographical data and information on Soviet publishing houses (pp. 11-20). Only then does the publication turn its attention to the local scene with a notice that two Russian musicians, the violinist Cecilija Ganzen and the pianist Boris Zaxarov had recently arrived in Berlin. (pp. 19-20).

An article on the Berlin House of the Arts recalls the founding of the organization on November 29, 1921 and once again highlights the "apolitical" nature of the group and its constitution. "All literary

25 The very same article had appeared in *Letopis'* V-VI (January 15, 1922), 7. Only the author's initials, D.P., are omitted in the Berlin version.

and artistic figures accepted for membership upon recommendation of the general assembly of the members of one of the sections – literature, arts and music – can be active members of the 'House of the Arts.' All persons recommended by two active members and accepted by resolution of the Advisory Council can be associate members." The article goes on to recall eight regular weekly meetings already held and expressed the hope for a larger meeting place, voicing a desire for a separate *Dom* to house members and accommodate the group's activities. There follows a list of 58 full and 83 associate members. (pp. 21-23).

Other articles report on the business of the Advisory Council which had been discussing the practice of not paying honorariums for speaking engagements. The Council had passed a resolution calling on all members to refuse engagements for which they would not be remunerated. The next article describes the February 3 evening held in the Secession Hall in honor of the German [sic] composer Arthur Nikisch signed by F. Gartman. (pp. 26-27).²⁶ The *Bjulleteni* also reports on the activities of *Vol'fila* in Berlin which had held its third meeting on February 2 when Belyj spoke in memory of Aleksandr Blok.

A somewhat lighter section, entitled "Albern," contains notes and nonsense by Aleksej Remizov, including a paragraph on the *Obezvelvolpal* (The Great and Free Chamber of Simians, *Obez'janaja velikaja i vol'naja palata*). (pp. 29-32). This is followed by a fictitious conversation: "Beseda s Andreem Belym." (pp. 33-34). In the good-natured article Belyj complains: "I can't lecture any more for free." He goes on in the interview to claim: "I join my voice with the opinion of Aleksej Maksimovič. The most remarkable poet among us is Solomon Kaplun." He also charges that Remizov at the instigation of Jaščenko "had stolen my green scarf" on Christmas. Lundberg, Minskij, Remizov as well as other artists and musicians receive similar treatment in the concluding pages of the journal. Presumably they were at least partially the work of Remizov, well known for his prac-

26 Arthur Nikisch was a Hungarian conductor born in 1855. After five years as head of the Boston Symphony he returned to conduct in Budapest and finally at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. He was a frequent guest conductor in Berlin. He died in Leipzig on January 23, 1922.

tical jokes and ability to play the fool. Remizov is also listed on the final page along with Minskij and Sumskij-Kaplun as one of the editors.

Issue 3 is dated March 10, 1922 and is a much more modest document. It is only four pages in length. The first article reports on the letter of the Berlin House and the reply of the Petrograd House reprinted from *Letopis' Doma Literatorov*, VII. (pp. 1, 2). After a short report on the publishing situation and literary activities in Russia (pp. 2, 3) there is another "Albern" section. Once again Andrej Belyj is the target of the good natured kidding. In a fictitious exchange of letters between Belyj, Remizov and Jaščenko, the green scarf is the major topic of concern. Belyj is also depicted in two caricatures. (pp. 3, 4)²⁷ This ability to caricature and make light of one another was still possible in the early days of March 1922, but events would soon make such exchanges unacceptable.

The House undoubtedly reached its high point in February and March of 1922. In preparation for the February 3 meeting the club announced that because "of the considerable expenses membership cards for the evening are not valid."²⁸ The program held at the Berliner Secession (Kurfürstenstraße 232) was indeed an impressive one. The musical portion had scheduled I. Vengerova, Cecilija Ganzen, N. Graudan, B. Zaxarov, Anna Mejčik and Professor Jaroši. Belyj, Minskij and Remizov were listed for the literary portion of the evening. Other regularly scheduled meetings were held in the Landgraf Café on the 10th and 17th with the latter including members of the Kammerspiele Arbenina and the newly arrived in Berlin Boris Pil'njak and Aleksandr Kusikov.²⁹ Pil'njak would be instrumental in persuading some that they ought to reconcile themselves with Soviet Russia. Kusikov would become involved in a public affair with Asja Turgeneva-Bugaeva, the first wife of Andrej Belyj. The February 24th meeting listed a poetry reading and several musical numbers.

In March the House sponsored two major events. The first was a

27 The case of the disappearing green scarf is also mentioned in Remizov's letter of December 27, 1921 to Jaščenko in *Russkij Berlin: 1921-1923*, ed. L. Fleishman, et alii. (Paris: 1983), pp. 167, 168.

28 *Rul'*, 368 (February 1, 1922), 4.

29 *Rul'*, 382 (February 17, 1922), 5.

gala concert-ball at the Brüdervereinshaus (Kurfürstenstraße 115-116) on Sunday March 19. The ball was staged, as were a number of other events, to benefit the "starving children of Russia." This effort to aid the hungry in Russia touched all of the political factions in Berlin and succeeded in uniting them for one last time in a common cause. A similar evening had been held on March 10 at which Belyj, Gessen, and V.D. Nabokov had spoken. Even after the meeting contributions continued to roll in, mostly due to the power of Belyj's presentation.

The other milestone for the House of the Arts was the public lecture by Thomas Mann on March 20 in the Logenhaus to benefit writers in Petrograd. The opening remarks were written by Minskij, but delivered by his wife, Vengerova. She had published articles in Russia about Mann's works and had done a condensed translation of *Die Buddenbrooks* in 1903. Mann read a paper entitled "Goethe and Tolstoi." Andrej Belyj then delivered in German some remarks expressing gratitude to Mann for his appearance and help in the "common cause." Belyj also voiced the hope that such moments would be repeated more frequently: "these minutes of encounter between individuals and of mutual rapprochement between Germany and Russia, so that the threads of true brotherly love and contact would stretch from heart to heart in the name of eternal human grief and joy."³⁰ Mann then concluded the evening's performance with a reading from his *Das Eisenbahnunglück*.

On the evening of March 24 the House moved to the Flora Diele at Motzstrasse 65 on the corner of Lutherstraße. On the program for the housewarming were Belyj, Minskij, Remizov and Aleksej Tolstoj. Tolstoj would soon become embroiled in one of the more heated disputes of the emigration surrounding the newspaper *Nakanune* and the *smenovexovcy*. On March 26 the first issue of *Nakanune* appeared. The organ of the *smenovexovcy* – those who had "changed the signposts," clearly angered many in Berlin, who saw them as opportunists and traitors. Particularly painful was the new alliance of Aleksej Tolstoj with the group of "bolshevik sympa-

30 K.M. Azadovskij and A.B. Lavrov, "Novoe o vstrečax Tomasa Manna s russkimi pisateljami," *Russkaja Literatura*, IV (1978), 150.

thizers."³¹ The situation was exacerbated by several events which gave rise to anxiety and mistrust, destroying forever the dream of peaceful co-existence for the emigré community. Early in March the newspaper *Novyj Mir*, a supporter of the bolsheviks had issued an attack on the new Socialist Revolutionary editors of *Golos Rossii*. The charges caused at least one of the editors, V. M. Černov, to seek damages in German court. Meanwhile *Golos Rossii* was giving increased attention to the approaching trial of the S.R.'s in Russia. On March 28 V.D. Nabokov, one of the most respected Russians in Berlin, was murdered in an assassination attempt on Pavel Miljukov. In connection with this murder the German police began widespread arrests. At around the same time Soviet Russia was preparing to assert its new rights gained by the Treaty of Rapallo (April 16, 1922), whereby Germany officially restored diplomatic and consular relations with the Soviet government. This political move would have at first a positive influence on the status of writers. More and more would be permitted to travel abroad. The publishing business in Russian language books boomed and few could see that 1922 would be the peak, rather than the beginning of better times. Improved relations also gave rise, however, to a number of questions concerning passports, the ability to return to the Soviet Union, the legal status of emigrés in Berlin, etc.

As the major meeting place of literary and artistic Berlin, the House of the Arts could not isolate itself from events or avoid the tensions and controversies which began to appear. The regular meeting scheduled for March 31 found the organization again in a new meeting place, the Nollendorf Casino (Kleiststraße 41), and the evening was dedicated to the memory of the recently deceased V.D. Nabokov. *Nakanune* reported on the presence of Minskij and Tolstoj and commented on a "curious dispute":

A private argument broke out between A.N. Tolstoj and Andrej Belyj, which so inflamed the latter that he jumped up from his seat and turning to the entire audience, quickly gathered around himself a 'Veche' of sorts. The argument concerned a current theme – the 'Smena vex', *Nakanune*, against which A. Belyj rose up with a fervor, not corresponding to his usual composure in private conversations.

31 See S. Sumskij, "O literaturnyx nravax," *Golos Rossii*, 932 (April 2, 1922), 7.

In the exchange Belyj was asked if he wished "to complicate the already unbearable situation of our isolated motherland."

This statement of the question confused Belyj who began to make excuses claiming an ignorance of politics, citing examples from the New Testament. These arguments failing to convince the audience, put it, nonetheless, in a jovial mood, and G.L. Kirdecov heard a number of sympathetic comments. Apparently the "vexi" are changing by themselves.³²

Belyj was a key figure in the organization and it was unfortunate that he was in the limelight during a period in which he was undergoing a personal tragedy connected with the rejection of him by his wife, Asja Turgeneva-Bugaeva, and her public affair with the poet Aleksandr Kusikov. Nonetheless, Belyj spoke again at the April 7 meeting, this time impromptu on the topic of eurythmy, the art developed by Rudolf Steiner which Belyj would adapt for Russian in his own soon to be published *Glossolalija*. Originally the meeting had been advertised as one devoted to theater. A review of the meeting found the presentation by Tolstoj simply "mush", but praised the words of genius of Andrej Belyi.³³

The April 28 meeting again served as the scene for the comical if not ridiculous aspect of the group and its politics.

The last session of the House of the Arts turned into a debate devoted to the recently published journal *Vešč*. The basis for the discussion was a review of the journal read by A. Šrejder. A. Belyj, N.M. Minskij, Mr. Parnax, Mr. Petrovskij, Mr. Sokovnin took part in the discussion. The editors of *Vešč*, I.G. Ėrenburg and E. Lisickij, expressed opposition to the reader. During the discussion a curious detail became clear: A. Belyj, fulminating against *Vešč*, from all points of view, seeing in it even 'the face of the Antichrist' – admitted finally, that he had never read *Vešč* and had never even seen it. The audience, as usual, laughed.³⁴

The first meeting in May on Friday the 5th called forth another tongue in cheek review from *Nakanune*, noting that Ėrenburg had read and that everything was boring. That condition was shortlived. On May 12, 1922 Tolstoj read some of his memoirs on Gumilev and others read until midnight. At just around that time Sergej Esenin and his extravagant wife, Isadora Duncan arrived. Her demand that all join in to sing the International was met with whistles and shouts of:

32 *Nakanune*, 7 (April 2, 1922), 5.

33 *Nakanune*, 13 (April 9, 1922), 4.

34 *Nakanune*, 29 (April 30, 1922), 5.

"Get out!" When things finally settled down Esenin read a few of his poems.³⁵

The final meeting of the season was scheduled for Friday, May 19, at which Esenin was supposed to be introduced by Ėrenburg and then read his poetry. Instead Marina Cvetaeva, recently arrived from Moscow, read her poems. A group from *Nakanune* was present and one of them read several poems which threatened to cause another "scandal." The cool-headed Minskij quieted things down, thanked everyone for their participation and announced that the regular sessions would be suspended for the summer, but that they would continue to gather on Friday evenings in the Landgraf Café.³⁶

The cessation of official activities helped the group to remain somewhat removed from a new controversy which arose around A. Tolstoj. At a meeting of May 30 of the Union of Journalists and Writers in Berlin it was decided to exclude from membership all collaborators with the newspaper *Nakanune*. Meanwhile the Soviets re-established their permanent mission in Berlin in June and demanded the return of the Russian Embassy including all of the properties of the Russian Orthodox Church which had continued services there. *Golos Rossii* was filled with accounts of and there was bitter public reaction to the trials of the Social Revolutionaries in Moscow. The Foreign Minister, Walther Rathenau, was assassinated on June 24, 1922. A twelve day printers' strike in July signaled more trouble ahead for the publishing business. But those in the Russian community prosperous enough got away to Heringsdorf and Swinemünde for a summer on the Baltic Sea.

The summer seems to have cooled tempers somewhat and the House of the Arts was back in full operation by mid September 1922. The membership was swelled by a number of recent arrivals such as the poet Vladislav Xodasevič. Nina Berberova recalls meeting Pasternak and Viktor Šklovskij at the Landgraf Cafe in early September, but the first official meeting was announced for 8:00 PM on September 15 at the Cafe Leon (Nollendorfplatz).³⁷ The Cafe Leon would serve

35 *Rul'*, 453 (May 14, 1922), 7, and *Nakanune*, 40 (May 14, 1922), 6. See also *Rul'*, 460 (May 23, 1922), 5.

36 *Golos Rossii*, 971 (May 21, 1922), 4 and *Nakanune*, 47 (May 23, 1922), 5.

37 *Golos Rossii*, 1059 (September 15, 1922), 5. Actually this was the Conditorei

as the regular meeting place for both the House of the Arts and the soon to be organized Writers' Club until the end of 1923. They met in a room on the second floor and as Gul' recalls: "When the 'House of the Arts' moved from the Cafe 'Landgraf' to the Cafe 'Leon' things became much better and simpler. The hall was separate from the restaurant and no one ate or drank at meetings ..."³⁸

A complete account of the early fall activities was carried in *Novaja Russkaja Kniga*:

At the first meeting V. Šklovskij delivered a paper on the life of writers in Soviet Russia and the poets VI. Xodasevič and N. Ocupe presented some of their poems. At the second meeting [September 22] A.N. Tolstoj read several chapters from his new fantastical novel *Aëlit* and B. Pasternak read his poetry. The third meeting [moved to October 1] and devoted to the thirtieth anniversary-jubilee to celebrate Maksim Gor'kij's first publication. N.M. Minskij, A. Belyj and VI. Xodasevič read congratulatory remarks. At the next session [October 6] I. Ėrenburg read some new stories *Trubki* and V. Pozern read some poetry. The fifth meeting [October 13] was attended by several writers and intellectuals who had been recently expelled from Russia, including Ju.I. Ajxenal'd and V. Lidin, and others. On this Friday Belyj read his "Aforizmy," N. Ocupe gave a brief paper on "Cex poetov" and Georgij Ivanov read a series of his own poems. The sixth meeting [October 20] was entirely devoted to the poet, Vladimir Majakovskij, who had just arrived from Soviet Russia, and who after a brief theoretical introduction establishing the place of Futurism in contemporary literature, read a series of his works. At this Friday Igor' Severjanin who had just arrived from Estonia was present. At the seventh session [October 27] V. Šklovskij delivered a paper on the theme: "Literature and the cinematographer," evoking a lively discussion, in which A. Belyj, V. Majakovskij, Levidov, A. Šrejder participated. At this session the recently arrived Evg. Ćirikov participated.

At the one year anniversary meeting of the House of the Arts new elections for the leadership were held. Elected were: A. Belyj (president), A. Remizov, Z.A. Vengerova, N.M. Minskij, I. Ėrenburg, A. Tolstoj, V. Šklovskij, Vlad. Xodasevič, I. Puni, P. Suvčinskij, Ferrari (secretary).³⁹

The matter of fact report in *Novaja Russkaja Kniga* gives no hint of the impending break-up of the writers in Berlin. An article in *Golos Rossii* did report on the first meeting and noted: "The session was opened by a speech of Minskij, containing an invitation to engage

and Cafe of Gustaf Leon as listed in the Berliner Adreßbuch at 1 Bülowstraße, the corner of Bülowstraße und Nollendorfplatz.

38 Gul', p. 151.

39 IX (September, 1922), 32.

exclusively questions of art and literature without any politics and party affiliation."⁴⁰

Meanwhile *Golos Rossii* in an article entitled "Among Writers and Artists" had complained that the organization had done nothing for the plight of writers. "In spite of two meetings this year the group simply has had evenings, readings and guests – but no discussion of changes in light of the current situation. 'The House of the Arts' is a rather incomprehensible institution. Organized as it were on the basis of community, now it has degenerated into a mere assembly for guests, who sit in a cafe and listen to a casual program ... But this really isn't what literature and writers need."⁴¹

The month of October as somewhat indicated in the *Novaja Russkaja Kniga* article saw a strange mixture of bedfellows at the organization's meetings. The celebration of thirty years of Gor'kij's literary career gave occasion for the literary community to come together again and the regular Friday session was moved to Sunday, October 1, because a number of writers representing their respective organizations (Minskij – the House of the Arts, Belyj – *Vol'fila* and Xodasevič – The All Russian Union of Writers) had presented flowers and congratulatory messages on September 27, 1922. There was apparently a minor disturbance at that meeting. In the notes of Xodasevič for the period is the entry: "October 1. (Sunday) Evening in honor of Gor'kij in the House of the Arts (Speakers: Belyj, Minskij, I). Majakovskij tried to cause a scandal."⁴² Ajxenal'd had been expelled from Russia at the same time in which Majakovskij, one of the more flamboyant representatives of the new Soviet society, appeared in Berlin. The elections were originally scheduled for October 13, but the press noted that the general meeting which had not taken place on that day would be held on the following Friday at 6:00 PM. and would be considered "valid regardless of the number of those gathered."⁴³

40 1063, (September 20, 1922), 3.

41 1069 (September 27, 1922), 3.

42 Nina Berberova, "Tri goda žizni Gor'kogo," *Mosty*, VIII (1961), 265. Berberova in a footnote indicates: "The 'rightists' were against the celebration but couldn't manifest their protest in any way. Majakovskij and his friends made noise, whistled and tried to disrupt the evening in every way." (p.273).

43 *Rul'*, 577 (October 21, 1922), 5 and *Nakanune*, 164 (October 20, 1922), 5. It

November promised to be an exciting month for the Russian community in Berlin. As part of the new cooperation between Germany and Russia an exhibition of Russian artists had opened in Berlin at the Galerie Von Diemen & Co. at Unter den Linden 21 on October 15. Over five hundred items by for more than one hundred artists were represented, among them – Burljuk, Chagall, Kandinskij, Malevič, Kustodiev, Rodčenko, Vasnecov, Benoi, Vasil'jev, Cetlin, Tatlin.⁴⁴ Ivan Puni, one of the founding fathers of the Berlin House of the Arts, was scheduled to read a paper at the November 3 meeting on "Sovremennoe russkoe iskusstvo i russkaja vystavka v Berline." As respondents a number of individuals were listed: Arxipenko, Al'tman, Gabo, Lisickij, Majakovskij, Štejnberg, Šklovskij and Ėrenburg.

The meeting turned into a shouting match. The briefest account is found in *Novaja Russkaja Kniga* which recalled: "During the discussion several incidents occurred between the sculptor Zalit and the artist Al'tman and between V. Majakovskij and A. Belyj."⁴⁵ Majakovskij upon his return to Russia mentioned the incident in a talk entitled "What is Berlin doing?" "A. Belyj ... is complaining about the inconveniences and malnutrition which he suffered in Russia, as if Soviet Russia arranged these inconveniences especially for A. Belyj! At one of the meetings of the House of the Arts at which he was presiding, he refused to let Majakovskij speak at a time when some hooligan had insulted a Russian artist. Belyj diplomatically declared that he had heard nothing. Majakovskij left the hall and most of the audience followed behind."⁴⁶

A much more complete account was given in *Dni* which noted that the hall was filled as if in anticipation of something:

Opening the meeting the president of the newly elected board of directors Andrej Belyj turned to the gathering with an introductory note (in the form of a declaration) in which he indicated in brief the program of activities, which had been outlined by the board of directors.

is still somewhat unclear whether elections were held on October 20 or 27. In addition to Belyj and Ferrari, the other officers were V. Šklovskij, vice-president and A. Baxrax, secretary.

44 There is a copy of the catalogue of this Erste Russische Kunstausstellung (Berlin: 1922) in the Bibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin.

45 X (October 1922), 26.

46 *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, XII (Moscow: 1959), 463.

"The House of the Arts" – he declared "is not a political establishment but since in the prevailing contemporary situation it is very difficult to maintain an apolitical character, since many will attempt to involve or ascribe to it a political character, then it will be not passively apolitical, but actively apolitical and pursue those who try move the House of the Arts onto this pathway."

Touching on the immediate tasks, A. Belyj indicated that the House of the Arts was determined to concentrate its activity in special workshops, in different fields of art. In these workshops questions raised would be further examined. In particular the next workshop would examine the works of the poet V. Xodasevič.

After the introductory remarks, Puni presented his paper with special attention to the art of Kandinskij and Malevič.

After the paper V. Šklovskij took the floor. In his speech he touched in passing the works of the young artist Natan Al'tman and permitted the expression that he has some good pictures, but also some which a 'Schieber' wouldn't buy. From the audience a voice exclaimed: "because he's a 'Schieber' himself." V. Majakovskij who was present at the gathering pronounced aloud: "I request the President to direct his attention to the fact, that one of those present is permitting himself rowdy outbursts." At the end of Šklovskij's speech Majakovskij again arose with his request and began to demand that the matter of the insult directed toward the artist Al'tman be clarified and resolved.

Noise breaks out. The artist Zalit demands the floor. The President declares that he had not heard any insulting words and tries to bring the affair to a halt. Zalit declares loudly that he will not disassociate himself from his expression and demands the floor for an explanation. The President requests that the affair be considered settled and that they continue the discussion of the paper and those who do not agree and are making the noise be asked to leave the hall – otherwise he will be forced to call the meeting to a close. The scheduled speakers refused to continue until the incident was resolved. Attempts of the President to insert some calm did not have any effect and he announced the session closed. Even after the close of the meeting V. Šklovskij in an exalted tone began to reproach "certain persons, who come to meetings to even personal scores, permit themselves misplaced outbursts, which only harm the House of the Arts."

The public was extraordinarily displeased by what had occurred. Fears have been expressed that if similar instances occur, then the House of the Arts will disintegrate.⁴⁷

Ultimately the worst fears of many would be realized. After Majakovskij and some of the others had departed, those remaining began to discuss excluding from membership A. Vasiljevskij and A. Tol-

47 7 (November 11, 1922), 10.



Andrej Belyj in Swinemünde a. d. Ostsee. Hinter ihm die Frau des Verlegers A. Višnjak, ihre Cousine und ihr kleiner Sohn.
Bildnachweis: Archiv der *Berlinischen Galerie*.