

**Title:** The Metaphysical Body: Ikhtiander's Androgyny, Animalism and Divinity in Alexander Belyaev's *Tschelovek-Amphibia*.

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Alexander Belyaev was the only prominent producer of science fiction in the late 1920s, and the most popular Soviet science fiction writer, especially among younger readers. His influence extended well into the 20th century, inspiring Alexei Tolstoy and The Strugatskii Brothers. Belyaev's aspiration towards the dream about perfection of human nature seems to have been driven by his longterm paralysis related to tuberculosis. Unlike the other science fiction of his time that emphasized "futuristic technological breakthroughs – time machines, space stations, and so on" (Glad) - Belyaev's most famous works focused on the human body.

In *Tschelovek-Amphibia* (1928), Belyaev imagines a new metaphysical body created out of a synthesis of the representations of the body in the Judeo-Christian tradition, ancient pagan cultures and the "exotic" orient. His interest in the metaphysical component of the body, linked to his vision of a perfect human being, appears to be specifically tied to an ancient harmony myth of androgyny – "a major trademark of Russian turn-of-the century culture" (Rosenthal). Resonating with the theme of androgyny represented by Vasilii Rozanov's philosophical position is the theme of the blurring of borders between humans, animals, and the divine body, all underlying the metaphysical nature of Ikhtiander's body.

Despite insistence of the Soviet commentators to tie Belyaev's protagonist to the myth of the New Soviet Man, Ikhtiander is imagined far from this ideal. Unlike the rational and soulless man-machine image that permeated Bolshevik discourse, the Amphibian Man is a metaphysical hybrid of divinity and devilry. The protagonist's identity encompasses a remarkable heterogeneity of mythological characters drawn from classical and Christian mythology, the Gnostic mystical tradition and Russian folklore. This paper will take a close look at Ikhtiander's metaphysical body and tie his representation to contemporary body discourses.

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