

TranSiberia and Queer Comics in Russia

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With the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ discourses in the Putin era have come appalling levels of violence against gay and trans people in Russia, a frightening retreat from the civil and social gains for this population in the first post-Soviet decade. In June, 2013, the Duma (national parliament) adopted a law against “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” for purposes of “protecting children from information that can bring harm to their health and wellbeing.” The law and cultural climate have made life for many LGBTQ+ people in Russia even more difficult, with full-blown torture and killings not uncommon in regions such as Chechnya. The foregoing makes the appearance of the first comics series devoted to the transgender experience, produced by an artist from Omsk, all the more remarkable: Herman Alius’ *TranSiberia* (2017) follows Sasha in his female-to-male transition, straining family and friendship ties, discovering new supporters and allies along the way. The proposed paper examines Alius’ achievement within the context of both a transphobic contemporary Russian culture and a supportive international human rights environment (the project was partly funded by the Prague Civil Society foundation). I will also discuss comics by queer people in Russia more generally, and what makes graphic narrative an attractive format for sexual minorities to share their stories.

Kurzbiographie

José Alaniz, associate professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Department of Comparative Literature (adjunct) at the University of Washington, Seattle, has published two books, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia* (University Press of Mississippi, 2010) and *Death, Disability and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond* (UPM, 2014). His articles have appeared in the *International Journal of Comic Art*, *The Comics Journal*, *Ulbandus*, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, *Comics Forum* and *Kinokultura*, and anthologies including *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives* (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2016), *Cultures of Representation: Disability in World Cinema Contexts* (Wallflower Press, 2016) and *Russian Children’s Literature and Culture* (Routledge, 2007). He chaired the Executive Committee of the International Comic Arts Forum (ICAF), the leading comics studies conference in the US, from 2011 to 2017. In 2014 he assumed the directorship of the University of Washington’s Disability Studies Program. His research interests include Death and Dying, Disability Studies, Film Studies, Critical Animal Studies and Comics Studies. His current book projects include *Resurrection: Comics in Post-Soviet Russia* and *Beautiful Monsters: Disability in Alternative Comics*.