

Veil

SURG | Arts, Humanities, and Performance (AHP) | *Tags: Creative Output; Literary/Compositional Analysis, non-English Language Proficiency*

*This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal's structure and content.*



Proposal Strengths	Areas for Improvement
The gap in knowledge and justification for the creative medium are clearly stated.	When you are proposing a creative output, it is important to clearly articulate your intended audience.
The scope of the proposal stays narrowed to what will be accomplished during the 8-week project.	Whether broadly early in the proposal or more detailed at the end of the background section, the inclusion of an explicit research question (ending with a question mark) or statement of objectives would strengthen the proposal.
The background not only clearly articulates what other work has or has not been done in this area, but also justifies WHY it needs to be done.	



Other Key Features to Take Note Of
If a language other than English is required for your project, you must address your language proficiency. Translators are acceptable and can/should be included in your budget/proof of contact.
Every project that involves the methodology of literature review should have a reading list of the selected readings in the appendix. This list can be organized as this author did, chronologically, or it can be organized thematically, categorically, or in another way that helps a reader understand the project. These reading lists can also be annotated in a way that helps a reader understand what you plan to get out of each reading or subset of readings.

This summer, I hope to undertake the drafting and revision of a first person, realistic fiction novella, tentatively titled *Veil*, that centers around the homosocial and homoerotic relationship of two women in 1960s Soviet Russia. This creative project requires research into the treatment of same-sex desire between women in Soviet film and literature as well as the historical and socioeconomic context that shaped such representation (or lack thereof). Though my prose will be true to the time period, it will be lyrical in style, drawing on the poetic work of renowned Russian modernist poets Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Sofya Parnok. Censorship and other explicitly homophobic statutes perpetuated by the Russian government has forced a gap in queer historical literature or a reducing of it into mere subtext, however my novella will interrogate how a queer relationship could exist between two women in this time despite the institutionalized invisibility of lesbians and bisexual women in the historical and literary canon of Russia. My story will not ignore the social pressures that forced women to stay closeted, but it will also not be a narrative that hinges around shame or persecution of same-sex desire. Instead, in an attempt to subvert the stereotypical structure with which queer narratives are approached in media, *Veil* will follow the lives of two women characters that, amongst other things, simply *happen* to be lesbians. In other words, my novella will make for healthy LGBT representation without making the characters' sexuality the main narrative conflict.

Homosexuality was criminalized in Russia until 1993, and considered to be a mental illness until 1999.¹ If these facts are not disturbing enough, the marginalization of LGBT individuals continues to this day not only through the perpetuation of stereotypes and hate crimes² but through the Russian federal law officially described as "for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values," known colloquially as the "gay propaganda law."³ This law was passed unanimously in the Russian DUMA and enacted in 2013, allowing for the censorship of any and all LGBT-related and adjacent content, both in media and literature. The result of this is not silencing, but complete erasure of LGBT voices and individuals from the history and literary canon of Russia. Though my project cannot hope to challenge the controls instituted by the Russian government or change history, what it can do is create a much needed narrative space where queer characters not only exist in Russia, but operate in very similar ways as any other literary character would, that is, in a non-exploitative facet. Up to this point, queer narratives in Russia *do* exist, but those that do only engage same-sex desire between men, and often center around prison camps or prioritize the records of authorities rather than lived queer experiences.⁴ It is important to note that my novella will be treating same-sex desire between women specifically, of which there has been a "notable absence in both queer and Russian studies...namely that of the lives of women involved in same-sex relations in Soviet Russia (1917-1989)...lesbian lives even more so, have been notable by their absence and invisibility."⁴ Further, my writing will not center around the persecution of lesbian/bisexual women but rather provide a narrative representation of the lives of these women day to day and how the culture surrounding them shaped their relationship. Gender and sexuality scholar Laurie Essig notes in her book "Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other" that in her fifteen years of research within the country, she "was told that lesbians did not exist in Russia (*ne sushchestvuyet*)."⁵ Representation is essential to the creation of understanding and open-mindedness, and fiction has always been the medium that cultivates these important virtues. The Journal of European Psychology and The New School for Social Research identify the reading of fiction as positively correlated with affective empathy and advanced theory of mind^{6,7} while researchers at Washington and Lee University go so far as to say that fiction is experimentally linked with prosocial behavior.⁸ As the goal of my project is none other than the

Identifies gap in knowledge.

The focus of the project is clear within the first paragraph.

The inclusion of an explicit research question or statement of objectives (rather than being embedded) would strengthen the research aims.

Background draws on work from other relevant fields with clear logic flow.

Justifies focus and subjects of the novella.

Identifies gap in knowledge.

It is important to clarify the intended audience to help contextualize the research and why it is needed.

identification of the LGBT experience in Russia and, it only makes sense for me to utilize the creative medium to create a piece of art that will attempt to bring the stories of lesbian and bisexual Russian women out of the woodwork.

The first step I will take to actualize this project is to familiarize myself with the albeit limited breadth of existing queer narratives that are based in the Russian Federation and/or the former Soviet Union). My fluency in the Russian language will allow me to read and engage with my source texts and films in the original, allowing for the comprehension of peculiarities in jargon and literary form. This will be particularly helpful in the identification of subtextual homoeroticism in works from the era of censorship, when explicit references to same-sex desire could be potentially dangerous to the author. Because of the long history of censorship of literature in Russia, I will be dealing with a narrow collection of narratives across roughly a century of literary and film history, and as such, have separated the texts I hope to interrogate into three sections: Historical References (Appendix A), Literature and Poetry (Appendix B), and Films (Appendix C). The first subcategory will provide me with important information about the historical context in which my novella will be set. In the second subcategory, I will be searching for and noting down the language and literary devices with which queerness is treated within these implicitly homoerotic literary texts. The last group of films will provide me with a framework and narrative atmosphere of lesbian stories during the time period I am writing in, and, through the documentary films, an idea of the lived experience of queer women in Russia. Using this information, I will begin outlining the plot points and sources of conflict that face my two main characters, differentiating between interpersonal and broader societal and/or economic conflicts. Next, I will write two-page biographies for each of my characters in order to flesh them out as three-dimensional within their setting. After this, I will draft the novella chapter by chapter, moving chronologically, as this is the process that keeps me the most organized. Finally, I will revise my chapters as I go, paying particular attention to the way extended metaphor figures into the theme of identity within *Veil*, and how the voice of the narrator molds this theme.

This project requires that I write a historically accurate novella of realistic fiction that spans the mid to late 1960s of Soviet Russia, prioritizing the experience of same-sex desire between my two main characters, the narrator and the subject of her desire, Olesya. I have mentioned above that I am a native Russian speaker. My status as a joint Radio/TV/Film and English Literature major has allowed me to take such courses as Film and Gender, which provided me with an analytical process with which to approach storytelling relating to marginalized groups in an intersectional, non-stereotypical manner, Foundations of Screenwriting and Topics in Media Writing, which trained me in how to outline, construct character relationship arcs in individual scenes as well as in overarching plot developments, and sustain narrative verisimilitude. My work in Reading and Writing Poetry taught me how to be sensitive to subverted metaphor and imagery, as well as how to be attentive to consistency in writing style. Finally, the class that has most prepared me for the prose writing I plan to undertake in this project is the English department's Reading and Writing Fiction class, which provided me with skills such as how to utilize setting to narrative effect, develop and establish characters early in a text, and engage sensory detail for greater stylistic complexity.

This project is not only personal to me as a queer Russian, but will also aid me in the expansion of my professional portfolio, which is essential for honing my skills as an author and for preparation to apply for graduate programs in creative writing.

★
Methods are defined and explicitly justified in terms of how each step helps to answer the research questions.

★
Researcher offers details on how these close readings will inform their writing process.

★
Researcher lists preparation using relevant courses and previous experiences. They connect it back to their personal goals.

★
Justifies creative medium of project.

★
Gives overview of literary methods with illustrative examples at what the researcher will look for in the close readings.

Notes

¹ “The Facts on LGBT Rights in Russia,” *The Council for Global Equality*.

² Daria Litvinova, “LGBT hate crimes double in Russia after ban on ‘gay propaganda,’” *Reuters*, Last modified Nov 21, 2017

³ Alexander Kondakov, “Hate Crimes Against LGBT People in Russia: The Current State of Affairs and Prospects for Further Research.” *CREECA*, Last modified Mar 1, 2018

⁴ Francesca Stella, “Lesbian Lives and Real Existing Socialism in Late Soviet Russia.” *Queer Presences and Absences* (2013): 50-69.

⁵ Laurie Essig, “Introduction,” *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other* (1999): 1-

5.⁶ John Stansfield, Louise Bunce, “The Relationship Between Empathy and Reading Fiction: Separate Roles for Cognitive and Affective Components.” *Journal of European Psychology Students* no. 5(3) (2014): 9-18.

⁷ David Comer Kidd, Emanuele Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind.” *Science*. Vol. 342, Issue 6156 (Oct 2013): 377-388.

⁸ Dan Johnson, Grace Cushman, Lauren Borden, Madison McCune, “Potentiating empathic growth: Generating imagery while reading fiction increases empathy and prosocial behavior.” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*. Vol. 7, Issue 3.

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- Litvinova, Daria. "LGBT hate crimes double in Russia after ban on 'gay propaganda,'" *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-lgbt-crime/lgbt-hate-crimes-double-in-russia-after-ban-on-gay-propaganda-idUSKBN1DL2FM>. Accessed 14 March 2019.
- Stansfield, John and Bunce, Louise. "The Relationship Between Empathy and Reading Fiction: Separate Roles for Cognitive and Affective Components." *Journal of European Psychology Students* no. 5(3) (2014): 9-18.
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Appendix A Historical References

- “Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia” by Dan Healey
“Out of the blue : Russia's hidden gay literature : an anthology” by Kevin Moss
“Sophia Parnok: The Life and Work of Russia's Sappho (The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature Series)” by Diana L. Burgin
“The Soviet intelligentsia: An essay on the social structure and roles of Soviet intellectuals during the 1960s” by L. G. Churchward
“Soviet people with female bodies: performing beauty and maternity in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930-1960s” by Y. Gradszkova
“The art of dressing: body, gender, and discourse on fashion in Soviet Russia in the 1950s and 1960s” by O. Gurova

Appendix B Literature and

Poetry Wings by Mikhail

Kuzmin

Russian Beauty by Viktor

Erofeev Roses of Pieria by

Sophia Parnok Podruga by

Marina Tsvetaeva Requiem by

Anna Akhmatova

The Gentle Aggression of the Spiderweb by Evgenia Debryanskaya

Appendix C Documentary and Narrative Film

Another Way (1982) director Károly

Makk

To My Women Friends (1993) dir. Natalia

Sharandak Olya's Love (2014) dir. Kirill Sakharnov

Children 404 (2014) dir. Askold Kurov

Hunted: The War Against Gays in Russia (2014) dir. Ben Steele