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| Serapion Brothers |
| Серапионовы братья |
| The Serapion Brothers were a collective of writers who formed a group in Petrograd in 1921 under the leadership of Evgeny Zamyatin and Viktor Shklovsky. The group was named after Serapion — a hermit who believed highly in creativity — from E. T. A. Hoffmann’s collection of stories *The Serapion Brethren* (1819-1821). The group was united by their belief in freedom of creativity and the rejection of ideologically-controlled literature, rather than through a devotion to a singular vision or artistic style; their writing differed widely from each other’s.  The emergence of the Serapion Brothers was enabled by the more liberal atmosphere of the Soviet Union’s New Economic Policy period (NEP, 1921-1928). The group had their first meeting on 1 February 1921 at the House of Arts in Petrograd; the Serapions were united by their location as much as by their artistic inclinations. The original group included Nikolai Tikhonov, Veniamin Kaverin, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Victor Shklovsky, Vsevolod Ivanov, Elizaveta Polonskaya, Ilya Gruzdev, Mikhail Slonimsky, Lev Lunts, Vladimir Pozner, Nikolay Nikitin, and Konstantin Fedin. |
| The Serapion Brothers were a collective of writers who formed a group in Petrograd in 1921 under the leadership of Evgeny Zamyatin and Viktor Shklovsky. The group was named after Serapion — a hermit who believed highly in creativity — from E. T. A. Hoffmann’s collection of stories *The Serapion Brethren* (1819-1821). The group was united by their belief in freedom of creativity and the rejection of ideologically-controlled literature, rather than through a devotion to a singular vision or artistic style; their writing differed widely from each other’s.  File: Serapion\_Brothers\_Original\_Group.jpg  Figure 1: The original group of the Serapion Brothers. Image URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail\_Slonimsky  The emergence of the Serapion Brothers was enabled by the more liberal atmosphere of the Soviet Union’s New Economic Policy period (NEP, 1921-1928). The group had their first meeting on 1 February 1921 at the House of Arts in Petrograd; the Serapions were united by their location as much as by their artistic inclinations. The original group included Nikolai Tikhonov, Veniamin Kaverin, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Victor Shklovsky, Vsevolod Ivanov, Elizaveta Polonskaya, Ilya Gruzdev, Mikhail Slonimsky, Lev Lunts, Vladimir Pozner, Nikolay Nikitin, and Konstantin Fedin. Their artistic endeavours were offered some protection and patronage by Maxim Gorky and Shklovsky. The group stood for the absolute freedom of art from politics. In one of the many manifestos produced by the group, Lunts defines the Serapions’ goals in the following manner:  With whom do we stand, Serapion Brothers?  We are with the Hermit Serapion. We believe that literary chimeras are a special reality, and we will have none of utilitarianism. We do not want to write propaganda. Art is real, like life itself. And like life itself it has neither goal nor meaning; it exists because it cannot help existing.[[1]](#footnote-1)  Despite their staunch rejection of politics within literature, most of the members wrote in one way or another about the revolution and were responsible for disseminating this theme across the literary field. For this reason, they were tolerated by the otherwise controlling authorities as ‘fellow-travellers,’ a term that designated writers who supported the Communist cause but did not belong to the Party. The Serapions published their first anthology in 1922.  Throughout their existence, the group rejected any official union, suggesting that because they were all born from different fathers, they therefore did not belong together. They were only united by their belief in the freedom of literature and art. Because of this lack of formal structure, the group gradually dissipated; its patrons Shklovsky and Gorky emigrated as early as 1921, and Lunts, the author of the above quote, moved in 1923. Other writers moved to Moscow, and the group lost its velocity. Although they were initially tolerated as ‘fellow-travellers,’ they were soon accused of being anti-revolutionary and promoting the Western bourgeois idea of ‘art for art’s sake.’ The group never formally disbanded, but slowly petered out in the mid 1920s as writing conditions became further restricted. Selected Works by The Serapion Brothers (written and/or published during their period together):Konstantin Fedin: ‘The Orchard’ [‘Sad’], ‘Stillness’ [‘Tishina’], ‘The Peasants’ [‘Muzhiki’] (1920-1924) Veniamin Kaverin: *The End of a Gang* [*Konets khazy*] (1926) Lev Luntz: *The Outlaw* [*Vne zakona*] (1921) Nikolai Nikitin: ‘Night’ [‘Noch’], ‘Fort Vomit,’ ‘Pella’ (1921-1923) Elizaveta Polonskaya: *Signs* [*Znamenya*] (1921)  *Under a Stone Rain* [*Pod kammenym dozhdyom*] (1923) Mikhail Slonimsky: *The Sixth Fusiliers* [*Shestoy strelkovy*] (1922) Nikolai Tikhonov: *The Horde* [*Orda*] (1922) Vsevalod Ivanov: *Partisans* [*Partizany*] (1921)  *Armored Train No. 14-69* [*Bronepoezd No. 14-69*] (1922)   Zamyatin, Evgeny: *We* [*My*] (composed 1921-1922) Zoshchenko, Mikhail: *The Tales by Nazar Ilich Sinebryukhov* (1922) Note on References and Further Reading: There are few scholarly books dedicated to the group. However, it is possible to find chapters on the subject in most major works on Russian literature of the twentieth century. |
| Further reading: (Davis)  (Hickey)  (Kern and Collins)  (Oulanoff)  (Slonim) |

1. ‘Serapionovy bratia o sebe’ [‘The Serapion Brothers About Themselves’]. *Literaturnye Zapiski* 3 (1 August 1922): 25-31. The translation here is from Gleb Struve, *Russian Literature Under Lenin and Stalin*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1971. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)