

MAN, WOMAN, OTHER: DISRUPTING GENDER HIERARCHIES IN DIGITAL STORYTELLING

The illustrations you can see on display in case 1 were developed as a part of an ongoing impact project 'Man, Woman, Other' at the University of St Andrews. This collaborative project brings together academics, storytellers, illustrators, LGBTQI educators, and computer game developers, to explore the potential of digital storytelling for disrupting gender hierarchies. The planned outcome of the project is a new adaptation of Aleksandrov's biography with digitally augmented illustrations.

Digital augmentation creatively disrupts the traditional hierarchy of gender roles: it allows the reader to switch between the character's appearance as man, woman, or other, simply by sweeping a finger across their smartphone's screen while it is aimed at one of the book's pages. The book will be linked to a website hosting actual military and medical records that documented Aleksandrov's life. Underpinned by latest research on Aleksandrov's biographical writings, this project reframes this source material for contemporary audiences, popularising the idea of historical plurality of gender identities.

Main areas of impact for this project are public understanding, tolerance and social cohesion, creative industries and culture. This project takes a text from a particular culture and historical epoch and, through the medium of digital storytelling, makes it accessible to a wider international audience. Moreover, it aims to create, as its final product, a marketable English-language edition which will be picked up by a leading UK publisher.

In Russia, Aleksandrov's face graces commemorative coins, his writings are integrated into the literary curriculum, and there are two state museums dedicated to his life. There are several adaptations Aleksandrov's texts, which have, without exception, downplayed the ambiguity of his gender presentation. This project will overturn this trend and change the perception of Russian history of gender for the general public, benefitting LGBTQ+ communities worldwide. Publication and dissemination of historical materials leads to an increased public interest and enthusiasm to pick up such stories for popular entertainment, which in turn promotes tolerance and social cohesion: the diaries of Anne Lister, recently adapted for a BBC/HBO drama series *Gentleman Jack* (2019) are a good example of such 'academic' to 'public' transition. This project aims to bring Aleksandrov's story to a similarly wide audience.

Main Collaborators:

PI Dr Margarita Vaysman, Senior Lecturer, University of St Andrews

Storyboarding: Svetlana Shteba, an award-winning scriptwriter and storyteller, working in film, tv and performance art

Illustrations: Sainte Maria, an artist and illustrator, specialising in digitally augmented illustration for creative, educational, and commercial projects