



Revolutionary Experiments: The Quest for Immortality in Bolshevik Science and Fiction

Nikolai Kremensov

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Who are we? Where did we come from and where are we going? What is the meaning of life and death? Can we abolish death and live forever? These "big" questions of human nature and human destiny have boggled humanity's best minds for centuries. But they assumed a particular urgency and saliency in 1920s Russia, just as the country was emerging from nearly a decade of continuous warfare, political turmoil, persistent famine, and deadly epidemics, generating an enormous variety of fantastic social, scientific, and literary experiments that sought to answer these "perpetual" existential questions. This book investigates the interplay between actual (scientific) and fictional (literary) experiments that manipulated sex gonads in animals and humans, searched for "rays of life" froze and thawed butterflies and bats, kept alive severed dog heads, and produced various tissue extracts (hormones), all fostering a powerful image of "science that conquers death."

Revolutionary Experiments explores the intersection between social and scientific revolutions, documenting the rapid growth of science's funding, institutions, personnel, public resonance, and cultural authority in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. It examines why and how biomedical sciences came to occupy such a prominent place in the stories of numerous litterateurs and in the culture and society of post-revolutionary Russia more generally. Nikolai Kremmentsov argues that the collective, though not necessarily coordinated, efforts of scientists, their Bolshevik patrons, and their literary fans/critics effectively transformed specialized knowledge generated by experimental biomedical research into an influential cultural resource that facilitated the establishment of large specialized institutions, inspired numerous science-fiction stories, displaced religious beliefs, and gave the millennia-old dream of immortality new forms and new meanings in Bolshevik Russia.

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