V91.0830

Sex and Gender in Russian Culture

T-Th 1:20-2:35 Prof. Eliot Borenstein

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 In this course, we will investigate the categories of sexuality and gender in Russian culture. By “sexuality” I do not mean specific sexual practices, but rather the system that was developed for discussing (and regimenting) sexual expression. “Gender” is used not as a synonym for biological sex, but as a socially constructed category for interpreting biological sexual difference. Our focus on sexuality and gender will cause us to examine the concepts of masculinity and femininity in Russian culture, as well as the changing structure of the family in Russian life and art. Other recurring themes include homoeroticism and the connections between political and sexual rebellion.

 Russia provides a unique opportunity to examine such issues: not only does Russia straddle East and West both geographically and culturally, but Russia has also been the object of numerous conflicting stereotypes, both self-selected and externally imposed. Russia is alternately viewed as a matriarchal society composed of strong women and “superfluous” men or a stubbornly partiarchal order in which women’s subservient position is masked by rhetoric and chivalry. Similarly, Russia has been at times perceived by foreigners as the land of libertinism and free love (particularly in the 18th Century and the 1920s), and yet the notorious declaration of the perestroika era that “we have no sex” points to a long history of asceticism.

 Finally, the experience of Russia in the twentieth century can be viewed as the failed attempt to put radical theory into everyday practice, a grand scheme of social engineering that had the family unit as one of its primary subjects. The result is the common perception that Russia lived through “feminism” with disastrous consequences.

 Materials. Though most of our primary readings will be taken from literature, this is not a course on literature alone. Two films will be screened in their entirety, and excerpts from others will be shown in class during lectures. In addition, the relevant art and architecture will be included as slides during class. Finally, the later lectures will draw heavily on the Russian/Soviet mass media, while our discussion of the Silver Age will entail an overview of turn-of-the-century Russian religious philosophy (Fyodorov, Solovyov, Rozanov, and Berdyaev).

 Language: No knowledge of the Russian language is expected, as all works will be discussed in English. If you would prefer to do the readings in Russian, you should feel free to do so, but I will teach on the assumption that most people are reading translations. If you wish to do your writing assignments in Russian you may do so, but only if you type. I will not accept handwritten assignments under any circumstances.

 Attendance. Regular attendance is mandatory, as attendance and class participation figure heavily in the determination of your final grade. While you are expected to keep up with the daily reading assignments, much of the information for which you will responsible will come from lectures and discussions.

 Class participation. Most class periods will be a mix of lecture and discussion; only occasionally will I spend the entire class giving a lecture. It is essential that you keep up with the reading assignments and come to class prepared either to make observations or ask questions. Everyone is encouraged to participate in discussion, which will be facilitated by questions distributed in advance over electronic mail, and by the response papers (see below).

 The Internet. If you do not already have an e-mail account, you must apply for one immediately. Once you have an account, please send a message to either of the two versions of my Internet address listed above. The message can be blank; I only need it in order to get your e-mail access in a convenient format. Once I have received everyone’s e-mail address, a class listserv will be established to facilitate communication. I will be using e-mail occasionally to make announcements to the class, distribute class materials (including discussion questions), and share any relevant new information I download from the net.

 Bed and Sofa. This 1927 silent movie by Avram Room and Viktor Shkolvsky will be screened in class toward the end of the semester. Coincidentally, there is a new musical version of this story being staged in New York in February. Also called Bed and Sofa, this play (Book by Laurence Klavan; music by Polly Pen; Directed by Andre Ernotte) is running at the Vineyard Theater (353-3874) at 108 E. 15th St. through February 18. Showtime is at 8:00 Tuesday through Friday, at 6:00 and 9:00 on Saturdays, and at 3:00 on Sundays. Tickets are $15 before February 1, whereupon they will cost $20. If people are interested, we can organize a class excursion to see this play, in which case NYU will help cover the costs, reducing the ticket prices to $5 and $10. The play could also serve as the subject for a response paper or longer paper (see below).

 Writing AssignmentsThere will be three short response papers, a mid-semester paper (6-8 pages), and a final paper (10-12).

 The response papers should be no longer than two pages, and they can be about any of the works we are reading. These papers are a tool to help you think about an aspect of the text that interests you, and any ideas you generate in the course of these assignments would be welcome contributions to class discussion. You must turn in the response paper by the beginning of the last class during which the text (or film) is being discussed. That is, if you want to write a response to What is to Be Done?, you must turn this paper in no later than February 27. If we are only spending one class period on the work, then you must turn in the response paper at the beginning of that class. No late response papers will be accepted under any circumstances.

 You may not wait until April to turn in three response papers. The semester has been divided into three parts, and you must write one response paper by each of these three deadlines. That is, your first response paper must be turned in no later than February 27, your second is due no later than April 4, and no response papers will be accepted after April 25. Though may not wait to do all the response papers until the end of the course, if you would rather do your response papers earlier (turning two response papers during the first or second segments of the course), you are free to do so.

 The topics of your mid-semester paper and final paper are yours to choose, but you must come talk to me about them in advance. It is hoped that the short response papers will lead you toward topics for your longer papers. Both your mid-semester and your final papers can be based on response papers, as long as you are not tapping the same response paper for both longer works.

 Those who would prefer to work in depth on one particular topic may write one long paper (16-20 pages) as opposed to the mid-semester and final papers. If you choose to exercise this option, you must clear your topic with me in advance, and must commit to writing a long paper by February 22. After this date, you will not have the option of writing the long paper.

 The mid-semester paper is due on March 7, and the final must be turned on May 2.

 I welcome full or partial drafts of any of these writing assignment. Drafts of the short papers must be shown to me no later than one week before the due date; drafts of the long papers must be submitted no later than two weeks before the due date.

 Final Grade. Your final grade will be determined according to the following formula:

 Class Participation: 10% Mid-semester paper: 30%

 Response papers: 20% Final paper: 40%

 Texts: The following required works can be purchased at the NYU Book Center:

 Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. What is to Be Done?

 Gogol, Nikolai. The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol, Vol. II.

 Pavlova, Karolina. A Double Life.

 Tolstoi, Lev. The Kreutzer Sonata.

 Turgenev, Ivan. On the Eve.

 Recommended:

 Thompson, John. Russia and the Soviet Union.

 In addition, some of the required reading will be made available as photocopies. Assorted poems, folk-tales, and saints’ lives will be distributed in class.

 I have assembled a Class Reader which is to be purchased at Unique Copy Center (252 E. Greene; phone: 420-9198). This Reader includes timelines of Russian history, information about several of the authors we are reading, and the required texts. You should purchase this reader immediately.

 There are two versions of the Reader, one containing English translations of the texts, the other containing the Russian originals. Be sure to specify which version you wish to purchase.

 The first three parts of the Reader are identical in both the English and the Russian versions:

 Page

Part I: Historical Background

“Russian and Soviet History: A Chronology” 1

“Women, Sexuality and the Family: A Timeline” 13

“Russian Family Law” 27

Part II: Author’s Biographies

Isaak Emanuilovich Babel 29

Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky 33

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol 35

Yuri Karlovich Olesha 37

Karolina Karlovna Pavlova 39

Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev 41

Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy 43

Part III: Writing and Stylistics

“Advice for Student Writers” 47

“Citation” 51

“Russian and English False Cognates” 53

 The English version of the Reader contains the following texts:

Part IV: Texts

Aleksandr Blok, The Puppet Show. 55

Maxim Gorky, “Twenty Six Men and a Girl: A Poem.” 63

Isaak Babel, “My First Goose”, “Sashka Christ”, “The Life Story of 73

 Pavlichenko, Matvey Rodionych”, “Salt”.

Victoria E. Bonnell. “The Representation of Women in Early Soviet 85

 Political Art.”

Aleksandra Kollontai. “Three Generations.” 107

Panteleimon Romanof. “Without Cherry Blossom.” 123

Fyodor Gladkov. Cement. 133

Yury Olesha. A Stern Young Man: A Play for the Cinema. 147

Natalya Baranskaya. “A Week Like Any Other.” 171

Tatyana Tolstaya. “The Poet and the Muse.” 203

 The Russian version of the Reader contains the follwing texts:

Part IV: Texts

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 ÅÎÓÍ, «Å‡Î‡„‡Ì˜ËÍ». 55

å‡ÍÒËÏ ÉÓ¸ÍËÈ. «Ñ‚‡‰ˆ‡Ú¸ ¯ÂÒÚ¸ Ë Ó‰Ì‡». 63

àÒ‡‡Í Å‡·ÂÎ¸. «åÓÈ ÔÂ‚˚È „ÛÒ¸», «ë‡¯Í‡ ïËÒÚÓÒ», 73

 «ÜËÁÌÂÓÔËÒ‡ÌËÂ è‡‚ÎË˜ÂÌÍË, å‡Ú‚Âﬂ êÓ‰ËÓÌ˚˜‡», «ëÓÎ¸».

Victoria E. Bonnell. “The Representation of Women in Early Soviet 83

 Political Art.”

Aleksandra Kollontai. “Three Generations.”

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Fyodor Gladkov. Cement.

 153

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 Å‡‡ÌÒÍ‡ﬂ. «çÂ‰ÂÎﬂ Í‡Í ÌÂ‰ÂÎﬂ». 167

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 íÓÎÒÚ‡ﬂ. «èÓ˝Ú Ë ÏÛÁ‡». 197

 Note that the pagination of the Russian and English versions do not always coincide. When they vary, the Russian page numbers are noted in the schedule by the letter R in brackets: [R: 175-193].

January 23 (T) Introduction

January 25 (Th) Russian Folkways

 t For Today:

 JGet e-mail account

 JSend me an e-mail message

 JSelected folktales

January 30 (T) Medieval Sexuality

 t For Today:

 JSelected texts

February 1 (Th) Nikolai Gogol and Male Anxiety (1)

 t For Today:

 J”Viy” (Gogol 132-168)

 J Dead Souls (1-page excerpt)

 JReader 35-36

February 6 (T) Nikolai Gogol and Male Anxiety (2)

 t For Today:

 J”Taras Bulba” (Gogol 22-131)

February 8 (Th) Ivan Turgenev and the

 “Strong Russian Woman” (1)

 t For Today:

 J On the Eve (Chapters 1-16)

 JReader 41-42

February 13 (T) Ivan Turgenev and the

 “Strong Russian Woman” (2)

 t For Today:

 J On the Eve (finish)

February 1 5 (Th) The Corset

 t For Today:

 JPavlova, A Double Life

 JReader 39-40

February 20 (T) Utopian Housekeeping (1)

 JChernyshevsky, What is to Be

 Done? (Prefaces, Chapters. 1-2)

 JReader 33-34

February 22 (Th) Utopian Housekeeping (2)

 t For Today:

 JChernyshevsky, What is to Be

 Done? (Chapter 3)

 Deadline for choosing to do the

 longer paper

February 27 (T) Utopian Housekeeping (3)

 t For Today:

 JChernyshevsky, What is to Be

 Done? (finish)

 Final Deadline for

 First Response Paper

February 29 (Th) The Women’s Movement

 in Russia

March 5 (T) Buried in the Marriage Plot

 t For Today:

 JTolstoi, The Kreutzer Sonata

 JReader 43-46

March 7 (Th) Sex and the Silver Age: Decadence

 t For Today:

 JAssorted Symbolist Poetry

 MID-SEMESTER PAPER DUE

March 12 (T) SPRING BREAK

March 14 (Th) SPRING BREAK

March 19 (T) Sex and the Silver Age:

 the Eternal Feminine

 t For Today:

 JAssorted Symbolist Poetry

 JBlok, The Puppet Show (Reader 55-62)

March 21 (Th) Squaring the Love Triangle

 t For Today:

 JGorky, “Twenty Six Men and a

 Girl” (Reader 63-72)

March 26 (T) The New Soviet Man

 (and Woman)

 JBonnell, “ The Representation of

 Women in Early Soviet

 Political Art” (Reader 85-

 106; [R: 83-104])

March 28 (Th) The Odd Man Out

 JBabel, “My First Goose”, “Sashka Christ”, “The Life Story of

 Pavlichenko, Matvey Rodionych”, “Salt” (Reader 73-84 [R73-82])

 JReader 29-32

April 2 (T) “Make Way for Winged Eros”

 t For Today:

 JKollontai, “Three Generations” (Reader 107-122 [R:105-120])

 JRomanov, “Without Cherry

 Blossom” (Reader 123-132)

April 4 (Th) Soviet Love Triangles (1)

 t For Today:

 J Film: Bed and Sofa

 Final Deadline for

 Second Response Paper

April 9 (T) ”Boy Meets Tractor”: Socialist Sublimation

 t For Today:

 JGladkov, Cement (Reader 133- 146 [R: 153-166])

April 11 (Th) Soviet Love Triangles (2):

 Komsomol Boys

 t For Today:

 JOlesha, A Strict Youth (Reader

 147-170 [R: 129-152])

 JReader 37-38

April 16 (T) The New Soviet Woman:

 The Second Shift

 t For Today:

 JBaranskaia, “A Week Like Any

 Other” (Reader 171-202 [R167-196])

April 18 (Th) The Manhunt

 t For Today:

 JTolstaia, “The Poet and the

 Muse” (Reader 203-211

 [R: 197-203])

April 23 (T) The New Soviet Prostitute (1)

 t For Today:

 J Film: Intergirl

April 25(Th) The New Soviet Prostitute(2)

 t For Today:

 J Film: Intergirl (finish)

 Final Deadline for

 Third Response Paper

April 30 (T) Sexual Revolution or Counter-

 Revolution?

 t For Today:

 JTBA

May 2 (Th) Conclusions

 FINAL PAPER DUE

 This text was writen in English.

 This text was unavailable in Russian.

 Most of the Soviet editions of this text are censored, and it is unlikely that this book will be reprinted in the Russian Federation in the foreseeable future. Therefore, we are using the English translation of the unexpurgated version. If you read a Russian version, you will probably miss some important points.

Borenstein Russian and Slavic Studies (NYU) Sex/Gender

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Palatino

Zapf Chancery

Old English Text

Klang MT

CyrillicIISans

Russian Language Office