

**REES 235 / FGSS 234****Fall 2018**

## **QUEER RUSSIA**

Instructor: Roman Utkin

Meetings: T+R, 1:20-2:40

Location: Fisk 413

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### **Course Description**

Russia is accustomed to playing the role of the “evil empire.” The current ongoing war in Ukraine has resurrected the Cold War-era narratives about Russia as a dark, aggressive, and ruthless military power. The notorious legislation of recent years—whose functions range from barring Americans from adopting Russian orphans to criminalizing the so-called “gay propaganda”—have further solidified Russia’s reputation as a country with little regard for human rights. Yet generations of Russian poets, artists, and writers have transformed the country’s systematic oppression and violence into spectacular forms of protest and self-expression. This course focuses on gender and sexuality in exploring an alternative cultural history of Russia, which highlights its queer legacy from the nineteenth century to the present. We will examine poetry, fiction, art, memoirs, plays, films, performances, and discursive texts that showcase uniquely Russian conceptions of marriage, gender relations, gender expression, and sexual identity. Attention will be paid to the ways in which Russian and Western narratives of queerness align and diverge. In English. No knowledge of Russian is required or expected.

### **Requirements**

Attendance and Participation	15%
Short weekly reading responses	15%
Creative Research Presentation	20%
Midterm Essay	20%
Final Paper	30%



### Writing Assignments

In addition to a Midterm Paper (3-5pp.) and a Final Paper (7-10pp.), you will be asked to write short weekly reading responses on Moodle. (We will discuss a possibility of posting interpretative content on social media in lieu of the Moodle forum and thus extend the in-class ideas into the world beyond the classroom.) Evaluation criteria and instructions will be specified in the prompt for each paper.

### Oral Presentations

Active class participation is one way to hone your skills of public speaking, which is one of the objectives of this course. Additionally, you will be asked to develop and present a “creative research” project: you can either craft a conventional academic mini-lecture on a topic of your choice or capture your reflections on a particular topic using art media in any genre. We will hold separate meetings to discuss the details.

## **Course Materials**

### *Required:*

Mikhail Kuzmin, *Wings*, trans. Hugh Aplin (Hesperus, 2007)  
Marina Tsvetaeva, *Letter to the Amazon*, trans. A’Dora Phillips and Gaëlle Cogan (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2016)  
Fyodor Sologub, *The Petty Demon*, trans. S.D. Cioran, ed. Murl Barker (Ardis, 1983)

### *Recommended:*

Alexandra Kollontai, *Love of Worker Bees*, trans. Cathy Porter (Academy Press, 1978)  
Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias*, trans. Thomas Campbell (Penguin, 2017)  
Kevin Moss, *Out of the Blue: Russia’s Hidden Gay Literature* (Gay Sunshine Press, 1997)

\*All other required course materials will be available in the PDF format on Moodle\*

## **Learning Objectives**

Students, who successfully complete this course, will learn:

- To identify and explain main developments in the history of gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, and queer culture in the Russian literary and artistic tradition from the nineteenth century to the present;
- To define such key concepts as gender, sexuality, queer, heteronormativity, homophobia, homonationalism, and intersectionality in relation to Russian material;
- To understand and account for the complexity of factors that shape official and alternative narratives of cultural history, such as context, causality, contingency, authorial perspective and intent, and reliability of sources, especially in the case of Russia;
- To apply gender and sexuality analysis to a variety of texts and media;

## Policy on Attendance

You are allowed up to TWO absences in class, no questions asked. However, please notify me in writing before missing a class meeting. Please choose your absences wisely, keeping in mind that absences due to illness and athletic commitments count. More than the allowed two unexcused absences will impact your final grade. If you have a family emergency or serious illness, please contact your Class Dean immediately.

## Accommodations

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021/022, or can be reached by email ([accessibility@wesleyan.edu](mailto:accessibility@wesleyan.edu)) or phone (860-685-5581).

Moreover, if any assignments conflict with a major religious holiday for your faith, please let me know as soon as possible and we can discuss necessary accommodations.



## Class Schedule

*Note:* The schedule is subject to change. Readings are listed by discussion date; please come prepared. All changes will be posted on Moodle. Film screening times TBA.

### Russia's Gender Trouble: Motherland/Fatherland & Legacies of Homophobia

#### 09.04 Introduction: "Mother Russia" and Its (Naughty) Children

Aleksandr Blok, "The Hawk" (1916); Yevgeny Vuchetich and Nikolai Nikitin, "The Motherland Calls" (1967); Pussy Riot, "Punk Prayer" (2012)

**09.06** *One Day in the Life of*, dir. Alina Rudnitskaia and Olga Privolnova (2014)  
 Brian James Baer, "Now You See It: Gay (In)Visibility and the Performance of Post-Soviet Identity" in *Queer Visibility in Post-Socialist Cultures*, ed. Nárcisz Fejes et al.

**09.11** Dan Healey, "Introduction: 2013 – Russia's Year of Political Homophobia" in his *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*  
Dan Healey will join our class discussion

➤ **09.12** Public Lecture by Dan Healey, "Working on the Past in a Homophobic Present: Do Post-Soviet Queers Need History?" Wednesday, September 12, 4:30 p.m. in Fisk 208. *Please make every effort to attend.*

**09.13** David Tuller, "Public Faces, Private Lives," pp. 258-75 in his *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia* (1996)

### **The Russian Novel as a "Freudian Treasure Chest of Perversions"**

**09.18** **No class.** Please read Fyodor Sologub, *The Petty Demon* (1905; 1913), chapters I-IX

**09.20** Sologub, *The Petty Demon*, chapters X-XVII

**09.25** Sologub, *The Petty Demon*, chapters XVIII-XXXII

### **People of the Moonlight & the Discourse on Homosexuality at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**

**09.27** Mikhail Kuzmin, *Wings* (1906), first half  
 Alexander Ivanov, *Apollo, Hyacinthus and Cypress, Playing Music and Singing* (1834)  
 Recommended Dan Healey, "Depravity's Artel": Traditional Sex between Men and the Emergence of a Homosexual Subculture," pp. 21-49 in his *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (2001)

**10.02** Kuzmin, *Wings*, second half  
 Recommended Evgenii Bershtein, "An Englishman in the Russian Bathhouse: Kuzmin's *Wings* and the Russian Tradition of Homoerotic Writing," pp. 75-87

**10.04** Zinaïda Gippius, Marina Tsvetaeva, Sophia Parnok, selected poems  
 Recommended Diana Lewis Burgin, "Laid Out in Lavender: Perceptions of Lesbian Love in Russian Literature and Criticism of the Silver Age, 1893-1917," pp. 177-203 in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, ed. Costlow and Sandler  
 Dan Healey, "'Our Circle': Sex between Women in Modernizing Russia," pp. 50-73 in his *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*

**10.09** Marina Tsvetaeva, *Letter to the Amazon* (1932)  
**Socialism, Gender, and Sexuality**

**10.11** Alexandra Kollontai, *Love of Worker Bees* (1924) (excerpts)  
*Recommended* Elizabeth A. Wood, "Representations of Sexual and Political Anxieties in Postrevolutionary Russia," pp. 124-136

**10.16** Sergei Tretyakov, *I Want a Baby* (1926)  
*Recommended* Eric Naiman, "Historectomies: On the Metaphysics of Reproduction in an Utopian Age," pp. 255-275

**10.18** *Bed and Sofa*, dir. Abram Room (1927)  
*Recommended* Eliot Borenstein, "Introduction: Brothers and Comrades," in his *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929* (2001)

➤ Midterm Essay DUE Friday, October 19 by 9:00 p.m.

**10.23** *No Class. Fall Break*

**10.25** Harry Whyte, "A Letter to Stalin" (1934)  
*The Night Witch: The Story of Nadia, Soviet Bomber Pilot*. The New York Times Op-Doc  
 Sergei Eisenstein, selection images  
*Recommended* Joan Neuberger, "Strange Circus: Eisenstein's Sex Drawings," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 5-52

### **The Lives of Others in the USSR**

**10.30** Varlam Shalamov, "The Snake Charmer" (1954)  
 Adi Kuntsman, "'With a Shade of Disgust': Affective Politics of Sexuality and Class in Memoirs of the Stalinist Gulag," *Slavic Review*, pp. 308-328

**11.01** Evgeny Kharitonov, "The Oven" (1969)

**11.06** Abram Tertz, "Pkhentz" (1966)  
*Amphibian Man*, dirs. Vladimir Chebotaryov and Gennadi Kazanski (1962)

**11.08** Vasily Aksenov, "Around Dupont" (1995)  
 Nikolai Kolyada, *Slingshot* (1986)

### **Queer Diasporas**

**11.13** *Anatoly*, dir. Yevgeny Fiks (2014)  
 Slava Mogutin, selected texts and projects  
*Recommended* Richard Mole, "Identity, Belonging and Solidarity among Russian-Speaking Queer Migrants in Berlin," *Slavic Review*, pp. 77-98

**11.15** Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias*, selections  
Daria Serenko, “#tikhiipiket”  
Deti-404

**11.20** Dmitri Kuzmin, Friedrich Chernyshov, Lida Yusupova, Ekaterina Simonova, selected poems

**11.22** *No Class. Thanksgiving*

**11.27** Creative Research Presentations

**11.29** Creative Research Presentations

**12.04** Creative Research Presentations. Last Class

- Final Paper DUE Friday, December 14 by 9:00 p.m.