NOTE

ONOLA DERBISHEVA-SUTHERLAND (Christchurch, New Zealand)

THE JOURNAL NOVYI MIR IN 1925-1940
AS AN OBJECT OF GENDER ANALYSIS

This study makes an attempt of looking at the history of the journal Novyi mir from the point of view of gender theory. Undoubtedly, this is a fairly complicated task, primarily because the gender factor has been excluded from the study of the history of literature until the last few decades. Meanwhile, research into the literary process from the gender viewpoint allows us to determine new approaches to the subject under investigation, as well as to actualize new issues in this sphere. We will highlight just some of these. So, for example, we are interested in such aspects as the formation of gender disposition in the field of literature – in other words, the correlation between male and female writers – and the reasons for and the basis of the construction of this phenomenon.

Modern gender systems, including the Russian gender system, are characterized as patriarchal, that is, based on male domination. This is manifested, first and foremost, in the fact that the whole system of social relations and socio-cultural links inculcates in the mind of the people the idea of male superiority being an axiom, with masculinity established as a benchmark. In turn, masculinity in the modern civilization is associated and identified primarily with notions of power, energy and pursuit of superiority.

Thereafter, within the framework of this system, culture itself bears a character of patriarchy and reflects the priority of masculinity. What does the contemporary concept of patriarchal culture involve? We consider the following utterance of a Russian scientist to be of great interest, as it refers directly to Russia and its culture:

Our culture remains patriarchal, while establishing the dominant position of the man, it is distinguished by male dominance. Modelled after a male pattern, it is permeated by sexist stereotypes regarding the woman (who is assigned a secondary role in society, whose rights often remain only declared). . . . Patriarchal culture is an embodiment of male characteristics – cruelty, aggressiveness, ambition, and domi-
...power is considered to be a goal in itself, a means of self-assertion, not of problem solving.1

While by and large we agree with the author, we would like to remark that there was a period in the history of Russia when hypothetically there were some premises for the formation of a more balanced gender system. We are talking about the period of the revolution, under the conditions of which the new authority had to attract as many allies as possible to its side.

This, in our opinion, was the reason for the unprecedented liberalization of laws regarding the equality of rights of men and women. The Bolsheviks declared gender parity and, granting women civil rights and liberties in all entirety, summoned them under their banners.2

However, the character of the revolution itself, as well as the methods and ways of its realization were extremely aggressive, which again was the manifestation of male domination. Because of this, the declared principles of gender parity were realized and women were included in the reformation of society only in some areas of social life and only to a degree.3 As for the strategic directions of state development, these problems were traditionally solved in a male way, with the use of violence and aggression.

Literature is no exception to this, as its strategic importance lies in the fact that it was meant to be one of the main conductors of the communist ideology. The following remark illustrates this:

...the struggle for the ideological commitment of literature was one of the most important tasks of that time, and it was part of the overall strategy of the Party's struggle for the victory of the communist ideology on the whole front of culture construction. The departure

2. That this action was purposeful is confirmed by the fact that by November 16-21, 1918, the TsK RKP(b) [Tsentral’nyi Komitet Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol’shevikov)] called together The First Russian Congress of Female Workers. Lenin gave a speech, which definitely expressed the notion of the importance of the female movement in the revolutionary process, and posed before it the tasks of actively assisting the establishment of the new political regime. See V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 37: 185-87.