

RUSS 220-420

'BAD LOVE' IN RUSSIA



Viktor Vasnetsov. *Sirin and Alkonost, The Birds of Joy and Sorrow*, 1896.

Autumn, 2017

José Alaniz, instructor

TTh 1:30 – 3:20

Love, that mysterious and powerful force, can often turn dark and destructive. It can even come to threaten the body politic. At least, so has Russian culture often viewed “alternative” expressions of love and sexuality. This course examines several examples of “bad love” in Russia (from the Czarist era through the Soviet period and to the present day) for how they reflect and refract the culture’s values, politics and anxieties over time. Among other things, we will learn about Russian Orthodoxy’s views on sex, Soviet attempts to redefine marriage, post-Soviet treatments of homosexuality and the oldest profession throughout all these periods. More broadly, we’ll investigate the creation and enforcement of cultural values, and how “alternative” institutions negotiate always-fraught ideological terrain. We will examine the idea of love in Western culture – what is it? why is it important? what counts as love? – before turning to its critique. For this we will rely on the work of, among others, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Laura Kipnis and Lionel Trilling as we analyze short stories, novels and films. Authors include Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Vladimir Nabokov, Eduard Limonov and Lyudmilla Ulitskaya.

Please note: We will be discussing mature subject matter which some may find disturbing, liberating, offensive, or all of the above.