
Marcelline J. Hutton. *Russian and West European Women, 1860-1939: Dreams, Struggles, and Nightmares*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001. 468p.

TATYANA NOVIKOV
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA—OMAHA

A subject of critical discourse for several decades, women's social history has been of growing interest to scholars, students, and the general public in the West. In Russia, this interest coincided with the period of transition from totalitarianism to democracy. The transformation of national culture is now matched by a surge of studies on history and culture of Russian women, an interest to which the recent release of Marcelline Hutton's *Russian and West European Women* has contributed. Hutton's study has the merit not only of conducting a very serious examination of women's social history in Russia, England, Germany, and France, over almost one hundred years, but also of providing a vivid comparison of their social, educational, economic, and political situations.

In her study, Hutton accomplishes some formidable tasks, exploring her subject in impressive depth and detail. She begins by claiming that her volume will move beyond the existing corpus of work on Russian and West European women to "provide a gender and class analysis within a broad chronological framework" (1). It is an intriguing proposition. To achieve her objective, Hutton presents her readers with a plethora of sources: statistical data, documents, and memoirs, as well as current research and works of fiction, tracing patterns in women's lives and revealing what was unique and what was similar to women of particular classes and countries.

This wide-range study adopts the methodological formula of comparative analysis governing many similar works. In proceeding, however, Hutton rises above her formula to produce a book more sophisticated and more interesting than the reader might expect. As the title implies, the volume demonstrates convincingly that women of different classes and nationalities shared the same dreams, struggles, and nightmares in the areas of education, employment, political involvement, and family life. In adding to our understanding of their problems and sensibilities, Hutton's book contributes in a significant way to generating a composite portrait of the European woman in 1860-1939. This clearly written and solidly researched monograph produces a captivating overall picture of its primary subject shown against a backdrop packed with the political, economic, cultural, and intellectual tenor of the times. The result is the most detailed analysis of women's lives and of various factors that influenced them.

The Introduction is an impeccably precise presentation of the tenets of the book outlining purpose, principles, argument, and the justification for choice of the material to be discussed. Hutton tells us that “central to women’s lives were class, nationality, and religion” (1). Setting the parameters of her position, she provides an overview of the investigation and uses these three categories as points of entry into her analyses.

In her central body of work, Hutton analyzes women’s social, economic, educational, and political situations, covering in twelve chapters the entire chronological range under investigation. She divides this range into three periods: 1860-1914, the 1920s, and the 1930s. Providing a synthesis of women’s status, each chronological period becomes an independent section in the book, an organization that means that Hutton’s study can be examined as a whole or in parts. Hutton structures her exploration of each aspect in women’s lives by issues. For example, her discussion of their lives in society addresses such topics as marital life, birth rates, motherhood, abortion, prostitution, the status of housewife versus career woman, and other social issues. Hutton conducts these discussions in regards to each of the four countries, wonderfully examined against each other. What happens in these groupings is exciting: we see how women coexisted in different cultures and how they lived similar and yet different lives.

Hutton convincingly shows how at different times, gender, class, and nationality defined women’s lives. In the 19th century, class more than nationality shaped women’s existence, whereas nationality became more important after WWI. Hutton sheds important new light on the process of blurring class distinction in the 1920s due to the expansion of white-collar work in the West and new educational opportunities for working-class women in the Soviet Union.

In a work notable for thorough documentation (including valuable notes and appendices), Hutton presents a wealth of information on women’s distribution in the economy. The book, for example, makes a convincing case that employment patterns among women remained stable from 1897 through 1939. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an overwhelming proportion of European and Russian women worked in agriculture, until in the 1930s millions of women were drawn into industry, especially in the Soviet Union. Hutton also demonstrates that Russian and Soviet women’s participation in manufacturing reveals the similarity of pattern. Another enlightening moment comes when she explores the challenges experienced by working European and Russian women. Her careful analysis reveals that women everywhere suffered from low pay, inadequate housing, poor childcare, and sexual harassment.

The amount of scholarship and data Hutton brings to this project becomes apparent in her knowledgeable discussion of women's political activity. She examines party documents, conference speeches made by female delegates, statistical data, biographies, and newspaper materials. A perceptive interpreter of such evidence, Hutton employs it skillfully in her discussions and the reader follows her argumentation with interest, not least because of her lucid and engaging style.

Other enlightening material that Hutton discovers includes her discussion of surrogate prison families in the Soviet Union during Stalin's purges of the 1930s. The book sharply illuminates not just women's support groups in prisons and labor camps, but beyond this, the larger political and moral context against which those female victims of Stalin's terror lived. Hutton provides the reader with an insight into women's educational opportunities. There she asserts that, while "educational policies varied according to class and country" (400), university education was generally the privilege of the middle and upper classes. The section on education in the Soviet Union demonstrates how the Bolsheviks encouraged working and peasant women to pursue higher education, excluding women from the gentry and the bourgeoisie. Hutton brings to light informative material bearing on the subject, such as statistics on female students in universities and on distribution of women in professions.

In this insightful and solid work, Hutton accomplishes all her objectives. None of her readers will come away from this book without having learned a great deal. I intend to send my students of women's studies to this book and I think other students can only benefit from its perusal. With its unusual approach, this volume should be of interest to scholars and must be on the shelves of all libraries where serious research in women's studies is likely to occur. ❁