

Title: The Writer as Prostitute and the Prostitute as Writer in I. Babel's "My First Fee" and V. Erofeev's *Russian Beauty*

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This paper will examine the portrayal of the prostitute in Babel's "My First Fee" (1922 and 1928) and Victor Erofeev's *Russian Beauty* (1990). The protagonist in Babel's story discovers that he, as a writer, is no different from Vera the prostitute. Erofeev places the words of his treatise on the proper direction for Russian literature in the mouth of the prostitute, Irina Tarakanova. The decision to use the prostitute as a metaphor for the writer touches on three important issues. First, it plays on the idea that the Soviet writer as prostitute for government propaganda/values. Second, Russia, as the metaphorical object of the prostitute character, is allowed to speak with a vocabulary unusual for "high literature." Third, the narrator as prostitute adds another dimension to the pornographic promises (not always fulfilled) of these stories by enticing the reader into the inner sanctum of the prostitute's world, endowing the tabooed subject/object with a voice. The paper will be to assess the ways in which the authors' use the prostitute and her work as a metaphor for the writer and the writing process. An examination of the political and social parallels between Babel's 1920s and Erofeev's 1980s and 1990s and why the prostitute emerges in these two volatile periods as an ideal metaphorical object will feature prominently. Also discussed will be the role of "otherness" during these two periods. Additional issues included in the paper will include: the authors' approaches to writing about the physical, particularly the female body; the male gaze and the objectification of the female body; and the ways in which the novels impact a real life understanding of the life of the prostitute.