

news and miscellanea



In Memoriam: Richard Stites (1931–2010)

Richard Stites (2 December 1931–7 March 2010), a pioneer in gender history, took on “unfashionable” themes, researched them diligently, produced imaginative, fascinating monographs, and made his subjects fashionable. He died of cancer in his beloved Helsinki while on research leave, and is buried near the city’s Russian Orthodox Cathedral.

Dressed unconventionally, often in a work shirt, no tie, jeans, and a bandana around his long, thinning hair, Stites was a brilliant maverick in the field of Russian history. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 1968, was about the question of the emancipation of women in nineteenth-century Russia. It was not a topic looked upon with great favor at the time. But he got his Harvard degree, and wrote his *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930*, first published by Princeton University Press in 1978, republished in a slightly updated edition in 1991. It was an innovative work, among the first of a wave of books by Western scholars influenced by second wave feminism, which introduced concepts of gender and women’s agency into the writing of Russian and Soviet history.

Stites’s oeuvre ranged wide within the general area of social history. His extraordinarily long list of influential publications includes scores of articles, at least five edited or co-edited volumes, a major co-authored textbook, *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), and four single-authored books. In addition to *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia*, these include *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Social Experiment in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989; 2nd ed. 1991); *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); and *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (Yale University Press, 2008). *Revolutionary Dreams* won the 1989 Wayne S. Vucinich Prize of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. At his death he was at work on a book that took him into general European history, tentatively titled “The Four Horsemen: Revolution and the Counter-Revolution in Post-Napoleonic Europe,” and on another project on “Hitler’s International Crusade,” about Axis volunteers in the armies invading the Soviet Union in World War II. “His works were one of a kind, outstanding in their writing and in their scholarship,” said Richard S. Wortman, an emeritus professor of Russian history at Columbia University. “He dealt with subjects that other people had not yet gone into” (*New York Times* obituary, 12 March 2010).

Stites mastered not only Russian but several Scandinavian languages. In addition to English, he had a reading and speaking knowledge of nine other languages. Recognized by Georgetown University with a “Career Research Achievement Award from the Georgetown University Graduate School” in 2001 and by Helsinki University with an Honorary Doctorate (he spent most of the past thirty summers there, and longer

times when possible), he wore his honors proudly but never boastfully. He was fun loving, adventurous, with a wicked sense of humor.

An exceptional scholar, Stites was a very special human being as well. In my own experience, when I first began my work on the Russian feminist movement, he was unusually generous in sharing his sources and research.

Richard was married and divorced successively to Dorothy, Tatyana, and Elena Stites. He is survived by four children, Tod, Thomas, Andrei, and Alexandra, and by countless colleagues, students, friends, and admirers. He will be sorely missed.

Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild