

CDIPS Final Project  
Alexandra Tkacheva

## Reading Russophone Women's Poetry through Feminist Lenses

### I. Analysis

- This course is meant to put Russophone women's poetry in dialogue with feminist theories. It adds women's voices to the male-centered Russian literary curriculum and offers instruments for reading poetic texts through feminist lenses — as sites of resistance (deconstruction) and liberation (creativity). I hope to encourage students to experiment with these two epistemic modes throughout the course: to critically evaluate the theoretical works we read, while also drawing new connections and generating meanings.
- I am a PhD student without prior experience of teaching content-based courses, so everything that follows is a product of my wishful thinking. The course is offered at a small liberal arts college with a surprisingly popular Slavic program. It is designed to accommodate a diverse community of students interested in Slavic studies and gender studies. Some of the students are puzzled Russian Majors, who could only name two Russophone women poets when they saw the title of this course. The majority were attracted by the unusual combination of Russophone literature and feminism – they expect to be served blini with peanut butter.
- This is a small class (10-15 students), and most students are BIPOC and have LGBTQIA+ identities. There are a few first-generation college students and non-Native English speakers, as well as students with disabilities, including learning disabilities. All the students speak Russian at least at an intermediate level and can access course readings in the original (with the help of a dictionary). This is important because some of the poetic texts included in the curriculum are not available in English translation (especially those written by lesser-known authors or published within the last decade). The class meets twice a week for 80 minutes. The classroom has large windows, mobile desks for group work, and all the necessary technology for audio and visual support.

### II. Design

*In this course, students will...*

- Learn about the basics of various feminist theories, compare and criticize them.
- Work collaboratively, express and support their opinion, and thoughtfully engage with different perspectives.
- Employ feminist theories to analyze poetic texts and their own lived experiences.
- Reflect on the learning process and take control of it.
- Prepare meaningful questions and lead an engaging discussion on a topic of interest.
- Creatively engage with the material and produce an original adaptation of it.

Objectives	Strategies / Activities	Assessments
Trace the development of Russophone women's poetry in the historical	Students will read poetic texts alongside excerpts from scholarly articles	Every discussion board post is worth 1 point and students are asked to create

<p>context, identify major challenges and breakthroughs</p>	<p>discussing these works and contextualizing them in their historic time.</p> <p>Together, we will create a timeline, including major shifts and puzzling gaps. This can be done gradually, by adding one or two elements every time we meet.</p> <p>Students will post 2-3 reactions/discussion questions on the online discussion board before class.</p>	<p>10 posts to get a full score for this assignment. They are welcome to write more posts and earn extra points.</p>
<p>Learn the basics of various feminist theories, compare and criticize them</p>	<p>Students will contribute to a collaborative glossary of important terms.</p>	<p>There will be short quizzes aimed to check students' understanding of the basics. Those will be pass/fail and can be taken an unlimited number of times.</p>
<p>Employ feminist theories to analyze poetic texts and personal lived experiences</p>	<p>Students will write a "rooting and shifting" journal entry: "My story in relation to the course subject" (Yuval-Davis, 1997) at the beginning of the course.</p> <p>Students will write an exploratory essay in which they will use a critical feminist lens to thoughtfully address (1) a piece of literature, and (2) their own complex intersectional identity. (Adapted from <i>Letting Go of Literary Whiteness</i> by Carlin Borsheim-Black)</p>	<p>The journal entry will not be graded but I will provide feedback on it.</p> <p>For the essay, I will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate and write down my expectations and a rubric. Negotiate it with the students.</li> <li>• Provide a checklist to scaffold this project.</li> <li>• Offer an optional meeting with me and/or a collective brainstorming session.</li> </ul>

<p>Reflect on and take ownership of the learning process</p>	<p>Students will take the “How do I learn better: preferences and challenges?” quiz, an optional “Intelligence Type” test, contribute to the Study Tips Hub, and complete the midterm evaluation. We will also be discussing our reading and writing practices and habits in class.</p>	<p>Those assignments contribute to the participation grade.</p>
<p>Collaborate to facilitate an engaging discussion on the topic on their interest</p>	<p>Students will work in pairs to prepare questions and exercises and lead a 30-minute-long discussion on a topic of their choice.</p>	<p>In addition to my feedback, students will complete self-assessment reflecting on what went well and what they would do differently next time.</p>
<p>Creatively engage with the material and produce an original adaptation of it</p>	<p>Students will work in small groups on a creative project of their choice (a podcast, a website, a collage, a performance, a book cover, a translation, a musical adaptation, etc.) They can also write their own poetry based on the poems that inspired them. Each group will submit a brief project description, explaining their artistic choices and placing their projects within our class discussion.</p>	<p>Students will be asked to grade each other, using and further developing a general rubric. I will provide a template for feedback.</p>
<p>Engage with the community outside the classroom and make a meaningful contribution</p>	<p>Students will work in groups to organize a conversation with a poet, a poetry night, and a park cleaning day (following our discussion of ecofeminism). To make things easier, we can spend 30 minutes every three weeks brainstorming and planning together.</p>	<p>Students will briefly describe their contribution and will be given participation points.</p>

### III. Course Outline

I would suggest treating it as a Lego set where various parts can be moved around, resulting in a new creation. I organized the syllabus chronologically, but it can also be organized thematically or around individual women poets. Each group is different so I would ask students to vote and choose which modules they want to discuss and in what order. It can also be interesting to use different feminist frameworks to interpret the same poem.

I have not included specific poems below, but I would probably not assign more than 5 poems for one class. It seems more important to me that students read thoughtfully, ponder over their initial reactions, and make connections with the theoretical/contextual materials.

Please note that, in this outline, I mention recurrent tasks only once and use technical (impersonal) language. It would be important to address these issues before using this outline in an actual classroom.

Topic	Authors	Theory / Context	Tasks
Introductions	Introductions, syllabus, Study Tips Hub		<p>Write a “rooting and shifting” journal entry: “My story in relation to the course subject” (Yuval-Davis, 1997)</p> <p>Take a brief quiz “How do I learn better: preferences and challenges?” (inspired by B. Rifkin’s talk)</p> <p>Students may take an optional “Intelligence Type” test.</p> <p>Discussion board is open: feel free to post your first response before the next class.</p>
First Women Poets in Russia?	Poets of the eighteenth century: Anna Volkova, Mariia	Wendy Rosslyn, “Making Their Way into Print: Poems by Eighteenth-Century	<p>In class, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start working with the</li> </ul>

	<p>Bolotnikova, Aleksandra Murzina, Ekaterina Urusova, Nadezhda Teplova</p> <p>(From <i>Russian Women Poets of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: A Bilingual Edition</i>, ed. and trans. by Amanda Ewington, 2014)</p>	<p>Russian Women” (2000)</p>	<p>collaborative glossary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start creating a timeline</li> <li>- Discuss our reading practices and the art of asking questions</li> </ul> <p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sign up to lead a discussion</li> </ul>
“Thornless Roses”	<p>Poets of the nineteenth century: Anna Bunina, Evdokiia Rastopchina, Karolina Pavlova, Mitra Lokhvitskaia</p>	<p>Mariia Nesterenko, introduction to <i>Rozy bez shipov: Zhenschiny v literaturnom protsesse Rossii nachala XIX veka</i> (2022)</p>	<p>Fishbowl discussion: inner circle discusses a question, while outer circle focuses on logic and group interaction (from <i>Engaged Teaching</i> by E. Barkley and C. Major 2022)</p>
The Greatest Mystification of Silver Age	<p>Cherubina de Gabriak</p>	<p>Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (1988)</p>	<p>In class, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start planning our community engagement events</li> </ul>
Symbolist Androgyny	<p>Marina Tsvetaeva, Sofia Parnok, Zinaida Gippius (“Zverobog.O polovom voprose”)</p>	<p>Anya M. Kroth, “Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Dichotomous Poetic Vision” (2017)</p> <p>Excerpts from Karina McCorkle’s thesis <i>Those Strange</i></p>	<p>First student-led discussion (30 min)</p>

		<i>Moscow Ladies: Queer Identity in the Poetry of Tsvetaeva and Parnok</i> (2015)	
Futurism	Elena Guro, Nina Khabias	An excerpt from Shelby Wardlaw's thesis <i>Embodied Word, Disembodied Woman</i> (2016)  Artworks by Exter, Popova, Udal'tsova, Roxanova, and other women futurists	In class, I will:  - Articulate and explain my expectations and provide a rubric for the final project  Together, we will:  - Create a checklist for the final project
Emigre Poets and Life-Writing	Nadezhda Teffi, Irina Odoevtseva, Zinaida Gippius (poems accompanied by excerpts from the authors' memoirs)	Lauren Fournier, <i>Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism</i>	
Women's Revolution?	Agniia Barto	Aleksandra Kollontay's writings  Judy Cox, excerpts from <i>The Women's Revolution</i> (2019)  Nadezhda Plungian's <i>Rozhdenie sovetskoi zheshchiny</i> (2022)	
25 years in Gulag	Anna Barkova	Excerpts from the memoirs of women prisoners of Gulag: Evgeniia Ginzburg, Ol'ga Adamova-Sliozberg, Nina Bardina	Final Project Proposal due + sign up for a 15-30 min. optional discussion with me
War and Siege	Anna Akhmatova, Olga Berggol'ts, Natal'ia Krandievskaiia-	Polina Barskova, excerpts from <i>Sed'maia Shcheloch'</i> (2020)	Mid semester evaluation (created and then discussed

	Tolstaia, Iuliia Drunina		together with a CRLT consultant)
Ecofeminism and the Sacred	Elena Shvarts, Ol'ga Sedakova	Stacy Alaimo, <i>Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space</i> (2020)  Stephanie Sandler, "Scared into Selfhood: The Poetry of Inna Lisnianskaia, Elena Shvarts, Ol'ga Sedakova" (2017)	Lecture on the grass followed by a park cleaning
Neo-Avant-Garde	Anna Al'chuk, Nataliia Azarova, Ry Nikonova, Elizaveta Mnatsakanova	Irina Zherebkina, "In Russia a Poet is more than a Poet": Murderous/Murdering Poetical Nonconformism (Anna Alchuk and Political Regimes in Russia) (2010)  Stephanie Sandler, "Visual Poetry After Modernism: Elizaveta Mnatsakanova" (2017)	Creative projects brainstorming session
How Bodies Matter	Nina Iskrenko, Marina Temkina	Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976)  Julia Kristeva, excerpts from <i>Revolution in Poetic Language</i> (1984)	Jigsaw discussion
Post-Soviet Nomads	Polina Barskova, Elena Fanailova, Mariia Stepanova, Linor Goralik	Rosi Braidotti, "Writing as a Nomadic Subject" (2014)	

Queer Poetics	Lolita Agamalova, Oksana Vasiakina, Ekaterina Simonova	Sara Ahmed, “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology” (2006)  Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (1997)  Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, escritora y chicana” (1991)	Conversation with Oksana Vasiakina (or another interested poetka)
Decoloniality	Egana Dzhabbarova, Dinara Rasuleva, Zhanar Sekerbayeva, Zoia Falkova, Ruthie Jenrbekova, Manizha	Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” (2003)  Madina Tlostanova, a chapter from <i>Dekolonial’nost’ bytiia, znaniia, i oshchushcheniia</i> (2020)	Co-teaching with my expert friend
Poetic Posthumanism	Galina Rymbu, Ekaterina Simonova, Nika Skandiaka, Elena Mikhailik	Karen Barad, an introduction to <i>Meeting the universe halfway</i> (2007)  Donna Haraway, excerpts from <i>Staying with the trouble</i> (2016)	
Anti-War Poetry	Dar’ia Serenko, Vera Polozkova, Mariia Stepanova, Vera Pavlova,	Feminist Anti-war Resistance Manifesto (2022)	



	Evgeniia Berkovich, other authors featured in <i>ROAR</i> and <i>Disbelief</i>	Vanya M. Solovey, “Feminism and Aggressive Imperialism: Russian Feminist Politics in Wartime” (2023)  Rada Iveković, “Women, nationalism and war: ‘Make love not war’” (1993)	
Poetry Night			Presentation of creative projects followed by an optional “after-party” where students and guests can share their impressions. Ideally, there will be snacks and games.

#### IV. Development

- Students will be expected to read assigned poetic and theoretical texts before every class. They will use the online discussion board to share their reactions and post their questions.
- If necessary, I will meet with the Instructional Technology Support team to set up an accessible and intuitive course page.
- We will use the same platform (e.g., Canvas) for collaborative projects, such as the glossary and the study tips hub, as well as individual work submission. I will also use this platform to post announcements and provide feedback. I think of this course as discussion-based so I will not spend a lot of time “presenting” content, but when it is necessary (e.g., some biographical or contextual information), I will make sure to incorporate visual and audial aids when relevant.
- Based on my experience, I think that I can rely on the college’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), the Gender Studies Department faculty, and fellow graduate students for support.
- If students or my colleagues find the course content controversial, I will initiate a dialogue where I will articulate my goals for including particular themes or authors, referring to college policies and resources I have from CDIPS. I might invite an external facilitator to this conversation. I will also try to prevent this situation by discussing my syllabus with the

Department chair and sharing it with the students during the first class (they are still free to drop the course then). That being said, I want the students to have many opportunities to provide feedback throughout the course.

## V. Implementation

### *Throughout the course, I will...*

- Repeatedly express my high expectations and assure that all students are capable and can improve with effort; in my feedback I will provide specific actionable steps to work on (Zaretta's Hammond's WISE feedback protocol from *Learning and Teaching While White*).
- Define terms, offer clear rubrics, and scaffold the assignments.
- Share the list of resources of emotional, financial, and academic support available to students on campus.
- Reach out to our disability services office to provide accommodations for the students who need them.
- Share my story and reflect on my identity as a White middle-class immigrant woman, my standpoint, and personal relation to the subject. I will invite students to do the same and encourage them to trust their experiences and rely on their embodied knowledge when processing new information (treat students as co-creators of knowledge).
- Rebrand my office hours: call them happy hours, encourage students to come in small groups, and serve tea, coffee, and sweets (inspired by Sunnie Rucker-Chang's talk).
- Analyze the class materials for gender, class, race, and other biases and encourage the students to do the same (Gorski).
- Include the material relevant for underrepresented identities (women of color, working class, queer students).
- Provide opportunities for cooperative learning and facilitate students' engagement with the community outside our classroom/campus: a park cleaning day, an open conversation with a poet, and a poetry night.
- Use different modes of content presentation to reflect learners with different preferences and interests (e.g., verbal, visual, active demonstration) (UDL).
- Develop assignments that account to multiple intelligences. There will be a creative assignment where students can choose to record a podcast, create a website, a collage, stage a short performance, design a book cover, write a translation, or a musical adaptation of a poem. I will encourage students to take an intelligence type test to make more mindful choices. Students are also welcome to include sketches, videos, or schemes in their discussion board responses. We will have a lecture on the grass geared towards bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and will create a timeline, hopefully, engaging the interests of students with spatial intelligence.
- Allow (and encourage) revisions, have a grace period, and introduce "tokens" (for unexcused absences, late work submission, etc.) (inspired by Ben Rifkin's talk).
- Invite my colleagues for collaborative work and to examine and rethink my practice together.
- Be flexible and see this teaching and learning experience as art — unpredictable and always in the process of becoming (Ladson-Billings).

## VI. Evaluation

- There will be anonymous midterm and final course evaluations that I will develop together with the CRLT. Students will be asked to reflect on their experiences and provide suggestions for how the course can be improved.
- There will also be opportunities for students to reflect regularly in class (possible activities are “muddiest point” and “3-2-1”). I will also encourage students to post anonymously on the “Feedback” thread on Canvas throughout the semester.
- I will take notes throughout the course and analyze student evaluations (identify shared joys and concerns).
- I would like to organize a meeting with fellow graduate instructors at the end of the semester to reflect together on our teaching experiences.

## VII. Bibliography

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