

## **RUSS 390: WOMEN IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 4-5 via Zoom

### **Course Objectives**

This course is designed to analyze the place of women in nineteenth-century Russian literature. We will be looking at a range of texts by both male and female authors, considering the questions: how did authors conceive of “the Russian woman” as a literary figure? How did she evolve as Russia entered its era of great reforms and the rise of the “woman question”? What role did female authors play in shaping her image? The novels, novellas, and short stories that form the core of the course will be supplemented with some historical readings to provide context on the conditions for women in nineteenth-century Russia as well as the debates raging across Europe about what women’s rights and roles should be. The course will cover a range of literary texts from Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, which created a powerful model of Russian womanhood, to Evgenia Tur’s *Antonina*, which sounded the alarm about women’s suffering, to Chernyshevsky’s *What Is to Be Done?*, which offered up a model for 1860s radicals. And we close not with Tolstoy’s famous “Kreutzer Sonata”—which set off a storm when it was originally published—but with his wife’s *Whose Fault?*, which offered her own version of the story, providing the woman’s perspective.

While covering this content, RUSS 390 is also designed to hone skills in literary analysis and close reading. The activities and assignments offer opportunities for practicing discussion and writing skills. There are no prerequisites for this course.

### **Structure of the Course**

We are living in crazy times. I have designed the course to provide as many ways as possible to engage with the material we are covering. Our hub for everything will be our myCourses page. There is a module for each of the literary texts we are covering (some we will spend one week on, others two). In each module there are a series of learning activities, some involving listening to pre-recorded podcasts, some involving small group work (discussing questions I have provided and writing up an answer via an online platform), some involving posting to discussion boards. There will also be a weekly Zoom meeting where we will synthesize the material covered in the week’s reading and activities and push our understanding to a deeper level. A month into the class I will give a survey to see how these different types of engagement are working for you so that we can make adjustments as needed to help everyone best learn and succeed. You will see that this initial version of the syllabus only lists the specific weekly activities for the first 5 weeks because I will create the rest of them guided by your feedback. There will be some kind of activity every week that you are not working on your mid-semester writing assignment or final paper (those weeks you will have plenty to do!).

### **Communication Plan**

I will be holding office hours via Zoom on Tuesdays 4-5. If you would like to meet with me, but are not available at that time, please email me and we may be able to set up another time to meet. I can also be reached by email: [anna.berman@mcgill.ca](mailto:anna.berman@mcgill.ca) I will do my best to reply promptly, but

please remember that even professors sometimes observe evenings or weekends as non-work time.

### **Policies and Expectations**

My expectation is that this class is going to be awesome ☺ That said, I realize there are going to be unforeseen complications arising this fall. You may experience technical difficulties accessing online materials or participating in online discussions. You may not be able to attend Zoom meetings. We may experience a second wave of the virus and people may get sick. I am happy to try to accommodate your needs as the situation evolves, but you need to inform me if you are having difficulty completing an assignment so that I can help you find a solution. If you will need an extension for the mid-semester writing assignment or the final writing assignment, out of fairness to your fellow students, you need to ask for that in advance of the deadline.

As I noted above, myCourses is our hub for everything. All deadlines are listed there, all links to activities and discussions, all Zooms, all links to readings, guidelines for assignments and links to them, this syllabus... everything. Please check it regularly. I will post announcements if we discover glitches or need to modify activities.

The material we will be covering is utterly fascinating and I know you're going to have a lot to think about and react to in the readings. Because we will be considering gender roles and sexual power dynamics, some of this material can be sensitive. My expectation is that everyone will approach our discussions with this in mind and that we will foster a supportive and respectful environment.

### **Assignments/Activities**

- **Listening/watching:** most weeks there will be either a podcast or video I have created to introduce you to the material we are covering. These provide essential background and context and you are responsible for knowing the information I explain in these.
- **Small group activities:** some weeks there will be an activity that involves meeting in a small group via Bongo to discuss a question or complete a task I have given you. Your group will then submit one assignment based on your discussion. The purpose of these activities is to give you the opportunity to have small group discussions and to engage with your classmates about the texts in a more flexible format than the full-class Zoom meetings. They will be graded satisfactory/neutral/no credit.
- **Discussion posts:** Some weeks you will be asked to respond to a prompt and to post on a discussion board on myCourses. These online discussions will feed into our discussions on Zoom. They will be graded satisfactory/neutral/no credit.
- **Zoom meetings:** once a week we will meet as a full group on Zoom to discuss the material covered for that week. You can join our Zoom meetings through myCourses using the Zoom tab in the menu at the top of the screen. These meetings are an opportunity to work through ideas that may not be fully formed, to rethink those ideas, and to testing out new ways of interpreting the texts we read. In order to make them feel like a safe space for sharing and taking intellectual risks, they will not be recorded. I understand that not everyone will be able to attend these sessions and some people will be able to attend, but will not be able to have their video on, or perhaps to speak in the

sessions. Attendance will **not** be graded, but you will be able to reflect on it in your end of semester statement.

- **Mid-Semester Writing Assignment:** This will be a 5-page critical essay on Krestovsky (pseudonym)'s *The Boarding School Girl*. Specific guidelines will be posted on myCourses.
- **Final Paper:** This will be an 8-10 page critical essay on a text of your choice that we covered this semester. Specific guidelines will be posted on myCourses.
- **End of Semester Reflection/Self Evaluation:** This will be a written submission in which you will be asked to answer several questions reflecting on what you put into this course and what you got out of it. It is an opportunity for you to have direct input in deciding the grade you deserve for your engagement with the course materials. I will ask you to evaluate yourself on your level of engagement and to honestly assess your own learning.

### **Final Grade Breakdown**

- Small, weekly activities (small-group assignments, discussion board posts, etc.): 40%
- Mid-semester writing assignment: 25%
- Final paper: 25%
- End of semester reflection/self-assessment: 10%

### **Required Texts**

All the books are available at the McGill Bookstore and are also available as e-books for anyone who cannot come to campus to purchase copies. The course pack is available electronically as well. Links to the readings or information on how to access them are provided in myCourses.

- Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin* (trans. Falen)
- Tur, *Antonina* (trans. Katz)
- Turgenev, *On the Eve* (trans. Garnett)
- Krestovsky (pseudonym), a.k.a. Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya, *The Boarding School Girl* (trans. Rosneck)
- Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* (trans. Katz)
- Course Pack

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of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

McGill University is on land that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

### **Introduction**

**Zoom:** September 3

Introduction: How the course will run, what we're studying, and why it's awesome ☺

### **Week 1: Creating the Model: Pushkin's Tatiana**

**Listening:** Podcast, "Introduction to Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*"

**Reading:** *Eugene Onegin* (1824-32). Our focus is just on: Chapters 2, 3, 4 (stanzas 1-24), Chapter 5, 7 (stanzas 13-55), Chapter 8.

**Zoom:** Thursday, September 10. Who is Pushkin's Tatiana?

We will do an activity in small groups in break out rooms that you may want to think about in advance: choose a 1-3 stanza section to do a close analysis of in order to tease out as much as possible an answer to the question: "Who is Tatiana? What does she represent?"

### **Week 2: Tatiana's Legacy**

**Reading:** Emerson, "Tatiana" (in course pack); Dostoevsky, "Pushkin Speech" (1880) – our focus is on pp. 1285-1289, but I am giving you the whole speech for context (in course pack)

**Small Group Activity to complete by 9:00am on Wednesday, Sept 16:** You will find it in the myCourses module for *Onegin* under "Tatiana Assignment." It is a small group activity that will involve meeting over video to discuss questions I provide and to then write up your answer (one submission per group). This relies on using Bongo, which is integrated into myCourses. If you are having trouble accessing it, I found that it works best in Google Chrome (it may have problems in Firefox or Safari). This will be our first time using a new technology, so there may be glitches, but we will test it out and see how it goes. At the midterm survey, we can decide which options are working best for us. Brief overview of the assignment: Dostoevsky and Emerson offer up a number of ways to interpret Tatiana. Give a brief account of them and explain which you find the most compelling and why.

**Zoom:** Thursday, September 17

Our full-group Zoom will build on the small-group assignment. Key question to discuss: How did Dostoevsky build on/reshape the model of the Russian woman Pushkin created? How does Emerson's interpretation add to our understanding of Tatiana?

### **Week 3: The Plight of Women**

**Listening:** Podcast, "Evgenia Tur, *Antonina*, and the larger novel it comes from, *The Niece*"

**Reading:** Tur, *Antonina* (1851)

**Activity to complete by 9:00am on Wednesday, Sept 23:** In small groups on myCourses: Choose one of the following three questions and pick 3 places in the text where you see it addressed. List them (with page #) and then write a half-page answer: 1) What is the plight of women Tur is laying bare? 2) What aspects of Russian society is she critiquing? 3) What sources of power/strength do women have?

**Zoom:** Thursday, September 24

This session will build on your small-group assignments. We will consider the question of women's plights and how they become the source of narrative. We will also consider the issue of women writers and what their perspective adds. How is it different to have Tur writing this than a male author?

### **Week 4: Awakening**

**Listening:** Podcast, "Introducing the Woman Question"

Podcast, "Turgenev's Strong Women and *On the Eve*"

**Reading:** Turgenev, *On the Eve* (1860), Chapters I-XIV (p. 42 in the version at the bookstore); Mikhailov, "Women, Their Education and Significance in the Family and in Society" (1860); Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*: Chapter 1 (in course pack)

**Activity to be completed by 9:00am Wednesday, Sept 30:** on the discussion board in myCourses, please post a one paragraph response, reflecting on the historical context covered in the podcast, Mikhailov's article, and the Engel reading. What stands out for you about the "woman question" as it arose in Russia? Do you see any links to contemporary discussions of gender, or were the issues fundamentally different in nineteenth-century Russia? You must put forth your own idea, but you can also respond to something posted by one of your classmates in your post.

**Zoom:** Thursday, October 1

We will be discussing the rise of the "woman question" and how the family dynamics in the first half of Turgenev's novel reflect the issues at the heart of this question. We will also be paying attention to Elena, one of Turgenev's most famous "strong women." Who is she?

### **Week 5: Seeking Liberation**

**Reading:** Turgenev, *On the Eve* (1860), to end; Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*: Chapter 2, pp. 20-27 (in course pack)

**Activity to be completed by 9:00am Wednesday:** on the discussion board in myCourses, please comment on one of the following prompts and write a paragraph response: 1) Apropos the novel's title, what is it suggesting Russia is on the eve of? What statement is being made about Russia's present/future? 2) Elena ends her letter to her parents at the end of the novel with a question. In the original Russian, it is "Что делать в России?" or literally "What Is to Be Done in Russia?" (our translation handles it slightly differently). What is at stake in answering this

question? 3) In the final lines of the novel, another question is raised: “Will there ever be men among us?” (in the original, “будут ли у нас люди,” so the word is “people” not “men”). Why end with this question? What is really being asked? How does it relate to the first two questions I raised here? You’re welcome to write a response that blends the three or builds off then in any direction that interests you.

**Zoom:** October 8

### **MONTH-IN SURVEY: how is the structure working for us?**

#### **Week 6: Reconceiving the roles of hero and heroine**

**Listen:** Podcast, “Who is Krestovsky (pseudonym)?”

**Reading:** Krestovsky (pseudonym), *The Boarding School Girl* (1861), Chapters 1-7 (stopping p. 72); Greene, “Mid-Nineteenth-Century Domestic Ideology in Russia”

**Zoom:** October 15

#### **Week 7: Rethinking Women’s Options**

**Listening:** Podcast, “The conservative views of Proudhon and Michelet”

**Reading:** Krestovsky (pseud.), *The Boarding School Girl*, to end; Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Église* (1858); Michelet, *Love and Woman* (1859 and 1860) (in course pack)

**Zoom:** October 22

This week’s reading combines two of the most conservative European thinkers who were writing about women in this period with the final chapters of a novel that is polemicizing with their views. One of our goals will be to tease out how Krestovsky (pseudonym) shapes the debate in her novel. Does she take a clear side?

**Mid-Semester Paper:** due by 8:00am on Friday, October 23. This is a critical essay on *The Boarding School Girl* and some aspect of its treatment of women, gender roles, the woman question, gender and narrative perspective, or anything else that touches on the central themes of our class (if you are uncertain about your topic, please run it by me during office hours).

#### **Week 8: A Radical Take**

**Listening:** Podcast, “Chernyshevsky, Radicals, and Emancipated Women”

**Reading:** Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), through Chapter Three, part v (p. 202 in the version I assigned)

**Zoom:** October 29

#### **Week 9: The New Woman**

**Reading:** Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, to end

**Activity:** close reading of Vera’s fourth dream

**Zoom:** Tuesday November 3 (I have a conference, so class is “cancelled” on Thursday)

#### **Week 10: Happily Ever After?**

**Listening:** podcast, “The Society Tale”

**Reading:** Soboleva, “Pros and Cons” (1863) (in course pack)

**Zoom:** Thursday, November 12

Question to discuss: What is Soboleva's novella suggesting about what the desired outcome should be for the Russian woman? What do we make of the strange form the story takes?

**Week 11: An Assault on Marriage**

**Viewing:** "A Evening of the Kreutzer Sonata" – performance filmed at McGill in 2014, created in collaboration with Ilya Poletaev at the Schulich School of Music

**Reading:** Tolstoy, "The Kreutzer Sonata" (1889); Mill. *The Subjection of Women* (1869) (both in course pack)

**Zoom:** Thursday, November 19

**Week 12: A Wife's Reply**

**Listening:** Podcast, "The Tolstoy marriage: giving the woman the last word"

**Reading:** Tolstaya, "Whose Fault?" (in course pack)

**Zoom:** Thursday, November 26

**Week 12.5: Conclusion**

**Zoom:** Tuesday, December 1

Final reflections and semester wrap-up

**Final Paper due Tuesday, December 8 at noon**

**End of Semester Reflection/Self-Assessment due Thursday, December 10 at noon**