

Russian 230: Introduction to Russian Literature

Paper # 1: 1200-1400 words (give or take 100 words)

The goal of this paper is to get you to engage with a text deeply, meaningfully, and *literarily*: meaning, to pay attention to the way that the construction of the book as a work of literature (as opposed to a snapshot of life) shapes our experience as readers. We also seek to get some insight into the progression of the course as a whole; to seek out patterns and meaningful connections that can help us make sense of this time in Russian life, literature, and culture. As before, the goal is to be both careful (use close reading and stay grounded in the text) and daringly insightful (to bring to your interpretation a wider framework that helps your interpretation to be original). For this assignment, you're not required to read any works of criticism from outside of class (although you can, provided that you cite it). You **must** reference the texts directly and specifically, using quotes and page numbers where those quotes may be found. You should also have a paper title and a works cited.

In the essay topics that follow, you should choose which works you'll be looking at from among the following works: "Bronze Horseman", "Queen of Spades", "Princess Mary", "The Overcoat", "First Love," *Crime and Punishment*, or "Death of Ivan Ilyich."

Please choose one of the topics below:

1. The superior man. Many of the heroes of our stories present themselves – or are presented by their stories' narrators -- as superior men. Choose two characters from two stories (including *Crime and Punishment*) and analyze the way the idea of the superior man functions in the story.
2. Crisis moments. During our readings and discussions, we've talked about central or crisis moments: Pechorin crying over his horse, the hero of "First Love" witnessing his father hitting Zinaida; and, of course, *Crime and Punishment* is swimming in such scenes. Using two of the shorter texts OR *Crime and Punishment*, choose two such central scenes and look in detail at how they function in the story as a whole.
3. The fantastic vs. the real. Our stories all seek – in various ways – to say something "real" about the world, but even the most "realistic" stories have elements of the fantastic. Choose two of our texts and analyze what role the fantastic plays in them.
4. Gender. The main characters of our stories have been men, and yet women have also played an important part in our stories. Choose either (a) two female characters from two different stories ****other than**** *Crime and Punishment*; or (b) the role of women in *Crime and Punishment*. As you develop the topic, you may want to think about the way the characters evolve during the story (if at all); how the issue of gender intersects with the issue of hero or protagonist; how issues of power and powerlessness manifest themselves in the progression of the text; and how gender reflects on the relation between the individual and society.
5. Using **two** of the shorter texts, OR *Crime and Punishment*, devise a topic of your own.