

RUSN 1020 Essay #3

Due Date: December 7 (to be submitted onto Brightspace)

Length: approximately 1,500 words

Here are some possible essay questions. Choose one. You are allowed to come up with your own questions, although I would like you to clear it with me first. Essays should be around six pages (not including the title page or bibliography). Your essay should have an introductory paragraph that closes with a proper and **specific** thesis statement, paragraphs organized around topics that reinforce your thesis, and a strong concluding paragraph.

For this essay I want you to use at **least three critical, peer-reviewed sources**, so check with the library and with me to find the most appropriate books and/or articles. For books, the website Novanet provides a complete listing of all books and journals held by universities in Nova Scotia. For articles, the website JSTOR (which is free to access as Dalhousie students) provides thousands of articles on numerous subjects. **Note: Internet sources such as Wikipedia, Douban, SparkNotes, Shmoop, and CliffsNotes are not critical sources. Please ask me if you have any questions about the validity of a source.**

When it comes to the use of critical sources, I want you to use the critics to aid your argument, but not to supplant it. Sometimes you may agree with the critic, but your argument is often enhanced by having an opinion to spar against. Be specific, focus in on key scenes or details, and make sure that your argument is well supported with evidence and quotations from the texts. When it comes to quoting from the primary text, comment on the quotes you use and do not simply allow them to speak for themselves. If you have any questions while writing your essays, or if you would like me to see rough drafts, please let me know.

Note: While it is not required, I encourage you to email your thesis to me and/or your TA. I will give feedback on this, as I want to make sure that everyone does a good job with the question and that finds a good angle with which to pursue it. The more time you have to work on your paper with the proper feedback, the better it will no doubt turn out.

As always, please let me know if you have any questions.

1. How does Tolstoy explore the subject of death in "Three Deaths?" How might this

exploration be connected to his exploration of the subject, both personally and artistically, over the course of his life? For this essay you will want to consider making use of Tolstoy's biography as well as at least three other works by Tolstoy on the subject of death. When it comes to the latter, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" is a good place to start, but the introduction to our Penguin edition also provides another helpful example of Tolstoy's lifelong concern with death.

2. Why is it that "The Grand Inquisitor" has managed to challenge and provoke readers for so many years after its inclusion in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880)? Why is it this prose poem has taken on a life independent of the novel itself? To what ends? For this essay, you should consider at least three responses to the poem by other writers. You should also consider some of the critical literature on the scene as well. Does the scene undercut the novel? Is it a critique of Christianity, or a defense of it? Why or why not?
3. How does "The Grand Inquisitor" tackle such issues as belief and nonbelief, good and evil, salvation and damnation, temptation and resistance, freedom and confinement, kindness and cruelty? Many have described the poem as a parable, or a story, often simple on the surface, that seeks to teach a moral or spiritual lesson. If this story can be seen as a parable, what lessons could it be said to convey? Please note that you need not tackle all of these competing ideas; they are all included merely to give a sense of some of the poem's dimensions. When it comes to seeing the poem in terms of its contrasting, competing themes, think of the discussion between Ivan and Alyosha that follows it. How does their interpretations affect our interpretations? To what ends?
4. How does Tolstoy compare and contrast the authentic life with the artificial life in "The Death of Ivan Ilyich?" How is the artificial life typified? How is it connected to deception; about all things, including death? What roles do such virtues as pity and compassion play in living an authentic life? What kinds of human relationships are made possible by those who live the authentic life? How might Gerasim be seen to typify this life? What effect does his authenticity have on Ivan? To what ends? One way to tackle this may be to look at the class element, i.e. at the fact that Ivan and his family are members of the bourgeoisie while Gerasim is a peasant. Another way to tackle this question might be to explore how the story manages to grapple with the conflicts between the inner and outer life.
5. What is the nature of death in "The Death of Ivan Ilyich?" How is it presented as something

utterly inevitable and unavoidable? How has Ivan's life, and the lives of those around him, made him blind to the reality of death. To what ends? How does the reality of death affect Ivan himself? How does it affect his relationships with others? How does it affect their relationship with him? What lessons about life can be learned by confronting death? What lessons does Ivan learn? What happens when one avoids death? What happens when one confronts it?

6. What is the effect of the title, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich?" How does the title not tell the

whole story? What is the story, despite the title, actually most interested in? To what ends? What role then does irony play in the story, both in terms of Tolstoy's presentation of his subject and in the lives of his characters? For example, how do the reversals play out within the story? How is this a story about rebirth as much as death? Is it ultimately a story of success or failure? To what ends?