

**19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RUSSIAN LITERATURE:  
THE SEARCH FOR SELF IN THE RUSSIAN CLASSICS (RUTR 335)**

**Tuesday and Thursday 11:00 am- 12:15 p.m, Cabell 424**

**Instructor: Andrew Kaufman**

**Office Hours: Mondays, 1-3 pm, 109 Cabell Hall, or by appointment**

From copy clerks to kings, outcasts to aristocrats, demons to dandies, the characters that populate the pages of the nineteenth-century Russian classics represent a wide range of both Russian and universal human types. What unites all of these different characters is that they—and the writers who created them—lived in an era in which everything from Russian national identity to human destiny, personal ethics and the existence of God were vigorously questioned and debated. These writers and their characters struggled with the most challenging and perennial human questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What will make me happy? What are the values that should guide my life? What is the nature of death? Do I have free will? What does the “soul” feel like? Does evil exist inside me? What is the definition of “heroism”? What does it mean to lead a good, successful life? In the best and richest works of the period, many of these subjects are woven together into beautifully organic, artistic wholes. In this course we will sample some of those works from a variety of genres (short story, novel, poetry, “novel in verse,” drama) and authors (Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov). Throughout the course we will ask the recurrent question: To what extent are the issues raised in the nineteenth-century Russian classics applicable to the challenges of contemporary America and to our own personal lives?

***Course Requirements***

- 3 papers (4-5 pp. each) and other short writing assignments
- Course Journal: 20 entries total—to be turned in on the last day of classes.
- Online discussion board postings
- Participation in class discussions
- Final Exam

**Description of Paper Assignments**

***First Paper: Close Reading of a Short Passage (Due Friday September 30)***

The **first paper** should be a close reading of a short passage (no more than a few pages) in the context of the work as a whole. When analyzing this passage, some issues to consider are: How are the characters artistically presented in the passage? From whose point of view is the passage written? What is the setting in the passage, and how does that affect our experience of the selection? What physical or other clues does the author give the reader about a character’s social position, emotional state, and/or relationship with others in this passage? How does this particular passage shed light on the work as a

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whole? What can we learn about the worldview of the novel and its author by studying this passage?

### Second Paper: Character Analysis (Due Monday October 31)

The **second paper** should be a literary analysis of a character from one of the works we've read. This should be a character that has fascinated you, disturbed you, challenged you, or aroused your sympathies in some way. In your introductory paragraph, you should describe why you think this character is an important subject for reflection and what your argument about him or her will be. What does that character represent in the context of the work as a whole? Is he or she a hero? A villain? What are the character's major emotional and/or psychological dilemmas, and how does he or she resolve them, if at all? Does the author want us to sympathize with the character? Why or why not? In this paper remember that you are analyzing a character from literature, and not a real person, which means that you should pay particular attention to how that character is presented and functions *artistically* in the work. What are the specific literary techniques the author uses to present that character to the reader? You should conclude your paper with some reflection about what light your character analysis can shed on your chosen author's attitudes towards the social and/or philosophical problems of his time. Remember to stay close to the text to support your arguments, and to be coherent and clear in your analysis.

### Third Paper: Personal Reflection (Due Friday December 9)

You will discover that the issues raised in the works we read are as relevant today as they were in Russia of the nineteenth-century, and you are encouraged to find your personal connection with these works. In the **third paper** you are asked to discuss that personal connection. To what extent has your reading of these works challenged, deepened, complicated, or reinforced certain values and understandings about the world you held before taking this course? What specific life lessons have you learned for the first time—or relearned—from the works you have read? Are there any recurring ideas or themes in these works that particularly resonate with you? To what extent are the issues presented in these works applicable to the challenges of contemporary America? In this paper you should draw on concrete examples from your own life and your knowledge of contemporary America. And you should cite examples from **three** of the works we've read to illustrate your points. To help stimulate your thinking for this paper, you might want to take a look at all of your journal entries for the course. Perhaps there are certain recurrent patterns in your own personal reflection on these works that can help focus your thinking as you write this paper.

A word of clarification: This paper is not the same as your journal entry. It is a bona fide essay, and all the rules of good essay-writing apply. You should have a clear thesis statement, a well-developed argument, coherence and logical flow throughout. But that doesn't mean you should avoid being personal or passionate in your reflections. Quite the contrary: Feel free to express yourself as honestly and passionately as you feel comfortable doing, always remembering that passion and precision are not mutually exclusive. You can be very personal, sincere, and emotional, while still being clear and maintaining a healthy analytical stance towards yourself and your subject. Finding that balance will be one of your challenges in this paper.

### **Description of Course Journal**

Throughout the semester you will keep a journal of your responses to the readings (20 entries total for the course.) The journal is intended to be fairly free form, and it should record your reflection on that day's reading assignment. While you shouldn't consider the journal entry a polished essay, you should put some thought into your entries, as I will be reading them at the end of the semester. Some topics you might want to write about in the journal: A character, a quote, an idea that you found particularly interesting or which stimulated your thinking in some way, and why? A passage you found particularly inspiring, disturbing, creative, and why? Did you like or dislike the work, and why? Did you see any connections with other works we've read? How specifically does the work illuminate the larger idea of the search for self in the Russian classics? Are there any universal human ideas or problems in the work relevant to contemporary life?

Be sure to **bring your journal to class on Thursdays**, since I will give you 5-10 minutes at the beginning of (most) Thursday classes to record your journal entry for that day. This will also ensure that you're in thinking mode and ready to contribute to class discussion.

### **Description of online discussion group postings**

**Every Monday night by 10 pm** you should post in the discussion group a brief commentary on the reading for Tuesday. The kinds of issues you may wish to address are the same ones listed above under "Description of course journal." In your posting you should include one or two open-ended thought questions, which will launch us into class discussion on the day of your presentation. Students should read each other's postings and be prepared to share your reactions to your colleagues' postings in class. From time to time I might ask students to summarize the main idea of their posting in class, so make sure you've spent some time thinking about what you wrote that you come to class prepared to talk about your ideas. You may miss four postings throughout the semester, which means that you should have a total of 10 postings total by the end of the semester.

### **Description of participation in class discussion**

An important part of your learning in this class will depend on your willingness to contribute to class discussions, which will usually happen during the last 30 minutes or so of each class. You will be expected to have done the reading (which I've purposely kept to a reasonable volume), to have thought about it, and to be ready to share your ideas with the class. One element of your class participation will be reading and thinking about the student postings in the class discussion board (See "Description of online discussion group postings" above.) Decide whether you agree or disagree with your colleagues' insights, and be prepared to share your thoughts in class. After the first week or so of the semester, I will feel free to call on you during class, so make sure you come prepared to share your thoughts about the material.

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**\*\*To ease your concern about speaking up in class\*\*:** Remember, you don't have to be "brilliant" or "right" or even certain about your ideas. There are no "right" and "wrong" interpretations of literature. There are only better and more poorly argued interpretations. The important thing is to have prepared for class and to attempt—as best you can—to articulate your own ideas about the material. This will be an important skill for you to have throughout your academic career and beyond. Please be supportive of your colleagues, and of yourself, as you publicly try out new ideas in this class.

### *Grading*

- Three 4-5 page papers, Course Journal, and other short writing assignments—55% (see "Grading Standards for Essays" for grading guidelines)
- Final Exam—25%
- Class participation—20%

**SYLLABUS**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>READINGS/VIEWINGS</b>
Thursday, August 25	Course Overview and Introductory Lecture: "The Search for Self in the Nineteenth-century Russian Classics"	Mark Edmundson, <i>Why Read?</i> (Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 129 (in-class handout)
	<b>Self, State, and Russian History: A Look Back, A Look Forward</b>	
Tuesday, August 30		Alexander Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman" (in-class handout) Alexander Pushkin, <i>The Captain's Daughter</i> , Chapters 1-7, in Alexander Pushkin, <i>The Queen of Spades and Other Stories</i>
Thursday, September 1		"Alexander Pushkin, <i>The Captain's Daughter</i> , Chapters 8-14, in <i>The Queen of Spades and Other Stories</i>
	<b>Self-expression and Self-exploration in the "Encyclopedia of Russian Life"</b>	
Tuesday, September 6		Alexander Pushkin, <i>Eugene Onegin</i> , Chapters 1-3
Thursday, September 8		Alexander Pushkin, <i>Eugene Onegin</i> , Chapters 4-6
Tuesday, September 13		Alexander Pushkin, <i>Eugene Onegin</i> , Chapters 7-8
	<b>The Poetic Self: Poet and Society Poet and Nature Poet and Russia</b>	
Thursday, September 15		"Foreward" to <i>An Age Ago</i> , by Joseph Brodsky (in course reader) Selected poems (in course reader) V.A. Zhukovksy: "There is an enjoyment in a wilderness of trees..." Alexander Pushkin: "To a Poet" "Message to Siberia" "The Prophet" Mikhail Lermontov: "The Sail" "Native Land" "The Prophet" (1841) Fyodor Tiutchev ["Silentium!"] "Through reason Russia cannot be known..."

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	<b>Self, Psychological Struggle, and the Romantic Quest</b>	
Tuesday, September 20		Mikhail Lermontov, <i>A Hero of Our Time</i> (“Bela” and “Maxim Maximych”)
Thursday, September 22		Mikhail Lermontov, <i>A Hero of Our Time</i> (Pechorin’s Journal —“Foreword,” “Taman” and “Princess Mary” through 22May)
Tuesday, September 27		Mikhail Lermontov, <i>A Hero of Our Time</i> (Pechorin’s Journal— Finish “Princess Mary” and “The Fatalist”)
	<b>Self-deception, Self-Oblivion, and Self-Destruction in the “Graveyard of Dreams”</b>	
Wednesday, September 28	Room 322 A in Clemons: screening starts at 9 pm	<b>Movie Screening: <i>The Inspector General</i></b>
Thursday, September 29		Discuss movie <i>The Inspector General</i>
<b>FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30</b>	<b>FIRST COURSE PAPER DUE</b>	
Tuesday, October 4	<i>Substitute instructor (Rosh Hashanah)</i>	Nikolai Gogol, “The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich” and “The Nose” in <i>The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol</i> , vol. 2
Thursday, October 6		Nikolai Gogol, “The Portrait” and “The Overcoat” in <i>The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol</i>
	<b>Social Reality and Subjective Lyricism</b>	
Monday, October 10	Room 322 A in Clemons: screening starts at 9 pm	<b>Movie Screening: <i>Oblomov</i></b>
Tuesday, October 11		Ivan Turgenev, “The Singers,” “Living Relics” (in course packet) Discuss Movie <i>Oblomov</i>
Thursday, October 13	<i>NO CLASS-YOM KIPPUR</i>	
	<b>The Rebellious Self: Struggles with Authority in an Age of</b>	

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	<b>Social Transformation</b>	
Tuesday, October 18		Ivan Turgenev, <i>Fathers and Sons</i> , Chapters I-IX
Thursday, October 20		Ivan Turgenev, <i>Fathers and Sons</i> , Chapters XX-XXVIII
	<b>Self, Solitude, and Social Injustice</b>	
Tuesday, October 25		Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Poor Folk</i> (through letter of August 2) in Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Poor Folk and Other Stories</i>
Thursday, October 27		Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Finish Poor Folk</i> (letters of August 25-Sept. 30) in <i>Poor Folk and Other Stories</i>
<b>MONDAY, OCTOBER 31</b>	<b>SECOND COURSE PAPER DUE</b>	
	<b>Testing the Limits of Human Reason: The Self in a State of Metaphysical Rebellion</b>	
Tuesday, November 1		Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from the Underground</i> (Part I and Part II through Chapter iii (in course reader)
Thursday, November 3		Finish <i>Notes from the Underground</i> (in course reader)
	<b>The Ultimate Quest: The Self in Search of a Higher Truth</b>	
Tuesday, November 8		Leo Tolstoy, "Sevastopol in May," "Three Deaths," "The Death of Ivan Ilych" in <i>Tolstoy's Short Fiction</i>
Thursday, November 10		Leo Tolstoy, "Family Happiness" in <i>Tolstoy's Short Fiction</i>
Tuesday, November 15		Leo Tolstoy, "Master and Man," "God Sees the Truth, But Waits," "Alyosha the Pot" in <i>Tolstoy's Short</i>

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		<i>Fiction</i>
Thursday, November 17		Leo Tolstoy, “Kreutzer Sonata” in <i>Tolstoy’s Short Fiction</i>
Tuesday, November 22	<i>THANKSGIVING BREAK —NO CLASS</i>	
Thursday, November 24	<i>THANKSGIVING BREAK —NO CLASS</i>	
	<b>Man’s Search for Meaning in a Minor Key</b>	
Tuesday, November 29		Anton Chekhov, “The Duel” (in course reader)
Wednesday, November 30	Room 322 A in Clemons: screening starts at 9 pm	Movie Screening: <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>
Thursday, December 1		Discuss Movie, <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>
Tuesday, December 6	Final Discussion	
<b>FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9</b>	<b>THIRD COURSE PAPER DUE</b>	
<b>TBD</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	