

W2: Writing Assignment #2

“I Say” / Response Paper: Ways of being (an) Other

Due Dates

- Drafts for peer critique are due via Moodle on Friday, October 11 by 9:00 p.m.
- Peer critique due via email on Tuesday, October 15 by 9:00 p.m. You will need to meet with your partner in person to discuss their paper draft.
- Final versions of the paper are due via Moodle on Friday, October 18 by 10:00 p.m.

Purpose

- Practice building a complex argument supported by textual evidence.
- Engage “difficulty” as a path to generating interesting problems and claims about a text.
- Practice limiting the scope of your argument.

Description

You know that every good essay, whether informal or scholarly, builds an argument based on a central claim. In W1, you were asked to parse and summarize Shklovsky’s argument about formalist approach to art and the notion of defamiliarization. For this assignment, you need to develop your own claim about one of the texts or a group of texts we’ve read and discussed so far. You are not expected to use secondary sources for this essay.

Much of our in-class discussion revolved around different manifestations of otherness and (not) belonging in Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. Is there a text that advances a certain model of otherness or belonging that you find particularly compelling and worth investigating further? Consider the kinds of rhetorical figures and narrative strategies the authors employ in shaping their ideas about the implications of conforming and/or not conforming in their social environments. Have you noticed a pattern in the way different writers structure their principle characters as outcasts? Or perhaps you disagree that a given character is a marginal figure at all? Is there a point you wanted to make in class, but never got to articulating it out loud? This essay offers you an opportunity to “think out loud” in writing as you grapple with complex and at times contradictory ideas in the text you analyze.

The essay should be ca. 1200 words (without footnotes) and adhere to the MLA or Chicago formatting guidelines. Please be mindful of the scope of your claim: you will not be able and are not expected to provide a definitive and exhaustive reading on any of the stories we’ve read in a

short essay. Your claim should be arguable within the allotted space, so please edit the scope of your arguments accordingly.

Strategies

- Re-read the text you'd like to analyze. Mark up passages that catch your attention. As the authors of *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*, Salvatori and Donahue, advise, "When you encounter moments in a text that seem strange, unanticipated, unpredictable, surprising, or counterintuitive – that is a promising place to begin. *Trust that response*. Consider your uncertainty as a signal for work to be done."
- In the paper itself, use ample evidence from the original text to support your claims.
- Remember that you are writing about fictional characters, not real people.
- Think of your reader as someone who is familiar with the text and its author. Avoid generalizing statements.
- Keep in mind that you are reading a translation and approach the text with caution. The words in English are not the author's, and if the use and meaning of particular words, word order or idioms is crucially important for your reading, be sure to consult with me or a native speaker of Russian (or check an alternative translation, if available). Perhaps the issue of translation will become central to your main claim.
- Write your draft with the understanding that it's just that, a draft to be revised. Be bold and adventurous in your thinking, avoid clichés and obvious observations. If you are referencing a point made during class discussion, cite it accordingly.