

# After the dance

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Writing Topic: What point does Leo Tolstoy's story "After the Dance" (pgs. 71-75) make about Russian society? What moments or details in the story help to convey this point? Explain in a carefully written essay, supporting your argument with evidence from the text. Tolstoy's "After the Dance" is essentially a representation of Russian history and the exposition of a dark side to the seemingly regal atmosphere of the Russian aristocracy first introduced at the ball.

Using literary elements such as symbolism and foreshadowing to reveal a hidden meaning, Tolstoy tells the story of Ivan Vasilievich's first impression of the beautiful Varinka and how this impression changes after watching her father cruelly beat a Tartar for attempting to desert. Varinka is the first character we meet in Ivan's flashback. Described as "stately" and an object of much admiration, she entrances Ivan, who dances with her for majority of the ball. After being promised a quadrille dance after supper, Ivan watches her dance with her father, the Colonel.

Varinka is almost always associated with her father after being introduced, providing an unquestionable link between the two. Ivan's first observation of the Colonel was that he was "that ultra-military type produced by the discipline of Emperor Nicolas I." The Colonel's first words, "Everything must be done according to rule," also provides valuable insight as to what kind of person he is. He is introduced to the reader as an affable, aging man enjoying the ball with his daughter, Varinka.

Upon watching him dance with her, Ivan feels "a sort of tenderness for him that was almost rapture," which is a misled impression. Later on, he sees the procession in which a Tartar is being punished for attempting to desert. Not

only does the Colonel walk beside the Tartar as he is receiving his punishment, but he also demands that the soldier strike him harder with the whip. In seeing this, Ivan's whole view of him is changed from the friendly old man that offered to let him dance with his daughter into a cruel and unforgiving man that called for harsher punishment even when the Tartar was obviously already suffering.

Varinka represents the envisioned goodness the Russian government uses to appeal to and garner support from the people. The object that initially seems to show the benefits of following the regime is really a cover for the militaristic way the government runs Russia. The same suede-gloved hand that held Varinka's hand dancing the mazurka was the hand that struck the soldier for not whipping the Tartar to his satisfaction. They belonged to the Colonel, whose character is ultimately revealed to be militaristic and uncaring. With this event, Ivan also ties the Colonel and Varinka together.

However, instead of being united through dancing, they are linked through the paternalism, power, and brutality of the Colonel. Ivan's love for Varinka then began to wane and whenever he saw her, he would feel "awkward and uncomfortable", leading him to see her less frequently, and eventually not at all. After beholding this public whipping, Ivan's repulsion for the aristocratic attitude awakens and he rejects both the woman he loves, Varinka, and military service in Russia. In a similar manner, the harshness of the Russian government is shown to its citizens after the initial appeal.