
The Brothers Karamazov

OSHER 578**Dates:** Thursdays, 1/22/15-2/26/15, no class 2/16/15**Times:** 9:30AM-11:00AM**Location:** Commander's House, Fort Douglas**Instructor:** Gene Fitzgerald**Course Overview**

The Brothers Karamazov was Feodor Dostoevsky's final novel. Begun in the summer of 1878, it was only in November of 1880 that Dostoevsky sent the novel's Epilogue to the journal *The Russian Herald* and two months later in January 1881, Dostoevsky died. Although many say that it was to be the first book of a trilogy first called *Atheism* and then changed to *The life of a Great Sinner*, many think that it is a novel complete in its own right. *Life* was, according to Dostoevsky himself to deal a problem "that has tortured me consciously or unconsciously all my life—the existence of God. The hero is the course of his life is now an atheist, now a believer, then a fanatic and . . . then an atheist again." That description hardly fits the novel of *The Brothers Karamazov* as it was ultimately published very well.

This sprawling tale of a father and his three (or is it four?) sons their relationships with each other and especially with two or three women, is one of a world that is complex, confused, and apparently absurd in which death seems to be the only certainty. It is a world of flawed self-aware human beings some of whom believe in eternal life and eternal harmony and others who rebel against "God's world" as they perceive it and dream of establishing their own human harmony in history. It is widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of world literature. Class discussion will stem from excerpts such as: "There is no God . . . I absolutely renounce all higher harmony"; "Nothing has ever been more insufferable for man . . . than freedom"; and "Each of us is guilty in everything before everyone." We will closely read these literary texts and discuss human values and belief systems and Dostoevsky's view on what it means to be a human being. While any translation will be appropriate, I will be using the one by Richard Pevear and Lariss Volokhonsky. For a little extra reading (not that you need it) I would suggest Part One, of *Notes from the Underground*.

Weekly schedule:

Week one: Introduction to the novel's characters and how they relate to each other. Read the handout texts and discussion of Dostoevsky's world view and his view of the human being.

Week two: Continuation of above.

Week three: Discussion of the novel, the concept of "nadryv" (laceration in Garnett, "Strains" in the Pevear and Volohansky—I prefer lacerations though it refers primarily to a soul which is torn into little pieces and the demand for revenge because of it. The concept of "bows and forgiveness and more important, asking for forgiveness." Leads up to Ivan's rebellion, concepts of evil in the suffering of innocent children and the creation of the Grand Inquisitor.

Week Four: Continuation. More revenge as a vicious circle and how to break that circle with acceptance and grace.

Week Five: Continuation.

Week six: Is there a resolution to the dilemma of evil on earth?