
Freedom and Tragedy: Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov"

OSHER 357-001

Dates: Tuesdays: January 12 – February 16

Time: 11:30 am – 1:00 pm

Location: Online via Zoom

Instructor: Gene Fitzgerald

Course Overview:

Week 1: Discussion of Fyodor Dostoevsky's life and a selection of his unpublished articles concerning the nature of the human being. This will lay the groundwork for the discussion of the primary characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*. I include the three works here here. The first is called: "A Meditation of the death of his first wife, Marya Dmitrievna"; the second is an unfinished article entitled "Socialism and Christianity"; the third is my published short article that was delivered as a paper at the International Dostoevsky conference in Budapest in 2007. Finally, I would say to get reading and do Part I of the *Brothers Karamazov*, pp 1-160 which we will discuss next week. That would include the Dostoevsky's dedication to his wife, the biblical verse from John 12:24 and the "From the Author" section at the novel's beginning. From here on each week we will try to discuss enough of the ideas from as much as we can read to get to the novel's end on page 776. Clearly this class is not for the faint of heart since the reading to be done in 6 weeks' time (now five) is rather massive.

Week 2: Part I 1-160 relationships, the brother's characters, who are the brothers? Dmitri in particular, his relationship to his father, to Katerina Ivanovna, to Grushenka, to Alyosha. Ivan's character as well.

Week 3: Part II pp 163- 326 -- a discussion of Dostoevsky's concept of "nadryv" — translated as "strain," a translation championed by my own Ph.D. thesis mentor Victor Terras, but with which I am not happy. It is also translated by Dostoevsky's first English translator Constance Garnett as "laceration," which I consider better. In Russian it means a tearing open, but not massively, more like a tearing open of an envelope. It is used here as a tearing open, slowly excruciatingly of the psyche, the heart, feelings, the personality and the like. It involves more discussion. Part II contains the chapter "The Grand Inquisitor," perhaps the single most discussed chapter that Dostoevsky wrote. As important is the Ivan's argument against God, in the chapter just before. These are followed by a series of homilies from Father Zosima.

According to Dostoevsky they are supposed to counteract Ivan's argument and the inquisitor. Do they?

Week 4: Part III pp. 327-512, the discussion will cover the novel's hero (according to Dostoevsky) Alyosha, his fall (quite slight) and his awakening in the section Cana of Galilee. The beginning of Dmitri's path, but to where?

Week 5: Part IV the concept of Nadryv and the young boys. Smerdyako's character, and the dream of the Devil. The character of Smerdyakov is clear, the dream of the Devil, quite perplexing.

Week 6: Part V Mitya's (Dmitri) trial, and the idea of salvation and change through miracle. And so, it goes. The Epilogue. A final continuation of the discussion of all that we have read. And I repeat my opinion about making conclusions about a Russian novel: **You never finish a Russian novel, you just quit after a while.** (For me it has been most of my life.)
Gene