

Reading the Russians Classics

Dr. Adele Barker
Oct. 1,8,15,22,29,
Nov. 5,12,19,
Dec. 3,10.

Dear Students,

Welcome to Reading the Russian Classics. The works we will be reading together are timeless. I come back to them over and over again and always learn something new. Undoubtedly, many of you have read these novels already and are wanting to revisit them. For others of you, this class may be your first visit with Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky. Welcome!

A note on the texts we will be using. Since we will be looking at the books closely it would be helpful if we are all using the same editions. This is particularly true in the case of *Anna Karenina* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Below are the editions I will be using of each of the books:

1. Turgenev, *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, trans. Richard Freeborn (Penguin, 1990). If you have another version you would like to use, go ahead. Often the book appears under the title *Sportsman's Sketches*.
2. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Pevear and Volokonsky (Penguin, 2004). There are many different translations of Tolstoy's masterful novel, and I cannot in all honesty say that one is better than the other. Pevear and Volokonsky stick close to the original, and the size of the print is a bit easier on the eyes.
3. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Pevear and Volokonsky, (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002). Again, this translation is readily available, easier on the eyes, and as close as we can come in English to the original Russian.

Syllabus (approximate)

Oct. 1st Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*.

Why Turgenev's work was an important moment in Russian social and political history. These sketches are all stunning. Several I will be looking at more closely are "Bezhin Meadow," "Kasyan from Fair Springs," "Death," "The Singers," and "The Living Relic."

Oct. 8th We will finish up *Sportsman's Sketches* today and will start on *Anna Karenina*. If you can read 150-200 pages a week that will be great. Unfortunately, Tolstoy did not write short novels. Today I will be speaking about Tolstoy's life and the background to the novel.

Oct. 15th. *Anna Karenina*. First 250 pages

The structure of *Anna Karenina* (was Henry James right that this is a “loose and baggy monster?”) Tolstoy and psychology. To judge or not to judge. Tolstoy and moralism.

Oct. 22nd. *Anna Karenina*. To page 500. We will continue to look at individual scenes and see what they suggest about some of the larger issues with which Tolstoy was dealing (the Orthodox Church, religion, death).

Oct. 29th *Anna Karenina*. Levin and Tolstoy’s coming religious crisis, were things changing in Russia? Which film directors got Anna right?

Nov. 5th Tolstoy after Anna. We will begin Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov* today with a discussion of Dostoyevsky’s extraordinary life. 200 pages a week.

Nov. 12th The three boys, the father, and the important character of Father Zossima. “Who doesn’t wish for his father’s death?” Smerdyakov. How to set up a mystery.

Nov. 19th. Doubt and belief. Ivan’s ‘poem’ “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor.”

Dec. 3rd. Alyosha and the boys. Suffering in Dostoyevsky. Love.

Dec. 10th. Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Their very different answers to similar questions. Their fate in Soviet and post-Soviet times. The philosophical novel.

You may always contact me over e-mail, and I will do my best to get back to you quickly:
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