

## **Dostoevsky's *Demons*: Satire and Prophecy**

Summer 2023

### **About this course**

Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1872) – according to Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1970 – “are crawling across the whole world in front of our very eyes, infesting countries where they could not have been dreamed of” and “announcing their determination to shake and destroy civilization! And they may well succeed.” Often viewed as prophesizing the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Dostoevsky's satirical novel *Demons* has been read as a warning for the 21st century as well, with its themes of terrorism, the role of ideology, the power of rumor and “fake news”, etc. Throughout this course we will examine *Demons* in the context of its era, exploring the biographical events, cultural influences, sources, and themes that helped form Dostoevsky's intense exploration of the source of evil - whether psychological, something external, or metaphysical – and how to combat it. The course will end with an examination of Dostoevsky's post-*Demons* ideas and works, as well as his larger cultural legacy and impact.

### **Course Instructor**

Benjamin Jens  
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### **Summer 2023 Course Schedule**

Wednesdays from 10 AM - 12 PM  
May 17, 24, 31  
June 7, 14, 21

### **Course Format**

This course will be a hybrid course, meaning students may select to attend on campus or online at registration.

Seminar members should plan to read the assigned selections of the text in advance of class discussion. The discussions will be based on the assumption that everyone is familiar with the basic plot within the assigned selection for the class and has the texts at hand during class.

### **Course Text**

The following text is required for the course:

- Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Demons*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Vintage Classics, 1995. [ISBN-13: 978-0679734512 (Pbk)].

This edition of the novel will be the one I use in the class, and I encourage all seminar members to have them. This edition is reliably translated and contains helpful explanatory notes. Most importantly, having a copy at hand will enable seminar members to locate passages I will be referring to by page number in class. Having a different edition will make locating those passages a bit more difficult; knowing that, however, if you already have a different edition, that is acceptable and may also provoke some interesting discussion of

translation choices and their impact on the novel as a whole.

This edition listed above is readily available at bookstores and via online vendors, in both new and used formats (used copies are perfectly acceptable). Other versions of the novel by Penguin, Oxford World Classics, etc., can also be found in bookstores or online.

Any other course materials (i.e., handouts, etc.) will be provided by the instructor.

### **Course Schedule**

May 17

- Reading Assignment: Part 1 Chapters 1-3 (pp 7-124)
- Topics: Introduction: Dostoevsky's life and the cultural context of *Demons*. The Generational Conflict in *Demons*. Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Petrovna.

May 24

- Reading Assignment: Part 1 Chapters 4-5 and Part 2 Chapter 1 (pp 125-256)
- Topics: Nikolai Stavrogin and his disciples.

May 31

- Reading Assignment: Part 2 Chapters 2-6 (pp 257-387)
- Topic: The Demons Gather – Secondary Characters in the Novel

June 7

- Reading Assignment: Part 2 Chapters 7-8, the Appendix (“At Tikhon’s”), and Part 2 Chapters 9-10 (pp 388-460, 681-714)
- Topics: Pyotr Stepanovich. The role of Tikhon in *Demons* and the censored chapter.

June 14

- Reading Assignment: Part 3 Chapters 1-5 (pp 461-596)
- Topics: The Fete and its impact. Dostoevsky's satire. The plans of Pyotr Stepanovich.

June 21

- Reading Assignment: Part 3 Chapters 6-8 (pp 597-680)
- Topics: Atheism and belief in the novel. Conclusions. Dostoevsky after *Demons*. The legacy of *Demons*