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Gerlinger 110B  
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**English 109 (World Literature: The Modern Period), Spring 2016**  
**Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov***  
MWF 2-2:50, 300 Villard

English 109 is the third quarter of a year-long survey of World Literature. In the third quarter we read works from the modern period. What does it mean to be a modern? The word “modern” is commonly used to mean “new,” and most often it refers to our own era. It is a well-established practice for historians to use the word “modern” to refer to a particular set of attitudes expounded most influentially by the thinkers of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, especially in France. These ideas include secular attitudes that had gained momentum in the European Renaissance as well as an emerging confidence, in the late eighteenth and in nineteenth century, in industrial technology and science. The achievements of Europe’s Enlightenment were impressive, but they sent shock waves throughout much of the world, including Dostoevsky’s Russia, an enormous country suspended between tradition and a turbulent modernity, between the Far East and the West. In Dostoevsky himself, we witness the struggle between traditional and modern values, between religious faith and modern skepticism.

We will focus our attention this quarter on one of the greatest works of world literature, Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. We’ll be asking, with Dostoevsky: does the widely reported death of God -- as Dostoevsky’s character Ivan Karamazov contends -- mean that “everything is permitted,” i.e. that anything goes and ethics is out the window? What’s the relation between belief in God and ethics? Does belief in God promote ethics, or violence? If God doesn’t exist, am I still “my brother’s keeper,” as the Bible (Genesis 4.9) insists? Is there a way to think about God outside of the question of “belief” that so tormented Dostoevsky? We’ll consider Dostoevsky’s religious ideas in the light of his vision of the messianic role of the Russian people and of his bitter critique of European culture and civilization, attitudes that have recently been revived by Vladimir Putin in today’s Russia.

We’ll read *The Brothers Karamazov* in the text edited by Professor Susan McReynolds of Northwestern University. She will be visiting our class on Monday, April 18. She will be giving a lecture entitled “Russian Jesus: Dostoevsky and the Nationalization of Christianity” at 7 p.m. on Monday, April 18 in the Gerlinger Alumni Lounge. I’m requiring all the students in our class to attend this lecture and to write and submit a one-page summary of, and response to, Professor McReynolds’ lecture.

Every student in the class is required to come to my office hours at least once during the quarter. Please see me about setting up an appointment.

Texts

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, edited with a revised translation by Susan McReynolds Oddo; Norton Critical Edition, Second Edition (Norton, 2011)

Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Duquesne UP, 1985)

Assignments

I. March 28: introduction; Russian names; “From the Author”; Chapter I; March 30: *BK* 11-34; **paragraph expressing interest in a prospective visit to the Oregon State Correctional Institution for a seminar on Levinas and *The Brothers Karamazov* due via email to me by 5 p.m., Wednesday, March 30**; April 1: *BK* 35-56; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 7 (“The Face of the Other,” pp. 85-92); Friday, April 1, 3-5 p.m., Gerlinger 110B: **interviews for prison visit.**

II. April 4: *BK* 56-77; April 6: *BK* 77-98; April 8: 99-124

III. April 11: *BK* 124-141; April 13: *BK* 145-163; April 15: *BK* 163-183; **first in-class writing assignment**

IV. April 18: *BK* 185-213; Professor Susan McReynolds visits our class; **all students are expected to attend Professor McReynolds’ lecture at 7 p.m. in the Gerlinger Alumni Lounge**; Tuesday, April 19: twelve students from our class travel to the Oregon State Correctional Institution in Salem for a session with Professor McReynolds and my students inside OSCI on *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 8 (“Responsibility for the Other”) and *The Brothers Karamazov*; April 20: *BK* 213-230 (“the Grand Inquisitor”); **submit one-page (typed, double-spaced) response to Professor McReynolds’ lecture**; April 22: *BK* 230-243

V. April 25: *BK* 245-280; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 95-101 (Chapter Eight, “Responsibility for the Other”); April 27: *BK* 283-309; April 29: *BK* 309-334

VI. May 2: *BK* 334-355; May 4: *BK* 355-378; May 6: *BK* 379-400

VII: May 9: *BK* 400-422; May 11: *BK* 422-432; May 13: *BK* 435-454; **second in-class writing assignment**

VIII: May 16: *BK* 454-474; May 18: *BK* 475-494; May 20: *BK* 494-515

IX: May 23: *BK* 515-547; May 25: *BK* 547-568; May 27: *BK* 568-589; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 113-122 (Chapter Ten, “The Hardness of Philosophy and the Consolation of Religion”)

X. May 30: *BK* 589-610; June 1: *BK* 610-630; June 3: *BK* 631-646 (Epilogue); **third in-class writing assignment**

Requirements:

Students must keep up with the reading assignments, regularly attend class, and participate in class discussions. **More than two unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your grade by five points per missed class.**

Written work will consist of three in-class writing assignments (identification and explication of passages from the reading).

Your grades for the course will be based on the following criteria:  
class participation and one-page written responses to Prof. McReynolds' lecture: **10%**  
in-class written assignments: **90%** (30% each)