

RUSS 340: RUSSIA'S BIG BOOKS

DOSTOEVSKY'S *DEMONS*

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Fyodor Dostoevsky's 1872 satirical novel *Demons* (Бесы, formerly known in English as *The Possessed*) takes on a theme quite relevant to our own time: extreme political polarization and its consequences. The novel deploys comedy and tragedy in the story of a small town beset by young revolutionaries who want to topple the social order. The author charts the appeal of political nihilism, as well its psychosocial aftermath as compromise dissolves, norms corrode, and violence erupts.

In this course we will spend ten weeks with *Demons*, exploring its sources and themes, as well as its author's views on a rapidly modernizing 19th-century Russia. We will consider the novel's place in Dostoevsky's oeuvre, as well as in Russian and world literature/culture. And we will be doing all this during the climax of the 2020 US presidential race!

More generally, this course will provide a grasp of the key issues, socioreligious debates and political trends of the era in which the novel was written, an appreciation for how authors speak to their readers across the centuries, and the challenge of reading one of the greatest literary achievements of all time. All readings in English.

Offered jointly with RUSS 543A, ENGL 300A, CHID 495A, HONORS 240A, C LIT 362A