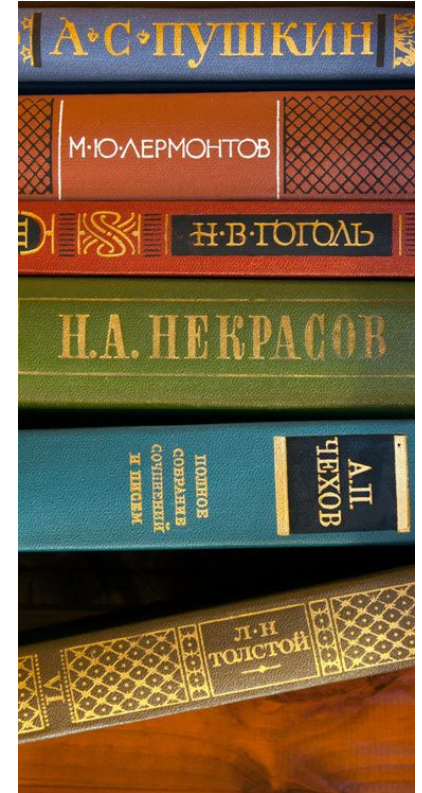
The background of the slide is a faded, artistic illustration of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. The cathedral's colorful, onion-shaped domes and intricate architectural details are visible, though the image is semi-transparent to allow the text to be the primary focus.

# Beauty, Prophecy, and the Incarnation: Russian Literature in the Classical Christian School

Stephen Rippon  
Delaware Valley Classical School  
New Castle, Delaware

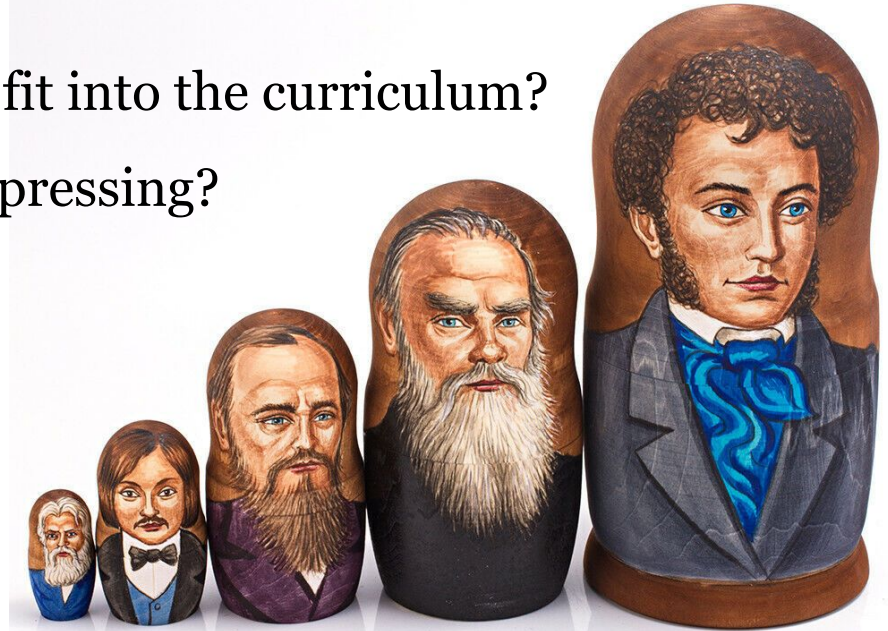
# Overview of Presentation

- Four Concerns about Teaching Russian Literature
- Three Important Aspects of Russian Literature
  - Beauty
  - Prophecy
  - Incarnation
- Five Key Russian Authors and Their Works
  - Pushkin
  - Gogol
  - Dostoevsky
  - Tolstoy
  - Solzhenitsyn



# Concerns About Teaching Russian Literature

- What is lost in translation?
- Isn't Russia the enemy?
- How does Russian literature fit into the curriculum?
- Isn't Russian literature so depressing?
- Other concerns?



English literature: French literature:

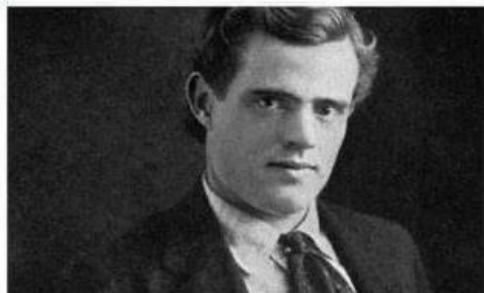


I will die for honour

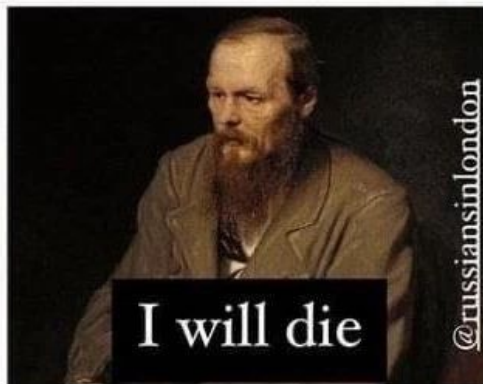


I will die for love

American literature: Russian literature:



I will die for freedom



I will die

@russiansinlondon



# Characteristic Themes of Russian Literature

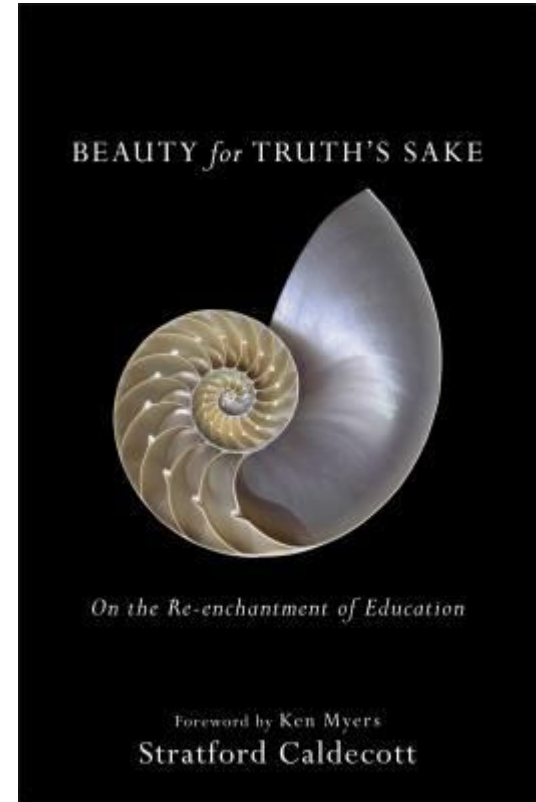
- The Value of Beauty
- A Prophetic Critique of Ideology
- The Importance of the Incarnation



# A Definition of Beauty

Beauty is the radiance of the true and the good, and it is what attracts us to both.

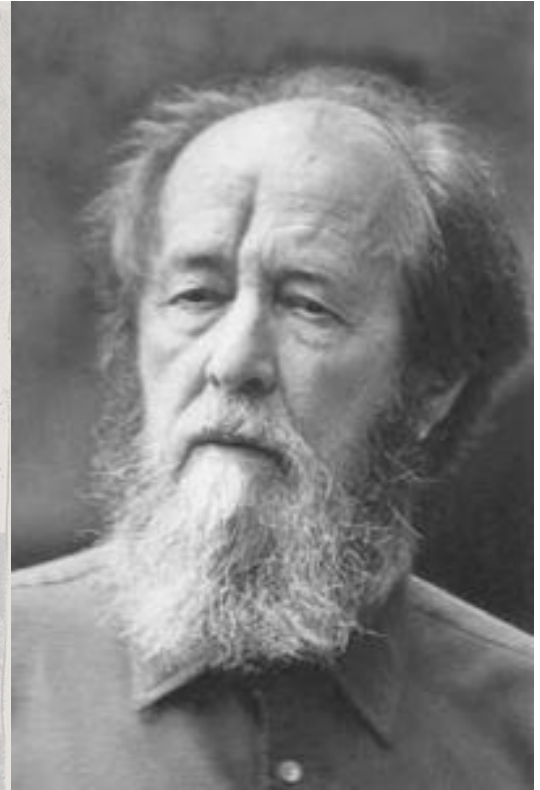
– Stratford Caldecott in *Beauty for Truth's Sake*



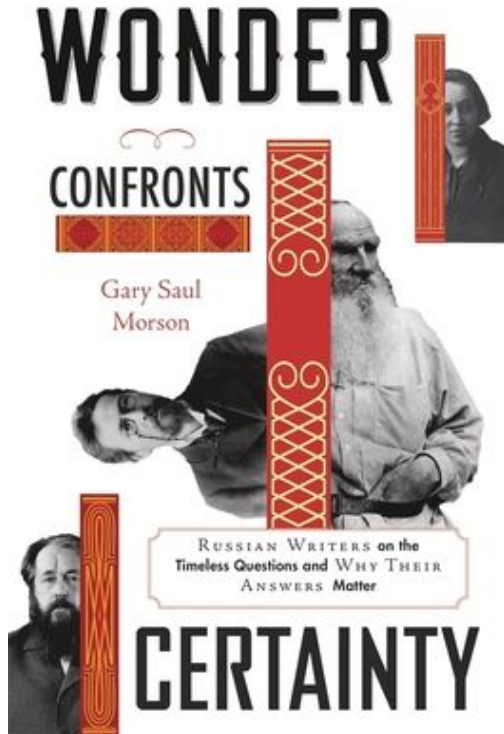
# How "Beauty Will Save the World"

If the tops of these three trees [Truth, Goodness, and Beauty] do converge, as thinkers used to claim, and if the all too obvious and the overly straight sprouts of Truth and Goodness have been crushed, cut down, or not permitted to grow, then perhaps the whimsical, unpredictable, and ever surprising shoots of Beauty will force their way through, and soar up to *that very spot*, thereby fulfilling the task of all three.

– Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture



# Prophecy: "Wonder Confronts Certainty"



Much of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century may be read in the light of the struggle between those who were concerned with the larger implications of the ideas and those who would convert them immediately into social levers . . . . Wonder confronts certainty. Theory and ideology challenge each other as mutually exclusive modes of thought.

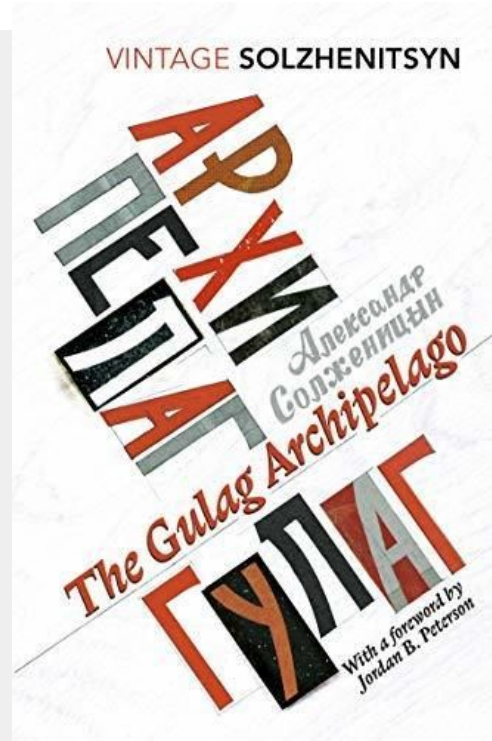
— Rufus Mathewson,  
*The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*



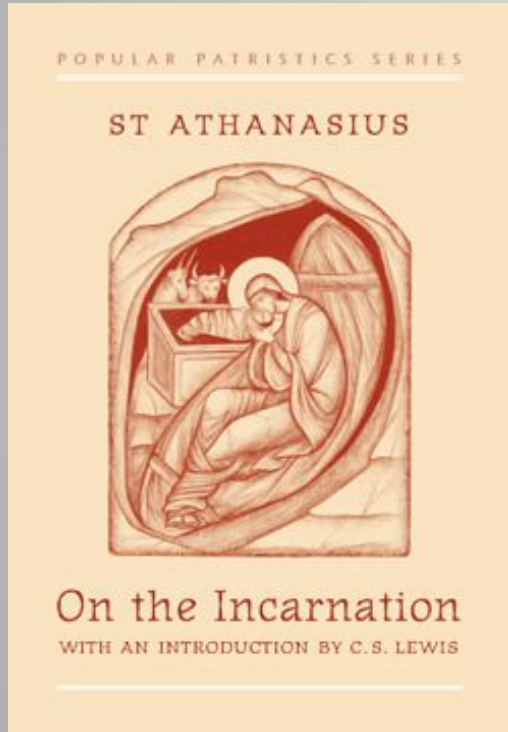
# Prophecy: The Destructiveness of Ideology

Macbeth's self-justifications were feeble – and his conscience devoured him. Yes, even Iago was a little lamb too. The imagination and the spiritual strength of Shakespeare's evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no *ideology*.

— Alexander Solzhenitsyn,  
*The Gulag Archipelago*



# The Incarnation



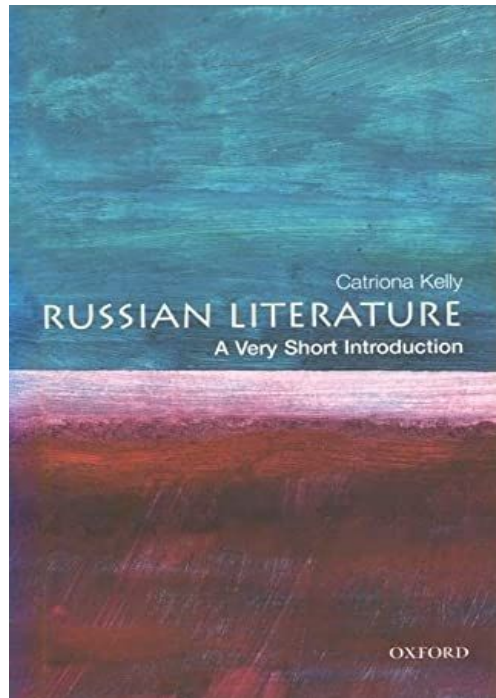
Just as the sun is not defiled by the contact of its rays with earthly objects, but rather enlightens and purifies them, so He Who made the sun is not defiled by being made known in a body, but rather the body is cleansed and quickened by His indwelling, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

– Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*

# Incarnation in Russian Literature

The uniqueness of Russian literature (and Russian culture more generally) has been held by many Western observers in precisely this ability to embrace material and spiritual worlds.

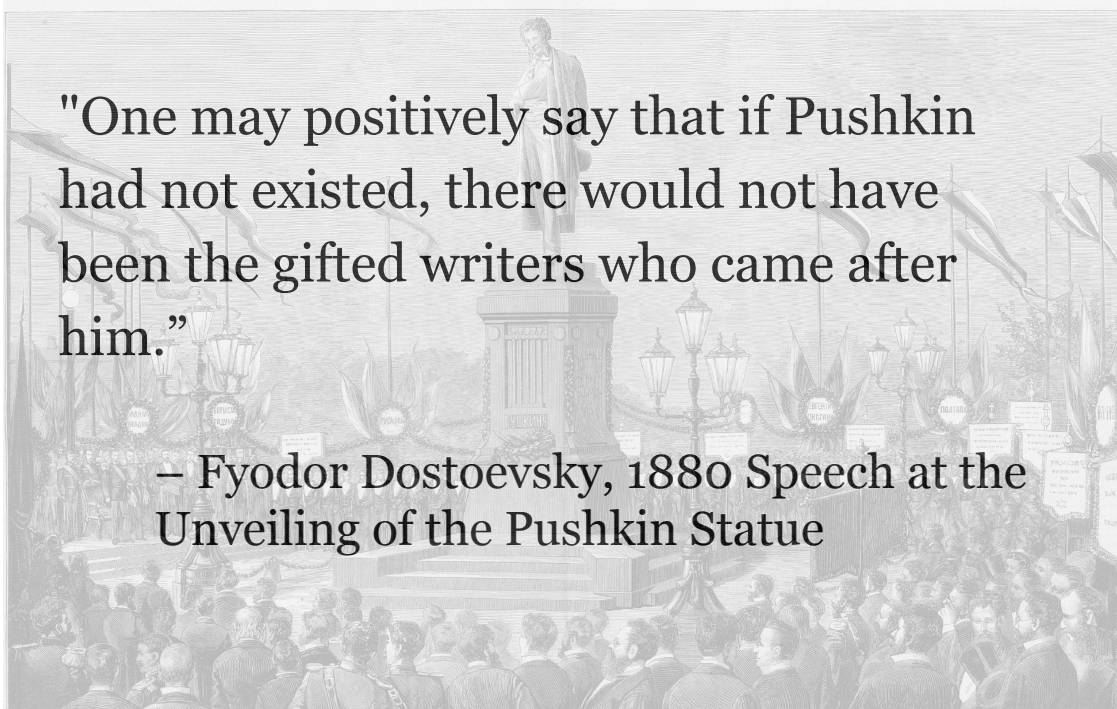
– Catriona Kelly,  
*Russian Literature: A Very Short Introduction*



# Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837): The Father of Russian Literature

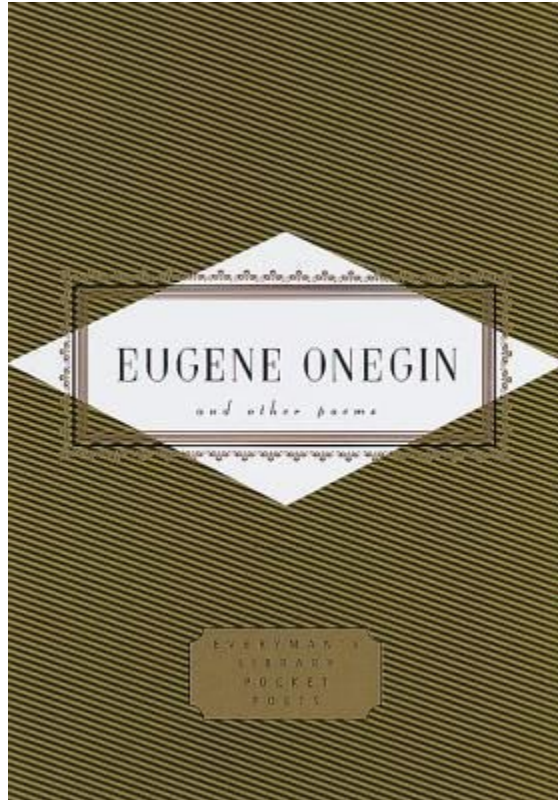
"One may positively say that if Pushkin had not existed, there would not have been the gifted writers who came after him."

– Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1880 Speech at the  
Unveiling of the Pushkin Statue





# *Eugene Onegin* (a novel in verse from 1831)



Spoilt by the habit of indulgence,  
now dazzled by one thing's effulgence,  
now disenchanted with the next,  
more and more bored by yearning's text.  
[....]

he killed eight years in such a style,  
and wasted life's fine flower meanwhile.

– Narrator in *Eugene Onegin*



*Eugene Onegin and Vladimir Lensky's Duel (Ilya Repin)*

# The Queen of Spades (a short story from 1833)

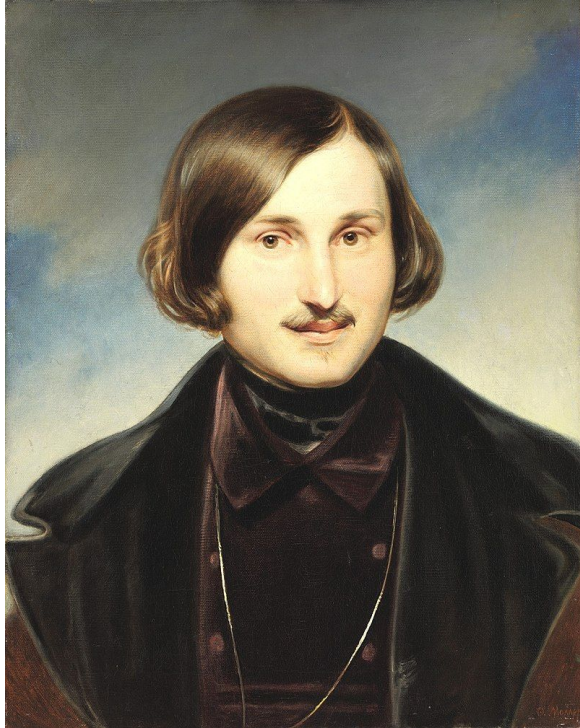
"Reveal your secret to me! What is it to you? . . . Perhaps it is connected to a terrible sin, to a pact with the devil . . . Think: you are old, you do not have long to live—I am ready to take your sin on my soul."

– Hermann in "The Queen of Spades"





# Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852)



"to Gogol the aesthetic and the religious were not separate categories; they were in reality one—the Kingdom of God was the Kingdom of Beauty."

– Jesse Zeldin in *Nikolai Gogol's Quest for Beauty*



## “The Nose” (a short story from 1836)

"My God, oh my God! What have I done to deserve this? If only I had lost an arm or a leg—it would have been far better; or even my ears—that would have been hard, yet I could have borne it; but without his nose a man is nothing: neither man nor beast, but God knows what!"

– Major Kovalyov in "The Nose"



# “The Overcoat” (a short story from 1842)

With this new regime his whole existence became somehow more fulfilled, as if he had got married, as if there were some other person with him, as if he were no longer alone but attended by some fair companion who had agreed to step down life's path with him—and this pleasant companion, this soul mate was none other than his heavy, padded overcoat, with its long-wearing and robust lining.

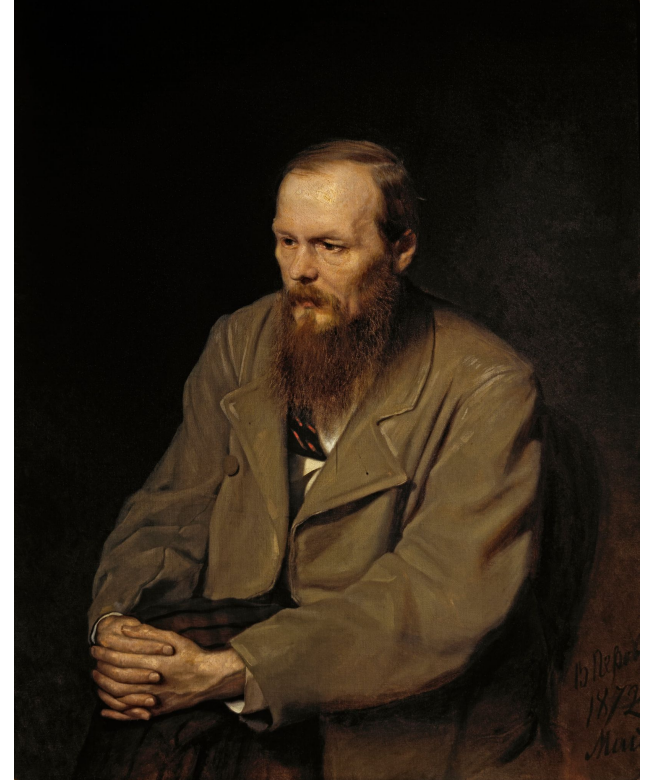
– Narrator in "The Overcoat"



# Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)

“Dostoevsky could understand how someone, starting with the highest idealism and the finest moral principles as ends, could agree to accomplish such ends through the use of the most ruthless and murderous means.”

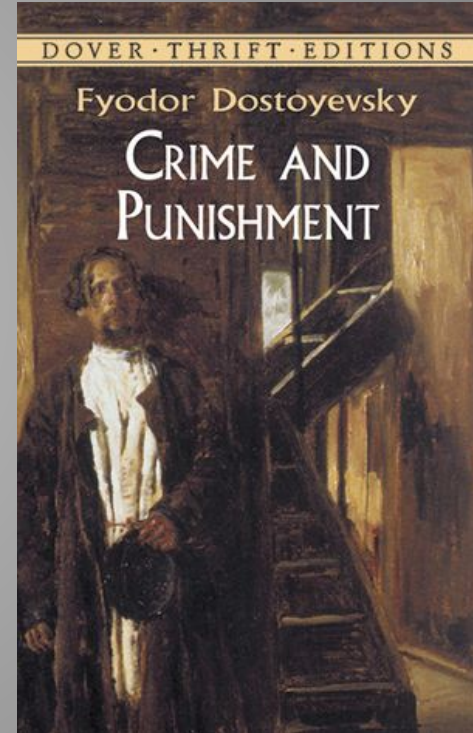
– Joseph Frank, *Lectures on Dostoevsky*



# *Crime and Punishment* (a novel from 1866)

Life had stepped into the place of theory and something quite different would work itself out in his mind.

– Narrator in the Epilogue of  
*Crime and Punishment*

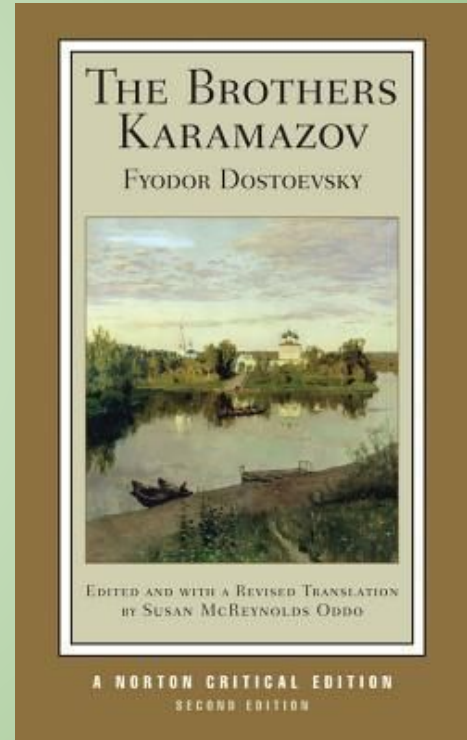




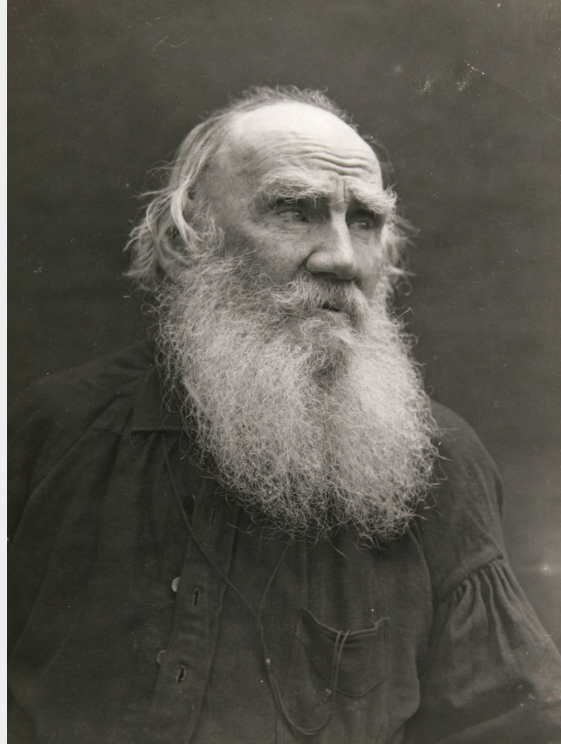
# *The Brothers Karamazov* (a novel from 1880)

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24)

– Epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov*



# Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)



"My question—that which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide—was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man from the foolish child to the wisest elder: it was a question without an answer to which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was, 'What will come of what I am doing to-day or shall do to-morrow? What will come of my whole life?' Differently expressed, the question is, 'Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?' It can also be expressed thus: 'Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?'"

– Leo Tolstoy in *A Confession* (1880)

# "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" (1886)

"Our only trouble is that we haven't land enough. If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself."

– Pahóm in  
"How Much Land . . .?"

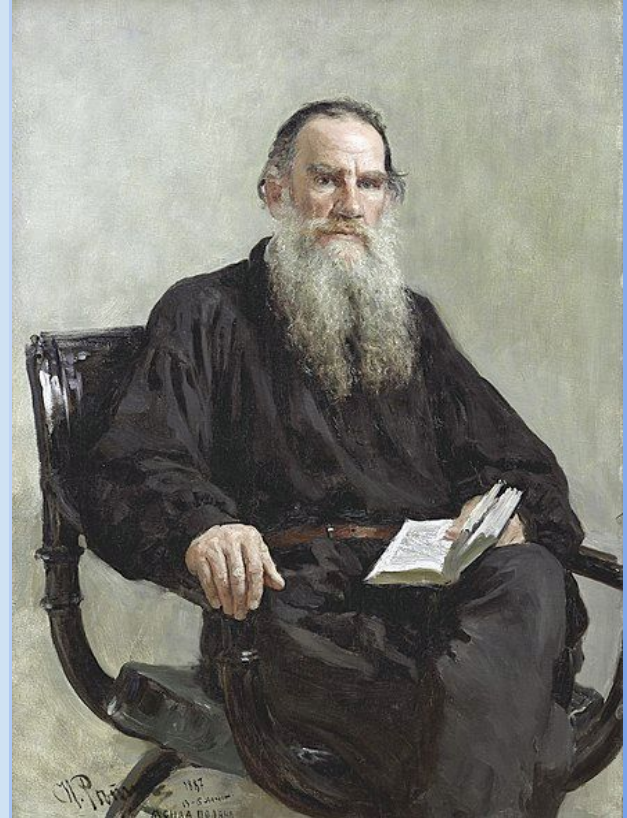




## *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (a novella from 1886)

The syllogism he had learnt from Kiesewetter's Logic: "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius — man in the abstract — was mortal, was perfectly correct, but he was not Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite, quite separate from all others. He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya, with the toys, a coachman and a nurse, afterwards with Katenka and with all the joys, griefs, and delights of childhood, boyhood, and youth. What did Caius know of the smell of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of?

– Narrator in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

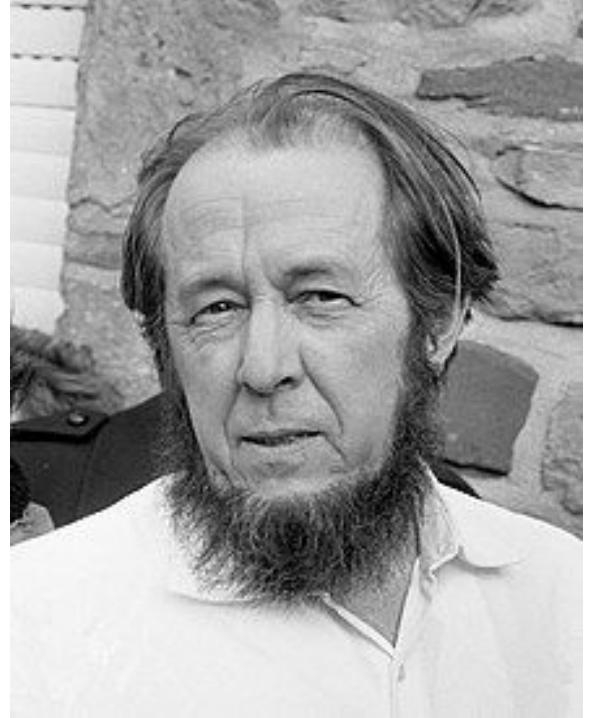




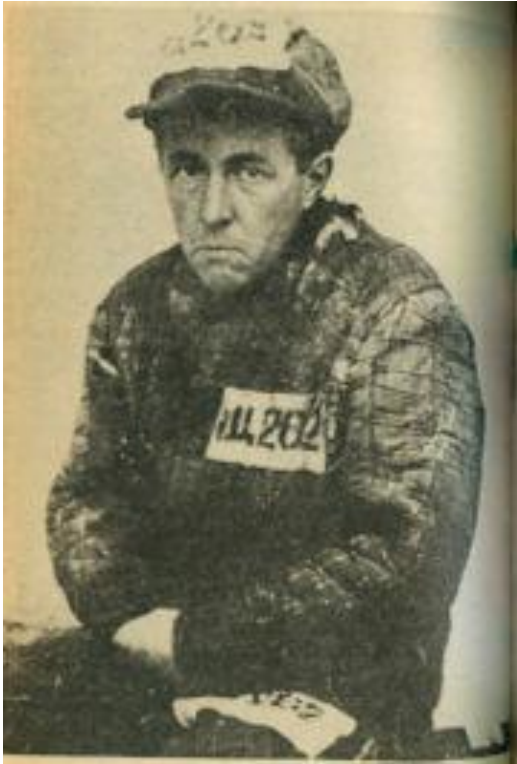
# Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008)

"after the Soviet Union disintegrated, historians would routinely list *Gulag* and *One Day* among the factors contributing to the regime's collapse."

– Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Alexis Klimoff,  
*The Soul and Barbed Wire: An Introduction  
to Solzhenitsyn*



# *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962)



Can a man who's warm  
understand one who's freezing?

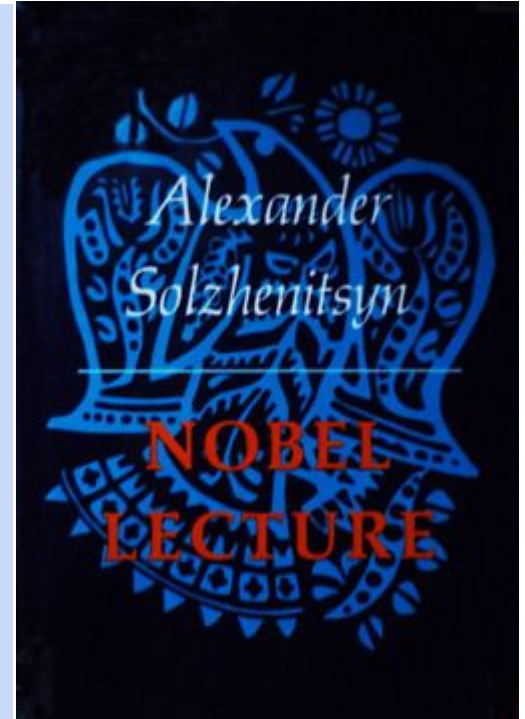
– Narrator in *One Day*

"Be glad you're in prison. Here  
you have time to think about your  
soul."

– Alyoshka the Baptist in  
*One Day*

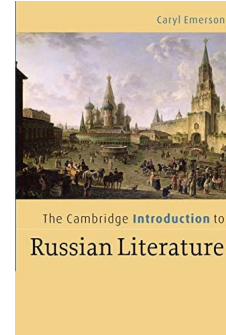
# Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Lecture (1970)

I believe that world literature has it in its power to help mankind, in these its troubled hours, to see itself as it really is, notwithstanding the indoctrinations of prejudiced people and parties. World literature has it in its power to convey condensed experience from one land to another so that we might cease to be split and dazzled, that the different scales of values might be made to agree, and one nation learn correctly and concisely the true history of another with such strength of recognition and painful awareness as it had itself experienced the same, and thus might it be spared from repeating the same cruel mistakes.

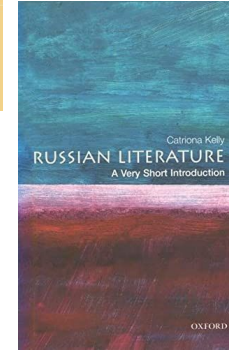


# Works for Further Background on Russian Literature

Emerson, Caryl. *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2008.



Kelly, Catriona. *Russian Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2001.



Morson, Gary Saul. *Wonder Confronts Certainty: Russian Writers on the Timeless Questions and Why Their Answers Matter*. Belknap Press / Harvard UP, 2023.

