



When Russia Learned to Read : Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917

Jeffrey Brooks

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Late Imperial Russia's revolution in literacy touched nearly every aspect of daily life and culture, from social mobility and national identity to the sensibilities and projects of the country's greatest writers. Within a few decades, a ragtag assembly of semi-educated authors, publishers, and distributors supplanted an oral tradition of songs and folktales with a language of popular imagination suitable for millions of new readers of common origins eager for entertainment and information. *When Russia Learned to Read* tells the story of this profound transformation of culture, custom, and belief.

With a new introduction that underscores its relevance to a post-Soviet Russia, *When Russia Learned to Read* addresses the question of Russia's common heritage with the liberal democratic market societies of Western Europe and the United States. This prize-winning book also exposes the unsuspected complexities of a mass culture little known and less understood in the West. Jeffrey Brooks brings out the characteristically Russian aspect of the nation's popular writing as he ranges through chapbooks, detective stories, newspaper serials, and women's fiction, tracing the emergence of secular, rational, and cosmopolitan values along with newly minted notions of individual initiative and talent. He shows how crude popular tales and serials of the era find their echoes in the literary themes of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and other great Russian writers, as well as in the current renaissance of Russian detective stories and thrillers.

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