SIBLINGS
THE PATH TO UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD
IN TOLSTOY AND DOSTOEVSKY

Anna A. Berman

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
SLAVIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Adviser: Caryl Emerson

June 2012
Abstract

Studies of the family in Russian literature tend to focus on marriage and women, or on the conflict of generations and failures of the patriarchal order. Little attention is paid to lateral, consanguineal sibling bonds. By applying a “sibling lens” to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fiction, this dissertation proposes a new way of understanding the role of family in their works. Because the two viewed sibling relations as non-sexual, non-hierarchical, close to the self (belonging to the Russian concept of “one’s own” [svoi]), and unchosen, siblinghood became the basis for their philosophies of ideal human connection.

Both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky distrusted the passion of romantic love, and in their early works they use sibling love and intimacy as an alternative or counterbalance to erotic desire. For Tolstoy, brother-sister relations are the model for happy marriages (War and Peace). For Dostoevsky, the sibling is a stabilizing figure within his early love triangles (“White Nights,” Insulted and Injured). As their thought developed, both authors sought ways to expand the potential of the sibling bond into the larger social world.

The dissertation traces an arc from Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s early depictions of individual sibling relationships, through their attempts to expand siblinghood beyond the immediate family, and ultimately to their visions of universal brotherhood in their late novels. Literal siblings and then metaphorical siblings provide their link between the immediate, concrete reality of “loving one’s neighbor” and the abstract, spiritual concept of everything as part of God (Tolstoy) or all people united in the brotherhood of Christ (Dostoevsky). I argue that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are exceptional in forging this bond between depictions of literal siblings and the ideal of brotherhood. The dissertation concludes by contrasting their treatment of siblings with the way siblings function in English novels of the period, where their significance remains rooted in the material reality of everyday life. In uncovering Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s use of siblinghood to move uninterruptedly from concrete instances of love between individuals to the broader spiritual ideal of brotherhood, the dissertation offers a new understanding of the role of family and religion in their literature.
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Acknowledgements

My greatest debt of gratitude goes to Caryl Emerson—adviser, mentor, colleague, close friend, sputnitsa, and “soulmate in these matters” (to draw on her words). Our five-year conversation about Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, family, siblings, brotherhood, and love has both shaped me as a scholar and provided my ideal of intellectual exchange. Caryl read, reread, and offered commentary on every idea in this dissertation, pushing me toward larger theoretical claims. Her deep emotional and intellectual understanding and her humble readiness to reconsider her views is a combination I can only hope to someday emulate. I cannot imagine a better model of generosity, brilliance, and compassion.

I have been blessed to find a second mentor outside of Slavic Studies who also profoundly influenced both this project and my development as a scholar, and that is Juliet Mitchell. If Caryl was my Slavic mentor, Juliet has been my sibling mentor. Working with her broadened my intellectual horizons and taught me how much is at stake in the study of siblings. Juliet is not only wise, but generous with her wisdom and I am grateful for all the hours she spent reading my work and for her keen questions and perceptive insights into the universal human problems siblinghood raises.

I feel lucky to have written my dissertation in such a caring, supportive department. I am grateful to Michael Wachtel for years of academic guidance, for bringing me back from the big questions to an attention to the level of the word, and for his meticulously close reading of my drafts. Ksana Blank provided invaluable help with all my questions about subtleties of the Russian language. The dissertation benefited from her nuanced comments based on native speaker sensibility and vast knowledge of Dostoevsky. Olga Hasty has been a source of encouragement since my first semester, and Ellen Chances was always ready with questions to push my ideas forward. I am also grateful to all my fellow graduate students who challenged me with their feedback in dissertation colloquium. A special thanks to Yuri Corrigan, an intellectual kindred spirit, who has been talking about this project with me now for five years, and to Christine Dunbar, who mentored me through every step of Princeton. And finally, Kate Fischer played a supporting role in all my endeavors here and made sure everything came together in the end.

Outside of the department several scholars have played influential roles. Svetlana Evdokimova’s enthusiasm for my undergraduate thesis on siblings in War and Peace launched me on this trajectory. Diane Thompson guided my introduction to Dostoevsky and affirmed my view of the positive role siblings play in his works. Gary Saul Morson generously provided detailed comments on the dissertation prospectus and gave me faith in the importance of the project. Jane Taubman read drafts of all the chapters with her keen eye and impeccable knowledge of grammar. Robin Miller and Donna Orwin discussed the ideas with me at several conferences and offered encouragement. My aunt, Jane Levin, offered an eager ear for all my thoughts about siblings in literature, and the conclusion benefitted from her knowledge of the English novel, especially Jane Austen.

Many friends have encouraged me along the way, but several deserve special note. Amelia Worsley read multiple drafts of my project description and her feedback helped me see what was of most significance to an audience outside Slavic Studies. She is the most astute, critical reader I have ever found and I credit her for making me a better writer. Mary Kuhn delved into all my thoughts about the dissertation with me and applied her knowledge of English literature to an early draft of the conclusion. Rachael Gaubinger also read the conclusion and
offered thoughtful commentary on siblings in the English context. Matthew Birkhold and Elise Bonner have been unstintingly enthusiastic about my work and eager to share ideas. And my “troglodyte” friends kept the spirit of fun in it.

Finally, I would never have undertaken this project were it not for my family. There are not words enough to thank my parents for creating a “Rostovian” idyllic home sphere that shaped my vision of family as the ultimate source of love and support. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the dissertation was getting over this “too rosy” view. And were it not for Josh being the ideal brother, I might never have recognized the essential importance of the sibling bond.

Note on Transliterations and Translations

I have used a modified version of the Library of Congress transliteration system with exceptions for commonly known names and the –y ending (instead if –ii) and “yo” and “ya” for “ё” and “я” in proper names. For the translations in this text, I have referenced the following versions in addition to doing my own:

**Dostoevsky**


**Tolstoy**


Introduction

Studies of the family in Russian literature fall into two broad categories related to two central themes of the European novel. The first category focuses on the marriage plot, emphasizing women, motherhood, and the dangers of erotic love. The second category focuses on the conflict of generations plot, emphasizing the patriarchal order and the troubled relations between parents and children. Tradition tells us that Tolstoy was a writer of the first category—*Anna Karenina* as a Russian *Madame Bovary*—while Dostoevsky belongs in the second category—*The Brothers Karamazov* as an oedipal tale of parricide. What these models leave out are lateral, consanguineal ties—the brothers and sisters who populate Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fictional worlds. Moving beyond the traditional romance and intergenerational focuses, I offer a new, sibling approach to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s works. This approach illuminates not only the familial love that serves as a positive alternative to erotic desire, but also the lateral axis of intra-generational bonds which offer a counterbalance to troubled hierarchical, parent-child relations. By uncovering alternative structures of power and connection, a sibling approach offers a new way of understanding love and kinship in the nineteenth-century novel.

I believe that siblinghood is not only a family concern for Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, but also becomes a model for all human connection in their fiction. Taking on social and spiritual significance, sibling bonds offer a model for the structuring of society and for the spiritual ideal.

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1 Symptomatic of this pattern, in the *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* family is treated in the chapter “Women, sexuality, and the family in Tolstoy” (Edwina Cruise). The central concern here is the tension between sexuality and motherhood in the creation of Tolstoy’s female characters, reducing family to the idea of marriage and child rearing. By contrast, in the *Cambridge Companion to Dostoevsky*, the chapter on “Dostoevskii and the family” is primarily about vertical relations between fathers and children and Dostoevsky’s related idea of the “accidental family” (Susanne Fusso).

2 The recently published *“Family Idea” in Russian Literature* [«Мысль семейная» в русской литературе] (2008, ed. Stroganov) provides an overview of the treatment of family in Russian literature and criticism, but makes little mention of sibling bonds. The opening article includes “intra-familial relations between children” [тема внутрисемейных отношений между детьми] as one of the five important family themes in Russian literature, but does not expand upon it. As the author notes, the idea of family tends to be reduced to the idea of spousal relations [мысль семейная проявляется как мысль супружеская] (E. N. Stroganova, “‘Mysl’ semeinaia’ v russkoj literature XIX veka,” 18).
of universal brotherhood. The fundamental claim of this dissertation is that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky build upon their ideas about the dynamics of the literal sibling bond to arrive at their ideals of universal brotherhood. Always concerned with how abstract philosophical conceptions played out in real life, the two authors use siblings—first literal, then metaphorical—as the stepping stones toward their ideas of brotherhood. The dissertation traces this arc from Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s depictions of individual sibling relationships in their early works, through their attempts to expand siblinghood beyond the immediate family, and ultimately to their visions of universal brotherhood in their late novels.

Scholarship on Siblings

In psychology it was not until the 1980s that siblings began to take their place alongside parents in shaping understanding of family systems and identity development. In founding psychoanalysis, Freud wrote extensively about the lasting influence of a person’s relationship with his/her mother and father, but made little mention of siblings. He saw siblings as rivals, and the few references to them in his theories focus almost exclusively on the negative aspects of the sibling bond. Only in 2000 did Juliet Mitchell publish the first book attempting to make a place

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3 In using this term, I do not mean to imply a distinction between brotherhood and sisterhood. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s ideal included both men and women.
4 I am using the definition of “sibling bond” provided by Bank and Kahn: “a connection between the selves, at both the intimate and the public levels, of two siblings; it is a ‘fitting’ together of two people’s identities” (The Sibling Bond, 15).
5 Despite the concept of brotherhood and literal siblinghood’s shared linguistic origin, they are rarely explored together. In Lev Tolstoy and the Concept of Brotherhood: Proceedings of a conference held at the University of Ottawa 22-24 February 1996 (edited by Donskov and Woodsworth), siblings receive almost no mention.
7 See for example The Interpretation of Dreams, 250.
for siblings in psychoanalytic theory. She argues that “the major [new] consideration is the introduction into psychoanalytic theory of laterality – it is one’s horizontal, not one’s vertical relations, that both threaten and confirm one.” Mitchell traces a shift in psychoanalytic theory in the twentieth century “from the importance of the father to the importance of the mother.” This shift can be linked with the decline of the patriarchal order, as children came to be seen as belonging to the mother more than the father and both parents began to hold more equal roles as authority figures. Mitchell argues that one role for the mother which has gone overlooked is her position as law giver. The “law of the mother” runs parallel to that of the father, but it operates laterally among her children, enjoining them not to murder each other or commit incest with each other. This law helps to define sibling relationships, turning the hatred that arises from the threat of having one’s place usurped into love for one who is similar, yet not identical. I concur with Mitchell when she cautions that a focus on the lateral is in no way meant to discount the importance of vertical parent-child bonds, but rather to enhance and expand the image we have formed through an exclusive focus on them.

Following psychology’s lead, literary scholarship has been slow to take notice of the importance of siblings. As I mentioned in the opening lines of this introduction, traditional studies of the family novel have focused on conjugal and parent-child relations at the expense of sisters and brothers. It was only in the last twenty years that brothers and sisters began to receive attention in British literature (and occasional notice in French and German literature).

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9 Madmen and Medusas, 318-319.
10 Siblings, 49.
11 Siblings, 43.
12 Psychoanalytic readings of Dostoevsky’s novels were common in the mid-twentieth century and many were published in psychoanalytic journals, rather than literary ones. I cite some of these studies in Chapter Two.
13 For example, in surveying the depiction of family in eighteenth-century French novels Lynn Hunt describes two categories of family disarray: novels by women that focus on abusive husbands, and novels by men that focus on tyrannical fathers and rebellious sons (The Family Romance of the French Revolution, 23).
My dissertation will be the first in-depth study of siblings in Russian literature. The scholarship on siblings in European literature focuses primarily on the dynamics of individual sibling pairs, emphasizing issues of love and sexuality.\textsuperscript{14} Incest, primarily in Romantic and Gothic literature, has received by far the most attention.\textsuperscript{15} Some of the patterns I discovered in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fiction have been noticed in British literature as well, such as sibling bonds serving as models for romantic relations or sisters sacrificing themselves for their brothers. Nowhere have I encountered my central claim—that literal siblinghood is a model for the more abstract idea of universal brotherhood. Beyond using a sibling approach to enhance our understanding of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, this dissertation will also explore what their works can tell us about the sibling bond and its significance in the second half of the nineteenth century. In analyzing the links between depictions of sibling relations and the ideal of brotherhood, I will offer several hypotheses for why siblinghood may be treated differently in Russian literature than in the West.

**siblings and the family in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky**

People traditionally have two families in their lives—consanguineal and conjugal—the family they grow up in and the new one they create in marriage. For both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the consanguineal family is primarily defined by sibling relations rather than parent-child. This first “sibling-family” is linked to childhood and innocence, uncomplicated by sexual passion or adult concerns. In Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s own lives, siblings were among the most


\textsuperscript{15} A famous example is the second half of Otto Rank’s *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend*, which is entirely devoted to siblings. A useful overview of the sibling incest theme in European Romantic literature is provided by Thorslev: “Incest as Romantic Symbol.” Richardson notes the distinction between sibling incest’s depiction in Gothic literature, where it is usually unintentional and committed between people who were separated at birth, and its depiction in English Romantic poetry, where the attraction stems from a shared past (“The Dangers of Sympathy,” 739).
stable sources of love and support. Tolstoy lost his mother before he was old enough to remember her and his father was distant even before his death when Tolstoy was nine. Tolstoy was raised with his three brothers and sister on their family estate and wrote fondly about this family constellation all his life. Dostoevsky was the second of seven children and spent his first thirteen years entirely at home without attending school.\textsuperscript{16} He and his elder brother, Mikhail, were sent to the Engineering Institute in St Petersburg together (during which time both parents passed away) and Mikhail remained one of the most important figures in Dostoevsky’s life. Perhaps based on their biographical experiences, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky made sibling relationships the core of many of their fictional families, with parents either absent or of secondary importance.

Despite the prominent place siblings hold in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fiction, neither author offers any declarative statement about what the sibling bond should be. Tolstoy wrote incessantly about what an ideal marriage should look like or how a woman could shift from girlhood into motherhood without being corrupted by sexuality. His ideas on these matters were paradoxical and contradictory because he never settled upon a satisfactory solution. I believe siblinghood, on the other hand, was an unconflicted sphere for him, so he saw no need to define it. Similarly, Dostoevsky wrote at length in his \textit{Writer’s Diary} about the role of parents and their relations with their children, but he too offers no direct statement about the proper look and feel of sibling relationships. He made declarations to fathers in his \textit{Writer’s Diary}, but never addressed brothers. Lacking declarative statements of their visions of literal siblinghood, we must glean our picture from the fictional depictions of sibling relationships in their works (the focus of Chapters One and Two).

\textsuperscript{16} For a complete description of Dostoevsky’s childhood, see Frank, \textit{Seeds of Revolt}, 23-41.
I find four defining characteristics of the sibling bond as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky conceived it that (in combination) help distinguish it from other types of connection. First, although sequential, it is lateral, allowing for equality not possible in intergenerational relations. Second, it is non-sexual, removing the danger and instability both authors associated with erotic desire. Third, it is unconditional (i.e. unchosen and non-revocable), distinguishing it from friendships, which can be made and broken. And finally, siblinghood is made up of svoi, the Russian term for “one’s own/native.” Through shared blood, name, household, and/or relations, siblings hold a place exceptionally close to the self. Fostering a sense of lateral belonging among svoi, the consanguineal sibling-family becomes the basis of both authors’ ideals of a loving and supportive family base, which in turn can be the basis for a model society. All of these aspects will be discussed in greater depth in the chapters that follow.

While I have been stressing this point of concurrence between the two authors, both of whom put family connections at the heart of their works, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s conceptions of family are in other respects radically opposed. The warmth, serenity, and unity of the Shcherbatsky and Rostov households would seem to have almost nothing in common with the fractured and fractious nature of the Versilovs or Karamazovs aside from the name “family.” In fact, Dostoevsky’s “accidental families” were in part intended as a polemic against the idyllic vision of family found in Tolstoy’s fiction, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

Given these stark differences, siblinghood takes different forms in the two authors’ works. For Tolstoy, the bond is based on warm childhood memories and time spent in close proximity, a passive accumulation that affords an intimate knowledge of the hidden sides of a person’s character. Sibling love arises from this familiarity. For Dostoevsky’s siblings from broken families, raised apart and often under great financial strain, sibling unity is dependent
upon “active love” and understanding of a shared lot in life. Dostoevsky’s fictional sibling relationships endure more ruptures and strains, but the siblings’ ability to overcome these challenges affirms the resilience and power of the sibling bond.

In exploring Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s views of siblinghood, this dissertation builds on a long tradition of contrasting the two authors. Critics traditionally define the two by oppositions: one was a writer of the gentry class who depicted life on the country estate; the other was an urban writer who depicted life in the squalid tenements of St Petersburg. One was wracked with guilt over his privilege and idealized the life of the simple peasant; the other had lived among such “simple peasants” in Siberian prison camp and understood both the brutal and pious sides of the Russian nature. One looked to the past, the other to the future. In the Russian Silver Age, Dmitri Merezhkovsky is perhaps most famous for creating the dichotomy of Tolstoy as a seer of the flesh, Dostoevsky as a seer of the spirit.17 George Steiner’s Tolstoy or Dostoevsky defined the contrast for an English speaking audience. He argues that Tolstoy’s characters go to the land for salvation, while for Dostoevsky, the Kingdom of God can never be of this world.18 While these poles are not definitive, they provide useful background because they inform the two authors’ treatments of the sibling theme. In Resurrection Nekhlyudov goes to Siberia to serve his brothers suffering in the oppressive prison system. The goal is brotherly union on this earth. For Dostoevsky’s characters like Zosima, brotherhood comes not through remaking society, but through spiritual rebirth and union.

17 Merezhkovsky, L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii. Similarly, Berdiaev saw Dostoevsky concerned with the spiritual plain, while Tolstoy “stuck to the psychic and bodily domain” (Dostoievsky, 23).
18 Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, 93. For more on this issue, see pp 257-264.
The Tradition: Biblical and Mythological Models of Siblinghood

Our ideas of siblinghood are shaped, in part, by the myths we inherit, and these in turn are reflected in literature. Due primarily to Hegel’s commentary, Antigone has become one of the foundational models for the brother-sister bond in Western thought. As I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter One, Hegel uses Antigone’s speech justifying the decision to bury her brother—putting her duty to him above duty to a parent, child, or the State—as his basis for claiming the privileged status of the brother-sister bond. According to Hegel, brother and sister are united by blood, but do not desire each other. Therefore, they can exist in a state of equality, independence, and mutual self-realization not possible in other types of relations.19 This idealized vision contributed to the depiction of sister-brother relations in nineteenth-century literature as a site where kinship love could be enacted without the power-imbalance of the parent child relationship or the sexual desire found in conjugal relations, which could overcome reason and threaten free will.

In addition to this vision of specifically brother-sister relations, the Western tradition offers two contrasting visions of brotherhood—one based around rivalry and jealousy, the other around compassion and love. These opposing views stem from opposing visions of human nature, the extremes of which have been defined by Hobbes and Rousseau—the first arguing that man’s natural state is antagonism and war, and the second standing up for the inherent goodness of man.20

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19 Phenomenology of Mind, 477.
20 Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued that Nature has rendered men “apt to invade, and destroy one another” (Leviathan, 84). Consequently, civilization must restrain man’s “brutish” nature in order to foster brotherly relations. By contrast, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) argued that man is born innocent and is corrupted by society (Emile, 1762). While he did not suggest that natural/savage man was bound to other men by brotherly feelings, Rousseau posited that natural man had one key virtue—compassion—that created in him a natural “repugnance […] against doing evil” (as opposed to the idea of “do onto others” being acquired by reason) (A Discourse on Inequality, 101). Rousseau’s vision for society expounded in The Social Contract (1762) was based
Both of these visions of siblinghood appear in the Bible. The Old Testament takes the negative view. According to Genesis, the first sibling pair (born of human parents) is Cain and Abel. They have bequeathed to us a model of siblinghood as jealousy and competition; the relationship is mediated through rivalry for the favor of a higher power. Cain and Abel are never seen together in the Bible, except when Cain invites Abel to the field to slaughter him. The first brothers commit the first fratricide. Rome’s foundation myth of Romulus and Remus follows this model.

In the early twentieth century Freud created another influential myth around the idea of fraternal rivalry. Although it came after Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s lifetimes, it can help inform our reading of them. Building on Darwin’s idea of the primal horde, Freud developed a myth of an oppressive father whose sons ultimately rise up to overthrow him (*Totem and Taboo*, 1912-1913). Brothers in this model are brought together by their shared rivalry with the dominant father, who has control of all the women. They are united by the act of parricide, and then faced with their guilt they “revoke their deed” by placing a ban on killing and by rejecting the women of their clan whom the father had been withholding. According to Freud, they “thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism [murder and incest], which for that very reason inevitably corresponded to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex.”

The brothers agree that “no one of them must be treated by another as their father was treated by them all jointly,” and “to the religiously-based prohibition against killing the totem” they now add “the socially-based prohibition against fratricide.” Thus Freud explains on the premise that man wants the best for his fellowmen as well as for himself. Although *The Social Contract* never uses the words “brother” or “brotherhood,” people have interpreted it to be advocating brotherly relations.

21 *Totem and Taboo*, 143.
22 *Totem and Taboo*, 146.
the peace that is maintained between the “fraternal clan” as based on prohibition—keeping rivalry and hatred in check.

In opposition to these pathologically negative models, the New Testament is based on a positive conception of human nature, offering Christ’s brotherly love as an alternative to Cain’s murderous jealousy. Turning away from blood-kinship, Christ embraces the spiritual union of all people as the progeny of one God the Father. ²³ By positioning himself as the first among brothers (Romans 8:29), Christ offers a lateral model of connection, based on love, not rivalry. The tension between the Old and New Testament versions of brotherhood is at the heart of Dostoevsky’s novels, where rivalry and jealousy exist in constant tension with Christian brotherhood. Neither of these models satisfied Tolstoy. He never engages the Cain and Abel model and creates his own version of Christian brotherhood that avoids miracle or mysticism. In Tolstoy’s view, people do not become of one flesh with Jesus, but instead experience themselves as part of a larger Whole (God) that is accessed through love.

Russia has her own sibling foundation myth which has much in common with Freud’s, yet ultimately rejects Cain and Abel in favor of Christian brotherly love. The first Russian saints, Boris and Gleb, were brothers who allowed themselves to be killed by their brother Sviatopolk in order to avert a war that would have divided their people. The chronicler, Nestor, invokes Cain and Abel, calling Sviatopolk “truly a second Cain.” ²⁴ Yet the focus in Nestor’s telling of the Russian saints’ lives is quite different from its biblical predecessor. Rather than highlighting the rivalry and hatred of Sviatopolk, he emphasizes the brotherly love and meek submission of Boris and Gleb. Boris asks Christ to help him endure his passion and calls out to

²³ In Matthew 19:29, Jesus tells his disciples: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”
²⁴ One chronicler labeled him Abimelech from the Old Testament, who murdered his seventy brothers (Lenhoff, The Martyred Princes, 114).
God: “For Thou knowest, my Lord, that I do not resist, nor do I speak in defiance, even though I had at my command all my father’s warriors […] and yet I plotted nothing against my brother.”

His final words to his murderers are: “Brothers, draw near and finish your task and let there be peace to my brother and to you, brothers.” As Gail Lenhoff notes, “passive resistance of this sort could not have been viewed as a princely virtue because it would compromise a prince’s ability to rule: it was, rather, the virtue of a saint.”

Similarly, when Gleb learns that Boris has been killed, he weeps and prays: “Better it would be for me to die with you than to live on in this life alone and deprived of you.” After Gleb’s murder: “He ascended into the heavenly mansions to the Lord and beheld the brother for whom he had longed. Together they received the heavenly crowns which they had desired, and they rejoiced in the great and unspeakable joy which they did attain.”

Russia’s foundation myth is a lateralized version of Freud’s primal horde. Brother kills brother, yet that part of the myth is underplayed and the tale culminates in a glorification of brotherly love.

**Cultural Background: Siblings in the Russian Context**

Russian’s cultural tradition has a more positive conception of siblinghood than that of the West. In part because Russia did not observe primogeniture, and in part because of a stronger emphasis on kinship, siblinghood in Russian culture is not characterized by the rivalry and jealousy that Freud saw as its defining traits, though certain moments of this appear in some

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26 Hollingsworth, *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus’*, 106.
27 *The Martyred Princes*, 36. Lenhoff posits that three moral codes are being enacted: Orthodox Christianity, East Slavic pagan tradition, and Mosaic law; Svjatopolk is punished “for violating the bonds of kinship as much as for violating the norms of Christian behavior, and is contrasted to his martyred brothers and Jaroslav, who uphold the family honor” (113).
fairytales. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky both admired the fact that Russian traditional culture (i.e. peasant culture) emphasizes the collective as opposed to the West’s focus on the individual.

Traditionally, Russia has a more inclusive conception of family ties. Katerina Clark claims that: “Looking at kinship in terms of the horizontal axis, one finds that Russians consider a wider range of people to be kin than was customary in the West (milk brothers by the same wet nurse, adopted brother, coparents-in-law, ritual siblings, etc.).” Noting the predominant practice among the Russian peasantry of using kinship names in addressing strangers, George Fedotov argues: “In this procedure all social life is shaped as an extension of family life and all moral relations among men are raised to the level of blood kinship. This is of tremendous importance in understanding Russian social ethics.” Siblinghood is also extended through particularities of the Russian language. While English has special words reserved for brother and sister and then expands kinship outward from cousinhood (first cousins, second cousins, etc.), Russian expands kinship outward from siblings. Cousins are literally “second-kin-sisters” or “second-kin-brothers” (dvoiu-rod-nyi brat), followed by third-, fourth-, etc. Russian Orthodox ritual also enhances the sense of brotherhood in Russia. The church offered an ancient brother-making sacrament, adelphopoiesis, by which two people (typically men) can become brothers through the exchanging of crosses. When people marry in the Russian church, their

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30 Many tales involve three brothers, the youngest of whom is a fool or lazy. There is often conflict if he goes off to seek his fortune and proves more successful than his older brothers.

31 Tovrov provides five definitions of family (sem’ia, semeistvo) that coexisted in nineteenth-century Russia, only one of which is restricted to blood relations. The others include affines and members of the household or people who recognize the same “head of the family” (The Russian Noble Family, 66-67). She stresses that behavior—acting like a relation—was more important to determining family than actual blood ties (70-71). L.P. Naidenova notes that the term “family” (sem’ia) in the sixteenth-century Domostroi referred all the members of a household (family, servants, dependants, etc.) (“Svoi’ i ‘chuzhie v Domostroe,” 303). This was not unique to Russia, however. Ruth Perry notes that in eighteenth-century England there was fluidity as to which members of the household were considered part of the family (Novel Relations, 15-16).


33 The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, 16. This tendency is also discussed by Tovrov (The Russian Noble Family, 72). Serguei Oushakine has noted a similar pattern of using the “structure and/or logic of family relations for the organization and conceptualization of individual life” in contemporary Russian society (“Mesto-imeni-ia,” 11).
entire families become kin to each other (as opposed to just each member of the couple joining with his/her new family), so all the siblings of the bride become siblings to those of the groom.

The possibilities for extending siblinghood in Russia through language, forms of address, and church sacraments offer support for Dostoevsky’s claim that brotherhood was a national trait. In his famous Pushkin speech (1880), he argued that to become a Russian meant “to become a brother to all people,” and that “the Russian heart is more plainly destined, among all the peoples, for universally human and brotherly unity.”

In line with Dostoevsky, Virginia Woolf called the feeling of a shared brotherhood the defining feature of Russian literature, as the word “brother” expresses “not only the attitude of the characters to each other, but the writer’s attitude towards the world.”

Historical Context

Russia was fertile ground on which to explore ideas of brotherhood and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were writing at a time when both political and familial structures were being re-envisioned along sibling lines. The eighteenth century had been a time when politics was defined by authoritarian rule that paralleled the patriarchal order reigning in the home. At the end of the century, however, the French Revolution brought a shift from metaphors of paternal authority to fraternal equality. In a psychoanalytic interpretation of this shift, Juliet Flower MacCannell argues that the fall of the father as dominant law-giver ushered in the “regime of the brother.”

34 The speech was delivered on June 8, 1880, and published in Dostoevsky’s Writer’s Diary for August of that year.
36 Hunt, Family Romance; McCannell, Regime of the Brother; Spencer, Literary Relations, 132.
37 This brother, according to her reading, never became a new father (he remained one among equals, rather than the privileged son and heir), but only played the father’s role (Regime of the Brother, 12-17). She draws on Freud’s primal horde to explain the brothers’ new place: imitating the father, serving as love object for the mother (but only in dreams), as a rhetorical lover of his brothers (the brotherhood of man), and as the true boss over his sisters. Thus
Lynn Hunt’s analysis of the family metaphors underlying the French Revolution is less psychoanalytic in nature, but reaches similar conclusions. Analyzing the speeches and journalism of the time as well as fiction, paintings, engravings, and legal history, Hunt exposes the shift in metaphors from king as father to the band of brothers, drawing on the metaphor of Freud’s primal horde.\(^\text{38}\) The brothers tried to use legal means to ensure peaceful coexistence, equalizing inheritance (taking away rights of primogeniture) and creating a system of universal education.\(^\text{39}\) In their attempt to curb the power of tyrannical fathers, however, they ended up giving more power to the state without clearly defining how it would maintain control as a body of equal brothers. How should *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* actually function as a political system? Having severed the bonds of deference that used to hold the hierarchy together, the revolutionaries failed to create a new basis for political control.\(^\text{40}\) Obedience is not automatic and feelings of fraternity proved too weak to keep violence and bloodshed in check. The band of brothers inevitably turned this violence on themselves.

In many ways the philosophies that grew up in the mid-nineteenth century were attempts to correct the failures of French revolutionary *fraternité*. In Germany, political philosophers like Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) envisioned a brotherhood that would arise from the union of workers (including both men and women). Their vision of technological advances was shaped by a Hobbesian view of man, as they saw man’s “greed and lust for power” as driving historical development.\(^\text{41}\) But unlike Hobbes, Marx and Engels believed that the self-interest in human character was not based on man in a “state of nature,” but was linked to the

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in MacCannell’s analysis, the sexual inequalities that could have been erased by the fall of patriarchy were instead reinforced under the new order.

\(^\text{38}\) *Family Romance*, 59.

\(^\text{39}\) *Family Romance*, 88.

\(^\text{40}\) Both Hunt and MacCannell also focus on the suppression of women in the new order. For MacCannell, the regime of the brother is based explicitly on denying the sister.

\(^\text{41}\) Kessous, *Two French Precursors of Marxism*, 23.
structure of capitalist society, marked by competition and the pursuit of personal gain. In advocating the unification of workers and the overthrow of the capitalist system, they envisioned a new brotherhood that would be ushered in with communism. As Engels stated in the closing lines of an 1847 speech: “Because the condition of the workers of all countries is the same, because their interests are the same, their enemies the same, they must also fight together, they must oppose the brotherhood of the bourgeoisie of all nations with a brotherhood of the workers of all nations.”

This vision of violent class conflict developed partly in response to a more peaceful socialist utopian vision led by thinkers like Charles Fourier (1772-1837) in France. Fourier’s approach to human relations was based on the Rousseauian idea of man’s goodness, and consequently, he believed that progress was inevitably leading society to a higher order. The new order he foresaw—designed by himself—involves communal living in phalansteries that would harmonize, rather than abolish different classes. This appreciation for human differences would resonate with Dostoevsky’s views. Although Fourier was not fully a materialist—failing to see how his own ideas were shaped by the society in which they arose and crediting them all to logic—he did share the materialists’ essential view that society’s woes could be solved through improving people’s material conditions.

Along with these changes at the societal level, the second half of the nineteenth century also saw the structure of the family come under assault. Nowhere, perhaps, was this more true than in Russia (where this shift came later than in the rest of Europe). When Alexander II began

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42 Reiman, “Moral philosophy,” 163.
43 The speech was delivered on November 29, 1847 at the International Meeting in London to mark the seventeenth anniversary of the 1830 Polish Uprising (Marx and Engels, Collected Works, vol 6, 390).
44 Naaman Kessous notes that Fourier had a more positive and unequivocal faith in progress than Rousseau, who saw society as having a corrupting effect upon people and who recommended that “natural virtues should be used to correct the vices of society” (Two French Precursors of Marxism, 24).
talk of abolishing serfdom in 1856, socially conscious Russians saw that the authoritarian family structure was reproduced in the hierarchical, despotic social order. Like society as a whole, the family also experienced a shift in emphasis from vertical to lateral relations. The ways to escape the “tyranny” of the patriarchal family included unmarried girls moving in with their married siblings, older unmarried sisters living together, and fictitious marriages to a “brother.”

Many of these ideas are captured in Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s (1828-1889) famous novel, *What Is to Be Done?* (1863). Although not a work of great literary merit, it was one of the most influential novels in nineteenth-century Russia because of the models it offered for restructuring society, models that began with a restructuring of family and the relations between the sexes. Chernyshevsky’s ideas drew heavily on those of fellow materialists and utopian thinkers in the West. His emphasis on the importance of women’s emancipation and free choice in love can be traced back to Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and George Sand’s *Jacques* (1834). *Julie* expresses Rousseau’s ideal of communal living. Julie’s period of greatest happiness is when she is surrounded by her husband, children, former lover and extended family in one harmonious whole—a microcosm for society. Rousseau’s novel also provided an example of a triple union, something Chernyshevsky would repeat in his own life, as well as in *What Is to Be Done?*. The traditional hegemony of male authority is threatened by this new

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45 See: Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, 45. Engel’s book is about the roles available for women, and while she only considers mothers and daughters, it is striking how many of the examples she cites include sisters. In a fascinating example, she quotes Herzen’s praise of the women around the Decembrists. He writes that their wives “abandoned wealth and social position, and went to a lifetime of bondage in the terrible climate of Eastern Siberia, under the still more terrible oppression of the police there. Sisters, who had not the right to go with their brothers, withdrew from court, and many left Russia; almost all of them kept a feeling of love for the victims alive in their hearts” (*Mothers and Daughters*, 19). Engel then goes on to discuss only the wives, though Herzen himself seems to valorize wives and sisters equally.

46 I use the term “materialist” broadly to refer to the school of thought that rejected the dual nature of man and emphasized the importance of reforming material conditions in order to improve society. Scholars have debated whether Chernyshevsky’s philosophy can truly be classified as materialism, but this debate is not essential to the scope of my project. For an overview of this problem, see: Drozd, *Chernyshevskii’s What Is to Be Done?*, 96-101.

47 In her Introduction to the novel, Kathryn Feuer provides a succinct discussion of Chernyshevsky’s philosophical influences (xii).

configuration. Similarly, George Sand was hugely influential in Russia for her glorification of love and of women’s rights to follow their hearts—another attack on the patriarchal order.\textsuperscript{49}

For Chernyshevsky, ideas about individual love were intimately linked with questions about society as a whole. The way the heroes of \textit{What Is to Be Done?} rationally and equitably arrange their married life is a model for the way all of society could be organized.\textsuperscript{50} The triple union, so central to his vision, is already one step away from the intense merger of two that was at the heart of Romanticism, and one step closer to the communal spirit of living that would characterize his societal ideals (an idea I will contrast with Dostoevsky’s views in Chapter Two).\textsuperscript{51}

A central paradigm for Chernyshevsky’s reinvisioning of intimate and practical social relations was the sibling bond. In \textit{What Is to Be Done?} Chernyshevsky champions the fictitious marriage and the establishment of worker collectives, both based on ideas of siblinghood. Unconsummated marriages were to resemble sister-brother relations, as emphasized by the appellation of fictitious husbands as “brothers.”\textsuperscript{52} Kathryn Feuer notes the importance of peer relations rather than intergenerational family loyalty in Chernyshevsky’s system (elderly parents and children are relegated to doing the housework in Vera’s Fourth Dream). The worker cooperatives, indebted to the ideas of Fourier, are based on sharing power laterally like a band of siblings. These ideas did not remain confined to literature, but were ardently put into practice by many of Chernyshevsky’s readers.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{49} For a discussion of Sand’s influence in Russia, see Engel, \textit{Mothers and Daughters}, 22, 36-7.
\textsuperscript{50} Irina Paperno argues that in \textit{What Is to Be Done?} “social harmony was viewed as an extension of family harmony, which was itself the result of the practical realization of the belief that love—a mediated emotion—was essentially of a collective nature” (\textit{Chernyshevsky}, 158).
\textsuperscript{51} Tolstoy openly polemicized with this view in \textit{Anna Karenina}.
\textsuperscript{52} Paperno, \textit{Chernyshevsky}, 34 and 136.
\textsuperscript{53} For a discussion of the influence of \textit{What Is to Be Done?} on contemporary readers, see: Drozd, \textit{Chernyshevskii’s What Is to Be Done}, 9-10; Paperno, \textit{Chernyshevsky}, 26-36.
Responding to all these writers and thinkers and sharing their rejection of hierarchical relations, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (both deeply critical of Chernyshevsky) added a spiritual component to brotherhood. Concerned not only with the material conditions of the world, but with the conditions of the human soul, the two wrote of brotherhood as a spiritual state of being as well as a way of relating to others. For Tolstoy, this emphasis came from his intense inward focus on his own thoughts, feelings, reactions, and moral strictures (the Kingdom of God being within), with far less attention given to the needs and particularities of others. For Dostoevsky, this emphasis came from the belief that the state of living in brotherhood could not be built in this world, but was a spiritual state attained in an instant through faith. Neither put forward a program for social reform. Instead their ideas of brotherhood remained a paradox: based on the real, lived experience of loving others as brothers, yet at the same time abstracted from social and political realities. Both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy envisioned a world in which all people could be called “brother” and “sister,” and without putting forth any program for reform, their novels explore what these terms should mean.

Methodology

This dissertation is first and foremost a literary study based on close analysis of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fiction. While siblinghood could be called my “subject,” it is also metaphorically an approach or lens that I apply to the texts to reveal levels of meaning that have been obscured by traditional lines of inquiry. A sibling approach calls for a shift in focus: from vertical power structures to lateral sharing among equals, from erotic desire that exists in volatile bursts of passion to more stable and sustainable forms of kinship love and intimacy. The sibling approach breaks down dominant paradigms about family and society in the nineteenth-century
novel and offers a new picture of the realignment of power dynamics. It is no longer heredity and relations to the past, but one’s place among peers that become the defining feature of identity. I am not toppling the dominance of the father, but rather exposing a coexistent structure of lateral bonds that have not fit into standard paradigms for discussing these texts.

The sibling approach also opens up new ways of understanding the role of women, making them not just objects (and sources) of erotic desire, but also agents in a kinship narrative that often bypasses (or renders mercifully secondary) standard marriage/adultery/fallen woman plots. With the rise of the nuclear family and the shift away from broad agrarian kinship networks, conjugal bonds came to dominate over consanguineal. While this shift has dominated the discourse on love in the novel, a sibling lens restores to consciousness the coexistent system of lateral familial ties that provide an equally valid and often more sustaining form of intimacy. Again, I am not rejecting the importance of erotic desire in fueling the novel, but instead opening up another avenue to approaching love and human connection in these texts by reinstating fraternal and sororal affection.

A sibling approach to literature inevitably draws its subjects into dialogue with other disciplines that offer relevant insights into siblinghood. Siblings exist at a point of intersection between psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, philosophy, theology, cultural history and gender studies. I have not confined myself to any one of these “lenses,” but draw on the perspectives of these different fields where they contribute most relevantly to my examination of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fictional worlds. In particular, a few words are needed about my use of the ever-contentious Freud. As the single most influential theorizer of the family in the last century, Freud’s views cannot simply be brushed aside as outdated. Nor—given the tremendous critique he has undergone—is it worthwhile merely to use him as a target of attack. Although I
do not claim Freud to be a definitive authority, I find many of his ideas offer helpful and at times provocative insights into the complex human problems I am exploring in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s thinking. Thus I am using him as one—though not the only—model for understanding different forms of love and human connection. I put his ideas in dialogue with those of the authors I am studying, as well as with the ideas of literary critics and other theorists whose work is equally relevant and valid to understanding Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

While this is primarily a study of literary images, personalities, and tropes, I at times draw on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s non-fictional writings to elucidate ideas in their fiction. This feels particularly appropriate for these two authors because the line between fiction and nonfiction in their writing is often blurred. The variety of perspectives I am using is intended to highlight the varied functions siblings serve in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s literature and thought, as well as to open up a new approach to the family in the nineteenth-century novel.

**Argument by Chapter**

The first two chapters of the dissertation explore the dynamics of individual sibling relationships in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s early works, emphasizing sibling love as an alternative to erotic desire. Chapter One begins by placing Tolstoy’s views on love in the context of the Romantic tradition to which he was a successor and then explores his privileging of familial love over Eros. Chapter Two examines the “triplicity” of love in Dostoevsky’s early fiction, redefining our conventional understanding of his love triangles by acknowledging the role of siblings in them. The chapter also explores *Crime and Punishment* as a family novel, highlighting the realignment of kinship ties.
Chapter Three begins my shift of focus from individual sibling bonds to the quest for universal brotherhood in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s later works. The chapter explores the lateral network of kinship bonds in *Anna Karenina*. As all the characters become united in one continually expanding family through siblings-in-law, Tolstoy questions the limits of this expansion. In his controversial Part VIII, he closes the novel with the Russians’ attempt to defend their brother Slavs in Serbia, ultimately ridiculing the idea that siblinghood can be raised to the national level, especially when this entails war and violence.

Chapters Four and Five examine Dostoevsky and Tolstoy’s ideas about universal brotherhood in their late works. Beginning with Dostoevsky’s look at disastrously failed brotherhood in *Demons*, Chapter Four then explores the restored hope of Christian brotherhood in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky’s final three novels are famous for depicting the failure of fathers, but this chapter shifts the emphasis to lateral bonds, highlighting the role of brothers as an alternative source of moral values. Chapter Five examines the ways Tolstoy builds from literal siblinghood to his ideal of universal brotherhood. Looking across the trilogy of his major novels, the chapter traces Tolstoy’s shift from his family ideal (*War and Peace* in the 1860s), to its coming under threat (*Anna Karenina* in the 1870s), to his ultimate spiritual reconception of family as the brotherhood of all people (*Resurrection* in the 1890s).

The conclusion of the dissertation draws together my analyses of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as proponents of the lateral kinship bond. By examining their works in relation to English nineteenth-century family novels, I attempt to illustrate what was unique about their treatment of siblinghood. While the English use siblings to probe issues of social status and sexuality, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky move beyond these concerns, elevating siblinghood to the spiritual plane. Both Russian authors preached universal brotherhood based on the sibling bond as their
highest ideal, yet neither offered a pragmatic vision of how it could truly be attained. Dostoevsky’s remained a spiritual brotherhood rooted in humanity’s potential for love—a potential he realized would never be actualized in this world. Tolstoy rejected all institutions and organizing systems of power and preached a brotherhood that must be embodied in this world through a conversion toward love in each individual, but which could never exist within the structure of any society.

The failure of the two greatest Russian Realists of the nineteenth century to depict a real and attainable brotherhood is not a condemnation of this ideal; instead it is a form of vindication. Although Tolstoy and Dostoevsky did not have a concrete social platform to put forth, their adherence to brotherhood as an ideal, as a moral truth toward which we must struggle, points to the tremendous influence brotherhood had on their thinking. Ideals do not exist to be realized, but to direct us. As Tolstoy argues in his “Afterward to the Kreutzer Sonata,” a moral ideal is like the needle of a compass: it provides a guide that we must attempt to follow even if we will inevitably come up short.54 In clinging to the ideal of universal brotherhood, both authors reinforce the idea that people need dependence—not to a higher being, but mutual dependence that comes from supporting and being supported by people who are equals in their human dignity. Even as brotherhood on the universal scale fails, the first step toward this ideal does not; siblings in the here and now provide the true source of connection in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fictional worlds. Their works capture the essential importance of “close ones,” of sisters and brothers, in forging the unity and harmony they so desperately craved.

54 PSS 27:88-89. I discuss this idea more fully in Chapter Five.
**Chapter One**  
**Tolstoy’s Ideal Love: Erotic vs. Familial**

All feelings which have love of the whole world as their source are good; all feelings which have self-love as their source are bad.¹

I’m lecturing again; but what can I do?—I can’t understand relationships with a person I love without doing so. And you sometimes lecture me, and I’m terribly glad when you’re right. And this is what love is. It isn’t kissing poppet’s hands (it’s disgusting even to say this)—it’s opening one’s soul to one another, checking one’s ideas against the ideas of the other, thinking together, feeling together.²

She’s charming. What joyful relations we could have. Why don’t I feel such pleasure with my sister? Perhaps the whole charm consists of standing on the threshold of love.³

Love is suffocating me – both physical and ideal love. Mariya Yakovlevna is charming. I’m extremely interested in myself. I even love myself because there is so much love for others in me.⁴

Masha is worth a lot; serious clever and kind. People reproach her for not having any exclusive attachments. But it’s this that shows her true love. She loves everyone and makes everyone love her – not just as much as, but even more than people who love their own family exclusively.⁵

When I’m dying, I would like to be asked whether I continue to understand life as I used to understand it, as a growing nearer to God, an expansion of love. If I’m unable to speak, I’ll close my eyes if the answer is yes, and raise them upwards if it’s no.⁶

Tolstoy never fully resolved his ideas about love and human connection. He had large voluptuous appetites, but came increasingly to condemn sex as degrading and immoral. He was obsessed with himself, but strove to believe selfless love was the only true form. He sought an ideal love that could be both elevating and grounded, both broad and intimate. This love should connect the individual with a larger whole but at the same time leave space for intense personal attachments. Understandably, Tolstoy ran into difficulties integrating his various ideals. At different stages of life he embraced different conceptions of the form love must take, but over the course of his writing certain patterns emerge. The examination that follows will begin by situating Tolstoy’s ideas in the context of the European Romantic tradition to which he was a

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² Letter to V. V. Arsenyeva (7 December, 1856), *Tolstoy’s Letters I*, 86.  
⁶ *Tolstoy’s Diaries Vol. 2*, 497 (11 October 1901).
successor, as well as in the context of other Russian thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century. This will provide the necessary background for examining Tolstoy’s pronouncements on love in his non-fiction and ultimately his fictional depictions of love, which both exemplify and challenge his ideas while drawing heavily on his own autobiographical experience.

PART ONE: TOLSTOY IN CONTEXT

Eros and the Stages of Love: Plato and the Romantics

One key aspect of Tolstoy’s thinking that distinguishes him from other philosophers of love is his ever increasing discomfort with and fear of Eros. An avid reader of European literature and philosophy, Tolstoy built upon the romantic search for “purity in love that transcended ordinary sexual experience” and the “metaphysical craving for unity,” but he took these ideas in a different direction than most romantic writers, shifting the ideal from amorous love to familial. Placing his thought in the context of his romantic predecessors in the West as well as in contrast with his Russian contemporaries Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) and Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) highlights what is unique about Tolstoy’s ideas on love.

As a beginning writer in the 1850s, Tolstoy was heavily influenced not only by his idol, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), but by the whole tradition of romantic literature and thought that had been flourishing in Western Europe. This tradition, in turn, looked back to Plato and his famous pronouncements on love in *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. In *The Symposium* Socrates traces the progression from loving physical beauty in one object (or subject), to loving it in many, then to the love of moral beauty in man, then in institutions and deeds, and finally to love of knowledge and then of absolute beauty. 

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8 *Symposium and Phaedrus*, 65-68.
similar shift away from carnal love toward an exalted, purified state in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). In her final letter to her former lover before the accident that will take her life, Julie lauds them on having achieved this shift: “I pride myself in the friendship which unites us, as of an unparalleled victory. People stifle great passions; rarely do they purify them. To forget one who was dear to us when honor requires it is the effort of an honorable and ordinary soul; but after having been what we were, to be what we are today—that is the true triumph of virtue.”

Julie believes they have moved beyond sexual desire to a more exalted state.

Siblinghood, which would be so important to Tolstoy, is offered by Julie as a pure alternative to passion. She tells Saint-Preux: “no, my friend, you can never be too nearly allied to me; it is not even enough that you could be my cousin; I wish that you were my brother.”

Julie presents siblinghood as the closest, most intense pure and unconsummated bond available to them. Despite this claim, when she is dying, she realizes she is still in love and wants more from her lover than fraternal love. The final letter to Saint-Preux from her deathbed expresses Julie’s gratitude that death has allowed her to remain virtuous and saved her from the temptations of the passion she had wished to believe purified. She goes to her grave lauding romantic love as the ultimate happiness: “but can my soul exist without you? Without you what happiness can I enjoy? No, I do not leave you—I go but to await you.”

For Rousseau, this union of souls, possible only in a romantic bond, seems to be the ultimate ideal, relegating siblinghood to a second or supplementary place.

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9 “Je m’honne de l’amitié qui nous joint comme d’un retour sans exemple. On étouffe de grandes passions; rarement on les épure. Oublier ce qui nous fut cher quand l’honneur le veut, c’est l’effort d’une âme honnête et commune; mais, après avoir été ce que nous fumes, être ce que nous sommes aujourd’hui, voilà le vrai triomphe de la vertu” (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 652). Discussed in Singer, *Nature of Love* 2, 309.

10 “Non, mon ami, vous ne m’appartiendrez jamais de trop près; ce n’est pas même assez que vous soyez mon cousin; ah! je voudrais que vous fussiez mon frère” (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 680).

Rousseau, however, sought not only this intense merger of two, but a bond that would unite all of society, a concern again shared by Tolstoy. In *Emile or On Education* (1762), Rousseau writes that unlike natural man, who “is entirely for himself,” civil man is only a “fractional unity” and “his value is determined by his relation to the whole, which is the social body.”12 Devaluing the relationships between individuals in this work, he calls instead for a focus on the whole of society, going on to suggest: “Good social institutions are those that best know how to denature man, to take his absolute existence from him in order to give him a relative one and transport the I into the common unity, with the result that each individual believes himself no longer one but a part of the unity and no longer feels except within the whole.”13 This type of unity with a larger whole would be crucial to Tolstoy. Rousseau’s answer to how this union and the romantic union of two souls can be harmonized is his ideal of communal living expressed in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Bringing together her family and former lover, Julie finds peace in the unity of family and loved ones, a microcosm for society. Tolstoy’s fictional families would serve a similar function as models for society as a whole.

Immanuel Kant’s ideas on love would also resonate with Tolstoy’s. In his *Lectures on Ethics* (1780-81), Kant presents a very negative view of sexuality:

A love that springs merely from sexual impulse cannot be love at all, but only appetite. Human love is good-will, affection, promoting the happiness of others and finding joy in their happiness. But it is clear that, when a person loves another purely from sexual desire, none of these factors enter into the love […] Sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite […] Sexual love can, of course be combined with human love and so carry with it the characteristics of the latter, but taken by itself and for itself, it is nothing more than appetite. Taken by itself it is a degradation of human nature; for as soon as a person becomes an object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone.14

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13 *Emile*, 40.
14 *Lectures on Ethics*, 163.
Schopenhauer—Tolstoy’s next idol after Rousseau—clearly built his philosophy of love on Kant’s, and Tolstoy would agree with both men’s view of sexual desire as degrading and objectifying the beloved. In “On the Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes” (1844) Schopenhauer states baldly: “For all love, however ethereally it may bear itself, is rooted in the sexual impulse alone, nay, it absolutely is only a more definitely determined, specialised, and indeed in the strictest sense individualised sexual impulse.”\(^{15}\) What is at stake in this passion, Schopenhauer argues, is the creation of the next generation: “The growing inclination of two lovers is really already the will to live of the new individual which they can and desire to produce.”\(^{16}\) Given this, “the essential matter is not the reciprocation of love, but possession, \textit{i.e.}, the physical enjoyment.”\(^{17}\) He leaves no place for the possibility of a true spiritual or emotional connection; this idea is just the will to live skillfully assuming “the mask of an objective admiration” in order to “deceive our consciousness.” Unfortunately for Tolstoy, in the second half of his life, he seems to have been taken in by Schopenhauer’s belief.

For Kant, however, unlike for Schopenhauer, true “human love” (not just lust) could exist and be combined with sexuality. The key was marriage: “The sole condition on which we are free to make use of our sexual desire depends upon the right to dispose over the person as a whole—over the welfare and happiness and generally over all the circumstances of that person.”\(^{18}\) This right comes only in marriage, where “one devotes not only sex but the whole person” to another in a mutual exchange. “I have given myself up as the property of another, but in turn I take that other as my property, and so win myself back again in winning the person

\(^{15}\) \textit{World as Will and Idea}, 339.  
\(^{16}\) \textit{World as Will and Idea}, 342.  
\(^{17}\) \textit{World as Will and Idea}, 341.  
\(^{18}\) \textit{Lectures on Ethics}, 166-7.
whose property I have become.”

This mutual ownership was Kant’s solution for making sexual love more than just an appetite for another’s body. Tolstoy originally believed marriage would offer an acceptable outlet for sexual passion, but came increasingly to see sex as sinful and debasing even in the marital bed.

Hegel, too, focuses on the importance of marriage, but for him its essence lies in the possibility of procreation. In *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), he writes that amongst the three relationships of “husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, the relationship of husband and wife is to begin with the primary and immediate form in which one consciousness recognizes itself in another, and in which each knows that reciprocal recognition.”

For Hegel, the spirit realizes itself not in the union of husband and wife, but in the child that they produce, a more positive version of Schopenhauer’s view.

Hegel also discusses the brother-sister relationship at this point, calling it “an unmixed intransitive form of relationship.” He argues that “they are of the same blood, which however, in them has entered into a condition of stable equilibrium. They therefore stand in no such natural relation as husband and wife, they do not desire one another, nor have they given to one another, nor received from one another, this independence of individual being; they are free individuals with respect to each other.”

Implicitly referencing *Antigone*, Hegel claims that while “unperturbed by desire,” “pure and unmixed with any sexual relation,” the bond between sister and brother is crucial. “The moment of individual selfhood, recognizing and being recognized, can here assert its right, because it is bound up with the balance and equilibrium resulting from their being of the same blood, and from their being related in a way that involves no mutual

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19 *Lectures on Ethics*, 167.
20 *Phenomenology of Mind*, 474.
21 *Phenomenology of Mind*, 475.
desire. The loss of a brother is thus irreparable to the sister, and her duty to him is the highest.”

Thus for Hegel, the sister-brother relationship is one of equality and mutual self-realization free from sexual desire. While elevating the importance of the sister-brother bond, Hegel also notes its limitations. In his view it lacks expansive potential outside of the immediate family. The brother must go out into society in order to take part in the “concrete ethical order.” As with Rousseau, Hegel saw the importance of siblings, but left them only a secondary role in his thinking.

Other romantics would choose to contrast amorous and brotherly/sisterly relations explicitly. George Sand’s *Jacques* (1833), which is obsessed with the theme of romantic love, portrays the volatility of romantic passion in opposition to the straightforward understanding that comes naturally to brother and sister. As the suffering wife (soon to be drawn into infidelity) comments about her husband and his sister: “my husband and Sylvia imagine that I am not in the state to understand their feelings and their thoughts. Taking refuge together in a world that they believe only accessible to themselves, they pitilessly close off my entry to it.” Siblinghood is invoked as a tranquil realm of understanding, while passionate love provides the greatest joys, but is also an unsustainable state. Characters call one another a “brother” or “sister” to denote purity of affection and depth of understanding. However, despite its positive features, sibling affection never rivals romantic love as the highest calling in Sand’s works. As in the other writings here discussed, siblinghood dances around the margins as a purified ideal, but it does not take center stage as it does for Tolstoy.

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23 “mon mari et Sylvia s’imaginent que je ne suis pas en état de comprendre leurs sentiments et leurs pensées. Réfugiés tous deux dans un monde qu’ils croient accessible à eux seuls, ils m’en ferment impitoyablement l’entrée.” (translation mine), *Jacques*, 187.
Although Coleridge was not of central importance to Tolstoy, his ideas about love combine or respond to many of these ideas. In this way, he provides a summarizing glance at the romantic tradition Tolstoy inherited. Coleridge, in his lectures on Shakespeare of 1811-1812, returns to Plato when he attempts to define love. “Love is a desire of the whole being to be united to some thing, or some being, felt necessary to its completeness, by the most perfect means that nature permits, and reason dictates.”\(^{24}\) Coleridge describes love as a “blending of the similar with the dissimilar,” which evokes the merger described by Aristophanes in *The Symposium*. This idea of blending or merging would be of central importance to the Romantics, and in an altered form, to Tolstoy as well. Drawing upon Plato’s idea of a progression, Coleridge argues that men can be judged by their reverence for women: “Plato has said, that in this way we rise from sensuality to affection, from affection to love, and from love to the pure intellectual delight by which we become worth to conceive that infinite in ourselves, without which it is impossible for man to believe in God.”\(^ {25}\) Through this progression we are led to “our marriage with the Redeemer of mankind.” Disagreeing with the more pessimistic view of romantic love, Coleridge claims “love is not, like hunger, a mere selfish appetite: it is an associative quality.”\(^ {26}\) When we experience love, we associate our feeling with everything in nature—seeing it expressed in tree whispers, roses, nightingales, and skies.\(^ {27}\)

A true romantic, Coleridge regards the union of man and woman as the highest form of love. In lauding the importance of marriage—“the knitting together of society by the tenderest, yet firmest ties”—he concludes: “From this union arise the paternal, filial, brotherly and sisterly

\(^{24}\) *Shakespearean Criticism Vol. Two*, 107.


\(^{26}\) *Shakespearean Criticism Vol. Two*, 108.

\(^{27}\) This may have links to Spinoza’s argument in “Ethics” (1677) that God is nature as a whole. Showing how this links to the philosophy of love, Singer notes that “now everything could be loved, not merely as God’s handiwork as the caritas-synthesis maintained […] but rather as part of the infinite totality which he was” (*Nature of Love 2*, 291).
relations of life; and every state is but a family magnified." Here, while making the family into a microcosm for society as a whole, Coleridge again places all forms of familial love as but subsidiaries to the true union, which is that of romantic lovers in marriage.

The Russian Context

While nineteenth-century Russian thinkers would forge their own ideals about love, they all built on various aspects of the western tradition. Chernyshevsky drew on German romanticism and French Christian socialism in creating his own rational view of love, marriage, and the structuring of society. In true realist fashion What Is to Be Done? (1863) offers explicit practical explanations of the daily routines for creating productive, happy marriages and by extension a harmonious society. Unlike Kant’s view of marriage as the intense union of two that comes through complete mutual possession, Chernyshevsky’s conception focused on mutual respect and freedom. For him sex was not inherently sinful, nor was it an essential element of marriage. Instead, he supported the idea of fictitious marriages that enabled women to escape “parental tyranny” through a chaste attachment to a friend, often referred to by the code name of “brother.” Such a marriage is at the heart of What Is to Be Done?. At the same time, Chernyshevsky supported free love and the right to change romantic partners. In What Is to Be Done?, Vera Pavlovna dreams of a future utopian community that practices free love. In the dream a goddess describes the utopia to Vera and explains the organization of sexual practices in fairly explicit detail. The goddess calls herself ‘equal rights,’ noting: “Without them the

29 Chernyshevsky’s rearranging of the family and its basis for the rearranging of society is discussed by Paperno (Chernyshevsky, 157-158).
30 Paperno, Chernyshevsky, 33-34, 135-136.
31 See: Paperno, Chernyshevsky, 26.
pleasures of the body and delight in beauty are tedious, dull and vile. Without them there’s no purity of heart, only the deceptive purity of the body.”

Although Soloviev regarded sexual love in fundamentally different terms from Chernyshevsky, he was equally adamant about its positive role. Beginning his essay, “The Meaning of Love” (“Smysl’ liubvi,” 1892-94) with a polemic against Schopenhauer, Soloviev sought to reestablish the positive place of sex in the intimate love relationship between a man and a woman. “The Meaning of Love” takes up many of the themes of Romanticism as well as responding to Tolstoy’s thought. Rather than seeing sexual love as restrictive union between two, based on the need for procreation and perfecting the next generation (Schopenhauer), Soloviev argues it is actually a means of connecting to the All in the present time. He describes love as an abolition of egoism, a transfer of one’s vital center from oneself into another. For him, this is a necessary step for attaining union with God.

God is everything […] Man (in general, and every individual man in particular), being actually only this one and not the other, can become everything only by removing in his consciousness and life the external barrier that separates him from another. ‘This one’ can be ‘everything’ only together with others; only together with others can he realize his unconditional significance—to become an inseparable and irreplaceable part of the all-united whole.

So for Soloviev sexual love is not just the joining of two individuals, but also the path to greater union. He notes that “although it is a fact that the most profound and intensive manifestation of love is expressed in the mutual relations of two beings fulfilling one another, in no way does it follow that this mutual relation could separate and isolate itself from everything else as something self-sufficient. On the contrary, such isolation is the ruin of love.”

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32 What Is to Be Done?, 369.
33 Cynthia Hooper provides an excellent study of romantic love in the writings of Tolstoy and Soloviev and their “rival ethical systems” (“Forms of Love”).
agree with this last statement, but he was never willing to acknowledge that “the most profound and intensive manifestation of love” must necessarily be the erotic union of two.

Soloviev describes three kinds of contact between the sexes, and suggests that our society has put them in the wrong order. First is the physiological animal bond, which Soloviev says we put as the foundation, but should actually be the culmination of love. When arrived at as the outcome of a deep and passionate connection, it is part of Soloviev’s ideal:

The true assignment of love consists not in the simple experience of this feeling, but in that which takes place by means of it—in the act of love. It is insufficient for one to feel for oneself the unconditional significance of the beloved object, but actually necessary to give or communicate to the beloved this significance, to unite with it in the actual creation of absolute individuality.  

Sex on its own, however, Soloviev calls “contact in brute life, or according to the lower nature.” Above this he places moral contact under the law, or marriage. And finally his third level is contact in spiritual life, or union under God.

Soloviev is upset that society has separated and isolated these three types of love which he believes must be joined. He argues that not only is purely spiritual love divorced from the body not the ideal, it is not even a possibility. Lacking “all actual content” or any act, “a supposedly spiritual love is not only an abnormal phenomenon, but also completely aimless, because the very best outcome of the separation of the spiritual from the sensual, to which it aspires, occurs with death.” Although Tolstoy often lauds spiritual love, he runs into the same difficulty integrating it with life (as I will discuss later in relation to Prince Andrei’s death in War and Peace).

37 These three levels have much in common with Tolstoy’s three stages (to be discussed below), but for Soloviev they are all built upon Eros, while for Tolstoy, Eros is confined to the lowest stage and must be overcome to attain higher forms of love.
38 “His vision of ideal love is grounded in the reconciliation of body with soul, rather than in the renunciation of one for the sake of the other” (Hooper, “Forms of Love,” 362).
Tolstoy on Love: Rejecting the Flesh

While even Tolstoy’s early novellas like *Family Happiness* (1859) show ambivalence about how to integrate sexuality into a loving relationship, Tolstoy’s late fiction and philosophical writing reach an extreme position of rejecting sexuality. *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), offers perhaps his strongest indictment of sexual love, albeit in the voice of one of his most unstable characters, the wife-murdering Pozdnyshev. Taking exactly the opposite view of Soloviev, who saw sexual love as a path to attaining Divine love and connection to the Whole, Pozdnyshev argues that passion (especially lust) is what stands in the way of people coming together. “If you want spiritual relations and unity of ideals, then do not sleep together,” 40 he claims, explicitly separating sexual and physical connection. 41 Although Pozdnyshev is certainly not Tolstoy and their views should not be conflated, in his “Afterward to the Kreutzer Sonata” [Послесловие к «Крейцеровой сонате»] Tolstoy, in his own voice, expresses many of the same reservations about sex and separates it from spiritual love. He wants people to regard physical love [плотская любовь] as a “degrading animal state” [унизительное для человека животное состояние] and not a “poetic and elevated state” [поэтическое и возвышенное состояние] as he feels they do in contemporary society. Similar ideas appear in a toned-down form in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. 42 Hélène’s overt sexuality is vilified, while Andrei’s lofty, spiritual love is glorified. Princess Marya cannot even contemplate “early love” without guilt, while

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40 “Духовное сродство! Единство идеалов! […] Но в таком случае незачем спать вместе” (PSS 27:14).
42 The general absence of positive moments of physical intimacy is striking. In all of Tolstoy’s works, I can think of only two, both involving Kitty and Levin, both only intimated, and both quickly interrupted (the first on the couch in Levin’s study, the second on a walk when Kitty explains why Koznychev did not propose to Varenka).
Anatole is shown to be rake for seeking physical gratification in the arms of a pretty dependant of the household.

Despite fundamental differences, Tolstoy’s ideas about love draw on Socrates speech in Plato’s *Symposium*. Both depend on love developing through stages. Like Plato, Tolstoy seeks transcendent love, but he frames his search in ethical, rather than aesthetic terms. And in his typically self-absorbed fashion, he describes these stages in relation to himself. First, “man lives only for his own passions, eating, drinking, enjoyment, hunting, women, vanity, pride.” Second, “I began to take an interest in the good of all people, mankind […] All my religious awareness came to be concentrated in my efforts directed towards the good of the people, in work for the realisation of the Kingdom of God.” Finally, he finds a “new basis of life” in him “which will replace, by including within itself, my efforts directed towards other people’s good, just as my efforts directed towards other people’s good included within themselves efforts directed towards my own personal good. This basis is the service of God, doing His will in respect to that part of His being which has been entrusted to me.” So love begins with the self, then shifts outward to focus on others, and finally comes to include both self and other as all are seen as part of God. Thus unity, not beauty, is at the heart of Tolstoy’s quest.

Seeking the improvement of society, not just of the individual, Tolstoy treats love as a social question—he cannot conceive of it in the abstract, apart from the family and a larger community or humanity as a whole. In *Anna Karenina*, Levin (much like Tolstoy in his own diaries and letters) “was not only unable to picture to himself the love of a woman without marriage, but he first pictured the family to himself and only then the woman who would give

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43 For a concise summary of Plato’s influence on Tolstoy, see: Sherman, “Philosophical Dialogue and Tolstoj’s War and Peace,” 14.
44 *Tolstoy’s Diaries Vol. I*, 267 (31 October, 1889). Tolstoy describes these phases in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* as well, calling them “the personal, or animal,” “the social, or the pagan,” and “the universal, or the divine” (66-67). They are discussed at length in Gustafson (*Resident and Stranger* and “Three Stages of Man”).
him that family.” While still a chaste and virtuous youth, Nekhlyudov (the protagonist of *Resurrection*) has a similar thought.

In Tolstoy’s second phase, love is part of the fabric of broader social structures like family and society. Then ultimately, these are subsumed under one cover in the final stage of Divine love or unity with God, which Tolstoy sometimes calls the Whole [все или целое]. At this point, God is in the self and the self is a part of God, as are all other creatures and therefore the distinction between loving self and other disappears. “The Christian doctrine shows man that the essence of his soul is love—that his happiness depends not on loving this or that object, but on loving the principle of the whole—God, whom he recognizes within himself as love, and therefore he loves all things and all men.” This is what Tolstoy’s best characters learn in moments of epiphany. One cannot begin with this form of love, however, but must work towards it through fixed stages, as in Socrates’ vision.

Unable to conceive of physical and spiritual love existing together, Tolstoy increasingly treats all sexual relations as the satisfaction of brute animal appetites that sully or destroy true human respect, tenderness, and love. In an 1895 letter to his son, Tolstoy echoes Schopenhauer

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45 “Любовь к женщине он не только не мог себе представить без брака, но он прежде представлял себе семью, а потом уже ту женщину, которая даст ему семью” (PSS 18:101).
46 Tolstoy makes the distinction between the earlier idea of self—“the animal,” and this self—“the divine spark, the self as the Son of God, as much God as the Father himself” (*Kingdom of God*, 79).
47 *Kingdom of God*, 80.
48 Richard Gustafson convincingly argues that a key aspect of Tolstoy’s thinking is the assumption that life is “a series of definable ‘phases’” that are more or less universal, so that describing them (in his art and non-fiction) “would have a psychological and moral purpose, for the readers would see themselves in it [the description] and discover their oneness with others.” “Three Stages of Man,” 481. Gustafson is basing this comment on a passage Tolstoy wrote at age sixty-six (1894) about wishing to compose a work that would define the ‘ages’ of life: “There is so little time left, that I don’t know if I would ever succeed in describing the various phases, the spiritual ages which we have all gone through […] It would be good to describe them [though] because if they were described accurately, then everyone going through those ages, those crises, would not be frightened, but rather they would be awaiting the next stage and they would know that the same thing was also happening to others” [Не знаю, удается ли мне когда-нибудь – уже мало осталось времени, описать те различные фазы, возрасты духовные, кот[орые] мы все проходили […] Описать это хорошо бы потому, что если это описать верно, то каждый, проходя эти возрасты, эти кризисы, не будет пугаться, а будет ждать следующего состояния, будет знать, что то же было и с другими.] (PSS 67:214).
in claiming: “You will say: why is man given this desire for a woman’s love, stronger than any other, if he ought not to desire it? It is given to us, as you know, for the continuation of the species and certainly not for pleasure.”

Sex does not contribute positively to the union of husband and wife. Even in his earlier writings, many characters like Marya Bolkonskaya or Levin have difficulty imagining sex as part of love. In his discomfort with integrating sex into love relations, Tolstoy at times does the reverse and attempts to reduce love to the purely spiritual, as when Andrei claims (and genuinely believes) he loved only the soul in Natasha, which was merely fettered to her body. Similarly, in an 1897 letter to his wife, Tolstoy says he loves her “with the best kind of love—not of the body or mind, but of the soul.”

Tolstoy comes to link this love of and from the soul with God and the teachings of Christ. Through acknowledging the soul as the true “self,” Tolstoy attempts to reframe lust as contrary to the self’s natural will:

The difference between the Christian doctrine and those which preceded it is that the social doctrine said: “Live in opposition to your nature [understanding by this only the animal nature], make it subject to the external law of family, society, and state.” Christianity says: “Live according to your nature [understanding by this the divine nature]; do not make it subject to anything—neither you (an animal self) nor that of others—and you will attain the very aim to which you are striving when you subject your external self.

By separating the “animal” and “spiritual” selves, Tolstoy defines two natures for man, much like the black and white horses described by Plato in Phaedrus. There Plato depicts a tripartite self: a chariot driver with two horses—one white, “with restraint and modesty” who “keeps itself in check” before the lover and the other black, “the companion of excess and boasting” who rushes towards the lover to seek sexual pleasure.

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49 Tolstoy’s Letters II, 530.
50 Tolstoy’s Letters II, 555.
51 Kingdom of God, 79.
52 Symposium and Phaedrus, 134.
two radically separate selves, arguing that one should be rejected in favor of the other, purging sexuality from the love relationship, while in *Phaedrus*, Plato sees the self as one who mediates between these two halves. Plato makes clear the importance of having both horses; the sexual drive must be controlled and transcended, but it should be present.  

**Beyond Eros: Tolstoy’s Alternative**  

Having turned away from erotic love as his ideal, Tolstoy needed another form to exalt in its stead. Soloviev lists and rejects many alternatives to justify his privileging of erotic love. He argues that love must be mutual and that parental love cannot be fully mutual because the lover and beloved belong to different generations. He rejects same-sex friendship because it “lacks an all-round formal distinction of qualities making up one another.” Patriotism and love for humanity, he says, cannot abolish egoism as “neither humanity nor even the nation can be for an individual man as concrete an object as he himself.” Tolstoy would explore all of these loves in his fiction and reach similar reservations about their expansive potential. However, this led him not to Eros, but to another love relation Soloviev does not mention—the sibling bond.  

Siblings are closer than mere friends who can be gained and lost throughout life (as noted by Hegel). They are of the same generation, allowing for the mutuality Soloviev demands. The incommensurability of lover and loved one that poses problems for patriotism is not an impediment. In fact, as psychologist Juliet Mitchell argues, the sibling is “someone who stands

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53 It is only with the Neoplatonists in the Renaissance that this second horse would be rejected altogether and “Platonic love” would take on a “bodiless, ethereal, wholly transcendental character” (Singer, *The Nature of Love*, 1, 74).

54 “It is enough that parents cannot be for children the aim of life in the sense in which children exist for parents” (99).

55 *Meaning of Love*, 99. Tolstoy makes almost the same statement in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*: “Love of one’s own people who are of the same blood, the same tongue, and the same religion as one’s self is possible, though far from being so strong as love of self, or even love of family or clan. But love for a state […] is a thing almost impossible […] Love must have an object, and […] humanity is not an object. It is nothing but a fiction” (*Kingdom of God*, 77).
exactly in the same place as oneself” in psychoanalytic terms (sharing the same position in relation to the parents). 56

In his early career (the first two stages, as he divides his life), Tolstoy believed that the most tender, compassionate, unconditional forms of love existed in the home sphere between relations. Family offered the ultimate sense of connection and belonging. As Richard Gustafson notes: “Tolstoy’s most ideal image of himself, his most cherished sense of life, his most firm conviction of faith, flow from his urge and desire to belong. His many years of family life rooted in Yasnaya Polyana surrounded by his wife and many children testify to this deep-seated need to feel himself a part of a community.” 57 This statement may seem paradoxical, looking back at the outcome of Tolstoy’s family life: the breakdown of his marriage, the tensions with some of his children, and his ultimate flight from home in the middle of the night. The home he was truly most “at home” in—the one he idealized in his fiction—was not the home of his adulthood, where he was plagued by his sexual appetites and ensuing guilt, continuous conflicts over the level of gentry privilege he could accept, and questions about his material, intellectual, and spiritual legacy. Instead, as I discussed in the Introduction, the idealized home was that of his childhood, where family was defined by his relationships with his siblings.

This idealization and desire to recreate his past comes out clearly in a letter to his aunt, Tatiana Ergolskaya (12 January 1852), in which he describes his dream of returning to Iasnaya Poliana to live there with her:

We lead the life that we used to lead […] We recall the people who were dear to us and who are now no more; you will weep, I will do the same; but these tears will be sweet. We will talk of my brothers who will come to see us from time to time, and of dear Marya, who will also spend some months of the year at [Yasnaya], which she so loves, with all her children. […] It’s a beautiful dream, but it’s still not all that I allow myself to dream of. I am married—my wife is a sweet, good, affectionate person; she loves you in

56 Mitchell, Siblings, 43.
57 Gustafson, Resident and Stranger, 8.
the same way as I do. We have children who call you ‘grandma’ […] the whole house is as it was in papa’s time, and we begin the same life again, only changing roles […] I take the role of papa, but I despair of ever deserving it; my wife, that of mama; the children—our own; Marya—the role of the two aunts […] There will be three new persons who will appear on the scene from time to time—my brothers—especially the one who will often be with us—Nikolay—an old bachelor, bald, retired from service, noble as ever.58

The frequent presence of Tolstoy’s siblings in the dream is noteworthy. His ideal home as an adult has the same family constellation as his childhood home. Each of his siblings has a continued place.

Growing up in Iasnaia Poliana, Tolstoy was the youngest of four brothers with one younger sister. His mother died when Tolstoy was less than two, and his father passed away when Tolstoy was nine, leaving the five children orphans. With the death of both his parents when Tolstoy was still only a child, Tolstoy’s connections to his siblings became among the most important relationships of his life and helped shape his views on family and human connection.59 Lacking parents, the children were not in competition for parental affection and displayed a low level of rivalry.60 Lateral bonds replaced vertical as the defining framework.

While Tolstoy’s writings are full of statements about various forms of love—marital, maternal, selfless, patriotic, Christian, Divine—to my knowledge, he never made any direct theoretical statement about sibling love. This may at first seem striking, given the prevalence of warm, devoted sibling relations at the heart of his major works of fiction. The absence of analytical commentary is telling coming from a man who analyzed everything. I believe it stemmed from the fact that sibling bonds were an unconflicted sphere for Tolstoy; he did not

59 Tolstoy’s childhood relationships with his siblings are described in Simmons, Leo Tolstoy, 20-30.
60 In the most comprehensive psychological study of siblings to date, Bank and Kahn discuss the crucial role of parents in determining sibling relations (The Sibling Bond, 56-59). They note that “in most families there is only one person who can occupy a certain psychological space in a family at any one time,” and that parents seek to differentiate among siblings, confining each to a unique role (23). Frank J. Sulloway provides a Darwinian explanation for sibling differentiation and niche finding within the family as a way to maximize parental attention (Born to Rebel, 83-100).
need to define them because he knew innately what they should be and never questioned his understanding. From the fictional sibling relationships he creates, we can conclude that for Tolstoy, being a sibling should mean unconditional love, a deep level of understanding, equality, and intimacy unthreatened by sexual desire (as we find between Nikolenka and Volodya Irten’ev, Natasha and Nikolai Rostov, Marya and Andrei Bolkonsky, Kitty and Dolly Shcherbatskaia, Anna and Stiva Oblonsky, etc.). Despite the vast attention *The Kreutzer Sonata* has received in criticism, little mention has been made of the way Pozdnyshev invokes siblinghood as an alternative to degrading sexual relations between men and women. Calling any man who has slept with multiple women a hopelessly lost “libertine” [блудник], he claims that “simple, clear, pure relations, brotherly relations with a woman can never be had by him again” (my italics).⁶¹ He goes on to suggest that seeing such a libertine in society, one should protect his sister or daughter from him. Sisters are safe and pure objects of love for Tolstoy. While they remain of secondary importance to the European writers discussed at the outset of the chapter, sibling relations were essential to Tolstoy’s views of human connection. I will argue that the sibling bond became a replacement for Eros in his ideas about love.

**PART TWO: FICTIONAL DEPICTIONS**

Having placed Tolstoy’s ideas about love and siblinghood in the context of western thought and in relation to his Russian contemporaries, I turn now to depictions of sibling bonds in his fiction. In Tolstoy’s early works, the nuances and complexities of siblinghood often take center stage and provide rich material for determining just what Tolstoy thought the relationship to be in its ideal (and polluted) form, and how he uses it in his fiction to further his ideas about love, marriage, brotherhood, and the structuring of society. Gustafson notes that “true

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⁶¹ “простого, ясного, чистого отношения к женщине, братского, у него уже никогда не будет” (PSS 27:19).
philosophical or theoretical discourse must emerge directly from our subjective experience of our reality,” and this gives weight to the importance of Tolstoy’s depiction of the lived experience of literal sibling bonds. In *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth* (1852, 1854, 1856) Tolstoy explores the way siblings provide a template for creating the self, both as an individual and as a social being. Here the focus is on self-definition and peer relations. In *War and Peace* (1865-1869), the focus will be on romantic bonds and the role of brother-sister relationships in determining how and with whom these bonds will form. Sibling relationships also help to determine the form these romantic unions will take.

**Literal Depiction: *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth***

Tolstoy’s early autobiographical trilogy, *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, provides an intimate depiction of family life in the Russian gentry class during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Tracing the maturation of Nikolenka Irten’ev, a sensitive child much like Tolstoy himself was, the novellas focus on Nikolenka’s relationships with his elders and peers as he seeks love, affirmation, and models to aspire towards. While most critics focus on *Childhood*, I will discuss *Boyhood* and *Youth*, where Nikolenka’s beloved older brother, Volodya, emerges as the main force in shaping his little brother’s development. Both a source of intense pride and envy, Volodya is the standard by which Nikolenka judges the world. With its focus on the early years of development and the system of relationships within the home, the trilogy naturally gives more attention to familial bonds than romantic love. It offers some of Tolstoy’s most vivid descriptions of the literal experience of siblinghood and highlights his sensitivity to the complex psychological dynamics of the family system.

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62 *Resident and Stranger*, 90.
In an early chapter of *Boyhood* entitled “Older brother,” Nikolenka remarks to the reader: “Who hasn’t noticed those secret, wordless relations that manifest themselves in a barely perceptible smile, motion, or look between people who have always lived together: brothers, friends, husband and wife, master and servant, especially when these people are not entirely open with each other.”\(^63\) It is his attention to these unspoken relations that makes Tolstoy a brilliant psychological writer, and these relations are a focus of Nikolenka’s young life. Painfully self-aware and self-critical, Nikolenka is obsessed with how he is regarded by his peers, the most important among them being his brother. He is wounded when he senses that Volodya is trying to act older and superior and pretending not to understand him.\(^64\) At a later point, speaking of the silences that sometimes occur between himself and Volodya, Nikolenka notes: “We felt that we knew each other too well. And knowing one another too much or too little is just as detrimental to closeness.”\(^65\) This point will be explored again in *Anna Karenina* when Levin and his dying brother struggle to find things to say, while *not* talking about his brother’s impending death.

Instead of emulating his somewhat distant father, Nikolenka has turned to his brother as an ego ideal.\(^66\) Nikolenka vacillates between attempts to imitate Volodya and to assert his independence.\(^67\) When Volodya starts having separate tutoring to prepare for his exams, Nikolenka confesses: “I listen with envy and involuntary respect as he boldly taps the chalk on the blackboard and talks of functions, sines, coordinates, and so on, which seem to me terms of

\(^{63}\)“Кто не замечал тех таинственных бессловесных отношений проявляющихся в незаметной улыбке, движении или взгляде между людьми, живущими постоянно вместе: братьями, друзьями, мужем и женой, господином и слугой, в особенности когда люди эти не во всем откровенны между собой” (PSS 2:17).

\(^{64}\)Tolstoy makes a similar comment about his brother, Nikolenka in his January 13 diary entry from 1851 (*Tolstoy’s Diaries I*, 22).

\(^{65}\)“Мы чувствовали, что слишком хорошо знаем друг друга. А слишком много или слишком мало знать друг друга одинаково мешает сближению” (PSS 2:69).

\(^{66}\)The sibling as ego ideal is discussed by Mitchell (*Siblings*, 4).

\(^{67}\)In his *Writer’s Diary* (January 1877), Dostovesky emphasizes or perhaps even enhances the vertical aspects of Nikolenka’s relationship with Volodya: “He envies his brother and considers him incomparably higher than he, especially as regards adroitness and good looks; and yet he secretly senses that his brother is far beneath him in all respects; but he drives away this thought, which he considers mean” (844). This description makes the relationship sound more like something out of a Dostoevsky novel, than Tolstoy.
inaccessible wisdom.”68 Things take on value because done by Volodya. “Although in the company of Volodya’s friends I played a role offensive to my pride, I liked to sit in his room when he had guests and silently watch everything that went on there.”69 Though not participating in the conversation, Nikolenka would imbibe the group’s views. He is pained to recognize that “it was as if Volodya was sometimes ashamed of my most innocent actions in front of his friend [Dubkov], and even more so of my youthfulness.”70 As the person closest to him—in terms of time shared, common associations, and position in the family—Volodya has the most impact on shaping Nikolenka’s sense of self.

That impact continues into Youth. Nikolenka initially experiences distance from his brother as Volodya begins to attend adult balls. Although still convinced that he and his brother love each other, Nikolenka notes: “We felt that the difference between a boy still having lessons at home with tutors and a person who dances at grown-up balls was too great to allow us to share our thoughts with each other.”71 He takes for granted that he and his brother understand the situation the same way. Stages of life are marked by Volodya’s development; Nikolenka never quite keeps up. The balls indicate that Volodya is reaching an age of sexual maturation, while Nikolenka is still a child. Volodya is a constant presence as a model and support when Nikolenka prepares for his university entrance exams. When he passes, Nikolenka feels the need to do as his brother did, and purchase a “Victor Adam horse,” tobacco and a pipe, but is also afraid to buy exactly the same thing and be accused of “aping Volodya” [в обезьянстве Володе]

68 “Я с завистью и невольным уважением слушаю, как он, бойко постукивая мелом о черную доску, толкует о функциях, синусах, координатах и т.п. которые кажутся мне выражениями недосягаемой премудрости” (PSS 2:59).
69 “хотя в обществе знакомых Володи я играл роль, оскорбляющую мое самолюбие, я любил сидеть в его комнате, когда у него бывали гости, и молча наблюдать все, что там делалось” (PSS 2:67).
70 “Володя как будто стыдился иногда перед ним за мои самые невинные поступки, а всего более за мою молодость” (PSS 2:68).
71 “Мы чувствовали слишком большую разницу – между мальчиком, к которому ходят учителя, и человеком, который танцует на больших балах, – чтобы решиться сообщить друг другу свои мысли” (PSS 2:87).
Tolstoy shows a particular sensitivity to the multifaceted nature of the sibling bond—one of simultaneous emulation, pride, envy, understanding, distancing, and love.

Nikolenka’s interactions with his peers are shaped by his experience at home with his brother. During his first drinking bout, Nikolenka and his classmates drink to Bruderschaft, marking the parallel between peer and sibling relations. In Youth, Volodya’s friend Nekhlyudov becomes close to Nikolenka in a relationship that is clearly modeled on the latter’s relationship with his brother. Nikolenka even becomes taken with the idea of marrying Nekhlyudov’s sister and thereby becoming a member of his family, again marking the overlap between familial and friend relations.

Nikolenka is fascinated by the idea of love and theorizes about it, coming up with three kinds—beautiful love [любовь красивая], self-sacrificing love [любовь самоотверженная], active love [любовь деятельная]—and defining them for the reader, but all this remains highly abstract, and he is disappointed not to experience what he believes to be true romantic love for any of the girls he meets.

Constantly concerned with status and hierarchy, Nikolenka is most content when he can find moments of equality and laterality. This theme will play out across Tolstoy’s fiction. In Youth, Nikolenka’s father, whom he had placed on a pedestal in the earlier novellas, is brought down to earth and humanized. The boys are upset by the new marriage their father plans, and he becomes a person with faults that can be criticized. This is another important step in Nikolenka’s development. The father tells his sons: “I am not your daddy now, but your friend, or at least I want to be your friend and comrade and adviser so far as I’m able, and nothing more.”

Nikolenka comes to feel very close to his father, but this closeness cannot compare

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72 In his treatise on friendship, The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth, Pavel Florensky illustrates both the parallels between brotherhood and friendship in the religious context, and also their points of difference (296-7).

73 “я теперь ваш не дядька, а друг, по крайней мере, хочу быть другом и товарищем и советчиком, где могу, и больше ничего” (PSS 2:163-164).
with what he and his brother share. “In our family this understanding was developed to the highest degree between father and us brothers […] But with no one had I brought this faculty to such a pitch as with Volodya, who had grown up with me in identical circumstances. Papa had lagged behind us long ago, and much that was as clear to us as two times two is four was incomprehensible to him.”74 This is one of the only passages where Tolstoy offers a reason for sibling intimacy, linking it to shared upbringing. Nikolenka goes on to describe how he and his brother had given their own special meaning to words that served as a kind of private language. The Rostov siblings in War and Peace will share a similar depth of understanding and connection. Still retaining many intimate details, War and Peace moves one step away from the realistic, close-scrutinizing depiction of siblinghood in the trilogy towards a slightly more romanticized view of the relationship. Fewer of the telling gestures are described, and more is left for the imagination to fill in.

**siblings in War and Peace**

While Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth are concerned primarily with a brother-brother relationship (Nikolenka’s relationships with his sisters are given substantially less attention), War and Peace centers primarily on sister-brother relations. Moving further away from the autobiographical into the realm of fiction, the remainder of this chapter explores Tolstoy’s depiction of siblings in his first major prose work. Here not only family love, but also romantic ties are in the balance and Tolstoy’s ideas about siblinghood determine his portrayals of amorous love.

74 “В нашем семействе, между папа и нами, братьями, понимание это было развито в высшей степени […] Но ни с кем, как с Володей, с которым мы развивались в одинаковых условиях, не довели мы этой способности до такой тонкости. Уже и папа давно отстала от нас, и многое, что для нас было так же ясно, как дважды два, было ему непонятно” (PSS 2:168).
Tolstoy worked on the book from 1860-1869, during the period of his greatest domestic felicity. Although War and Peace is too complex a work to be said to have only one thematic focus, in many senses it is a family novel, tracing the development of three main families—the Rostovs, Bolkonskys, and Kuragins—during the historic years surrounding the 1812 war with Napoleon. The depiction of each of these families is in turn structured around a brother-sister pair, offering three contrasting visions of family and siblinghood. The Rostovs are Tolstoy’s idealized image of warm, joyous, spontaneous living and loving in the family sphere. The Bolkonsky siblings offer a more subdued, spiritual image of family connection. And finally, the Kuragins are a pollution of the family ideal; lacking any genuine caring, their family is characterized by falseness and selfish desire that turns to incest between two of the siblings.

As the ideal of family, the Rostovs are first introduced in the novel in their home, unlike the Kuragins, who appear at a high society soiree. They embody Gary Saul Morson’s claim that “Tolstoy had the special ability to create families that were not mere collections of individuals but a sort of small cultural unit of their own.” The Count, Countess and their oldest daughter, Vera, are entertaining guests when the younger children literally burst into the drawing room in an overabundance of energy. They are heard before seen—a succession of boys’ and girls’ feet and bumped furniture. Their appearance and Natasha’s infectious laughter permeate the drawing room, breaking all social conventions and bringing a taste of genuine family affection that infects even the outsiders. “The guest, compelled to admire this family scene, thought it necessary to take some part in it.”

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75 For an in depth analysis of the stages of War and Peace’s creation, see Eikhenbaum, Tolstoi in the Sixties.
76 The other place Tolstoy planned to write about sibling incest was in a comedy he worked on in 1856, for which he described the main theme as: “the debauchery everywhere in the country. The mistress with the footman. The brother with the sister. The father’s illegitimate son with the father’s wife, etc.” (Diaries Vol. 1, 117).
77 “Прозаики в Anna Karenina,” 7.
78 “Гостья, принужденная любоваться семейною сценой, сочла нужным принять в ней какое-нибудь участие” (PSS 9:48).
After describing how the children adapt to this sudden encounter with the decorum of adult visitors, Tolstoy notes: “It was evident that in the back rooms from which they had dashed out so impetuously, the conversation had been more amusing than the one here about society gossip, the weather, and Countess Apraksine.” Tolstoy then takes us behind those closed doors into their world of first loves and dreams and plans, privileging its earnestness over the formulaic talk of adults during a social call. Hidden among the flower pots, Natasha witnesses a kiss between Sonya and Nikolai and then imitates this with her sweetheart, Boris—our first instance of a sibling acting as a model for romantic matters. Both couples are working out their naïve ideas about love and imagining how their lives will unfold. Through the shift of focus into the inner rooms of the house, Tolstoy validates the concerns of the domestic world as equally important to the questions about Napoleon and politics being discussed in parallel adult spaces, like Anna Pavlovna’s salon. And it is in this home sphere that the most genuine instances of caring take place.

We see the depth of empathy in the sibling bond first exhibited between Natasha and Sonya, cousins [двоюродные сёстры] who are being raised as siblings (at this time “Sonya considered and called the Countess her mother”). Noticing that Sonya has slipped out of the Name Day celebration and predicting the cause of her disappearance, Natasha leaves the party to seek Sonya on the chest in the hallway—“the place of woes for the generation of young women in the Rostov house.” Despite her high spirits, the instant Natasha sees Sonya in tears she herself begins to cry, “not knowing the reason, but just because Sonya was crying.” The narrator’s comment is not entirely true; although Sonya has not yet explained her sorrow, Natasha has instinctively guessed that Nikolai is at the core, and realizes Vera must have provoked this
outburst. She comforts Sonya and brings her back to the party to sing a trio with Nikolai, which was originally intended only to be a duet for him and Natasha.

Singing is at the heart of several of the scenes of intense Rostov sibling unity. Natasha and Nikolai’s bond is perhaps most explicitly illustrated when Nikolai listens to Natasha singing after he has lost a huge sum of money to Dolokhov in cards.

And suddenly the whole world centered for him on anticipation of the next note, the next phrase, and everything in the world was divided into three beats: ‘Oh mio credele affetto.’ One, two, three . . . one, two, three . . . ‘Oh, this senseless life of ours!’ thought Nikolai. ‘All this misery, and money, and Dolokhov, and anger, and honor—it’s all nonsense . . . but this is real . . . Now then, Natasha, now then, dearest! Now then, darling! How will she take that si? She’s taken it! Thank God!’ And without noticing that he was singing, to strengthen the si he sang a second, a third below the high note [. . .]

Oh how that chord vibrated, and how moved was something that was finest in Rostov’s soul! And this something was apart from everything else in the world and above everything in the world.

Nikolai goes from despair to elation all through the inspiration he receives from his sister’s singing. Music plays an important role in many of the transcendent moments of War and Peace (the balalaika music at Uncle’s, the opera music during Natasha’s seduction, Petya’s dream of a fugue before his death, etc.), and in this scene, Tolstoy fuses the emotional and spiritual power of music with the intimacy and intensity of the sibling bond, allowing the two to

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81 The aria comes from Giovanni Pacini’s opera seria, “L’Ultimo Giorno di Pompei” (1825), and tells of a tormented love. The complete lyrics read: “Oh mio crudele affetto! / Perché mi strazi ancora? / Ah! fuggi dal mio petto... / fuggi tiranno Amor! / E ne’ momenti estremi / vedrò / languir colei, / che fu de’ voti miei / soave oggetto ognor? / Oh duolo inesprimibile!/ Oh mio fatal rigor!” [Oh my cruel love! / Why do you torture me? / Ah! Flee from my chest ... / Flee tyrant Love!/ And in the final moments / I shall see / her languish, / for whom I prayed / ever a soft object? / Oh woe unutterable!/ Oh my fatal severity!].

82 “И вдруг весь мир для него сосредоточился в ожидании следующей ноты, следующей фразы, и все в мире сделалось разделенным на три темпа: «Oh mio crudele affetto... Раз два, три...раз, два...три [...] Эх, жизнь наша дурацкая! – думал Николай. – Все это, и несчастье, и деньги, и Долохов, и злоба, и честь, – все это вздор... а вот оно – настоящее... Ну, Наташа, ну голубчик! ну, матушка!.. Как она этот сi возьмет... Взяла? Слава Богу! – И он, сам не замечая того, что он поет, чтобы усилить этот си, взял вторую в терцию высокой ноты [...] О, как задрожала это терция и как тронулась что-то лучшее, что было в душе Ростова. И это что-то было независимо от всего в мире и выше всего в мире” (PSS 10:59).

83 The passage is beautifully described by Donna Orwin, who sees Nikolai relinquish “his individuality with all its trappings” and reach down to the level of “dukh, or spirit” (Tolstoy’s Art and Thought, 118). “He descends to the legitimate ‘common life’ in which human beings act in concert and leave the reasons for their behavior to God” (Tolstoy’s Art and Thought, 125).
enhance each other. Nikolai spontaneously joining Natasha at the climax of the piece is, quite literally, a moment of complete harmony between the pair.

The *Kreutzer Sonata* centers around the power of music and its corrupting influence in unleashing passions that are given no outlet in the drawing room context where music is performed. Poznyshev supposes his wife to be drawn into infidelity with a violinist through the activity of joint music-making. In *War and Peace*, confined to the sibling sphere, the powerful effect of music is purified and portrayed as a union of souls, free of sexual passion. Critics have argued that Tolstoy could not create a complete relationship between a male and a female character because he did not want to sully the female character with sexuality.\textsuperscript{84} I believe the scene of Natasha and Nikolai singing is one illustration of the way that Tolstoy *does* create complete relationships between male and female characters and moments of perfect unity. However, these moments come most strongly for his sibling pairs, not his romantic ones, and therefore have gone overlooked. A brother-sister relationship, because of its inherent asexuality (aside from the failed case of the incestuous Helene, to be discussed later), could be fulfilled and complete while the woman still remained pure. Although the act of singing the climax of a piece together could have a sexual connotation in another context, here the couple seems unaware of the potentially incestuous undertones that one might read into their behavior.\textsuperscript{85} Tolstoy further

\textsuperscript{84} Benson (*Women in Tolstoy*, 10-15) and Holbrook (*Tolstoy, Woman and Death*, 149). Cruise writes: “It is only in *Resurrection*, with its wholesale rejection of sexuality, that women and men together can achieve a harmonious relationship with each other and with themselves” (“Women, Sexuality, and the Family,” 204).

\textsuperscript{85} There are two major schools of thought accounting for the incest taboo. The first centers around the theories of Finnish anthropologist, Edward Westermark, and the second around the theories of Freud. Westermark postulates that childhood propinquity results in a positive aversion to incest (*Short History of Marriage*, 80). The scene under discussion fits with Westermark’s theory that siblings who have grown up together, like the Rostovs, would naturally lack the desire to consummate their relationship sexually. In opposition to this view, Freud argues that people’s first love-choice is usually an incestuous one and that prohibitions against incest were created to counter that desire. For a complete comparison of the various theories on reactions to the incest stimulus, see Fox (“Sibling Incest,” 130-136). I believe Tolstoy’s view would probably come closest to Kant’s assertion that “nature has implanted in our breasts a natural opposition to incest” and that “nature herself provided restraints upon any desire between brother and sister” (*Lectures on Ethics*, 168). Tolstoy never questions the reprehensibility of incest or the source of our aversion to it.
enforces the innocence of the scene by commenting before the passage that there was “virginity” 
[девственность] in Natasha’s voice.

Perhaps the other most striking instance of Natasha and Nikolai’s closeness comes during a philosophical conversation that evolves into the sharing of childhood memories. Settled on the couch where they always have their “most heartfelt conversations” [самые задушевные разговоры], Natasha and Nikolai begin to discuss moments of sudden emptiness they have experienced. The scene is punctuated by a refrain of “do you remember?” “I remember” that links them in a shared past to which others—including their cousin Sonya, who was present for many events—seem to have no access. Eventually Natasha recalls their uncle calling them into the study as young children and discovering… “a black man” [апаp] Nikolai fills in. Natasha affirms, but notes: “I don’t know now whether there was a black man or whether we saw him in a dream or if we were told about him.” According to the Rostov parents, no such event ever occurred, but Natasha and Nikolai share the same memory, and even the same detail of the man’s white teeth. They are in tune with each other and smile at the “poetic, youthful memories, those impressions from their most distant past where dream merges with reality.”

After this scene of sharing, Natasha and Nikolai are called upon to sing. Tolstoy again emphasizes the intense bond between the pair, noting, “Nikolai did not take his eyes off his sister and drew breath in time with her.” This drawing of breath together is a symbol of their unity, and again has a potentially incestuous undertone of which the characters remain blissfully oblivious. Protected by their sibling bond, Natasha and Nikolai regard their actions as perfectly

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86 “Я теперь не знаю, что это был арап, или мы во сне видели, или нам рассказывали” (PSS 10:276).
87 “поэтического, юношеского воспоминания, те впечатления из самого дальнего прошедшего, где сновидение сливаются с действительностью” (PSS 10:276). The importance of idealized childhood in War and Peace is discussed by Edwina Cruise in “Women, Sexuality, and the Family,” 196-197.
88 “Николай не спускал глаз с сестры и вместе с нею переводил дыханье” (PSS 10:278).
innocent and therefore are not restrained in their attachment. Throughout the novel, the romantic partners seem to strive for the simple and unreserved connections that siblings enjoy.

By using the language and images of erotic poetry to talk about a sibling pair, Tolstoy estranges this language. That sibling love has received so little attention in the scholarly literature on love suggests that we do not pick up on this language outside of its traditional romantic context. The intimacy goes under-appreciated not because it is described in less intense terms, but because we are accustomed to equating intense love with Eros and therefore ignore the union of singing souls when they belong to a brother and sister who have no sexual desire for each other.

**Siblings as a Model for Romantic Relations**

In *War and Peace*, the feelings between brothers and sisters resemble those between husbands and wives and both sibling and marital pairs share similar kinds of interactions. Tolstoy emphasizes this by creating parallel scenes for them. Like Nikolai, Andrei also connects to Natasha through her singing. When he comes to the Rostov house after Natasha’s first ball and listens to her sing, he becomes choked with tears and “something new and joyful stirred in his soul,”89 much like Nikolai’s experience after gambling. For Andrei, listening to Natasha sing is spiritual, giving him “a sudden, vivid sense of the terrible contrast between something infinitely great and illimitable within him and that limited material something that he, and even she, was.”90 For both Nikolai and Andrei, this connection to Natasha’s singing stirs something lofty in their souls.

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89 “в душе его произошло что-то новое и счастливое” (PSS 10:210).
90 “вдруг живо сознанная им страшная противоположность между чем-то бесконечно великим и неопределенным, бывшим в нем, и чем-то узким и телесным, чем был он сам и даже была она” (PSS 10:211).
As Natasha’s relationship with Andrei at moments mirrors her relationship with Nikolai, so too does Natasha’s relationship with Pierre. When Nikolai returns home from the army for the first time, Natasha is waiting for him in the morning when he wakes up so that they can have a talk. “They hardly gave one another time to ask questions and give replies concerning a thousand little matters which could not interest anyone but themselves.” The conversation jumps from topic to topic, with Natasha showing a burn she gave herself on the arm to prove her love for Sonya. “Looking into Natasha’s wildly bright eyes, Rostov re-entered that world of home and childhood which had no meaning for anyone else, but gave him some of the best joys of his life; and the burning of an arm as a proof of love did not seem senseless, he understood and was not surprised at it.” What is striking in this interaction is the deep level of understanding between the pair. They do not have to finish their questions or replies because they are in tune with one another. And equally important, they are having a conversation that would be meaningless to any outsider.

Tolstoy describes the conversation between Natasha and Pierre after their marriage in a very similar fashion. When Pierre comes home to Natasha after an absence (much like Nikolai returning from war), Natasha happily captures him for a tête-à-tête. “Natasha and Pierre, left alone, also began to talk as only a husband and wife can talk, that is, with extraordinary clarity and rapidity, understanding and expressing each other’s thoughts in a way contrary to all rules of

91 “Они не успели спрашивать друг друга и отвечать на вопросы о тысячах мелочей, которые могли интересовать только их одних” (PSS 10:7).
92 “глядя в эти отчаянно-оживленные глаза Наташи, Ростов опять вошел в тот свой семейный, детский мир, который не имел не для кого никакого смысла, кроме как для него, но который доставлял ему одни из лучших наслаждений в жизни; и сожжение руки линейкой, для показания любви, показалось ему не бессмыслицей: он понимал и не удивлялся этому” (PSS 10:8).
logic.” Like Natasha and Nikolai, they have a deep understanding that does not require the same kind of logic and organization most people need in communication. Their conversation is:

contrary to all the laws of logic and contrary to them because quite different subjects were talked about at one and the same time. This simultaneous discussion of many topics did not prevent a clear understanding but on the contrary was the surest sign that they fully understood one another […] the words themselves were not consecutive and clear but only the feeling that prompted them.

Though Tolstoy claims that Natasha and Pierre are talking “as only a husband and a wife can talk,” we have already seen Natasha share this same immediate connection and dialogue with her brother.

Tolstoy models the romantic relationship between Nikolai and Marya on sibling relations as well. Early in their acquaintance, Nikolai brings Marya a letter from his mother telling that Marya’s brother is among the wounded traveling with the Rostovs from Moscow. With the sharing of this letter, “Nikolai suddenly became almost as intimate with the princess as if they were relations,” setting up a sibling-like bond between the two. Nikolai’s relationship with Marya strongly parallels that of her brother, Andrei. The latter, although unable to understand his sister’s lofty spiritual side, recognizes it and comes to appreciate its worth. When Andrei is wounded, he thinks of the higher love that is binding him to life as “that love which God preached on earth and which Princess Marya taught me and I did not understand.” Thus he acknowledges his admiration for what his sister had and his failure in never having attained her

93 “Наташа, оставшись с мужем одна, тоже разговаривала так, как только разговаривают жена с мужем, то есть с необыкновенной ясностью и быстротой познаивая и сообщая мысли друг друга, путем противным всем правилам логики” (PSS 12:290).
94 “противный всем законам логики, противный уже потому, что в одно и то же время говорилось о совершенно различных предметах. Это одновременное обсуждение многое не только не мешало ясности понимания, но, напротив, было вернейшим признаком, того, что они вполне понимают друг друга […] противом всем законам рассудка, последовательны и ясны не речи, а только чувство, которое руководит ими” (PSS 12:291).
95 “Николай вдруг сблизился с княжной в почти родственные отношения” (PSS 12:30).
96 “та любовь, которую проповедовал Бог на земле, которой меня учила княжна Марья и которой я не понимал” (PSS 11:256).
spiritual heights. In the same way, Nikolai also admires Marya’s spirituality and sees it as something beyond his understanding. After their marriage, “his steady, tender, and proud love of his wife rested on his feeling of wonder at her spirituality and the lofty moral world, almost beyond his reach, in which she had her being.”\textsuperscript{97} As Marya had gently tried to teach Andrei love and compassion for those around him, in the same way, she instructs Nikolai to be forgiving, and that it is wrong for instance to beat his serfs.

While Tolstoy’s ideal romantic relationships closely resemble sibling bonds, his sibling pairs share moments that could read like a scene between a married couple. When Andrei leaves Bald Hills to go to war, Tolstoy does not focus on his parting from his wife, Lise, and write the classic scene of two lovers being torn apart by war, dating back at least to Homer and his description of Hector’s parting with Andromache. Instead, he focuses on the parting between Andrei and Marya, describing their final conversation and the gift of a cross that Marya places around his neck. When Andrei says his final farewell, Lise falls unconscious and Andrei leaves her in a chair so that he can give his last parting to his sister, whom he kisses. Tolstoy leaves the reader with a view of Marya’s “beautiful eyes full of tears” [с заплаканными прекрасными глазами] as she makes the sign of the cross in the direction of the empty doorway (I:138).

After Lise’s death, Andrei and Marya work together to care for Andrei’s newborn son. Tolstoy describes Marya as “taking a mother’s place to her little nephew,” thus in a sense making Marya and Andrei the parents of the same baby, although their relationship is asexual. Quarreling over how to care for their sick infant, the two resemble a husband and wife with deep affection underlying their little disputes about medicines and rest. At the end of the medical crisis, when the child finally perspires and it is clear that the danger has passed, Tolstoy creates

\textsuperscript{97}“Главное основанием его твердой, нежной и гордой любви к жене имело основанием всегда это чувство удивления перед ее душевностью, перед тем, почти недоступным для Николая, возвышенным, нравственным миром, в котором всегда жила его жена” (PSS 12:287).
another marriage-like tableau in which Andrei and Marya stand together by the side of the cot, looking down at their infant. The cot is surrounded by a curtain [полог], and when Marya joins Andrei there, this curtain leaves the pair with the infant cut off from the rest of the world.

Prince Andrei looked at his sister. In the dim shadow of the curtain her luminous eyes shone more brightly than usual from the tears of joy that were in them. She leaned over to her brother and kissed him, slightly catching the curtain of the cot. Each made the other a warning gesture and stood still in the dim light beneath the curtain as if not wishing to leave that seclusion where they three were shut off from all the world. Prince Andrei was the first to leave the cot, ruffling his hair on the muslin of the curtain. “Yes, that’s the one thing left to me now,” he said with a sigh.98

This desire for seclusion and separation from the rest of the world is one typically associated with lovers, not siblings. Through repetition of the word polog (specifically bed curtain), Tolstoy emphasizes that Andrei and Marya have come together inside “bed curtains” and have a child; this is almost a scene of procreation without sex.

Nikolai and Natasha also share such a scene of isolation from the rest of the world during their carriage ride home from Uncle’s on the night of the wolf hunt. The night is so dark that the pair cannot even see the horses; they feel as if they are in another world. Nikolai even suggests that perhaps they are not driving home, but to “a magical kingdom” [в волшебном царстве]. As she is fond of doing, Natasha asks Nikolai what he has been thinking and he, in turn, questions her. Then suddenly she announces: “I know that I shall never again be as happy and tranquil as I am now.”99 Although neither of them says it, Nikolai thinks, “How charming this Natasha of mine is! I have no other friend like her and never shall have. Why should she marry? We might

98 “Князь Андрей посмотрел на сестру. Лучистые глаза княжны Марьи, в матовом полусвете полога, блестели больше обыкновенного от счастливых слез, которые стояли в них. Княжна Марья потянулась к брату и поцеловала его, слегка зацепив за полог кроватки. Они поцеловали друг другу, еще постояли в матовом свете полога, как бы не желая расстаться с этим миром, в котором они втроем были отделены от всего света. Князь Андрей первый, путая волосы о кисею полога, отошел от кроватки. «Да, это одно, что осталось мне теперь», — сказал он со вздохом” (PSS 10:102).
99 “я знаю, что никогда уже я не буду так счастлива, спокойна, как теперь” (PSS 10:268-269).
always drive about together!” while Natasha thinks, “What a darling this Nicholas of mine is!”

[Экая прелесть этот Николай!]. The desire to be always driving like this as a pair is reminiscent of typical descriptions of lovers, removed from the rest of the world and caught up in their own private sphere. Nikolai questions why Natasha should ever marry right before he thinks about wanting to be a pair with her forever. This suggests the overlap between their sibling bond and marriage, as Nikolai desires not to be supplanted. The romantic partner becomes a rival to the sibling (Marya will feel this about Natasha as well).

While Nikolai is away at war his mind dwells on his sister, rather than on his romantic interest, Sonya. Falling asleep on his horse one night, Nikolai begins to dream of Natasha. Tolstoy writes out Nikolai’s stream of consciousness, constantly interrupted when something awakens him. Each time Nikolai dozes, his mind returns to Natasha. When his mind drifts to the emperor, Nikolai thinks, “But that’s nonsense, the chief thing is not to forget the important thing I was thinking of. Yes, Na-tasha.” While most protagonists dream of their lovers, Nikolai dreams of his sister, considering even his idol, the emperor, unimportant in comparison.

When Andrei is wounded and his lifetime hero, Napoleon, is looking down at him, he too experiences a moment of not caring about great men, but, instead of valuing his sister. “Looking into Napoleon’s eyes, Prince Andrew thought of the insignificance of greatness, the unimportance of life which no one could understand, and the still greater unimportance of death,

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100 "Что за прелесть это моя Наташа! Такого другого друга у меня нет и не будет. Зачем ей выходить замуж? Всё бы с ней ездили!” (PSS 10:269). This desire to remain a pair forever fits with the type of sibling attachment known as twinning and is described by Akhtar and Kramer (“Beyond the Parental Orbit,” 11-12).

101 On the ride back from the mummers, where Nikolai decided to marry Sonya, he runs to Natasha’s carriage to ask her repeatedly if has done right. His need for her approval and insistence on repeating his question suggests that he is also concerned about replacing her.

102 "Да это пустяки, а главное – не забывать, что я нужное-то думал, да. На-ташку.” (PSS 9:323).
the meaning of which no one alive could understand or explain.”

despite the fact that everything has seemingly become insignificant to him, a moment later, seeing the icon Marya had placed around his neck, Andrei thinks, “it would be good if everything were as clear and simple as it seems to Marya,” and wishes for the kind of faith she has in order to calm him when he feels faced with “a Power indefinable” [сила – неопределенная]. Although Andrei does not experience Marya’s faith, she has not lost her value for him. The sibling, rather than the romantic interest, retains her value when everything else has been devalued.

In *War and Peace* the distinction between sibling and romantic relationships is blurred. Tolstoy relies on the sibling model from his idealized childhood in creating his depictions of marriages. In turn his characters rely on their sibling relationships as a form of practice for the amorous ones that follow, which at times makes their sibling bonds resemble asexual marriages. This pattern has been observed in English literature of the time as well. As Valerie Sanders notes: “There grew up in many Victorian families an aura of romantic loyalty and devotion surrounding siblings, with sisters playing the role of nurturers and carers, and boys that of natural protectors.” Tolstoy’s characters learn about intimacy through connecting with their siblings and then they try to recreate those relationships in their adult husband-wife

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103 “Глядя в глаза Наполеону, князь Андрей думал о ничтожности величия, о ничтожности жизни, которой никто не мог понять значения, и о еще большем ничтожестве смерти, смысл которой никто не мог понять и объяснить из живущих” (PSS 9:356).
104 “хорошо бы это было, ежели бы все было так ясно и просто, как оно кажется княжне Марье” (PSS 9:356).
105 Benson points out that Tolstoy does nothing to distinguish between Natasha and Marya’s reactions to Andrei’s death, though one would expect a lover and a sister to respond differently to the loss (*Women in Tolstoy*, 65).
106 Laura J. Olson calls Natasha “a ‘sister,’ who becomes a ‘lover’ to several male characters,” but she does not comment on the link between these two roles (“Russianness, Femininity, and Romantic Aesthetics,” 516).
107 This idea is backed up by sibling psychology. Gray and Steinberg write that children’s early relationships, which would include sibling relationships, function as a “template for the nature and quality of later relationships” (*Adolescent Romance and the Parent-Child Relationship*, 245). Colonna and Newman write of how the sibling bond can affect the choice of romantic partners later in life (“The Psychoanalytic Literature on Siblings,” 297).
relationships. These attempts to transfer experience based on asexual relationships to marriage relationships contribute to the characters’ struggles with integrating sexuality into their intimate relationships. Perhaps in part for this reason, the marriages in *War and Peace* are described in quite un-erotic terms.

**Discomfort with Sexuality and the Lack of Fulfilled Romantic Relationships**

In *War and Peace*, many of the characters seem removed from or ill at ease with sex. Despite the fact that they experience sexual feelings, they are often uncomfortable with the idea of themselves and others as sexual beings. At the extreme, Marya, who has been taken to represent Tolstoy’s mother, tries not to allow herself to care about romance and her “self-esteem was wounded by the fact that the arrival of a suitor agitated her.” Although Tolstoy tells us that her “most important, strongest, deeply hidden longing was for earthly love,” as an ugly woman trapped on an isolated country estate with no possible suitors, Marya trains herself to consider this desire a temptation of the devil. Giving up on the hope of having a family, she turns to religion and self-sacrifice—a mode of existence that helps her to cope with the trials of her situation and reinforces the value of her undesired single state.

As soon as sexuality enters a situation in either thought or deed, Tolstoy’s characters often feel unclean and morally reprehensible, even if they have taken no actions. Pierre experiences this when being seduced by Helene and finding himself attracted to her. “Pierre was

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109 Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring’s study of conflict resolution styles found that the patterns of interactions between siblings carry over into the way they interact with romantic partners (“Conflict Resolution Styles in Family Subsystems and Adolescent Romantic Relationships”). Specifically, the negative methods siblings use in resolving conflicts are directly related to the way they resolve conflicts in romantic relationships.

110 Wilson (*Tolstoy*, 23), Maude (*The Life of Tolstoy*, 422).

111 “чувствовала себя оскорблённой в чувстве собственного достоинства тем, что приезд обещанного ей жениха волновал ее” (PSS 9:265).

112 “главною, сильнейшею и затаённою её мечтой была любовь земная” (PSS 9:268).

113 Gary Saul Morson emphasizes the fact that her attempt not to be affected by sexual desires is a “strenuous exercise of the will” (*Hidden in Plain View*, 263).
one of those who are only strong when they feel themselves quite innocent, and since that day when he was overpowered by a feeling of desire while stooping over the snuffbox at Anna Pavlovna’s, an unacknowledged sense of guilt of that desire paralyzed his will. " Although Pierre takes no actions, this moment of lust is enough to make him feel guilty and powerless (a clear reference to Matthew 5:28: “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”). He has lost his innocence simply through feeling sexual desire.

Natasha feels similar discomfort and guilt the first time she experiences true sexual desire during her seduction by Anatole at the opera. Seen through her eyes, the opera house is full of naked arms and shoulders, exposed bosoms, tight trousers, and bare-legged dancers. In this sexually charged atmosphere, Natasha is introduced to Anatole, whose physical attractiveness she has been admiring from a distance. After five minutes of talking with him as he stares at her bare shoulders with undisguised desire, Natasha “felt that they were close, as she had never been with a man,” indicating that this is her first experience of true sexual attraction. Although the experience is pleasurable, she is also afraid and uncomfortable with how she feels. Later, trying to make sense of her feelings, “everything seemed dark, obscure, and terrible” to her.

Natasha is the central inspiration for many characters throughout the novel, but no one ever truly possesses her or forms a complete romantic bond with her. Denisov is rejected, Boris sent away. Andrei actually forms an engagement, but instead of claiming his bride, he asks “to be made happy in a year” and leaves Natasha free, keeping the engagement secret. Natasha remains untouched. Andrei visits the Rostovs every day, “but did not behave to Natasha

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114 “Пьер принадлежал к числу тех людей, которые сильны только тогда, когда они чувствуют себя вполне чистыми. А с того дня, как он овладело то чувство желания, которое он испытал над табакеркой у Анны Павловны, неосознанное чувство виноватости этого стремления парализовало его решимость” (PSS 9:253).
115 “она чувствовала, что они близки, как она никогда не была с мужчиной” (PSS 10:329).
116 “все казалось ей темно, невесно и страшно” (PSS 10:331).
117 This idea is discussed by Holbrook (Tolstoy, Woman, and Death, 82-83).
as an affianced lover: he addressed her using the formal you [вы], and kissed only her hand.”

The absence of sexuality pertains not only to the way the couple acts, but also in how they speak of and think of the relationship. After the engagement has been broken off, Andrei recalls the way in which he loved Natasha: “it was just that inner, spiritual force, that sincerity, that frankness of soul—that very soul of hers which seemed to be fettered by her body—it was that soul I loved in her.” He completely rejects the physical, claiming the soul he loved was merely “fettered” by her body. Ironically, this thought comes to him as he remembers Natasha telling him a story about collecting mushrooms—a common symbol of sexuality in Russian culture. Andrei consciously reacts against sexuality by reaffirming to himself the importance of the spiritual over the physical. Not until he is dying, and all possibility of a sexual union has been removed, is Andrei able to love Natasha without restraint or distance.

Although Pierre actually marries Natasha, Tolstoy does not present an image of them as an amorous couple. During the French occupation of Moscow, years before he marries her, Pierre describes his love of Natasha to the French captain, Ramballe.

Pierre then explained that he had loved this woman from his earliest years, but that he had not dared to think of her because she was too young, and because he had been an illegitimate son without a name. Afterwards when he had received a name and wealth he dared not think of her because he loved her too well, placing her far above everything in the world, and especially therefore above himself.

To this, Ramballe responds only “Platonic love, clouds . . .” [L’amour platonique, les nuages...].

Here Tolstoy draws out his problem with creating a romantic relationship. If the woman is

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118 “но не как жених обращался с Наташей: он говорил ей вы и целовал только ее руку” (PSS 10:227).

119 “эту-то душевную силу, эту искренность, эту открытость душевную, эту-то душу ее, которую как будто связывало тело, эту-то душу я любил в ней… так сильно, так счастливо любил…” (PSS 11:210).

120 Mandelker writes on the mushroom as a sexual symbol when examining Varenka’s failed romance with Koznyshov in Anna Karenina (Framing ‘Anna Karenina’, 170).

121 “Потом Пьер объяснил, что он любил эту женщину с самых юных лет; но не смел думать о ней, потому что она была слишком молода, а он был незаконный сын без имени. Потом же, когда он получил имя и богатство, он не смел думать о ней потому что слишком любил ее, слишком высоко ставил ее над всем миром и потому, тем более, над самим собою” (PSS 11:373).
worthy of a whole lifetime’s love, then she must become something holy, something “far above everything in the world,” and therefore she cannot be touched. After Natasha’s aborted elopement and attempt to poison herself, Pierre is a regular visitor and asks her to “consider me your friend” [считай меня своим другом] and to remember him when in need of help or a confidant. He leaves her at the midpoint of the book with his famous proposal in the conditional: “If I were not I, but the handsomest, most intelligent, best person in the world and were free, I would get down on my knees this minute and ask for your hand and your love.”

Through the use of grammatical mood, Pierre protects himself from an actual romantic pronouncement and leaves friendship as the only role he has truly offered. Natasha takes his statement not as a declaration of love, but a sign of his kindness and compassion. “I know no one kinder, more generous, or better than you, and nobody could be,” she later tells him. Pierre’s connection with Natasha resembles that of her brothers: a blend of enchantment (Petya’s attachment is described as “lover-like”) and deep understanding.

Even when Pierre is finally in a position to propose to Natasha, he is not comfortable acknowledging the amorous nature of his feelings. In his typical self-deprecating style, he informs Marya: “I know it all. I know I am not worthy of her, I know it’s impossible to speak of it now. But I want to be a brother to her. No, I don’t want [that]…I can’t…” Pierre himself, in trying to say that he loves Natasha, gets confused between wanting to be her brother and wanting to be her husband, which is what he truly desires. When he corrects himself he cannot even say “husband,” indicating his discomfort with adding sexuality to an otherwise pure love.

We never see Pierre married to the enchanting Natasha of the ball, the wolf hunt, or the nights of

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122 „Если бы я был не я, а красивейший, умнейший и лучший человек в мире и был бы свободен, я бы сию минуту на коленях просил руку и любви вашей” (PSS 10:371).
123 „Добрее, великолуше, лучше вас я не знаю человека, и не может быть” (PSS 11:81).
124 „Я все знаю. Я знаю, что я не стою ее; я знаю, что теперь невозможно говорить об этом. Но я хочу быть братом ей. Нет, не хочу…я не могу…” (PSS 12:227).
singing. Instead, Tolstoy skips over the first seven years of their marriage and only shows us Pierre with a Natasha who has dropped all her seductive charms and become a fertile mother. Their life is centered on family and children and we see little indication of sexual passion between the two.  

The other important romantic relationship—that between Marya and Nikolai—also centers on idealization and lacks a sexual component. With Nikolai, “for the first time all that pure, spiritual, inward travail through which she [Marya] had lived appeared on the surface.” Nikolai sees and appreciates this and falls in love with Marya’s “moral beauty” [нравственной красотой]. “He felt that the being before him was quite different from, and better than, anyone he had met before, and above all better than himself.” As Pierre does with Natasha, Nikolai places Marya on a pedestal. Despite his admiration and love, or perhaps because of it, Nikolai is originally unable to picture married life with Marya, as he has been able to do with other women like Sonya; he regards her as too holy to be in a sexual marriage relationship. 

Marya herself has trouble believing that she could be loved in a romantic way, considering herself plain and unattractive. Even after several years of marriage she frets about this, but Nikolai reminds her, “It is not beauty that endears, it is love that makes us see beauty.” Tolstoy appears to be preaching through his characters what he wanted to believe himself. Nikolai puts forth a wholly unromantic idea of love, telling Marya: “But do I love my

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125 In describing Natasha’s interaction with her baby, Petia, Cruise writes that “Natasha has achieved a whole and complete love in which the roles of wife and mother are indivisible and interchangeable” (“Women, Sexuality, and the Family,” 199). I agree that Tolstoy did not wish the two to be separable, but given that, the idea of interchangability seems illogical to me.

126 “В первый раз вся та чистая духовная внутренняя работа, которую она жила до сих пор, выступила наружу” (PSS 12:24). Cruise notes that Marya is Tolstoy’s only female character whose “spiritual aspirations propel her into a realm of cerebration otherwise reserved for male characters” (“Women, Sexuality, and the Family,” 199).

127 “Он чувствовал, что существо, бывшее перед ним, было совсем другое, лучшее, чем все те, которые он встречал до сих пор, и лучшее, чем он сам” (PSS 12:24).

128 “Не по хорошу мил, а по милу хорош” (PSS 12:264).
wife? I don’t love her, but . . . Without you, or when something comes between us, like this, I seem lost and can’t do anything. Now do I love my finger? I don’t love it, but just try to cut it off…”  

This statement suggests that for Nikolai, loving Marya is a merger of identities; she becomes a part of him, but a totally nonsexual part (distinguishing this kind of merging from that of the Romantic tradition).

Failed Sibling Models: Vera, Helene and Sonya

Thus far I have been looking at happy, healthy sibling relationships and how they serve as models for marriages and the continuation of family life. In Tolstoy’s world beloved sisters become happy mothers. But what of the sisters who do not have caring, nurturing relationships with their brothers? Vera Rostova and Helene Kuragina present two alternatives—rejection of siblinghood, or its pollution—both based on selfishness and both leading to sterility.

While the rest of the Rostov children are introduced together, playing in joyous harmony, Vera is isolated from them from the very first scene. They begin the novel in the back rooms of the house, while Vera sits with her mother entertaining visitors. This is emblematic of her privileging of society over the family. Vera is the eldest, and Countess Rostova notes that she was stricter with Vera, but Tolstoy never wholly explains the reason for Vera’s alienation from the family.  

It is felt not only with her siblings, but also with her parents.  

129 “а жену разве я люблю? Я не люблю, а так, не знаю, как тебе сказать. Без тебя и когда вот так у нас какая-то кошка пробежит, я как будто пропал и ничего не могу. Ну, что я люблю палец? Я не люблю, а попробуй, отрежь его…” (PSS 12:264).

130 Morson calls her “the exception proving the rule” of how families have their own culture (“Prosaics in Anna Karenina,” 7). The Countess had twelve children, of whom only four survived, so depending on where the lost eight fell in the birth order, they could help account for the Countess’ different approach to parenting her younger survivors.

131 Vera does not pick up on social cues, and when her mother wants to have a private talk with a childhood friend, she turns to her oldest daughter, who was “clearly not her favorite” [очевидно, нелюбимой] and tells her angrily “How come you don’t understand anything? Don’t you see that you’re not wanted here?” [Как у вас ни на что понятия нет? Разве ты не чувствуешь, что ты здесь лишняя?] (PSS 9:55).
the Rostovs are very close, Vera often has a destructive effect on their unity. After the first painful incident where we see Vera disrupt a harmonious moment between Natasha and Nikolai and their respective first loves, Natasha tells her, “You’ll never understand it […] because you’ve never loved anyone. You have no heart!”

In this first scene, Vera’s siblings make references to her suitor, Berg, which highlights her connection to him, rather than to her brothers and sister. Ruth Crego Benson notes: “Vera is already linked with Berg, himself an outsider, for Natasha says to her, ‘We don’t bother you and Berg’—and indeed Berg removes Vera completely from the rest of the Rostovs.” In fact, this connection with Berg is the only positive description Tolstoy provides of Vera; at all other times he writes only of what she lacks. Tolstoy notes that Vera produced “an irritating and unpleasant effect on everyone.” Her inability to connect with her family is again made clear when the Rostovs receive a letter from Nikolai in the army describing how he was wounded and given an award. While everyone else is brought to tears by the letter, Vera is unmoved and asks why her mother is crying, to which the countess and Natasha share a look as the countess thinks, “And who is it she takes after?” Vera cannot relate to her brother’s words or to her sister and mother’s reactions. She is like an outsider, not part of the bond of family, not filling her role as sister.

In the same way that Vera’s connections to her siblings lack any deep understanding or meaningful emotional component, her connection to Berg is also devoid of genuine caring, resembling more a business transaction. Their connection is based on practical considerations and selfish motivations. As Berg explains his proposal to a comrade, “I am not marrying for

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132. “Ты этого никогда не поймешь […] потому что ты никогда не любила; у тебя сердца нет” (PSS 9:56).
133. Women in Tolstoy, 50.
money—I consider that dishonorable—but a wife should bring her share and a husband his."\(^{135}\)

Berg then provides a detailed account of what each of their shares are and only then sums up with the remark, “But above all she is a handsome, estimable girl, and she loves me . . . And I love her, because her character is sensible and very good.”\(^{136}\) This is entirely pragmatic, with no lofty sentiments or hint of anything spiritual to cloud the clear business reasoning Berg uses to define his relations with and feelings for Vera. Berg wants Vera’s dowry and Vera wants to set up her own home with a husband who will do well in society.

Given these selfish goals, it is not surprising that their marriage produces only soirees and not children. When Moscow is burning and the Rostovs are unpacking their carts to evacuate wounded soldiers instead of their possessions, Berg asks the count for a cart so that he can go buy Vera a chiffonier and dressing table that he has seen at another house being evacuated. He tells the count, “You know how dear Vera wanted a chiffonier like that.”\(^{137}\) Amidst the destruction of their capital, Berg and Vera can still only think of their own material well-being. The pair is always more concerned with how they are perceived by society than about the genuine emotions or private concerns that would not be visible to the outside world. While waiting for the guests to arrive at the first party they host, Berg remarks that they must not have children too soon, to which Vera agrees, saying, “I don’t want that at all. We must live for society.”\(^{138}\) This desire not to be a mother is Tolstoy’s ultimate mark against any woman. Vera

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\(^{135}\) “Я не из-за денег женюсь, я считаю это неблагородно, но надо, чтобы жена принесла свое, а муж свое” (PSS 10:186).

\(^{136}\) “А главное, она прекрасная, почтенная девушка и любит меня… И я люблю ее, потому что у нее характер рассудительный—очень хороший” (PSS 10:186). He literally engages in a business deal, cornering Vera’s father for details about the dowry. “Berg, smiling pleasantly, explained that if he did not know for certain how much Vera would have and did not receive at least part of the dowry in advance, he would have to break off the engagement” [Berg, приятно улыбаясь, объяснил, что ежели он не будет знать верно, что будет дано за Верой, и не получит вперед хотя части того, что назначено ей, то он принужден будет отказаться] (PSS 10:187).

\(^{137}\) “Вы знаете, как Верушка этого желала” (PSS 11:312).

\(^{138}\) “Я совсем этого не желаю. Надо жить для общества” (PSS 10:213).
did not learn to care for others and get past her own selfishness in her childhood home with her siblings and therefore her marriage does not produce a family and expand the circle of her love.

Similar to Vera, Helene Kuragina is caught up in society life and cares nothing for family. In fact, all aspects of her family life are forced and artificial. When Prince Vasily attempts to use a loving, paternal tone with his daughter it rings false because it is so clearly unnatural. Helene’s mother appears rarely in the novel, and always at moments of feeling jealous and negative about her daughter. Instead of family, Helene is connected to high society and first appears at Anna Pavlovna’s soiree. In his first full description of Helene, Tolstoy writes:

With a slight rustle of her white dress trimmed with moss and ivy, with a gleam of white shoulders, glossy hair, and sparkling diamonds, she passed between the men who made way for her, not looking at any of them but smiling on all, as if graciously allowing each the privilege of admiring her beautiful figure and shapely shoulders, back, and bosom— which in the fashion of those days were very much exposed—and she seemed to bring the glamour of a ballroom with her as she moved.

By focusing on Helene in relation to the men observing her, Tolstoy makes the reader see her as one of those men might, glimpsing only her exterior, with no access to anything within. Tolstoy thus defines Helene by her physical beauty, as an object of desire. This is how she relates to her brother, Anatole, as well. Tolstoy introduces the first hint of their incestuous relations during Helene’s seduction of Pierre, when the latter thinks to himself, “I have been told that her brother Anatole was in love with her and she with him, that there was quite a scandal and that that’s why

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139 PSS 9:258.
140 “Слегка шумя своею белою бальною робой, убранною плющом и мохом, и блестя белизной плеч, глянцем волос и бриллиантов, она прошла между расступившимися мужчинами и прямо, не глядя ни на кого, но всем улыбаясь и как бы любезно предоставляя каждому право любоваться красотою своего стана, полных плеч, очень открытой, по тогдашней моде, груди и спины, и как будто внося с собой блеск бала” (PSS 9:14).
141 In Totem and Taboo, Freud acknowledges that a man’s first incestuous object choice may be his sister as well as his mother (16). He writes, “It is regularly found that he chose his mother as the object of his love, and perhaps his sister as well, before passing on to his final choice. Because of the barrier that exists against incest, his love is deflected from the two figures on whom his affection was centered in his childhood on to an outside object that is modeled upon them” (my italics). Clearly, Freud was aware of the possibility of incestuous sibling feelings, though he never chose to pursue this idea.
he was sent away.”

After this thought, Pierre visualizes Helene’s body and her “womanly beauty” [женственной красотою], thus affirming her identity as sexual object. Later, Pierre remembers that “Anatole used to come to borrow money from her and used to kiss her naked shoulders. She did not give him the money, but let herself be kissed.” This is siblinghood in its most polluted form.

Given her background, it is not surprising that Helene has little interest in forming a family. Early in their marriage, when Pierre asks Helene whether she thinks she may be pregnant, he recalls how “she laughed contemptuously and said she was not a fool to want to have children, and that she was not going to have any children by me.” Helene selfishly and intentionally rejects what Tolstoy believed was the highest calling for a woman—motherhood. Instead of broadening the circle of her caring through an expanding family, she makes her physical union with Pierre purely a source of sexual gratification. Eventually even this tie is severed and he becomes only a source of income.

Once she has tired of Pierre, Helene decides to marry again and cannot decide between two wealthy suitors. Tolstoy criticizes this idea in the First Epilogue when he uses the analogy of marriage as being like dinner.

If the purpose of dinner is to nourish the body, a man who eats two dinners at once may perhaps get more enjoyment but will not attain his purpose, for his stomach will not digest the two dinners. If the purpose of marriage is the family, the person who wishes to

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142 “Мне говорили, что ее брат Анатоль был влюблен в нее, и она влюблена в него, что была целая история и что от этого усали Анатоль” (PSS 9:251).
143 Rancour-Laferriere points out that Pierre and Helene are distantly related, spent time together as children, and are living in the same home during their courtship and suggest that their relationship has an incestuous quality (Tolstoy on the Couch, 52). He portrays Helene as a mother icon, but I would argue that the traditional Oedipal model does not apply and instead the feeling is closer to sibling incest (of which Helene is already guilty with Anatole).
144 “Анатоль ездил к ней занимать у нее денег и целовал ее в голые плечи. Она не давала ему денег, но позволяла целовать себя” (PSS 10:28).
145 “Она засмеялась презрительно и сказала, что не дура, чтобы желать иметь детей, и что от меня детей у нее не будет” (PSS 10:28).
have many wives or husbands may perhaps obtain much pleasure, but in that case will not have a family.  

This is exactly what Helene does. Using even religion for selfish, voluptuous aims, she converts to Catholicism to get out of her marriage with Pierre so that she can marry again. Tolstoy notes: “In her view the aim of every religion was merely to preserve certain proprieties while affording satisfaction to human desires.”

When her confessor tells Helene that a second marriage might be acceptable only if it was entered “with the object of bearing children” [с целью иметь детей], she gets bored and interrupts him. Having children is certainly not part of Helene’s aim in a second marriage, as it was not during her marriage to Pierre, and she eventually dies of complications relating to an abortion. The model of her sexualized relations with her brother carries over into all Helene’s relations with men and her sexual passions and rejection of motherhood are literally the death of her.

Sonya plays a more complicated role. At the beginning of the novel she feels like a member of the Rostov family, viewing the Countess as her mother and Natasha as a sister. Yet at the same time, she is in love with Nikolai, never treating him as a brother. Over the course of the novel she becomes alienated from the Rostovs, and her relations with the Countess turn hostile as the prospect of her marriage to Nikolai gains in likelihood. Tolstoy consistently describes Sonya with organic metaphors throughout the text (a positive indicator in his world), yet they are at the same time dehumanizing. Sonya begins as a playful kitten and ends as a cat, attached to the home, not the people. Even Natasha by the time of the First Epilogue has a rather

146 “Если цель обеда—питание тела, то тот, кто съест вдруг два обеда, достигнет, может быть большего удовольствия, но не достигнет цели, ибо оба обеда не переварятся желудком. Если цель брака есть семья, то тот, кто захочет иметь много жен и мужей, может быть большего удовольствия, но ни в каком случае не будет иметь семьи” (PSS 12:268).

147 “В ее понятиях значение всякой религии состояло только в том, чтобы при удовлетворении человеческих желаний соблюдать известные приличия” (PSS 11:282).

148 Erotic relations between cousins were not uncommon in nineteenth-century Russian and French culture and Anna Mikhailovna even uses the saying, “Cousinage—dangereux voisinage,” to describe Nikolai and Sonya.
negative and impersonal view of her former best friend, calling her a “have not” [неимущий] from the Bible: “She’s a *sterile flower* [пустоцвет] you know, like on a strawberry plant? Sometimes I feel pity for her, but sometimes I think that she does not feel it like we would.”

The strawberry plant metaphor is apt, as they send out runners and sprout new plants horizontally, rather than creating deep roots. Sonya’s problem is that she was “found under a cabbage” and lacks roots in a family (she has no last name). Sonya’s example reminds us that it is not enough to grow up in a family and have shared childhood experiences. As the scene of exchanging memories between Natasha and Nikolai shows, what matters is how one relates to one’s past, and *this* Sonya does not share. She lacks the depth of spirit of her adopted siblings and will never be a true Rostov. Her path through the novel is more like that of an only-child (like Boris Drubetskoi), culminating not in family, but in sterility.

**Conclusion**

For each of the characters discussed in this chapter, sibling relationships serve as a model for how the character learns to relate to others around him or her. In *War and Peace* brother-sister relationships become the model for husband-wife ones. In *Boyhood* and *Youth* Nikolenka’s relationship with his brother forms the template for his other peer relations. He learns to think of himself and his role in social situations in relation to how he is treated by his brother and his identity is defined by how he thinks his brother perceives him. From these very early novellas through to Tolstoy’s latest, *Hadji Murat* (published posthumously), he would honor the importance of the sibling bond both in its own right as one of the most important

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149 “Она пустоцвет, знаешь, как на клубнике? Иногда мне ее жалко, а иногда я думаю, что она не чувствует этого, как чувствовали бы мы” (PSS 12:259-260).
relationship types in a person’s life and also for its expansive potential in providing the model for other forms of connection.

Siblinghood serves not only as a model for romantic and peer relations, but also as an equalizing alternative to hierarchical relations. Just as Nikolenka Irtenev seeks lateral bonds to validate his sense of self in *Youth*, the characters in *War and Peace* also revel in moments when hierarchy breaks down and they find themselves on equal footing. The army—an institution defined by its strict military hierarchy—works best in *War and Peace* when the characters forget about their ranks and work together like brothers (something we see on the Russian side, but never among the French).

The structure of the Rostov family provides another example of such equality. When Natasha stands up to her mother and convinces her parents to unload their possessions and take wounded soldiers with them instead on the retreat from Moscow, the Rostovs all feel instinctively that this breach of traditional family hierarchy is correct. “‘The eggs… the eggs are teaching the hen…’” the count said through happy tears, and he embraced his wife, who was glad to hide her ashamed face on his chest.”¹⁵⁰ In the world of *War and Peace*, even parents are at their best when they can relate to their children like siblings.

¹⁵⁰ “Яйца… яйца курицу учат…—сквозь счастливые слезы проговорил граф и обнял жену, которая рада была скрыть на его груди свое пристыженное лицо” (PSS 11:316).
Chapter Two
The Dynamics of Sibling Love in Dostoevsky: from the Dreamer to the Idiot
“White Nights,” The Insulted and Injured, Crime and Punishment, and The Idiot

We gave each other our word to be like brother and sister. – Insulted and Injured

Dostoevsky’s characters are caught in a paradox: they crave an escape from isolation, yet are fiercely protective of their freedom and consequently perceive almost any human connection as a threat. In his world, romantic ties based on the tyranny of erotic desire destroy free will because this desire turns into an all-consuming passion that takes control of the individual. Likewise, the hierarchy inherent in intergenerational relations challenges the autonomy of both child and parent. For fathers, freedom means abnegation of a sacred duty towards their children and consequently the nation’s future; for sons it means rebellion and a threat to the social order.

In the turbulence of Dostoevsky’s world, sibling love can emerge as a unifying and sustaining force. Because of its reciprocal nature, this connection between equals based on mutual caring and support does not stifle individual freedom. There are few literal (biological or legal) sibling pairs in Dostoevsky’s early fiction, but many characters claim the role of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ to one another. In doing so, they attempt to create lateral bonds that are free of sexual desire. Because of these two important features of the sibling bond—its non-hierarchical and non-sexual nature—siblings can embody Dostoevsky’s ideals of compassion and mutual aid.

PART I: SIBLING VS. LOVER

Love is an even more troubled issue for Dostoevsky than for Tolstoy. His world is darker and bleaker, lacking in the human warmth that characterizes Tolstoy’s vision. Dostoevsky provides no romantic love plots like that of Natasha and Andrei, Nikolai and Marya, or Anna and

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1 “Мы с ней дали друг другу слово быть как брат с сестрой” (PSS 3:243).
Vronsky. Although there are romantic couplings in most of his works, he does not depict mutually erotic love.\(^2\) Instead, Dostoevsky concerns himself with passion as a dangerous form of insanity, engagement as a renunciation of freedom, marriage as a form of mutual bondage. In Vikenty Veresaev’s words, for Dostoevsky’s characters: “the highest happiness of love is to torment and tear to pieces the beloved” [мучить и терзать любимое существо].\(^3\) Nikolai Berdiaev claims that in Dostoevsky “man is fettered to woman by passionate desire, but this passion remains […] a matter between him and himself […] it can never unite him with the desired woman.”\(^4\) Pride and power, not love, are the essence of these plots. According to Berdiaev: “The place that love holds in Dostoievsky’s novels is a very big one but it is not an independent place: love has no value in itself or symbolism of its own but serves only to show man his tragic road and to be a reagent of his freedom.”\(^5\)

Berdyaev’s claim only holds if we take a limited view of love as exclusively erotic desire. Yet the moments of greatest tenderness, warmth, and human connection in Dostoevsky’s works stem not from Eros, but from *agape* and *philia*. These religious and familial forms not only have “value of themselves,” but are essential to Dostoevsky’s radiant faith. As such, he puts them to the ultimate test in his novels. In opposition to Tolstoy’s loving gentry families, Dostoevsky created the idea of the “accidental family.” His great believers—Sonya Marmeladova, Makar Dolgoruky, Father Zosima—all come to their faith through trials and suffering. But for all of them, this faith is predicated on their ability to love.

Dostoevsky’s religious understanding of love, faith, and brotherhood is only fully worked out in the later novels. In the first half of his career, under the influence of many western writers

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\(^2\) When such healthy mutually reinforcing erotic love does probably exist, as between Dunya Raskolnikova and Razumikhin, Dostoevsky pointedly does not describe it.

\(^3\) *Zhivaia zhizn’*, 66.

\(^4\) *Dostoievsky*, 115.

\(^5\) *Dostoievsky*, 112.
(Schiller, Balzac, Hugo, Dickens, and others), he struggled to define the feelings that could draw people together. Many of Dostoevsky’s pre-1870 works are structured around the contrast of different forms of love. Friendship is placed alongside conjugal bonds (“White Nights,” 1848), brotherly tenderness alongside romantic love (Insulted and Injured, 1861), Christian sacrificial love alongside idealizing family love (Crime and Punishment, 1866), compassion alongside passion (Idiot, 1869). Dostoevskian scandals brew not only from the collision of ideas (each embodied in a single character), but also from the complex interactions of these different forms of attachment (a single character in relation to others). As Dostoevsky brings together these forms of loving and connecting with others, he challenges the distinctions between them. While some characters steadily exhibit one form of love, others fluctuate between different types.

Dostoevsky seems to wrestle with ambivalence about whether these forms of love are radically different, or part of a continuum. Is love for a sister just a modified version of love for a wife? Some of the slippages in Dostoevsky’s works would seem to suggest that he was toying with the continuum idea, which would have brought him in line with Freud. Freud sees all loves as fundamentally of the same substance. In his conception, all are based on libido and can be placed on one axis from “inhibited” to “uninhibited.” He explains:

People give the name ‘love’ to the relation between a man and a woman whose genital needs have led them to found a family; but they also give the name ‘love’ to the positive feelings between parents and children, and between the brothers and sisters of a family, although we are obliged to describe this as ‘aim-inhibited love’ or ‘affection.’ Love with

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6 The “dialogic relationships” between ideas in Dostoevsky’s novels are discussed by Bakhtin (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 88).
7 Probing this idea, Marc Shell notes that universal siblinghood means the overcoming of the incest taboo because all sex is inherently incestuous (The End of Kinship, 4, 16).
8 Harriet Murav provides a thoughtful commentary on the problems of using Freud to analyze Dostoevsky. As she notes in her psychoanalytic study of Notes from the Underground: “the whole question of whether science, specifically, the natural sciences, can or should provide the authoritative model of human behavior constitutes the central philosophical issue of the Notes. The problem of the role of science in the human sciences was one that Dostoevsky shared with his century and is one that we still struggle with in our own century” (“Dora and the Underground Man,” 422). Murav goes on to claim that “the critique that Dostoevsky develops in the Notes can be directed at Freud’s attempt to rationalize desire, that is, to provide ‘laws’ of its operation” (422).
an inhibited aim was in fact originally fully sensual love, and it is so still in man’s unconscious.\textsuperscript{9}

As all love is sexual in this model, the question is only how much that sexual element has been repressed or sublimated.\textsuperscript{10}

Although some of Dostoevsky’s works seem to fit this model, I do not think he ever fully accepted such a radical view. I believe he either acknowledged or wanted to believe in another form of love, fundamentally different from this first form, which is \textit{not} at base sexual.\textsuperscript{11} This second love would not need to be “inhibited” to remain chaste because it would be built on non-sexual forms of caring and devotion. I am calling it ‘sibling love,’ for that is its paradigmatic form.\textsuperscript{12} The term sibling love is appropriate for Dostoevsky because his characters use sibling terminology to refer to this love (the Russian language facilitates this). When they claim to love someone “like a sister” or with “brotherly tenderness,” their statements imply a belief in this second form of love. There are two possible meanings to these utterances: in straightforward cases, the characters mean that this second form of love is felt, but in other instances they are trying to make themselves or others \textit{believe} this to be the case.

This creates ambiguous situations in which the characters seem to vacillate between the two forms of love. The brother-figure suddenly professes himself a suitor. The former lover now claims he loves like a brother. Confusion about this flipping fuels the drama in several of Dostoevsky’s early novels. He sets up a pattern of characters who try to take a “brother” role to

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}, 102-3.
\textsuperscript{10} In \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents} he states explicitly that the “evenly suspended, steadfast, affectionate feeling” people experience who are able to “love thy neighbor” is nevertheless derived from genital love (102).
\textsuperscript{11} There is disagreement on this point. Eve Sedgwick writes: “Psychoanalysis, the recent work of Foucault, and Feminist historical scholarship all suggest that the place of drawing the boundary between the sexual and the not-sexual, like the place of drawing the boundary between the realms of the two genders is variable, but is \textit{not} arbitrary” (\textit{Between Men}, 22).
\textsuperscript{12} This idea can be traced back to Hegel’s famous discussion in \textit{The Phenomenology of Mind} (cited in Chapter One) where he states unequivocally that sister and brother “do not desire one another” (\textit{Phenomenology of Mind}, 475). Hegel’s reading is expanded upon by Jacques Derrida (\textit{Glas}, 148).
women they love, but it is never clear if they are satisfied in this role or if they wish for more. Unlike Tolstoy, who stubbornly argued what he wished to be true—the possibility of ‘pure’ sibling-like love even in marriage—despite its contradictions with his own life, Dostoevsky leaves open the ultimate question of whether loving but entirely non-sexual male-female relations outside of the biological family are possible. His pre-1870 texts beg the question of whether these are just a paler, “inhibited” version (sublimating the sexual feelings) or whether they are something radically different with a strength and power of its own.

The “Triplicity” of Love

Scholars in various disciplines from Freud and Lacan to Lévi-Strauss, René Girard, and Eve Sedgwick have theorized about the role of the third in love relations. For Freud, there is no room for a third in sexual love, only in the inhibited love that holds people together at the social level and makes civilization function. Lacan, by contrast, sees the third as essential because he believes love involves a triangulation, as all desire is aimed at “the object of the other’s desire.” Writing from an anthropological standpoint that stresses the social structure around love—marriage—Lévi-Strauss also sees the need for three. “Marriage is an eternal triangle,” he writes, “not just in vaudeville sketches, but at all times, and in all places, and by definition. Because the women have an essential value in group life, the group necessarily intervenes in every marriage.” Women, for Lévi-Strauss, become “the supreme gift” in a system of reciprocal gift-giving and exchange, placing the emphasis and agency on the men who exchange them.

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13 This has clear resonances with Rousseau’s Julie, as discussed in Chapter One.
14 “The Other and Psychosis,” 39.
15 Elementary Structures of Kinship, 43. This intervention takes place “in the form of the ‘rival’, who, through the agency of the group, asserts that he had the same right of access as the husband,” and “through the group as a group, which asserts that the relationship which makes the marriage possible must be social, that is defined in group terms.”
16 Elementary Structures of Kinship, 65.
Focusing on literature, Girard argues that desire is almost never direct, but instead comes by way of a mediator and “the impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator.”¹⁷ This mediator can either be external—for example, a novel read by the character which puts the idea of the desire in his/her head (Don Quixote taking Amadis of Gaul as his model of chivalric love)—or internal—another figure who is present and actually participates in the character’s life (Lancelot desiring the wife of his best friend, Arthur). Dostoevsky’s characters face internal mediators in the form of friends and family who become rivals in love. Girard writes: “Except for a few characters who entirely escape imitated desire, in Dostoevsky there is no longer any love without jealousy, any friendship without envy, any attraction without repulsion.”¹⁸ Tolstoy, by contrast, relies on external mediators: Anna Karenina’s English novel which she reads on the train, Natasha’s opera that helps prime her for Anatole’s advances, Nikolai’s sense of being in a fairytale that makes him see romantic potential in his first meeting with Marya. Through this reliance on external mediators, Tolstoy creates a world without the love triangles that haunt Dostoevsky.

Approaching these theories of three-way love with a gendered lens, Sedgwick argues that what we find in nineteenth-century literature is the “triangulation” of “homosocial desire through women.”¹⁹ In other words, she sees the relationship between the male rivals for the woman as paramount to either man’s relationship to the beloved. Or as Gayle Rubin notes, “Lévi-Strauss’s normative man uses a woman as a ‘conduit of a relationship’ in which the true partner is a man.”²⁰ This insight gets to the heart of the relationships in The Idiot, where too little attention has been given to the ties binding Myshkin and Rogozhin (or Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna).

¹⁷ Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 10.
¹⁸ Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 41.
¹⁹ Between Men, 102.
Coming out of a fundamentally different tradition from this sex and gender oriented assortment of western scholars, the Russian critic Konstantin Mochulsky treats the problem of triangular love in Dostoevsky in existential, rather than psychoanalytic, anthropological, or social theory terms. He writes: “The triplicity of human interrelations is affirmed by Dostoevsky as a psychological law and expresses something very profound and mysterious in his art.” He describes these triangles in terms of the one who is loved and the one who loves: Nastenka between her fiancé and the dreamer (“White Nights”), Natasha between Alyosha and Vanya (Insulted and Injured), Dunya between Svidrigailov and Razumikhin, Nastasya Filippovna between Rogozhin and Myshkin, Myshkin between Nastasya Filippovna and Aglaya, etc. Mochulsky concludes: “The one who loves is not loved, and the one loved does not love […] Triplicity bears witness to the naturally tragic character of love in this world, to its incurable wound.”

Rather than focusing on the series of relationships that results from love triangles, Berdyaev keeps his focus within the individual, leading him to see “double love” rather than triplicity. He claims that in Dostoevsky:

love is decomposed into two elements, and to make them more perceptible a lover nearly always loves two objects at the same time, a duality that Dostoevsky describes with incomparable power. He reveals two principles in love, two gulfs in which the individual is swallowed up, sensuality and pity [zhalost’], and he shows love welling from both of these exaltations and tending always to extremes […]. Sensuality and pity know no measure, obey no higher principle, and their scorching power reduces the individual to ashes.

I would modify this slightly, because the opposition I see in Dostoevsky’s works is between sensuality and compassion, not pity (except for one notable exception to be discussed below).

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21 Although Mochulsky’s book was originally published in 1947, I refer to it frequently because it remains one of the most insightful studies of Dostoevsky and has been foundational for much of the scholarship that followed.
22 *Dostoevsky*, 207-208.
23 Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, 208.
24 *Dostoevsky*, 116-117.
Both love and beloved become divided and this lack of unity leads to destruction. Thus for Berdyaev, sexual love in Dostoevsky “signifies the loss of the integrity of human nature and that is why he finds passion unclean, for pureness is realized only in unity: debauchery is disaggregation.”25 This insight leads him to the same conclusion as Mochulsky, namely that “Dostoievsky reveals the hopeless tragedy of love, the human impossibility of realizing it in the ordinary conditions of life” (my italics).26

Like all the western scholars discussed above, Mochulsky assumes that love-triangle threes are based on two lovers and one beloved. None of these scholars consider how a sibling could alter this composition. Building on their ideas, but reinstating the sibling element I see in Dostoevsky’s novels, I am led to challenge Mochulsky on the specifics of how triplicity works, in terms of both form and constancy across Dostoevsky’s oeuvre. I define the triples not in terms of one who loves and one who is loved, but rather in terms of different forms of love. The pattern that emerges then is one of sibling and lover, which meshes with Berdyaev’s two principles of pity, which I would replace with compassion (sibling) and sensuality (lover). While triplicity takes a rivalrous, antagonistic form in the late novels where we do find two lovers (as Mochulsky assumes), in Dostoevsky’s early works he invests triplicity with positive potential through the inclusion of a sibling.27 By tracing these threes from “White Nights,” through The Insulted and Injured, to Crime and Punishment, and The Idiot, I hope to demonstrate the evolution of Dostoevsky’s thought about romantic love and its sibling alternative.

To set the context, let me first add a note about Dostoevsky’s contemporary, Chernyshevsy, who openly embraced the idea of the three-way union. While also initially

25 Dostoievsky, 116.
26 Dostoievsky, 113.
27 A similar pattern can be seen in Poor Folk (1846), as Varenka is situated between the brotherly love of Makar and an exploitative conjugal union with Bykov.
positive, Dostoevsky’s vision of this union differs radically from Chernyshevky’s. Chernyshevsky advocated the triple-union in marriage, offering it as an alternative to the traditional understanding of adultery. In recognizing rivalry and jealousy as inherent in triangles that involve two lovers, Dostoevsky rejected this view. He did not place triple-unions as part of a positive program for the reforming of society, but focused instead on their psychological implications.

“White Nights” explores Dostoevsky’s romantic 1840s views of the loving relations that may unite a man and woman. Totally isolated and craving human love, the dreamer claims that “all that I ask,” from a woman “is only that she say a few brotherly words to me.” He is drawn to the tearful Nastenka by a feeling of “brotherly compassion” \[братское сострадание\]. Invoking the language of siblinghood, Nastenka and the dreamer present their relationship as one of mutual sympathy, an alternative to Eros (thought it is clear from the start that there is amorous potential in their budding relations). Nastenka is loving toward the dreamer, but not in love with him, and specifically warns him not to fall in love with her (which he swears not to do). The dreamer—who dreams about everything—dares not even dream of Nastenka falling in love with him. He gives outlet to all his affectionate, tender feelings in what I would term a “romantic friendship.”

Romantic friendships of this sort are a common feature in Dostoevsky’s work and at the heart of his ambiguity about love. They are based on the idea of a tender, unique bond that has the poetry of an amorous love but without the sexual desire. I say “the idea of” because Dostoevsky appreciates the complexities of a psychology that can delude itself or hide its own feelings from itself. A key to Dostoevsky’s “psychological” novels is the step of removal he

28 See: Paperno, Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism, 153-5.
29 “всё, чего я требую, состоит в том только, чтоб сказать мне какие-нибудь два слова братские” (PSS 2:107).
30 PSS 2:108.
places between the characters and their direct awareness of their own thoughts and feelings. Following in Bakhtin’s wake, many scholars have written of the importance of unfinalizability to Dostoevsky, of the antinomy, where opposites can simultaneously exist. Dostoevsky understands and revels in the potential of such romantic friendships that exist on the threshold between two fundamentally different loves, one of which the “friend” may wish to deny in himself. Such romantic friendships cannot exist in Tolstoy’s fictive world, where characters may delude others, but are never cut off from knowledge of their own emotions. In Dostoevsky, the characters in these romantic friendships want to believe in the purity and permanence of their feelings, often invoking siblinghood to help explain their connection. In many ways “romantic friendships” would seem to be the ideal, just as deep as true romantic love, but lacking its isolating exclusivity and untainted by the crazed passions Dostoevsky often associates with Eros. However, they are never stable (as true siblinghood is for him). In “White Nights,” the dreamer quickly realizes that he is not truly a “sexless being” [существо среднего рода] as he had claimed, and that he wants more from Nastenka than siblinghood. Romantic friendship proves to be a self-delusion. When Nastenka despairs of her fiancé’s return, she impulsively agrees to marry the dreamer, showing that on both sides, the potential for amorous connection lurked just below the surface of their seemingly pure bond. The rapid shifts for the dreamer from brother-figure to fiancé and back to brother-figure indicate the surprising fluidity

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31 In his discussion of the antinomial nature of love in Dostoevsky, Berdyaev claims that: “Dostoievsky detected a sort of sensuality even in pity” (Dostoievsky, 117). See as well: Veresaev, Zhivaia zhizn’, 66-72; Blank, Dostoevsky’s Dialectics.
32 The closest thing in Tolstoy are instances when one character is clearly in love and the other is more or less aware of this fact (e.g. Pierre and Natasha).
33 PSS 2:112.
of the roles of brother and lover in Dostoevsky’s conception. This also hints at the possibility that in spite of himself, Dostoevsky puts all loves on one axis, like Freud.

Rather than placing this loving friendship in opposition to her relationship with her absent fiancé (Mochulsky’s vision of triplicity), Nastenka sees the two as complementing and enhancing each other. George Steiner notes (in reference to The Idiot) that “Dostoevsky believed that it was possible to love two human beings with tremendous force and in a way which excluded neither. He perceived in this not a perversion but a heightening of the capacity for love.”

Nastenka wants the dreamer to be with her when her fiancé arrives so that he can see “how we love each other,” and claims: “when I marry, we shall be such good friends, closer than brothers. I will love you very much, almost as I love him…” Her ideal is three, not two, but as Steiner’s discussion of The Idiot fails to take into account, threes work only when one is a lover, the other a sibling. Although “White Nights” illustrates the “tragedy” Mochulsky writes of, as the dreamer must cede his place to the fiancé, the story is not wholly tragic. Nastenka still loves the dreamer and her letter of the morning confirms that she wishes to have a continuing presence in his life. The dreamer has gained his first friend. While there is no object hindering this future three, Nastenka seems to lament the inability to love both men (“O God! If only I could love you both at once! Oh, if only you were he!”), while at the same time still promising to come to the dreamer in the company of her new husband so that they can all love each other. Ambivalence reigns, but if a valid place can be made for non-erotic love, then “White Nights” offers a model

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34 In his Writer’s Diary (July and August 1876), Dostoevsky includes a story, “One on Whom Modern Woman Has Shown Favor,” in which a man is pining for a woman who is engaged to another. Only after she realizes this man loves her does she become “as dear a friend as anyone can be” to him, suggesting that Dostoevsky saw love as a possibly useful precursor to friendship (Writers Diary I, 585). Chekhov would express a similar idea in “Uncle Vanya.”

35 Though in Dostoevsky, this would apply only to love outside of the family, while in Freud, it is literally all loves.

36 Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, 171.

37 “когда я выйду замуж, мы будем очень дружны, больше чем как братья. Я буду вас любить почти так, как его…” (PSS 2:129, 128).

38 “О боже! если б я могла любить вас обоих разом! О, если б вы были он!” (PSS 2:140).
of passionate love coexisting with tender, compassionate love. Sibling and lover are not inherently incompatible (though here the dreamer seems to really be a suitor in the role of a brother).

*The Insulted and Injured* goes much farther with triplicity in love, creating a repeating series of love triangles, again based on the roles of lover and brother. Nastenka’s fiancé proves enduring in his affection, but in *Insulted and Injured*, we see the beginning of Dostoevsky’s anxious and skeptical attitude toward passionate romantic love. The novel centers on two overlapping stories, each involving a love triangle. The orphaned narrator/protagonist, Vanya, was raised in the home of a loving couple, Nikolai Sergeich Ikhmenev and Anna Andreevna, “like brother and sister” with their daughter, Natasha (three years his junior). Their childhood years together are characterized as a “golden, beautiful time” [золотое, прекрасное время] when the pair roamed through an idyllic natural landscape “hand in hand.”[^39] Meeting later in life in St Petersburg, where Vanya is earning a name for himself as a writer, the pair shift from their earlier sibling affection to a romantic attachment. Their awaited union is interrupted, however, by the appearance of Alyosha, the son of Prince Valkovsky, whose estate Nikolai Sergeich used to manage. Alyosha also spent time as a youth living with Natasha’s family, and Vanya recognizes that Natasha and Alyosha are now falling in love (despite the fact that their fathers have become bitter enemies and are caught up in a law suit that is ruining Natasha’s family). Vanya falls back into his “brother” role and attempts to help secure Natasha’s happiness.

This triangle contrasts two coexistent loves: the steadfast, brotherly, compassionate love of Vanya vs. the passionate, fickle romantic love of Alyosha. This is not a Mochulsky situation, for Natasha is torn by *two* loves and wishes, like Nastenka, for them to exist in harmony. She sees danger and madness in her love for Alyosha, and when she abandons her family for him, she

tells Vanya: “if I love Alyosha madly, insanely, then perhaps I love you even more as my friend.”

Even at her moment of least self-control, Natasha recognizes that the steady love she feels for Vanya may be stronger than her insane obsession with Alyosha. Dostoevsky does not belittle the power of compassionate sibling love and makes bonding along all axes of the triangle essential. When Alyosha arrives to claim Natasha as she waits with Vanya, he says he wishes to embrace Vanya “like my own brother” [как родного брата] and Natasha supports this, telling him: “Yes, yes. Alyosha… he’s our, he’s our brother, he has already forgiven us, and without him we will not be happy.”

This is not a triplicity of rivalry, but of mutual dependence. It can function only because of Vanya’s selflessness and genuine compassion for Natasha and his willingness to accept his potential rival as a brother instead.

Later in the novel, we learn of a similar love triangle that Prince Valkovsky had been part of with the mother of Nellie, an orphan Vanya adopts. Nellie’s mother, beloved by an “ideal man, one of the Schiller brotherhood, a poet,” was seduced by the scheming Valkovsky, who wanted to get his hands on her father’s wealth. The poet stood by Nellie’s mother after Valkovsky abandoned her, creating a contrast between his brotherly love and the fleeting passion of the dangerous lover. This paradigm is generalized when Masloboev retells the history of this affair using pseudonyms for each of the characters. He begins by calling the poet “Pfefferkuchen” [Феферкухен] but then confuses himself and uses the names “Frauenmilch”

40 “если я люблю Алешу как безумную, как сумасшедшую, то тебя, может быть, еще больше, как друг моего любимого” (PSS 3:197).
41 “Да, да. Алеша… он наш, он наш брат, он уже простил нас, и без него мы не будем счастливы” (PSS 3:202).
42 This triangle seems to owe something to the threesome in Dickens’ Bleak House (1853), where again the parties are caught up in a lawsuit that will determine their fortunes.
43 From this point, Vanya’s relationship with Natasha truly becomes like that of an affectionate, deeply caring brother and sister. The two have special signals for each other and ways of expressing themselves (PSS 3:226, 228), much like Tolstoy’s sibling pairs in War and Peace.
44 Nellie’s real name is Elena, but her mother called her Nellie, most likely because she foresaw that her daughter would share the difficult fate of Dickens’ Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841).
45 “идеальный человек, братец Шиллеру, поэт” (PSS 3:336).
Both love triangles illustrate the fluidity of the roles of brother and lover, much as in “White Nights.” When Alyosha gets to know Katya, the girl his father has chosen for him, he initially loves her “only like a sister, like a dear, kind sister” and they “gave each other their word to be like brother and sister.” Katya was beginning to fall in love with Alyosha, but when he tells her that he is already promised to another, he “aroused at the same time her sympathy for her rival, and forgiveness and a promise of selfless, brotherly friendship for him,” thus establishing another triangle. Alyosha reports to Natasha: “You were created to be sisters to each other and should love each other.” Like Natasha telling Alyosha that they cannot do without Vanya and need to be a three, Alyosha tells Natasha that he feels pity for Katya and wants Natasha to love her: “we will all three love each other.”

Neither Alyosha nor Natasha can imagine a romantic love standing on its own without the support of a sibling-like presence, and the sibling-figures seem grateful for their involvement. After Alyosha abandons Natasha, Katya still needs her in the triangle. Just as Lacan and Girard write of the desire for what the other desires, in Katya’s final letter to Natasha, she claims that: “If [Alyosha] falls out of love with you one day, if he ceases to grieve at your memory, then I

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46 This word recurs at a significant and ironic moment when Vanya has rebuffed Prince Valkovsky, who is trying to get him drunk to wheedle out information. The Prince says: “Брудершафт ведь не будем пить” (PSS 3:369).
47 In a moment of distraction Natasha confuses brother and lover, accidently calling Vanya “Alyosha” (PSS 3:231).
48 “только как сестру, как милую, добрую сестру” (PSS 3:319).
49 “дали друг другу слово быть как брат с сестрой” (PSS 3:243).
50 “возбудил в ней симпатию к ее сопернице, а для себя прощение и обещание бескорыстной братской дружбы” (PSS 3:248).
51 Girard would see this triangle as thriving on love for the mediator, as Katya has Alyosha tell Natasha, “что уже любит тебя как сестру и чтобы и ты ее любила как сестру” (PSS 3:243). I differ from Girard in seeing the romantic love pairs enabling the creation of siblinghood.
52 “Вы обе созданы быть одна другой сестрами и должны любить друг друга” (PSS 3:243).
53 “мы будем все трое любить друг друга” (PSS 3:244).
myself will immediately fall out of love with him.”55 Romantic love is nourished by its sibling counterpart. This contradicts Mochulsky’s view that it is tragic that in Dostoevsky’s novels, “love never suffices for itself, is not fulfilled between two; it is broken by a third.”56 His reading of triplicity oversimplifies by invalidating or ignoring the variety of love Dostoevsky considers.

While a lover must be captivating, the role of a sibling is to be faithful. Alyosha’s parting words to Vanya when he leaves Natasha are “always be a brother to me: love her, don’t abandon her.”57 Alyosha entrusts the woman he has abandoned to his (and her) eternal brother. Forsaken by her beloved, Natasha calls Vanya: “my friend, my brother, my savior.”58 She links “brother” with the most positive roles of caring and support. After Natasha returns home and regains her equilibrium, Vanya reflects on her affection for him: “she simply loves me, loves me endlessly, and cannot live without me and not care about everything that concerns me; I think that no sister has ever loved a brother to the extent that Natasha loves me.”59 Not fully content with his brother-role, Vanya would like to believe Natasha’s feelings are stronger than a sister’s, though it is not clear that this moves them toward a lover’s.60 In the final lines of the novel Natasha tells Vanya that the whole year of her escapade with Alyosha was a dream and questions: “why did I destroy your happiness?” which suggests that perhaps she was in love with him after all.61 We are never certain. This romantic friendship remains unfinalized, ambiguously giving hints at crossing over into an actual romantic love.

56 Mochulsky, Dostoevsky, 208.
57 “будь мне до конца братом: люби ее, не оставляй ее” (PSS 3:402).
58 “моего друга, моего брата, моего спасителя” (PSS 3:403).
59 “она просто любит меня, любит бесконечно, не может жить без меня и не заботится о всем, что до меня касается, и я думаю, никогда сестра не любила до такой степени своего брата, как Наташа любит меня” (PSS 3:427). Although it is not discussed, Natasha confesses to Vanya in the end that she loves her father more than anyone in the world… even him (PSS 3:428).
60 Onegin's comment to Tatyana—“I love you with the love of a brother / And perhaps even more tenderly” [Я вас люблю любовью брата — / И, может быть, ещё нежней]—in response to her letter indicates a similar ambiguity (Chapter 4, stanza XVI).
61 “зачем я разрушила твое счастье?” (PSS 3:442).
As Dostoevsky moves away from his Romantic phase and his psychology deepens, the
triplety of love becomes increasingly challenged, fitting more with Mochulsky’s claims. In
*Idiot*, Myshkin is caught in two muddled triangles because he professes himself as a suitor, when
the love he can offer is really the compassion of a brother. Part of Myshkin’s ability to be the
“positively beautiful man” [положительно прекрасный человек] is his inability to experience
sexual passion. According to his doctor, he is in every way a child, and in his first meeting
with General Yepanchin he announces flatly: “I cannot marry anyone, I am unwell.” When the
Yepanchin women ask if he was in love in Switzerland, Myshkin replies: “I was not in love,
I…was happy in another way,” launching into the story of Marie and the children—a microcosm
of universal brotherhood.

As Diane Thompson explains: “It is just because compassion, unlike sexual love, can be
aroused by potentially anyone, that makes it susceptible to a larger mission in the world. For in
Christian ethics, the practice of compassion transforms every suffering stranger into one’s
neighbour, thus potentially uniting the world into a community based on brotherhood.”
Myshkin is Dostoevsky’s strongest attempt to create a purely sibling love, but the novel is
ambiguous at best about this love’s success. Myshkin could unite children in his Swiss idyll, but
not adults in the real world of St. Petersburg. This failure and his ultimate return to idiocy have
the sinister implication that true brotherly love cannot exist in our corrupted adult world.

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62 PSS 28:251. Dostoevsky claimed that his project in *The Idiot* was to depict the “positively beautiful man,” and
that the only such figure in the world was Christ. In literature, the closest had been Don Quixote, but he was good
only because he was ridiculous (other attempts he cites included Pickwick and Jean Valjean). For further discussion
of this, see: Frank, *Miraculous Years*, 274.
63 As Myshkin paraphrases the doctor: “I am an absolute child, I mean a complete child, so that only in height and
face do I resemble an adult. But in the development of my soul, my character, and maybe even my intellect I am not
an adult and so I will remain, even if I were to live to sixty.” “я сам совершенный ребенок, то есть вполне
ребенок, что я только ростом и лицом похож на взрослого, но что развитием, душой, характером и, может
быть, даже умом я не взрослый, и так останусь, хотя бы я до шестидесяти лет прожил” (PSS 8:63).
64 “Я не могу жениться ни на ком, я нездоров” (PSS 8:32).
65 “Я не был влюблен, я… был счастлив иначе” (PSS 8:57).
66 “Motifs of Compassion,” 195.
One virtue of sibling love is its compatibility with other forms of love, but by putting himself in the wrong role in St. Petersburg, Myshkin forecloses the possibility of his brotherly love coexisting with Rogozhin’s passionate love in Nastasya Filippovna’s life. Instead, she must continually set them against each other, which means vacillating between mutually exclusive conceptions of self: the innocent victim—wronged but still pure in spirit—vs. the sinner who has lost her virtue and therefore is free to transgress. Because Myshkin does not experience sexual love, he does not fully understand what is at stake for Natasya Filippovna (or Aglaya) in their choice of loves, and he struggles against the opposition between himself and Rogozhin. During their time in Moscow (the six unaccounted for months between Parts I and II), we learn that Myshkin and Rogozhin became like brothers, another instance of the love triangle enabling homosocial desire (as Sedgwick describes).

When Myshkin returns and attempts to restore those comradely relations in St. Petersburg, he does not understand the difficulty of what he is asking of Rogozhin. Wrestling with murderous jealousy, Rogozhin initiates an exchange of crosses—adelphopoiesis outside of the church—in an attempt to bind himself to love, not hate, by becoming brothers with Myshkin. He even seeks his mother’s blessing over his new brother.

Rogozhin sees the difference in their loves for Nastasya, and acknowledges that although he does not understand it, “What’s more certain than anything is that your pity is even stronger

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67 Steiner notes that Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna shift in and out of consciousness of Myshkin’s “limitations” (Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, 172). Thompson points out that when Nastasya Filippovna rejects Myshkin at her Name Day celebration, she realizes he cannot “marry normally” and takes her leave of him, claiming it is the first time she’s seen a “human being” [человек], a word that is “sexually neutral” (“Motifs of Compassion,” 191).

68 Adelphopoiesis was an ancient sacrament in the Eastern Orthodox Church by which two people (usually men) could become brothers (no longer practiced by the time Dostoevsky was writing). Its significance and relation to other brother-making rites is discussed by Pavel Florensky (The Pillar and Ground of the Truth, 327).

69 By treating Rogozhin and Myshkin as complete individuals, my reading diverges from that of Elizabeth Dalton, and others, who see them as Dostoevskian doubles. For Dalton, “the lust and aggression forced out of Myshkin’s character […] erupt in the character of Myshkin’s polar opposite, Rogozhin.” She sees Myshkin as superego and Rogozhin as id, “a grisly other self that corresponds exactly to the elements denied and repressed in Myshkin” (“Myshkin and Rogozhin,” 89).
than my love!" This echoes Natasha’s claim that her sisterly love for Vanya is stronger than her passion for Alyosha. In their meeting at Rogozhin’s home, first Myshkin, then Rogozhin offers to give Nastasya Filippovna up to his rival, if that is her wish. Yet despite these genuine desires for peace between them, the characters’ fates prove that their different forms of love cannot coexist as they did in Insulted and Injured because they have both put themselves in the place of suitor, rather than one as lover and one as brother. Rogozhin raises his knife to Myshkin and ultimately plunges it into Nastasya Filippovna; the rivalry and competition created by sexual desire cannot be held in check by the men’s desire for brotherhood.

Only after Nastasya Filippovna’s death, when the possibility of such desire has been removed, can the three be joined. The final scene highlights this creation of unity, instigated by Rogozhin. He finds Myshkin on the street and brings him to his room where Nastasya Filippovna’s body lies, telling him:

We will spend the night here together. There’s only that bed here, so I thought I’d take the cushions off the two sofas, and set them up here beside the curtain, for you and me, so we can be together […] So let her lie here beside us, beside you and me…—Yes, yes! – agreed the prince heatedly. (my italics)

The final unity in this three is really two men—brought together by one woman—who can now act unrestrainedly on their earlier proclaimed brotherhood. But this brotherhood—built on the violent sacrifice of the female love object—is corrupted. Nastasia Filippovna was not Christ dying so that others might become brothers, but a victim of male passion. The closing tableau of the novel proper (excluding the epilogue) is Myshkin stroking Rogozhin and then lying with his

70 “Вернее всего то, что жалость твоя, пожалуй, еще пуще моей любви!” (PSS 8:177). Diane Thompson emphasizes the distinction between Myshkin’s “pity” and “compassion” and argues that his treatment of Nastasya Filippovna as a “pitiful creature” who is “crazy” is “fatal both to compassion and to sexual love. According to her, pity destroys sexual love because it “does not enter into our most intimate personal relationships” (“Motifs of Compassion,” 192).

71 “Ночь мы здесь заночуем вместе. Постели, окромя той, тут нет, а я так придумал, что с обоих диванов подушки снять, и вот тут, у занавески, рядом и постель, и тебе и мне, так чтобы вместе […] Так пусть уж она теперь тут лежит, подле нас, подле меня и тебя…—Да, да! – с жаром подтвердил князь” (PSS 8:504).
face pressed against his brother’s, his tears rolling down the other man’s cheeks.\textsuperscript{72} This brotherhood came at too high a price and could not save them.

Understanding only the brother-role, Myshkin also fails to appreciate why his loves for Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna must be mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{73} At the end of the novel, he tells Yevgeny Pavlovich that he loves both women, and he cannot understand why this is problematic. His ideal three is non-exclusive, like sibling bonds. Sarah Hudspith calls his love of both women “an expression of his call to \textit{sobornost’},” making explicit the link to religious ideals Dostoevsky shared with the Slavophiles.\textsuperscript{74} Yevgeny Pavlovich explains that Aglaya loved Myshkin “as a woman” and suggests that perhaps Myshkin had never truly loved either Aglaya or Nastasya Filippovna (Myshkin concurs that this is possible). Yevgeny Pavlovich’s comment dismisses the possibility or validity of a brother’s love, instead equating love only with Eros (which seems fair, given that the women have interpreted Myshkin’s love in this way). But Dostoevsky’s novels all put forth brotherly love as a positive, unifying alternative. As Rogozhin and Natasha Ikhmeneva state explicitly, compassionate love does not have to be weaker than Eros. \textit{The Brothers Karamazov} will offer resounding proof of this truth for Dostoevsky’s world. In \textit{The Idiot}, Myshkin fails because the love of a brother can only be salvific when taken as such, and he remains pigeonholed in the wrong role.

\textsuperscript{72} This stroking also evokes his care for Nastasya Filippovna after her face-off with Aglaya. There he “stroked her head and face with both hands like a small child” [гладил ее по головке и по лицу обеими руками, как малое дитя] (PSS 8:475), and here each time Rogozhin would begin to rave, “the prince would stretch out his shaking hand to him and quietly touch his head, his hair, stroke them and stroke his cheeks…there was nothing more he could do!” [князь протягивал к нему тогда свою дрожащую руку и тихо дотрагивался до его головы, до его волос, гладил их и гладил его щеки... больше он ничего не мог сделать!] (PSS 8:506).

\textsuperscript{73} This similarly troubled triangle also draws the two women to each other. Nastasya Filippovna sees in Aglaya the pure ideal of what she might have been and claims in one of her letters that she is actually in love with her. For Aglaya, Nastasya Filippovna represents the freedom from suffocating societal constraints that she craves. Malcolm Jones notes that Dostoevsky loves dramatic confrontations of rival women, and one consistent element of these confrontations is “an offer of sisterhood, which in reality involves the submission of the will of one woman to the other” (“Sisters and Rivals,” 162).

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Dostoevsky and the Idea of Russianness}, 155.
Looking ahead to *The Brothers Karamazov*, we see a difference in how the triplicity plays out between brothers vs. father-son. Ivan and Dmitri are not rent asunder by their overlapping interests in Katerina Ivanovna, but instead are brought together by it. They are bound to her by different ties—not just blinding passion—and the varied quality of their feelings for her allows them to remain in a delicate equilibrium as a three. However, between Dmitri and Fyodor Karamazov there is no longer even the attempt at coexistence and three-way unity. Father and son are bitter rivals for Grushenka’s love from first to last. They use her as a “conduit” for their virulent hatred of each other. Sedgwick would be right to see the two men’s relationship as primary in this triangle. This is the failure of father-son relations writ large.

The big question I see at stake with all these love triangles is how love can be built on to expand into the social world. Romantic love does not allow for this expansion. For Freud an “antithesis between civilization and sexuality” arises from the fact that “sexual love is a relationship between two individuals in which a third can only be superfluous or disturbing, whereas civilization depends on relationships between a considerable number of individuals.”

In Freud’s view, sexual love is incredibly isolating for the pair: “When a love-relationship is at its height there is no room left for any interest in the environment; a pair of lovers are sufficient to themselves, and do not need even the child they have in common to make them happy.” If all love is truly libidinal, then unity is impossible because that love fractures unity. Yet Dostoevsky’s love triangles show that an alternative second form—what I’m calling sibling love—offers a valid place for the third and a move into the social.

75 *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 108.
76 *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 108. Freud goes on to explain that while we could imagine a society in which these “double individuals” were connected “through the bonds of common work and common interests,” this state of things does not exist. “Reality shows us that civilization is not content with the ties we have so far allowed it. It aims at binding the members of the community together in a libidinal way as well” (108).
PART II. REALLIGNING KINSHIP ALLEGIANCES

Breaking down Hierarchy: the Lateral Replaces the Vertical

The pre-1870 Dostoevsky does not define the potential of siblinghood in relation to romantic love alone. Sibling bonds are also contrasted with parent/child relations. Hints of the major theme of his last three novels—the conflict of generations and the failure of fathers—emerge in these early works as well. While this theme has received vast attention in the critical literature, in Chapter Four I will argue that what gets overlooked is the way siblings fill in as fathers fail. This theme of lateral replacing vertical has its roots in the works under discussion in this chapter, receiving its clearest elucidation in The Insulted and Injured. 77

Siblings and parents are usually treated as if they were on two mutually exclusive axes, but in The Insulted and Injured, a rigid, patriarchal order seems to be established at times, and at others, fathers and children are put on the same level. In one and the same conversation Nikolai Sergeich calls Vanya “brother” and tells him “you were always like a son to us.” 78 Alyosha Valkovsky, whose father treats him with distain, like a ridiculous child [смешной мальчик], has other moments when he and his father are more like equals. He tells Natasha and Vanya: “I’m completely open with him, like brother with brother.” 79 Strikingly, this statement lays bare his assumption that brotherly communication is the ideal of openness (not an obvious truth). When the Prince shows up at Natasha’s, Vanya notes: “he seemed like Alyosha’s older brother.” 80

This lack of differentiation between father and son, which would become a positive ideal in Dostoevsky’s later writings, is here presented as problematic. Prince Valkovsky is the

77 Sussane Fusso provides an excellent discussion of the failure of fathers aspect of Dostoevsky’s thinking in Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky, 102-109. She does not, however, link The Insulted and Injured with her discussion of the theme.
78 “ты для нас был всегда как бы родным сыном” (PSS 3:211). Similar blurring will occur in the Karamazov family in the relations between Fyodor and Ivan.
79 “я ведь с ним совершенно откровенно, как брат с братом” (PSS 3:237).
80 “он казался старшим братом Алеши” (PSS 3:245).
archetypal failed father who sent his son away for much of his upbringing and gave him little in the way of love or positive moral values because he lacked these values himself. Concerned only with his own pleasure and accruing wealth, Valkovsky scorns his naïve, idealistic son and is bitter about Alyosha’s attempt to marry a poor woman instead of the wealthy one he had selected. Having received no moral training from his father, Alyosha is amazed when he encounters a circle of young utopians who introduce him to lofty ideals about love for humanity. He eagerly tells his father about these young men who “received me with open arms, like a brother” and Valkovsky laughs in his face.

Alyosha’s response to his father’s cruel laughter lays bare one of the central concerns of the novel: “You do nothing but laugh. But after all I have never heard anything like that from you or from anyone in your circle either.” The older generation has done nothing but acquire and squander fortunes. Alyosha explains that he had hoped to bring his father into his new circle, and when his father continues to laugh at him, he asks plaintively:

Father […], why are you laughing at me? I have come to you frankly and openly. If, in your opinion, what I say is silly, teach me better, and don’t laugh at me. And what do you find to laugh at? At what is for me good and holy now? Why, suppose I am in error, suppose this is all wrong, mistaken, suppose I am a little fool as you’ve called me several times; if I am making a mistake I’m sincere and honest in it; I’ve done nothing ignoble. I am enthusiastic over lofty ideas. They may be mistaken, but what they rest upon is holy. I’ve told you that you and all your friends have never yet said anything to me that could guide me, or influence me. Refute them, tell me something better than they have said, and I will follow you, but do not laugh at me, for that grieves me very much.”

81 Vanya notices “that he didn’t love his son at all, although he was always talking of his overly warm fatherly love” [“что он вовсе не любит сына, хотя и говорили про слишком горячую отцовскую любовь его”] (PSS 3: 308).
82 “приняли меня по-братски, с распростертыми объятиями” (PSS 3: 309).
83 “Ты всё смеешься. Но ведь я от тебя ничего никогда не слыхал такого; и от всего вашего общества тоже никогда не слыхал” (PSS 3: 310).
84 Отец […], для чего же ты смеешься надо мной? Я шел к тебе прямо и откровенно. Если, по твоему мнению, я говорю глупости, вразуми меня, а не смеися надо мною. Да и на чем смеяться? Над тем, что для меня теперь свято, благородно? Ну, пусть я заблуждаюсь, пусть это всё неверно, ошибочно, пусть я дурак, как ты несколько раз называл меня; но если я и заблуждаюсь, то искренне, честно; я не потерял своего благородства. Я восторгаюсь высокими идеями. Пусть они ошибочны, но основание их свято. Я
This is the most explicit statement we will find in Dostoevsky’s writings of a son lamenting his father’s failure and asking him to be a true guide and mentor. Given the over-simplistic nature of Alyosha’s character and of Dostoevsky’s sentimentalist writing, Dostoevsky’s idea appears in a naively straightforward form. Alyosha compares his father to the men of his own generation who accepted him as a brother, thus setting up a model that would remain essential to Dostoevsky in his later writings. When fathers fail, it is lateral bonds that fill in; brothers become the source of positive values.

While Dostoevsky gives the young socialists in The Insulted and Injured more integrity than the older generation, they are certainly not portrayed as the ideal. Instead, he parodies their utopianism and lack of practical grounding in the world. When Alyosha becomes enraptured by their supposed love for humanity, his hypocrisy is revealed in his ability to forget about love for his own fiancée, as his father rightly reminds him. The socialists are right to embrace brotherhood and to devote themselves to a purpose larger than their own selfish aims, but they have been misguided in their approach, and they forget that true brotherhood cannot exist only as words and ideals.

**Overcoming Pride**

Dostoevsky’s pre-1870 works abound with instances of parents or parental figures failing their children. Few of the families Dostoevsky depicts are complete. Parental absence stems

всегда сказал тебе, что ты и все ваши ничего еще не сказали мне такого же, что направило бы меня, увлекло бы за собой. Опровержу их, скажи мне что-нибудь лучше ихнего, и я пойду за тобой, но не смейся надо мной, потому что это очень огорчит меня” (PSS 3:311).

Dmitri Karamazov does this with more anger and less of a wish for actual council from Fyodor.

As Bakhtin (and others) have noted, in Dostoevsky’s works “the image of an idea is inseparable from the image of a person, the carrier of that idea,” so that they are always in the voice zone of a particular individual (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 85). He continues: “The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses” (88). As the characters’ psychologies become more complex in the later novels, the ideas too become complicated and their interactions more nuanced and double-voiced.

Similar hypocrisy will be displayed by the socialists in Demons.
from various sources and takes different forms, as with Valkovsky, Nastenka’s parents in “White Nights” (their absence leaves her with a grandmother who literally ties her up like a captive), or the Raskolnikov father. Even with physical presence, there can be an absence of support, as in the Marmeladov family.

The tragedy of The Insulted and Injured centers on parents who reject their children and on the lack of forgiveness. Natasha’s rift with her father and their ultimate reunion is the sentimental lynchpin of the novel. Indeed, Natasha claims that she loves her father even more than Vanya.\textsuperscript{88} In Ruth Perry’s study of the eighteenth-century English novel (a genre well known by Dostoevsky), she notes the prevalence and emotional force of this theme: “again and again the father embraces his long-lost daughter with mutual exclamations of joy and delight. He then solemnly blesses her, and she who has suffered throughout the narrative for want of a name and lack of money or friends is gladly given his name, his protection, and in most cases his wealth.”\textsuperscript{89} This could be a description of Insulted and Injured. Dostoevsky was clearly drawing on Dickens when he constructed the novel, and the court case Nikolai Sergeich is embroiled in is obviously borrowed from the English novel. Perry writes: “discharged from their consanguineal families and forced to bargain for terms with their potential families by marriage, caught between one system and another, daughters were an early casualty of the effects of capitalism on social relations.”\textsuperscript{90} Using this as a template, we can see the links between Nikolai Sergeich’s loss of property through his legal battle with Prince Valkovsky, and his inability to forgive his daughter for running away with Valkovsky’s son. A similar pattern appears in the history of Nellie’s mother, who ran away with Valkovsky, taking much of her father’s wealth.

\textsuperscript{88} PSS 3:428.
\textsuperscript{89} Novel Relations, 84-5.
\textsuperscript{90} Novel Relations, 76.
While brother-figures stand by these women during the separation from their fathers, the drama hinges on the fathers’ ability to forgive. In one emotionally charged scene, Vanya attempts to defend Natasha’s interests, and Ikhmenev rebuffs him, claiming:

Don’t imagine that fatherly tenderness or any weakness of that sort is speaking in me. All that’s nonsense! […] My daughter has abandoned me, has left my home with a lover, and I have torn her from my heart, I tore her from my heart once and for all on that very evening—do you remember? If you saw me sobbing over her portrait, it doesn’t follow that I want to forgive her. I did not forgive her then.  

The father is too caught up in his own pride and shame to forgive, while the brother, who had been a lover, did not even consider forgiveness necessary when he ceded his place. Natasha insightfully tells Vanya that “a father’s love is also jealous,” hinting at one factor that makes this love more difficult than sibling-love in his conception. Similarly, Dunya forgives Raskolnikov for his painful treatment in their first interview, while their mother focuses on her hurt.

In an English novel, the theme of a father’s forgiveness would be an end in itself, but Dostoevsky uses it as a window onto larger religious issues. Natasha’s plotline is linked to Nellie’s by this theme of abandonment, but Nellie elevates it to an ethical concern. Claiming that Ikhmenev is wicked for not forgiving his daughter, Nellie says Natasha should not return to him even if he asked. “Let her leave him forever. It would be better to let her go begging, and let him see that his daughter is begging for alms and is suffering.” This solution would leave Natasha free of hierarchical dependence. Even as a child, Nellie already understands the

91 “Не думай, что во мне говорит какая-нибудь там отцовская нежность и тому подобные слабости. Всё это вздор! […] Дочь оставила меня, ушла из моего дома с любовником, и я вырвал её из моего сердца, вырвал раз навсегда, в тот самый вечер – помнишь? Если ты видел меня рыдающим над её портретом, то из этого еще не следует, что я желаю простить ей. Я не простил и тогда” (PSS 3:290).
92 “отеческая любовь тоже ревнива” (PSS 3:230).
93 PSS 6:185. In the notebooks, Dostoevsky toyed with making Dunya hate Sonya, which suggests that he originally imagined jealousy in the relationship and then decided to remove it (PSS 7:156). In the final draft, the sister-brother pair is better aligned with each other than mother-son.
94 “Пусть она уйдет от него навсегда и лучше пусть милостыню просит, а он пусть видит, что дочь просит милостыню, да мучается” (PSS 3:295).
pleasure of pride and righteous suffering. She sees forgiveness as a religious question, and recounts challenging her grandfather: “why did Jesus Christ say: love one another and forgive injuries, and yet he doesn’t want to forgive mother?” (to which her grandfather kicked her out of the apartment). Yet in her own life, she proves equally unwilling to forgive her father, maintaining proof of her parentage, but never seeking her father’s assistance. Forgiveness on the vertical axis is more difficult than laterally because of the unequal power relations that exacerbate pride.

Unlike the socialists, Dostoevsky never sought to eradicate social or class distinctions; instead he understood that brotherhood was predicated on equality of a higher form. Nellie’s plot highlights the need for mutual dependence in experiencing this equality. She is afraid to be indebted to anyone and would like to be taken in by Natasha as a servant. Appalled at this idea, Vanya exclaims: “If she takes you in, then she’ll take you as an equal, as her little sister,” to which Nellie replies: “No, I don’t want to be equal.” Nellie does not trust the world and feels she must earn her place through work. Her morality, learned from a proud mother in extreme poverty, is one that has echoes throughout Dostoevsky’s fiction: “It’s not shameful to beg: I

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95 “отчего же Иисус Христос сказал: любите друг друга и прощайте обиды, а он не хочет простить мамашу?” (PSS 3:415-416).
96 Lary notes of Poor Folk: “For Dostoevsky, at this stage, the only real basis of equality and of any worthwhile society lies in the mutual recognition of human dignity (it is not until his later fiction that the vision of society as a specifically Christian brotherhood emerges, by which time he is more pessimistic than cautious as to the need of the urbanized Russian for reconciliation, and brotherhood is in the nature of an ideal against which to measure man’s alienation)” (Dostoevsky and Dickens, 29). He goes on to note that “when in 1876 he [Dostoevsky] called Dickens ‘a great Christian’, it was surely not only because Dickens had portrayed humble characters, but because he had attempted to make their outlook a basis for a new brotherhood, in which man’s thirst for equality would be satisfied” (34). Equality in romantic relations is a frequent theme in Insulted and Injured. All the characters cite inequality between Natasha and Alyosha (he is more of a child than her) as one of primary reasons for his transfer of affections to Katya.
97 “Уж если возьмет она тебя, то как свою равную, как младшую сестру свою,” “Нет, не хочу как равную” (PSS 3:379).
don’t beg from one person, I beg from all, and not from one; from one is shameful, but from all is not shameful.”

While gifts and aid could reinforce inequality, Dostoevsky saw a special place for almsgiving. Linda Ivanits explains: “It represents a mutual exchange in charity in which the destitute person receives material sustenance and offers in return a prayer for the well-being of the benefactor” (my italics). One of the lessons Zosima imparts in The Brothers Karamazov is the importance of being able to accept charity, as he accepted alms from his former servant. Misunderstanding this mutuality, Nellie sees begging, or turning to the world at large for help, as a way to retain her freedom and independence of spirit, while receiving aid from an individual would mean indebtedness and loss of free will. She appreciates neither the spiritual gift she is bestowing through accepting another’s aid, nor the importance of being bound to the rest of humanity through participating in this exchange.

Nellie has a hard time with the idea of being like a sister to Natasha, yet gathering alms in the street is predicated on the idea of seeing all people as potential brothers and sisters. Fostering this view of universal brotherhood appears to be one of the aspirations of the novel itself. By focusing on the insulted and injured who are usually hidden in the dark, unseen corners of St Petersburg, and by telling their tales in a romantic, humanizing manner, Dostoevsky’s novel is intended to make us realize: “that the most down-trodden, humblest man is a man too and my brother!” as Nikolai Sergeich says of Vanya’s novel. As Dostoevsky moves away from Romanticism, this call for brotherhood takes a less sentimental tone and becomes embedded in

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98 “Милостыню не стыдно просить: я не у одного человека прошу, я у всех прошу, а все не один человек; у одного стыдно, а у всех не стыдно” (PSS 3:384).
99 “The Other Lazarus,” 351-352.
100 Nellie will, however, ultimately learn how to accept love. During the final stages of her illness she is adopted by Natasha’s parents and does become like a little sister to Natasha, just as Vanya had suggested.
101 “что самый забитый, последний человек есть тоже человек и называется брат мой!” (PSS 3:189). Vanya’s novel is clearly a double of Dostoevsky’s own Poor Folk.
his understanding of Christianity. Love of one’s neighbors becomes a means to attaining faith, and faith is likewise reinforced by active love.

Self-Sacrifice vs. Saving a Sister: The Roles of Sister and Brother

Active love and faith are at the heart of *Crime and Punishment*. Although the novel is rightly famous for the intense access it provides to one troubled individual’s psychology, I will treat it as a family novel. Raskolnikov’s thoughts and actions are shaped by his complicated family relationships. For this chapter it is also notable that of all Dostoevsky’s pre-1870 novels, *Crime and Punishment* is the only one with a significant biological sibling pair. Raskolnikov’s ideas receive their greatest challenge from Sonya Marmeladova, a member of a more broken family, who presents him with an alternative understanding of kinship linked to faith.

Raskolnikov begins the novel embroiled in a loving, but dysfunctional family system. With his father deceased, Raskolnikov has become the primary object of love for his mother, who fails him through excess of devotion. Several psychoanalytic readings have laid bare the guilt and moral debt Pulkheria Raskolnikova heaps on her son. She has made sacrifices and suffered for him and, as W.D. Snodgrass notes of her letter, “She has learned the tender motherly art of introducing each item of accusation as if it were a matter of praise for her son or blame for herself. Thus she is able to insinuate as much blame as she likes without once relinquishing a

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102 The relations between the Epanchin sisters (Dostoevsky’s most complete and “happy” family) are also noteworthy, but they are less central to the plot of *The Idiot* than Dunya and Raskolnikov’s relations are to *Crime and Punishment*.

103 The burden Raskolnikov experiences from this love comes out more forcefully in the notebooks: “his mother’s tenderness was burdensome” [ласки матери тяжелые] (PSS 7:136). Several psychoanalytic studies of the novel claim Raskolnikov is driven by matricidal impulses, figuring the pawn broker as his mother (Kanzer, “Dostoevsky’s Matricidal Impulses; Kiremidjian, “Crime and Punishment: Matricide and the Woman Question”; Lower, “On Raskolnikov’s Dreams”; Snodgrass, “Crime for Punishment”; Wasiolek, “Raskolnikov’s Motives”).

convincing tone of saintly unselfishness and concern for others.”
Pulkheria Raskolnikova’s failures toward Dunya need little elaboration. Raskolnikov wonders if their mother even experiences pangs of conscience that “she agreed to sacrifice her daughter for her son.”

Perhaps to assuage her own guilt, Pulkheria tells Raskolnikov: “Love your sister, Dunya, Rodya; love her as she loves you, and know that she loves you boundlessly, more than she loves herself.” This is another form of triangulation, where the children’s love is in part mediated by the mother.

Raskolnikov bears the weight of all his family’s hopes in part because of a figure we tend to forget—his little brother. This brother is only mentioned once, but at a highly significant moment in Raskolnikov’s dream of the horse being beaten to death. The dream opens as he walks with his father past the cemetery where his grandmother is buried. Outside of the frame of the dream, the narrator explains: “there was also the little grave of his younger brother, who had died at six months old, and whom he also did not know at all and could not remember; but he had been told that he had a little brother, and each time he visited the cemetery, he crossed himself religiously and reverently over the grave, bowed to it, and kissed it.”

This helpless, innocent baby, linked with the church and with devout faith in his memory is an important symbol of meekness and of Raskolnikov’s reverence for the helpless. All these years later as an adult, this little brother is still a presence in Raskolnikov’s psyche and on his mind before the murder. As the surviving son, Raskolnikov has the pressure of all his family’s hopes. His

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106 “дочерью сыну согласилась пожертвовать” (PSS 6:36).
107 “Люби Дуню, свою сестру, Родя; люби так, как она тебя любит, и знай, что она тебя беспрельдомо, больше себя самой любит” (PSS 6:34).
108 “была и маленькая могилка его меньшего брата, умершего шести месяцев и которого он тоже совсем не знал и не мог помнить; но ему сказали, что у него был маленький брат, и он каждый раз, как посещал кладбище, религиозно и почтительно крестился на могилкой, кланялся ей и целовал её” (PSS 6:46).
109 This family make-up was clearly significant for Dostoevsky, as it appears again in The Adolescent. Arkady has a dead baby brother as well. Early in the novel, describing his family background he tells us that around ten years
mother’s letter emphasizes this when she writes: “You are all we have, Dunya and I, you are everything to us, all our hope and expectations.”

These women are obviously central to all that unfolds in *Crime and Punishment*, yet they rarely receive the attention they deserve because they fall outside the typical interests of feminist scholarship. The last fifteen years have seen the rise of woman-centric approaches to Dostoevsky’s fiction. These studies have done much to push us beyond the tradition of scholars, like Berdyaev, who believed that “woman never appears as an independent being for […] Dostoievsky was interested in her solely as a milestone on the road of man’s destiny.”

Even these new works focusing on prostitutes, wards, victims of rape, emancipated women, absent mothers, and the “woman question” must acknowledge that the female characters are often substantially defined by their relationships with men, as this list of types makes apparent. The roles they have focused on emphasize women’s potential as a sexual partner or object of male desire. This excludes the concept of woman as sister (literal or metaphoric), and with it an alternative vision of women in Dostoevsky’s works. In the following section, I would like to explore that potential by reexamining *Crime and Punishment* through a sibling lens.

By defining his “triplicate” love in *Crime and Punishment* as Dunya between Razumikhin and Svidrigailov, I think Mochulsky has very likely overlooked the three-way love that actually structures the novel: Raskolnikov between Dunya and Sonya. Too little significance is attributed to Dunya. In Mochulsky’s discussion of the “unity of action” (the only unity of Greek tragedy),

after his sister’s birth, he had a younger brother, a sickly infant who only lived a few months (PSS 13:13). This child is significant because the difficult birth destroyed their mother’s beauty, putting the family at greater risk of being abandoned by Versilov. Arkady notes: “My mother’s beauty ended with the painful birth of this baby […] she began to age quickly and become frail” [С мучительными родами этого ребенка кончилась красота моей матери […] она быстро стала стареть и хилеть.](PSS 13:13).

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100 Ты один у нас, у меня и у Дуни, ты наше всё, вся надежда, упование наше” (PSS 6:27).


112 *Dostoevsky*, 112.
he writes of Sonya as Raskolnikov’s good angel and claims that Dunya “draws with her
Svidrigailov who is mystically bound to the hero as his angel of evil.”113 His reading then pits
the two angels against each other, effectively relegating Dunya’s significance solely to her link
with Svidrigailov. This is not an atypical reading and finds additional justification in the
notebooks for Crime and Punishment, where Dostoevsky explicitly pits Svidrigailov against
Sonya as symbols in Raskolnikov’s mind.114 I am suggesting a radically different approach to
the novel in which Dunya is the primary figure, with Sonya becoming her stand-in.115

Critics often write of Svidrigailov as Raskolnikov’s double,116 but if we look at how the
novel unfolds, the initial figure Raskolnikov encounters whose life parallels his own is actually
Marmeladov. It might at first seem strange that Raskolnikov takes such an interest in this
unknown drunk in a tavern when he is contemplating the most serious act of his life, but I
believe he sees in Marmeladov’s tale a repeat of his own. Both are metaphorically lying on the
couch, helpless to act while their families suffer. They are in a similar state of
intoxication/delirium that cuts them off from the rest of the world, and they both endure guilt at
the awareness that their inability to provide for their families has led the families to make
sacrifices to provide for them.117

Raskolnikov initially takes interest in Sonya because of the close parallel to his own
sister’s situation. Right after being introduced to Sonya through the drunken narration of her

113 Dostoevsky, 298.
114 “Svidrigailov—the most cynical despair. Sonya—the most unrealizable hope. (Raskolnikov should express this
himself). He was passionately attached to both of them.” [Свидригайлов – отчаяние, самое циническое. Соня –
надежда, самая неосуществимая. (Это должен высказать сам Раскольников.) Он страстно привязался к ним обоим.] (PSS 7:204).
115 Nina Pelikan Straus’s writing on the novel offers some support for this idea. She claims that Dunya is
responsible for bringing out a “feminist conversion” in her brother that gets overshadowed by the religious
conversion brought about by Sonya. “It is the religiously pure and simple Sonya, and not the complex Dunya, who
must appear to be the source of Raskolnikov’s conversion, even if the novel’s imagery, its self-interception, and its
hidden dialogue suggest the contrary” (Dostoevsky and the Woman Question, 32).
116 Curtis, “Raskolnikov’s Sexuality,” 135; Frank, Miraculous Years, 129-130 (though he does not explicitly use the
117 Here I am in agreement with Straus, Dostoevsky and the Woman Question, 29.
father, Raskolnikov returns home to his mother’s letter about Dunya.\textsuperscript{118} With a parent speaking ecstatically and sentimentally of their merits, Sonya and Dunya are initially defined as selfless, sacrificing sisters. Raskolnikov learns from his mother’s letter not only that she and Dunya have taken on debt to send him money (leaving Dunya trapped in the home of the libertine, Svidrigailov), but also of Dunya’s planned marriage to Luzhin. Pulkheria Raskolnikova does not hide the fact that Dunya is already envisioning the marriage helping Raskolnikov with his career: “Dunya now thinks of nothing else. For several days now she has simply been in a kind of fever and has created a whole project for how in future you could become an assistant and even a partner of Pyotr Petrovich in his litigation.”\textsuperscript{119} Raskolnikov sees that his sister is essentially selling herself for him, or in his mother’s words, that Dunya can “endure much” [многое может сносить],\textsuperscript{120} and he claims: “I already knew that two and a half years ago, and for two and a half years I’ve been thinking precisely about that, that ‘Dunechka can endure much.’”\textsuperscript{121} His concern for Dunya vastly predates his knowledge of Sonya’s sacrifices, suggesting a reason for his particular interest in Sonya’s case.

From contemplating his sister’s sacrifice, he shifts to his mother’s complicity—“And mother? But we’re taking about Rodya, precious Rodya, her firstborn! For the sake of such a firstborn how can she not sacrifice even such a daughter!” drawing a parallel to the complicity of

\textsuperscript{118} Katherine Briggs also notes the importance of this proximity, leaving the story of Sonya fresh in Raskolnikov’s mind (\textit{How Dostoevsky Portrays Women}, 80, 97).

\textsuperscript{119} Дуня ни о чем, кроме этого, теперь и не думает. Она теперь, уже несколько дней, просто в каком-то жару и составила уже целый проект о том, что впоследствии ты можешь быть товарищем и даже компаньоном Петра Петровича по его тяжёлым занятиям” (PSS 6: 32-33).

\textsuperscript{120} Достоевский chooses the word сносить, which literally means to “carry” or “endure” rather than страдать (“to suffer” or “to be afflicted”). Pulkheria Raskolnikova is not using the terminology of martyrdom that her son will take up.

\textsuperscript{121} “Это я два с половиной года назад уже знал и с тех пор два с половиной года об этом именно, что «Дунечка многое может снести.»” (PSS 6:37).
Katerina Ivanovna in Sonya’s first introduction to prostitution. Indeed, Raskolnikov’s thoughts shift seamlessly from his own family situation to Sonya: “Worse still, for this we might not even refuse Sonechka’s lot!” and then bring the two together: “Do you know, Dunechka, that Sonya’s lot is in no way worse than yours with Mr. Luzhin?”

The whole letter scene has been leading up to this acknowledgement that the two girls share a single fate in Raskolnikov’s eyes. But unlike the Marmeladov parents, Raskolnikov rebels: “What, indeed, do you take me for? I don’t want your sacrifice, Dunechka, I don’t want it, Mama!”

Escaping from these bitter thoughts, Raskolnikov takes to the streets, where he encounters the drunken girl he attempts to save from a lecherous man. The pattern he sees in her plight is clear enough: trying to scare away the sexual predator who is lurking across the street, Raskolnikov even calls the man “Svidrigailov.” While sensualists like Svidrigailov see all girls as potential objects of sexual desire, Raskolnikov sees them as potential sisters. Love of his sister Dunya determines his reaction to the women around him.

The theme of sisters sacrificing themselves for their brothers or brothers profiting from their sisters’ sexual liaisons is not unique to Dostoevsky, and he may be drawing some of his ideas from Dickens. N. M. Lary writes: “In *Hard Times* [1853] as in *Crime and Punishment*,

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124 “Да что же вы в самом деле обо мне-то подумали? Не хочу я вашей жертвы, Дунечка, не хочу, мамаша!” (PSS 6:38).
125 PSS 6:40.
126 For discussions of Dickens in Russia and which works Dostoevsky is known to have read, see: Futrell, “Dostoevsky and Dickens,” 85-89; Lary, *Dostoevsky and Dickens*, 10; MacPike, *Dostoevsky’s Dickens*, 1-15. When tracing Dickens’ influence on Dostoevsky, scholars tend to go scene by scene and character by character, pointing out the direct correspondences. While these studies have their purpose, everyone acknowledges that Dostoevsky had many influences from not only the English, but also the German and Russian traditions, so correspondences tend not to be one-to-one. For example, Nellie in *The Insulted and Injured* is generally accepted to draw on both Dickens’ Nell (*Old Curiosity Shop*) and Goethe’s Mignon (Futrell, “Dostoevskii and Dickens,” 96). The sister’s sacrificing role in nineteenth-century English literature is discussed by Elisabeth Rose Gruner in “‘Loving Difference,’” 32.
we find a sister who wishes to sacrifice herself for the sake of a beloved brother and to marry a new-made man who spouts the economic slogans of the new age; both brothers commit a crime which is somehow implicit in the new prevailing ideology.” More interesting than the way Dostoevsky copies Dickens’ plotline, however, is how he changes it. While Tom Gradgrind has no contrition and openly uses his sister, Louisa, Dostoevsky’s brothers do not want to accept the sacrifices of a sister, however willingly and lovingly it is undertaken. In the world of Dickens, brothers are often complicit and sister-sacrifice is not always matched by the parallel theme of brothers attempting to save their sisters, as we find in Crime and Punishment.

Perry’s brilliant study of the eighteenth-century English novel finds a shift during that time from consanguineal to conjugal bonds as the salient form of kinship connection in Britain. Using social history to help explain the patterns she sees in the literature, Perry brings to light anxieties over the shifting nexus of family relations. These concerns create and are reflected in a consistent pattern of plot motivators centering around realigning familial attachments. As consanguineal family became less important, women lost their power as sisters and daughters, but gained status as wives. Many of these anxieties are not fully resolved in the eighteenth century and persist into the romantic literature of the nineteenth century as well.

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127 Lary, Dostoevsky and Dickens, 6.
128 This is the case in The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41) and Our Mutual Friend (1864-65).
129 Perry, Novel Relations.
130 In the British context, Perry can link the kinship anxieties that surface in the literature to shifting laws about property rights, the rise of industrialization, and changes in the laws about marriage and incest. Yet, while the implications of her book would seem to suggest that the standard plots and literary formulas that appear in eighteenth-century English literature would be localized and specific to those cultural and historical conditions, many of them appear in Russian literature of the nineteenth century. Unlike their English counterparts, Russian gentry women were allowed to own property, married women could retain control of their estates, and they were allowed to manage them themselves (in the rest of Europe, laws tended to be more generous to women than in England). Their superior legal standing in Russia granted them greater independence from their husbands. The development of women’s property rights fit into an ongoing struggle between the interests of the individual and the family and state. As Michelle Marrese explains: “In pre-Petrine Russia, women’s inferior inheritance rights in patrimonial property derived from their transient status in the natal family; thus, as long as property was conceived primarily in relation to the kin group, the incentive to minimize female claims to inheritance was considerable. During the eighteenth century, however, the trend toward more individualized property rights worked in women’s
This tension between the duties of consanguineal and conjugal attachments is addressed directly in Dunya’s face-off with Luzhin. He is offended to be put on the same plane as Dunya’s brother, but she, taking even greater offence, assures him: “I place your interests alongside everything that has thus far been most precious to me in life, that has thus far constituted the whole of my life, and suddenly you get offended that I attach so little value to you!”

We see here a clash of cultural perspectives, with Luzhin representing a more western outlook. His philosophy that “love for one’s future life-companion, for one’s husband, should exceed the love for one’s brother” does not mesh with the kinship traditions of Russia. His dream of marrying a poor girl who would be dependent upon him as a benefactor is in fact drawn from a French novel, George Sand’s Jacques (1833). This cultural transposition sheds light on the uniqueness of the Russian context and the Russian novelistic version of siblinghood, which is both derived from the West, and yet based on different ideas of kinship.

Of course, sibling goodness is not universal; Dostoevsky uses treatment of siblings as a moral litmus test. The pawn broker, Alyona Ivanovna’s, tyranny over her half-sister, Lizaveta, is one of the reasons cited for why it would be acceptable to kill her. Alyona Ivanovna makes her sister a slave, yet plans to leave Lizaveta nothing, giving all her wealth to the church so that her favor” (Woman’s Kingdom, 9). Chapter 2 of her book explores this expansion (17-43). Interestingly, Marrese observes that most of the court cases about daughters’ inheritance were not between brothers and sisters, but between aunts and their nieces and nephews (34).

Jacques claims: “Ce que j’ai amassé de force et d’indépendance durant toute une vie de solitude et de haine, je veux en faire profiter l’objet de mon affection, un être faible, opprimé, pauvre, et qui me devra tout” (36). While Jacques wishes to give this girl freedom, Luzhin is attracted precisely by her dependence: “In deepest secret, he entertained rapturous thoughts of a well-behaved and poor girl (she must be poor), very young, very pretty, well born and educated, very intimidated, who had experienced a great many misfortunes and was utterly cowed before him, a girl who would all her life regard him as her salvation, stand in awe of him, obey him, wonder at him and at him alone” [Он с упоением помышлял, в глубочайшем секрете, о девице благоразвинченной и бедной (непременно бедной), очень молоденькой, очень хорошенькой, благородной и образованной, очень запутанной, чрезвычайно много испытавшей несчастий и вполне перед ним приниженной, такой, которая всю жизнь считала его спасением своим, благоговела перед ним, подчинилась, удивлялась ему, и только ему одному] (PSS 6:235).
soul will be prayed for. This model is contrasted with that of Raskolnikov and Sonya, both of whom commit grave sins in this world in part to help their siblings (this care is more typical of Dostoevskian siblings). Raskolnikov claims that thoughts about Dunya are one of the factors that prompted him towards the murder. 134 Despite the scattered, dazed state of his thinking, concerns for Dunya surface frequently in his mind, and after helping dispatch Luzhin, he becomes increasingly concerned about protecting her from Svidrigailov.

Just as Raskolnikov wishes to protect Dunya, her primary motivation is also to protect him. After he has left the family, Dunya comes to him “with love” in order to say that she does not judge him, that she will look after their mother in his absence, and that “in case you should need me for something, or should need…my whole life, or…call me, and I’ll come.” 135 She is lured to Svidrigailov’s rooms by the promise that: “a rather curious secret of your beloved brother’s lies entirely in my hands,” held there with the promise that her brother can still be saved, then psychologically trapped by the argument: “afterwards it will be impossible to complain: after all, you won’t want to betray your brother, will you?” 136 This is a common scenario in world literature—Shakespeare’s “Measure for Measure” being a notable precursor—but Dunya’s solution of pulling a gun is unique. She proves herself to be Raskolnikov’s sister not by sacrificing for him, but by modeling him. Dunya just acknowledged in this scene that she has read Raskolnikov’s article, and through stepping out of the helpless female victim script

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134 Early in the novel he imagines her becoming a prostitute (PSS 6:43), and later claims his fears for her were a motive (PSS 6:319). I do not mean to suggest that this was his primary motive, only that the concern was pressing enough that he at least contemplated it as a potential motive. In the notebooks, Raskolnikov states more explicitly in several places that the crime was committed to help them. Dostoevsky clearly complicates Raskolnikov’s psychology in the final version.

135 “если, на случай, я тебе в чем понадоблюсь или понадобится тебе… вся моя жизнь, или что… то кликни меня, я приду” (PSS 6:326-327).

(typical of romantic novels), she adopts his idea of the great man who has the right to transgress. She becomes what her brother has wished her to be (and wished to be himself): her own keeper.

The third (living) sibling in this family situation is Razumikhin. While not technically a relative, he takes on all the responsibilities of kinship, becoming a metaphorical brother to Raskolnikov. Marmeladov spoke of the horror of having “nowhere left to go,” and even in Raskolnikov’s moment of greatest isolation, he is spared from this because his steps lead him subconsciously to Razumikhin. Beginning with this first visit, Razumikhin frequently calls Raskolnikov “brother” (admittedly a much more common address in Russian), and despite the rude treatment he receives, he remains loyally committed to caring for his friend.

While Raskolnikov never asks for or accepts help from anyone else (the food he receives from his landlady’s cook, Nastasya, he considers his due, not charity), he attempts to seek it from this brother-figure. Wrestling with himself even as he speaks, Raskolnikov tells Razumikhin brokenly: “I came to you because beside you, I do not know anyone who could help…to begin…because you are kinder than everyone, or rather smarter, and you can talk through things…But now I see that I don’t need anything, you hear, nothing at all…no favors or concern… I myself…alone…Well, enough! Leave me in peace! In giving up on the idea of help from Razumikhin, Raskolnikov cuts his last human tie. But like a true brother, Razumikhin will not accept this and without seeming to offer charity, he gives Raskolnikov translation work as if it would be an assistance to him. Again, Raskolnikov wavers between the world of belonging and brotherhood and the isolation of his sin, first taking the work, then silently

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137 “Я к тебе пришел, потому что, кроме тебя, никого не знаю, кто бы помог… начать… потому что ты всех их добрее, то есть умнее, и обсудить можешь… А теперь я вижу, что ничего мне не надо, слышишь, совсем ничего…ничьих услуг и участий… Я сам… один… Ну и довольно! Оставьте меня в покое!” (PSS 6:88).
returning it. Out in the street he is given alms for the first time, and in a parallel instance of rejecting aid and connection to other people, he throws the money in the Neva.\footnote{138 This decision to reject aid links with Snodgrass’s reading, in which Raskolnikov is suffering from an “almost unbearable” feeling of indebtedness to his mother and sister and feels he has been “inured” by the advances of money they sent him (“Crime for Punishment,” 217, 226).}

Ivanits has shown the pervasiveness of the alms-giving theme in \textit{Crime and Punishment} connected to the spiritual song of Lazarus (a retelling of Luke:19-31). In her analysis, “the way of giving and receiving alms (milostynia),” which Raskolnikov initially rejects, is opposed to “the way of power and reason,” which provides his justification for the murder.\footnote{139 “The Other Lazarus,” 343-344.} I would add to her analysis the distinction between aid on the vertical and horizontal axis; the mutuality of giving and receiving creates an element of equality which makes charity an exchange (material sustenance for spiritual blessing).\footnote{140 “The Other Lazarus,” 345.} The Lazarus song (unlike Luke) makes the poor and rich Lazarus brothers,\footnote{141 “The Other Lazarus,” 346.} emphasizing the lateral element of alms-giving despite material disparity. Raskolnikov views the world in terms of vertical hierarchy.\footnote{142 Sonya fits into this; she sees herself as low, but he elevates her to on high.} His pride prevents him from accepting aid, even from a brother, because he sees this as lowering himself.

Despite Raskolnikov’s rebuffs, Razumikhin becomes his brother’s keeper, literally both feeding Raskolnikov by hand during his illness and clothing him once money from his mother arrives. He dives head-first into the reunion of Raskolnikov with his mother and sister to scoop up Raskolnikov after a faint and restore him to consciousness (an act which has hints of the other Lazarus). Razumikhin’s initial connection to Dunya comes through Raskolnikov: “I am his friend, and therefore your friend,” he tells her, creating a system of parallels that make him a
brother to her as well.\footnote{Я его друг, а стало быть, и ваш друг} Trusting Razumikhin because of his care for her brother, Dunya reciprocates this familial intimacy, inviting him to the family’s meeting with Luzhin.

Beyond welcoming Razumikhin into the family as a brother, Raskolnikov gradually asks this brother to replace him, sending Razumikhin to check on his family in his stead, then encouraging him to help protect Dunya from Svidrigailov.\footnote{Воротись к ним и будь с ними… Будь и завтра у них… и всегда} After Luzhin has been driven from the family, Raskolnikov can see to what extent Razumikhin has been fully accepted into it. Razumikhin busily makes plans for a cooperative business venture (much like an idealistic, misguided Chernyshevsky), placing his faith in steady work and incremental progress. Parting from his family, Raskolnikov hands them over to Razumikhin’s care: “Go back to them and be with them…Be with them tomorrow too…and always.”\footnote{Одним словом, с этого вечера Разумихин стал у них сыном и братом} This moment parallels Christ’s parting action from the cross: “When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:26). Cementing the parallel, Dostoevsky closes the chapter with the words: “In a word, from that evening on, Razumikhin became a son and brother to them.”\footnote{Одним словом, с этого вечера Разумихин стал у них сыном и братом}

Beginning as a brother, Razumikhin gradually shifts into the role of lover to Dunya, with Raskolnikov’s explicit encouragement. After Dunya offers her life to Raskolnikov, his first response is: “this Razumikhin, Dmitry Prokofich, is a very good man.” When she blushes, he continues, “He’s a practical man, hard-working, honest, and capable of deep love… Goodbye, Dunya.”\footnote{Этот Разумихин, Дмитрий Прокофич, очень хороший человек, “Он человек деловой, трудолюбивый, честный и способный сильно любить… Прощай, Дуня} Giving her agency and empowering her free choice (he saw from her blush that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{Я его друг, а стало быть, и ваш друг} (PSS 6:155).
  \item \footnote{Воротись к ним и будь с ними… Будь и завтра у них… и всегда} (PSS 6:240).
  \item \footnote{Одним словом, с этого вечера Разумихин стал у них сыном и братом} (PSS 6:240).
  \item \footnote{Этот Разумихин, Дмитрий Прокофич, очень хороший человек, “Он человек деловой, трудолюбивый, честный и способный сильно любить… Прощай, Дуня} (PSS 6:327).
\end{itemize}
Dunya was not uninterested), Raskolnikov smooths the hand-off of his sister from brother to husband, from consanguineal kin to conjugal. Yet the type of relationship Razumikhin establishes is still invested with the constancy of a Dostoevskian sibling bond. As in Tolstoy, the ideal appears to be a mixture of these two relations.

The Christian Family of Sibling Sinners

As is often the case in Dostoevsky, a theme that exists purely at the literal level in the English tradition takes on religious implications in his novels. Thus siblinghood is treated not only as a question of material and emotional support, but also one of religion. On a material level, Sonya enters prostitution to provide for her half-siblings and to save Polya from a similar fate, but at the spiritual level, her siblinghood is also intimately linked to her conception of self-sacrifice and faith. Silent through much of the first half of the book, she gives voice to these beliefs when she reads Raskolnikov the story of the resurrection of Lazarus from the Gospel of John. The way the Lazarus passage is presented in Dostoevsky’s novel emphasizes Martha’s participation in the story, linking her with Sonya. As Elizabeth Blake notes, “like Lazarus’s sisters, Sonya has difficulty accepting the suffering of a sibling as part of a divine plan but still expresses great hope for a miracle.” Thus the story is not only about faith, but a specific kind of faith—that of a sister who believes in Jesus’ justice and ability to save a sibling. Drawing a parallel with Alyosha Karamazov’s belief that a miracle would follow Zosima’s death, Blake notes that in Sonya’s “pleas for God to save Polechka from a future of prostitution one may

148 I have only discussed English literature here, but Priscilla Meyer contrasts the spiritual nature of nineteenth-century Russian literature with its French subtexts. Specifically, she argues that while Dostoevsky’s French models for Crime and Punishment—Janin and Balzac—“parody the biblical topos of the Magdalene” and “use biblical references to mock their male sinners as well,” Dostoevsky “counters both of them by reinstating the power of the biblical Word” (How the Russians Read the French, 106).
discern a similar expectation for God to prevent injustice on earth by interfering in creation.”

Indeed, a key element of the Lazarus scene is its sibling dynamic. This scene results in a realignment of Raskolnikov’s sense of kinship. Dostoevsky activates Russia’s dual traditions—pagan and Christian. Pagan folk culture puts its emphasis on blood relations, while Christianity marks a shift in orientation towards spiritual kin in place of blood kinship. In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus is informed that his mother and brothers have come to see him, he replies: “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” In a similar manner, Raskolnikov turns away from his biological family and through Sonya, embraces the family of the guilty and humiliated. Their shared sense of their position in the world creates a stronger bond between Raskolnikov and Sonya than blood ties or a common past.

This transfer of allegiance has been carefully prepared in Raskolnikov’s thoughts throughout the novel. During his first visit to the police station after the murder, Raskolnikov experiences a sudden feeling of emptiness:

He sensed clearly, with all the power of sensation, that it was no longer possible for him to address these people in the police station, not only with heartfelt effusions, as he had just done, but in any way at all, and had they been his own brothers and sisters, and not police lieutenants, there would still have been no point in his addressing them, in whatever circumstances of life. Never until that minute had he experienced such a strange and terrible sensation. (my italics)
His sin has left him feeling isolated beyond the reach of even siblinghood, the most durable and accepting form of connection in Dostoevsky’s world.¹⁵³

The guilt and horror of this feeling stays with him and directs his relations with his mother and sister when they arrive. After one of the meetings with his family, Raskolnikov reflects: “My mother, my sister, how I loved them! Why do I hate them now? Yes, I hate them, hate them physically, I cannot bear having them near me…I went over and kissed mother this morning, I remember…To embrace her and think that if she found out, she…should I tell her, then? That would be just like me…Hm! She must be the same as I am—he added.”¹⁵⁴ Believing himself no longer worthy to stand at his family’s level, his love turns to hate, which is really hatred for himself. But in the midst of this she emerges in his thoughts—the one who is “like him.” Although it is not directly stated, this “she” is clearly referring to Sonya (on whom Raskolnikov’s thoughts settle at the end of this reflection).

After Raskolnikov hands his family over to Razumikhin, he goes directly from them to Sonya, physically enacting a shift in allegiance.¹⁵⁵ In this interview, he kneels before Sonya and kisses her feet, explaining: “I was not bowing to you, I was bowing to all human suffering.”¹⁵⁶ She is emblematic for him of the world of sufferers, and this is the only world in which he feels he has a place. Raskolnikov claims “that I did my sister an honor today by sitting her next to you […] I said it of you not for your dishonor and sin, but for your great suffering.”¹⁵⁷ When he

¹⁵³ Bakhtin claims that “at the heart of the tragic catastrophe in Dostoevsky’s work there always lies the solipsistic separation of a character’s consciousness from the whole, his incarceration in his own private world” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 10). This isolation is the alternative to siblinghood.

¹⁵⁴ “Мать, сестра, как любил я их! От чего теперь я их ненавижу? Да, я их ненавижу, физически ненавижу, подле себя не могу выносить…Давеча я подошел и поцеловал мать, я помню…Обнимать и думать, что если б она узнала, то…разве сказать ей тогда? От меня это станет…Гм! она должна быть такая же, как и я,— прибавил он” (PSS 6:212).

¹⁵⁵ In the notebooks, Dostoevsky makes this shift in allegiance even more explicit (PSS 7:185).

¹⁵⁶ “Я не тебе поклонился, я всему страданию человеческому поклонился” (PSS 6:246).

¹⁵⁷ “что я моей сестре сделал сегодня честь, посадив ее рядом с тобою […] Не за бесчестие и грех я сказал это про тебя, а за великое страдание твое” (PSS 6:246).
returns and listens to her read the story of Lazarus and announces that he has left his family, she understands only his unhappiness. That is where their kinship lies.

Hidden in this reconception of family, from biological kin to the family of sufferers, is a hint of the idea of the “accidental family” that would become so central to Dostoevsky’s thinking in the late 1870s. In Wasiolek’s study of the notebooks, where Raskolnikov’s “struggle to liberate himself from the punishing, painful, unfree love imposed upon him by his mother and the struggle to accept the new love offered by Sonia are much more intense,” Wasiolek suggests that “in a strange way, Raskolnikov may have committed the murder, in part at least, to liberate himself from one love and to find the kind of unconditional love of the other.” This love comes not from a shared past or shared blood, but from active love in the present.

Scholars have traced the pattern of Raskolnikov’s perambulation through St Petersburg, but the paths his contemplations follow are equally significant. Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov’s thoughts repeatedly trace a course from Dunya to Sonya. Even after Dunya’s farewell in which she offers her life, his thoughts are inevitably led to Sonya rather than staying with his sister. In the end, when the two women wait together to learn of Raskolnikov’s fate, Dunya understands that Raskolnikov has chosen Sonya and that she will stay with him forever. Her own sacrifice is unnecessary. This is essentially a scene of hand-off. Dunya cedes her position by Raskolnikov to Sonya, just as he has ceded his place by her to Razumikhin. This is partly a story of siblings growing up and shifting from consanguineal to conjugal bonds as the

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158 PSS 6:252.
159 Notebooks to Crime and Punishment, 200-201.
primary source of support. It is partly a story of coming to appreciate human interconnectivity and dependence, with family staying always at the heart of the drama.

**Conclusion: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy**

The drama of Dostoevsky in his pre-1870 works is not built on the western model of passion and the breakdown of marriage. Nor is it the drama of sons toppling their fathers. Instead, his plots are fueled by the shifting nexus of lateral relations the characters must navigate as they seek connection in a dark, isolating world. The varied meanings of the word “love” (*liubov’, liubit’*) emphasize the ambiguity and slippage between passion and compassion that this word encompasses for Dostoevsky’s characters. What unites both extremes of love—that of the romantic lover, and that of the affectionate sibling—is the depth of these feelings and their intense focus on the Other.

If Dostoevsky was a writer of passion and compassion, Tolstoy was a writer of pity (*zhalost’*). At their finest moments, Tolstoy’s characters feel a deep tenderness and pity for the one they love. This is the emotion of a stronger person looking down on a weaker one. Pity—unlike compassion (which, like the Greek and Latin cognates, literally means “suffering with” in Russian)—is focused on the self, on one’s own feeling in response to the Other and thus has a more impersonal rather than interpersonal quality. This is a fundamentally Tolstoyan problem—he was concerned with the self as source of love, unlike the dialogic Dostoevsky for whom the

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161 Just as Raskolnikov and Razumikhin are already like brothers, a bond forms between Dunya and Sonya, who are filled with the deepest admiration for each other. Their axis of the sibling/lover triangle around Raskolnikov will be cemented through their regular correspondence during his time in Siberia (though Sonya writes only of him in the letters, keeping their connection triangulated through the third).

162 In Lidia Gromova-Opul’skaya’s words: “Against self-love, against personal, social, religious or national egoism the Russian writer put forward the concept of people’s *brotherhood*, *love*, and *pity* for one another [братьство людей, любовь и жалость друг к другу]. It is no mere coincidence that in both popular and literary Russian the word ‘жалеть’ [lit., ‘to pity’, ‘to feel compassion for’] is also the equivalent of ‘любить’ [to love]” (“The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Brotherhood,” 15).
Other was always a complicated and conflicted being. Dostoevsky saw the hazards of pity and depicted its failures in Myshkin’s relations to Nastasya Filippovna—the one significant relationship from this chapter in which pity replaces love.163

Most discussions comparing Dostoevsky and Tolstoy’s views on family focus on their later works. Dostoevsky commented extensively on Anna Karenina in his Diary of a Writer and formulated his ideas about the “accidental family” largely in response to Tolstoy’s depiction of family (see Chapter Four). Less has been said of the resonances and contrasts between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s pre-1870s works.

Dostoevskian siblinghood focuses more on sacrifice and struggle, in part because of the social class he is depicting. Rather than the landed gentry, his novels describe the urban poor. Material sustenance is never at issue in a Tolstoy novel—no sister is forced into prostitution to feed a starving sibling. Isolated on their estates, Tolstoy’s gentry families form their own unique cultural units. There is a more bounded conception to family in War and Peace than in Crime and Punishment, where the urban environment enables the type of kinship realignment Raskolnikov experiences. Even in Anna Karenina, where kinship networks begin to expand (as discussed in Chapter Three), this expansion is limited to people who are at the level of making house visits.

The homestead is central to Tolstoy’s conception of family, while in Dostoevsky the physical space people inhabit is foreign to them. Families are transient and rootless. Both the Ikhmenevs and the Raskolnikovs are in temporary lodgings that hold no memories. Uprooted, they are cut off from a family history that would create a sense of stability and continuity. This loss of a past to rely on leads to the need for more active love in the present. This need for active love will come to link family with faith in late Dostoevsky. Tolstoy will confront the opposite

163 See Thompson’s brilliant discussion of Myshkin’s pity in “Compassion in Dostoevskii’s Novels,” 192.
challenge. His families are so strong and so rooted that he will need to break down some of these ties to places and shared memories in order to allow kinship love to expand to the broader human family.
Chapter Three

Expanding Kinship Networks: Anna Karenina

Anna Karenina is often discussed as a family novel,¹ but if we approach family through the lateral, sibling lens, a whole new dimension appears that has gone virtually unexplored. Scholarship on Anna Karenina has been limited by the implicit assumption that ‘family’ refers to marriages and children.² With this assumption comes an emphasis on romantic love and the formation of the nuclear family. Consequently, critics tend to contrast the Oblonsky, Levin, and Karenin households in isolation from each other, as the famous opening line seems to invite. However, if we can move beyond our expectations, we will see that family also operates in the novel as a lateral network of kinship bonds. Beginning with siblings, the kinship network expands through siblings-in-law so that by the end of the novel, almost every one of the main characters is joined in one continually expanding family. While in no way devaluing the importance of vertical parent/child relations or of marital bonds, restoring the lateral axis of the family matrix reveals family’s connection to Tolstoy’s overarching ideological mission in Anna Karenina.

Focusing on romantic love obscures the expansive potential of familial ties. While romantic love must be exclusive and reciprocal—often resulting in jealousy if either of these conditions is perceived to be broken—familial love can spread along the lateral axis. There is no limit to the number of brothers and sisters one can love. Given this potential, I believe sibling bonds come to provide a bridge in Tolstoy’s thinking between the love of one’s “close ones”

¹ Tolstoy himself claimed that he loved the “family idea” (Turner, Karenina Companion, 49).
² E. N. Stroganova notes that in many nineteenth-century works of Russian literature the “family idea” manifests itself as the “marital idea.” [“мысль семейная” проявляется как мысль супружеская] “Мysl’ semeinaia,” 18. This is the case in Wasiolek (Tolstoy’s Major Fiction, 129-157), Morson (Anna Karenina in Our Time), Knapp (“Tolstoy’s Labyrinth of Linkings”), and Slade (“Family Ideal”). Cruise provides an analysis of motherhood and the incompatible roles of mother and lover (“Women, Sexuality, and the Family,” 200-204). Others provide gendered readings of men’s and women’s roles (Karpushina, “The Idea of the Family in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina” and Mandelker, Framing Anna Karenina). Hruska draws out the parallels between the patriarchal family structure and serfdom (“Love and Slavery”).
[blizhnie], the Russian for biblical “neighbors,” and the broader concept of universal brotherhood toward which he was constantly striving. In Part VIII, when the Russians go to war to defend their “brother Slavs” in Serbia, Tolstoy questions the limits to which the kinship network can be stretched. I view Anna Karenina as the crucial link between a bounded view of family in War and Peace and a broader conception of interconnectivity in Resurrection. In experimenting with the expansion of literal sibling bonds, Tolstoy ultimately discovers their limits.

In War and Peace, characters needed only the love and validation of their immediate families, but in Anna Karenina extended family and the wider community become essential to the characters’ sense of belonging. While revising the drafts, Tolstoy expanded Part III in order to place Anna, Karenin, and Vronsky “more clearly and precisely in a social milieu.”

A happy home life is not enough if one does not participate in the broader network of family and society which provides or withholds support and validation. Anna’s personal story proves that even though she can have happy patches with Vronsky in Italy or secluded on their estate, she cannot survive outside this web of connectedness. Tony Tanner’s study of the adultery novel provides an explanation for this:

There is an area that is inside society and one that is outside, where the socially displaced individual or couple may attempt to find or practice a greater freedom. Whether there is a genuine outside becomes a problem in the nineteenth century, when it comes to seem that the apparent outside is an illusion, a space already socialized in one way or another. This may then precipitate a hopeless quest for an area outside the outside, as it were […], or a weary return to the existing society. Both of these patterns of action are very clearly pursued by Anna Karenina, for instance.

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4 Turner, Karenina Companion, 22.
5 Vladimir Alexandrov explores the web of connections one must exist in without commenting upon family’s role. He sees that Anna is “too thoroughly embedded in a matrix of defining relations with everyone around her” to exist completely outside of society, yet he argues that “it is not clear, however, whether this web of relations is for the better or the worse” (Limits to Interpretation, 241).
6 Adultery in the Novel, 23.
Her predicament as a fallen woman calls for a removal to the ‘outside,’ but this removal also marks her destruction because it is precisely connectedness and family that she craves.

On a structural level, the unity of the novel comes from weaving together the web of family connections that make even Anna and Levin—who only meet once—relations through shared siblings-in-law. Indeed, to return to the famous opening line, there are not “happy” and “unhappy” families, because the novel does not depict families—plural—but family. Characters are happy or unhappy based on how connected they feel to this family network. Although Tolstoy clearly intended the opening line as an authorial truth, his depiction of family subverts his claim, giving it a somewhat ironic flavor.

While family in War and Peace is based on an idealized past and warm childhood bonds, and Resurrection will look with hope toward the future, Anna Karenina deals with a troubled present. Literally set in the open-ended present—Tolstoy wrote it from 1873-1877 and the Serbian War described in Part VIII was not even underway when he began—the novel delves into the complexities of the characters’ immediate experiences with little access to their backgrounds. They appear in the novel without childhoods; aside from the Shcherbatskaia sisters, we know little of anyone’s parents, and consequently of the homes from which they came. Vronsky’s mother is present in the novel, but Tolstoy notes that Vronsky “did not know family life” with her, and the band of brothers he finds in the army are in many ways his true family. There are no happy memories of Stiva and Anna, Levin and Nikolai, or even of Dolly and Kitty playing together as children. In Tolstoy’s new formulation, sibling love must be

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7 Gary Jahn believes the tension between the need to be an individual and also to be “part of a social context” makes Anna Karenina a unified artistic whole. He notes that the characters can be compared in their responses this challenge, but does not explore the role of family in mediating this tension (“The Unity of Anna Karenina,” 149).

8 “Вронский никогда не знал семейной жизни” (PSS 18:61).

9 Given Tolstoy’s preoccupation with childhood in his early trilogy and War and Peace, this absence has aroused critical attention. Turner notes the lack of common memories linking Anna and Stiva (“Blood is Thicker than
active, not reliant on an idealized past. Consequently, the image of family in Anna Karenina, and specifically of siblinghood, is more fraught with tensions and failures.

Despite these complications, sibling bonds, and the kinship network to which they contribute, emerge as the strongest source of support in the novel. In moments of trouble, characters turn to their siblings (or those in a sibling role)—not lovers or parents—or siblings come to their aid unsought. In an adultery novel, sibling bonds are key because they are unaltered by the woman’s transgression. Tanner writes: “Adulteress points to an activity, not an identity: an unfaithful wife, and usually by implication a bad mother, is an unassimilable conflation of what society insists should be separate categories and functions. The wife and mother in one set of social circumstances should not, and cannot be, the mistress and lover in another.” While these other roles come into conflict, siblinghood remains untouched and Stiva and Anna can go on supporting each other despite their affairs. Consanguineal relations have a stability and permanence that conjugal relations lack. By focusing on the importance of lateral family ties, my reading departs from most interpretations of Anna Karenina. Understanding the role of both forms of connection will provide a fuller picture of Tolstoy’s vision.

Beyond the Love and Adultery Plot

In tracing the origins of Anna Karenina, Eikhenbaum notes that the original inspiration came from a Dumas novel, L’Homme-femme (1872), about an adulterous woman and the proper

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Champagne,” 136). The one exception where childhood is mentioned is the brief discussion of Kitty’s brother, who provided Levin’s original introduction to the Shcherbatsky household.


11 The prevalence of honor killings in some Muslim countries actually reinforces this continuation of siblinghood (if the sister were no longer a sister, there would be no need to restore the family’s honor).

12 Turner’s “Blood is Thicker than Champagne” is only study I know of that deals with siblings in Anna Karenina in their own right.
response to her actions.\textsuperscript{13} The initial plan for the novel had only one plotline—what became the triangle of Anna, Karenin and Vronsky—without a Levin or Kitty figure.\textsuperscript{14} It was intended to stick closely to a love plot, which would have placed it solidly in the tradition of Flaubert’s \textit{Madame Bovary} (1856). Eikhenbaum calls the original conception “a combination of the English family novel and the French ‘adultery’ novel.” However, as it evolved, \textit{Anna Karenina} came to represent “not so much the following of European traditions as their coming to an end, their being overcome.”\textsuperscript{15} A larger social dimension emerged. As John Bayley notes, Tolstoy became obsessed by the question of “what happens when you cut yourself off from society, or are cut off by it?”\textsuperscript{16} In its final version, the novel is much more than a story of passionate love and infidelity; instead it deals with the major moral and social questions of Tolstoy’s time, from peasant agriculture and political unrest to the ‘woman question,’ mortality, religion, and non-belief. Central to this shift was the addition of Levin. While Anna tries to answer the questions of life “for herself, and only for herself,” Levin broadens the scale of inquiry by looking for answers to the important questions of life and death “for all people.”\textsuperscript{17}

Having written a first draft and even dispatched it to the printer in 1874, Tolstoy reconsidered, halted the printing, and began to seriously rework and expand the scope of the novel. Eikhenbaum links this shift with Tolstoy’s pedagogical works: “After the article ‘On Public Education,’ which raised the most important questions of social work, it was impossible

\textsuperscript{13} Tolstoy in the Seventies, 100-101; Turner, \textit{Karenina Companion}, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{14} Although it falls beyond the scope of this study, Pushkin also played an influential role in shaping Tolstoy’s ideas for \textit{Anna Karenina}. The opening line of the first sketch of the novel was inspired by a Pushkin fragment. See Eikhenbaum, \textit{Tolstoy in the Seventies}, 127-136. See also: Bilinkis, \textit{O Tvorchestve L.N. Tolstogo}, 284-293.
\textsuperscript{15} Tolstoy in the Seventies, 111.
\textsuperscript{16} Tolstoy and the Novel, 201.
\textsuperscript{17} Bilinkis, \textit{O Tvorchestve L.N. Tolstogo}, 292.
to return to a novel ‘in a light vein’ that was limited by the bounds of a love plot.”18 The shift in the novel follows Tolstoy’s shift in priorities brought on by his spiritual crisis. The question of what one must live for—which tortures Levin—came to the fore. In quantitative terms, Eikhenbaum observes that in parts VI and VII many more pages are devoted to Levin’s plotline than Anna’s. He concludes: “it is precisely in these parts that the limits of the novel are so expanded, that it is changed from a family-love novel to a philosophico-social one.”19 Eikhenbaum does not take the next step and link familial concerns to the overarching philosophical ones. From the perspective of the sibling theme, however, the shift at the end of the novel is really an expansion of the family question to a broader societal context. In Part VIII, Tolstoy raises ideas of siblinghood to a national scale as the Russian nation contemplates (and on Levin’s estate, debates) its bonds of “brotherhood” with its fellow Slavs in the Serbian war.

As the scope of the novel expanded, so too did its depiction of different forms of love.20 Anna Karenina explores two fundamentally different models of love. Part VIII takes up the form of love Tolstoy would embrace in his writing in the second half of his life: non-possessive, non-reciprocal love that emanates outward, falling on all equally, regardless their response. He experiments with this outward-radiating love first in War and Peace with Platon Karataev. Platon loves whoever is before him, but forms no true attachments. His love can be contrasted with more traditional preference-based love—the love of one specific individual for another. Romantic love is primary in this second category, but parent-child love and friendship also fit this model. Given their bounded nature and the need for reciprocity, these preference-based

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18 Tolstoy in the Seventies, 117. Eikhenbaum’s expression “in a light vein” refers to a letter he quoted in which Tolstoy told Strakhov that the original draft was “in the very lightest, non-severe style” (quoted in Tolstoy in the Seventies, 112).
19 Tolstoy in the Seventies, 125.
20 Scholars have noted that Anna Karenina depicts love in all its various forms: marital, maternal/paternal, sisterly/brotherly, platonic, adulterous, homosexual, religious, selfless, etc. The reference to homosexuality is pointed out by Alexandrov, Limits to Interpretation, 240.
loves often create jealousy. In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy seeks a synthesis between the two forms of love and finds it in lateral family love.

There are two levels to family ties: the literal state of being relations and the type of love or connection that is enacted upon that bond. Family ties—the state of being kin—are not chosen. Our relations are a given in our lives and come with a duty to care despite personal preferences. The lack of choice and element of duty in kinship call for a different kind of love than in romantic connections. They afford kinship a constancy that romantic ties lack. Because, for Tolstoy, family love involves elements of the outward emanating love that does not require love in return, it is not a source of jealousy. However, just because someone is our kin, it does not follow that we will necessarily experience love toward them (Levin’s struggle with Koznyshev). The stakes are higher, as failing to love a brother can easily create an enemy. I believe Tolstoy saw the role of kinship as prompting and enabling love that might otherwise not be forthcoming and making that love more durable and selfless.

Tolstoy’s happiest marriage in *Anna Karenina*—Levin and Kitty’s—is built upon romantic love that incorporates this familial feeling. The Levin and Shcherbatsky families “were always on close, friendly terms.” Levin became a frequent visitor to the Shcherbatsky household through his friendship with Dolly and Kitty’s brother, who died at sea shortly after completing his studies.

Strange as it may seem, Konstantin Levin was in love with the home itself, with the family, especially with the female half of the Shcherbatsky family. Levin did not remember his mother and his only sister was older than him, so in the Shcherbatsky home, for the first time, he came to know the family life of a well-educated and

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21 This is what differentiates family bonds from friendship, which lacks the first level.
22 Of course all of Freudian psychology is built on the jealousy inherent in family ties. Freud saw siblings as rivals for parental affection. Tolstoy had a more positive view.
23 “всегда были между собою в близких и дружеских отношениях” (PSS 18:24).
honorable family of the old aristocracy—a life such as he had been deprived of by the death of his father and mother. 

Levin’s initial introduction to Kitty has nothing romantic in it, but is based on familial feelings. In fact, “his previous relations with Kitty—those of a grown-up to a child whose brother’s friend he was—seemed to him a new obstacle to his love.” Kitty, in turn, regards Levin “like a beloved brother.” Awaiting his arrival on the night when he and Vronsky will meet each other, and still hoping for a proposal from the latter, “memories of her childhood and memories of Levin’s friendship with her dead brother lent a special poetic charm to her relations with him.” Levin fills a sibling, not romantic role in her thoughts. Ultimately, however, the man in her romantic script will prove fickle and Kitty will come to appreciate the strength, depth, and necessity of this more familial type of love.

Thus even in the “love and marriage” portion of Anna Karenina, Tolstoy challenges our traditional understanding of romantic love as it appears in French novels and gives us something closer to what was found in English literature, where often “the brother-figure embodies an ideal to which the suitor must aspire.” As in War and Peace and in many English novels, Tolstoy offers sibling-style connection as a model for the creation of “happy families.” While Kitty and Levin’s love undoubtedly has a “romantic” component (which accounts for their jealousies), it forces us to redefine what we mean by this term. Lofty, poetic sentiments and physical attraction must be combined with the stability of sibling-like connection in order to be sustainable.

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24 “Как это ни странно может показаться, но Константин Левин был влюблен именно в дом, в семью, в особенности в женскую половину семьи Щербацких. Сам Левин не помнил своей матери, и единственная сестра его была старше его, так что в доме Щербацких он в первый раз увидел ту самую среду старого дворянского, образованного и честного семейства, которой он был лишен смертью отца и матери” (PSS 18:24-25).
25 “его прежние отношения к Кити — отношения взрослого к ребенку, вследствие дружбы с ее братом, — казались ему еще новою преградой для любви” (PSS 18:26).
26 “как любимого брата” (PSS 18:35).
27 “Воспоминания детства и воспоминания о дружбе Левина с ее умершим братом придавали особенную поэтическую прелесть ее отношениям с ним” (PSS 18:51).
28 Valerie Sanders, Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature, 8.
The Spectrum of Sibling Bonds

Sibling relationships are ubiquitous in *Anna Karenina*, and across the many families in the novel, Tolstoy explores the varied forms the sibling bond can take: sister-sister, sister-brother, brother-brother, half-siblings, siblings-in-law, cousins (literally “second-sisters” or “second-brothers” in Russian). The sibling pairs range from offering the deepest intimacy, to material supports, to strained relations. Some sibling bonds were present from birth, others acquired through marriage. Taken together, this array represents the social world of *Anna Karenina*. By exploring the variety possible in lateral familial bonds (Russian, like French, has no generic word for “sibling” that does not specify gender), Tolstoy defines what a world of siblings looks like in the its real, concrete from, rather than as an abstract notion of “universal brotherhood.”

Tolstoy emphasizes the importance of siblings at the start of the novel through the way he introduces his characters. The novel opens not with Anna, but with her brother, Stepan Arkadich Oblonsky. Anna first appears several pages into the novel when Stiva tells his servant: “Matvei, sister Anna Arkadievna will be here tomorrow.” Thus, Anna is first defined as a sister rather than a wife or a mother, the roles with which we typically associate her. Introductions like this are a device for realigning our understanding of identity, which is typically linked to parents and spouses rather than siblings. Levin receives a similar sibling introduction. When he arrives at Stiva’s office in the first chapter, Stiva introduces him to his colleagues as “Konstantin Dmitrich Levin, the brother of Sergei Ivanovich Koznyshev.” This is a lateral version of the usual problem of a son caught in his father’s shadow, and like the son eager to make his own name,

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29 “Матвей, сестра Анна Аркадьевна будет завтра” (PSS 18:7).
Levin hates being defined this way. Kitty, too, is first mentioned in her kinship role as Stiva’s sister-in-law [svoiachenitsa Kiti]. Lateral siblinghood is more defining than vertical ancestry.

The Russian language is precise about kinship relations. In Anna Karenina, Tolstoy uses four different words for sister-in-law: three Russian, and the French “belle sœur.” The Russian terms indicate the precise line of connection: nevestka, the brother’s wife; svoiachenitsa, the wife’s sister, and zolovka, the husband’s sister. Similarly, we find three Russian words for brother-in-law: shurin, the wife’s brother; svoiak, the husband of the wife’s sister; and ziat’, the sister’s husband or husband’s sister’s husband.30 By contrast, in all Dostoevsky’s major novels combined he only used svoiachenitsa once and svoiak twice (both in The Idiot). None of these words appear even a single time in Crime and Punishment, The Demons, The Adolescent, or The Brothers Karamazov. These kinship terms are also rare occurrences in the novels of Turgenev and Goncharov. This is not to suggest that these other authors were unfamiliar with the terms (which are all still in common use today); rather it indicates that Tolstoy’s emphasis on these relationships is unusual in Russian novels of the time.31

In this world structured and defined by lateral bonds, literal siblings become the paradigm for other lateral kinship relations. Tolstoy’s three main sibling pairs—Anna and Stiva, Kitty and Dolly, and Levin and Nikolai—represent not only the three gender-pairings, but also three types of connection that can be imposed on the literal state of being a sibling: practical, emotional, and spiritual (each of increasing depth). The deeper these connections run, the more potential they have to cause pain as well as to provide solace. Siblings with a shared past and shared outlook

30 One significant point about these terms is they way they make entire families kin through marriage (in English, the husband of the wife’s sister is not a relation). Thus, in War and Peace, if Natasha married Andrei, it would have been incest for Nikolai to marry Marya because they would have become siblings.
31 Several of these terms appear frequently in War and Peace as well. For example, nevestka is used nineteen times (mainly in relation to Lise and Marya). Shurin and zolovka also appear with some regularity (eight and seven times respectively).
on life understand each other better than anyone else in Tolstoy’s works—including romantic pairs—and with this understanding comes an inability to hide things from each other and consequently from oneself.

As Morson has noted: “The first thing one needs to know about Anna is that she is the former Anna Oblonskaya, Stiva’s sister.”32 The pair are stuck in the present and—although Anna resists and Stiva does not—they live for their passions, leading them to become the two main adulterers of the novel (both also show a propensity for lying). When Anna is feeling guilty after the ball where she first dances with Vronsky, she even looks like Stiva as she claims “really, I’m not guilty, or only a little bit guilty”33 and is upset when Dolly points out this resemblance. Here, identification with her brother threatens Anna’s sense of self. Edwina Cruise supports Anna, finding the comparison between the siblings “unjust” to Anna, who is clearly governed by a stronger moral conscience than her brother.34 However, the shared ability to become carried away by their desires is a failing in both.

Anna and Stiva’s problems exist at a practical level—they cannot have the incompatible things that they want. The novel opens with Anna coming to save her brother’s marriage, which has been threatened by his desire for both an attractive mistress and a peaceful, comfortable home life. The supportive role Anna can fill is consequently a practical one—to act as mediator in patching up his relations with Dolly. Like her future lover, Vronsky, we are introduced to Anna during her meeting with Stiva at the railway station, which “seems to stress her closeness to her brother: the first thing that strikes Vronskij about her is the manner in which she greets Stiva.”35 Not waiting for him, Anna rushes to her brother, thus displaying for the first time her

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32 Anna Karenina in Our Time, 53. A similar observation is made by Bilinkis (O Tvorchestve L. N. Tolstogo, 309).
33 “право, я не виновата, или виновата немного” (PSS 18:104).
characteristic over-abundance of energy in the sibling context. Through Vronsky’s eyes we see in detail how she embraces and kisses Stiva: “with a movement that impressed Vronsky by its decisiveness and grace, she embraced her brother with her left arm around his neck, quickly pulled him toward her and kissed him firmly.” The genuine emotion of this greeting is immediately contrasted with the coldness and artificiality of Vronsky’s meeting with his mother. He continues to watch through the train window as Anna takes her brother by the hand and speaks to him with great animation, and Vronsky is sorry that this conversation does not involve him. The lover initially desires the place occupied by the brother.

While Anna and Stiva are often together in the novel, we rarely hear much conversation between them. I believe Tolstoy omits this because what is significant in their relationship is not a deep emotional bond, but the practical role they play in each other’s lives. Anna repeatedly claims to understand her brother, but Stiva is not so complex that this would imply a deep level of empathy. More important, she understands his needs and successfully reunites him with Dolly. Later, Stiva will attempt a similar role of marriage ambassador on his visit to Karenin in St Petersburg, one of the many reciprocally balanced gestures that structure the novel.

Despite the practical support they provide each other, their bond is not idealized in the way of sibling relations in War and Peace. Stiva’s trip to St Petersburg is not an entirely disinterested attempt to help his suffering sister. The visit is also scheduled to help him attain a much coveted promotion. Stiva’s encounter with Vronsky after Anna’s suicide also provides a chilling window into his handling of his sister’s death. Hearing of Vronsky’s presence, “for a moment Stepan Arkadich’s face showed sadness, but a minute later, when, with a slight spring in his step and smoothing his whiskers, he entered the room where Vronsky was, Stepan Arkadich

36 “она движением, поразившим Вронского своею решительностью и грацией, обхватила брата левой рукой за шею, быстро притянула к себе и крепко поцеловала” (PSS 18:67).
had already completely forgotten about his despairing sobs over his sister’s corpse, and he saw in Vronsky only a hero and an old friend. 37 This is much like his response to the death of the railway worker at Anna’s arrival. There too, Stiva was deeply moved, but quickly forgot the painful impression. A man of the present, Stiva is not deeply affected by his past. Even the loss of his closest relation does not lastingly threaten his carefree outlook.

The sister-sister bond between Dolly and Kitty is deeper than Anna and Stiva’s and relies on the special tenderness Tolstoy believed possible only between women. 38 Prince Shcherbatsky refers jestingly, but lovingly to the gatherings of the three Shcherbatskaia sisters as “Aliny-Nadiny,” creating the feel of their own intimate, sisterly world. As women, they share the concerns of the domestic sphere and this enhances their closeness. Unlike Anna and Stiva’s connection, Dolly and Kitty’s relies on an emotional bond, but it too has its moments of rupture. During Kitty’s depressive illness, Tolstoy emphasizes Dolly’s faithfulness to her sister:

After the doctor left, Dolly arrived. She knew there was to be a consultation that day, and though she had only recently got up from confinement (she had given birth to a girl at the end of winter), though she had many griefs and cares of her own, leaving her nursing baby and a daughter who had fallen ill, she came by to learn Kitty’s fate, which was being decided just then. 39

Hearing that Kitty will be going abroad to convalesce, Dolly is saddened at the thought that “her best friend [лучший друг ее], her sister, was going away.” 40 Later in the novel we are told that

37 “На мгновение лицо Степана Аркадьича выразило грусть, но через минуту, когда, слегка подрагивая на каждой ноге и расправляя бакенбарды, он вошел в комнату, где был Вронский, Степан Аркадьич уже вполне забыл свои отчаянные рыдания над трупом сестры и видел в Вронском только героя и старого приятеля” (PSS 19:355-356).
38 Writing of Natasha and Marya, Tolstoy refers to “that passionate and tender friendship that exists only among women” (and these two are shortly to become sisters-in-law) (PSS 12:178). For a discussion of the implications of female friendship, see: Moss, “Tolstoy’s Politics of Love,” 567.
39 “Вслед за доктором приехала Долли. Она знала, что в этот день должен быть консилиум, и, несмотря на то, что недавно поднялась от родов (она родила девочку в конце зимы), несмотря на то, что у неё было много своего горя и забот, оставив грудного ребенка и заболевшую девочку, она заехала узнать об участии Кити, которая решилась нынче” (PSS 18:127).
40 PSS 18:127.
Kitty confides most in Dolly and that Dolly loves her like her own children [как своих детей]. This odd blend of lateral and vertical relations adds another layer of complexity and resembles Alyosha’s relations with Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov.

Despite the fact that they are supposedly best friends, Kitty is ashamed even before Dolly and cannot admit her humiliation and grief at having rejected Levin. Given their deep emotional connection, however, Dolly understands without being told. She is a threat because she brings this repressed shame to the surface. Her probing provokes Kitty to lash out: “I said and repeat that I am proud and would never, never do what you are doing—returning to a man who betrayed you, who fell in love with another woman.” In a moment of over-identification, she reframes Dolly’s radically different situation (an unfaithful husband) as parallel to her own. Dolly “did not expect this cruelty from her sister” and from this close source it wounds her all the deeper. The “love/hate” at the heart of siblinghood (as Juliet Mitchell describes it) is laid bare as this outburst is followed by tears and a reunion of the sisters.

While this is no longer the romanticized image of siblinghood that we find in War and Peace, Tolstoy still closes by reaffirming the sisters’ love. The depth of their connection is felt in the way they understand each other wordlessly, a theme throughout Anna Karenina. “Talking about unrelated things, they understood one another” about the most important matters. Kitty claims only to be happy when she is with Dolly and her children and in another of the many reciprocal gestures of the novel, the passage closes with her going to care for Dolly’s sick children, just as Dolly began the passage coming to care for her.

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41 PSS 18:286.
42 During the parallel situation of Natasha’s illness in War and Peace, Nikolai is away at war, so we do not see whether their closeness would have a similar effect of unmasking Natasha’s shame.
43 “Я сказала и повторю, что я горда и никогда, никогда я не сделаю того, что ты делаешь,—чтобы вернуться к человеку, который тебе изменил, который полюбил другую женщину” (PSS 18:132).
44 Siblings, 35.
45 See: Jones, “Problems of Communication.”
46 “говоря о постороннем, они поняли друг друга” (PSS 18:132).
Levin’s relations with his brother Nikolai are equally deep and reliant on unspoken understanding, but also include a spiritual element that Tolstoy reserves for men. While the painful topic Kitty and Dolly cannot discuss is matters of the heart, Levin and Nikolai’s unspoken zone is matters of the soul, and ultimately mortality. Therefore, their closeness and Nikolai’s impending death create all the greater threat to Levin’s sense of self and well-being.\textsuperscript{47} Directly after receiving Kitty’s rejection Levin goes to see Nikolai for the first time in three years. Koznyshev is ready to give up on relations with Nikolai after a first attempt to contact him yielded a note: “I humbly request you to leave me in peace. That is all I demand of my dear brothers.”\textsuperscript{48} Levin, however, will not abandon his brother.\textsuperscript{49} His love is blended with duty; it will keep radiating on his brother regardless of what he gets in return.

Despondent and filled with self-loathing after his rejection by Kitty, he thinks with pleasure on Nikolai.\textsuperscript{50} While Levin understands why others would find his drunken and debauched brother a “despicable fellow” [презренный человек], he thinks: “I know him from another side. I know his soul and know that we resemble one another.”\textsuperscript{51} It is at the level of the soul that their connection lies, regardless what ruffles the surface of their relations. Alyosha Karamazov makes a similar statement—“I am just the same as you”—after his brother, Mitya, speaks of his debauchery.\textsuperscript{52} As Kitty does with Dolly, Levin and Alyosha project part of themselves on their brothers. In Levin’s mental processes, Nikolai becomes not a radically separate being, but an extension of self.

\textsuperscript{47} This relationship is heavily autobiographical, combining features of Tolstoy’s relationships with his brothers Nikolai and Dmitri.
\textsuperscript{48} “Прошу покорно оставить меня в покое. Это одно, чего я требую от своих любезных братьев” (PSS 18:30).
\textsuperscript{49} Levin’s “failed relations” with his brothers and what he learns from them are discussed by Gustafson, \textit{Resident and Stranger}, 135-142.
\textsuperscript{50} Alexandrov claims Levin “latches onto the idea of visiting his brother” to “compensate” for the rejection (\textit{Limits to Interpretation}, 151).
\textsuperscript{51} “я знаю его иначе. Я знаю его душу и знаю, что мы похожи с ним” (PSS 18:90).
\textsuperscript{52} “я то же самое, что и ты” (PSS 14:101).
Levin feels guilt for not supporting his brother in the past, especially during his religious phase, and plans to atone for this: “I will tell him everything, will get him to tell me everything and show him that I love him and therefore understand him.” This is a classic Tolstoyan formulation whereby love gives access to hidden depths of the other. Nikolai, however, is not immediately ready to accept his brother’s caring. “—Ah, Kostia! – he said suddenly, recognizing his brother, and his eyes lit up with happiness. But at that second he glanced at the young man and convulsively jerked his head and neck as if his necktie were strangling him, a movement Levin knew well, and a completely different, wild, suffering and cruel expression settled on his haggard face.” Through the rapid play of facial expressions and gestures, Tolstoy takes us into all the complexities and ambivalences of Nikolai’s feelings about his brother. Love is primary, but it is threatened by shame, diffidence, and pride. Levin’s timidity softens Nikolai, and his defensiveness is further overcome by Levin’s acceptance of the former prostitute, Marya Nikolaevna, as his unofficial wife [подруга жизни], a moment that has resonances with Dunya’s acceptance of Sonya in Crime and Punishment.

The brothers’ meeting provides one of the brief instances in the novel when the characters reflect on the past. Levin mentions their family estate, Pokrovskoe, and Nikolai picks up on the bait: “Yes, tell me what is happening at Pokrovskoe. Is the house still standing, and the birches, and our schoolroom? And is Philip the gardener really still alive? How I remember the garden—

53 “Все выскажу ему, все заставлю его высказать и покажу ему, что я люблю и потому понимаю его” (PSS 18:91). David Herman provides a thoughtful analysis of this passage in “Allowable Passions,” 22.
54 Kitty has a similar feeling about why her father understands her better than anyone else in the family: “his love for her made him penetrating” [любовь его к ней делала его проницательным] (PSS 18:128). The idea is discussed in greater depth in the scene of Levin’s proposal to Kitty when he reflects on the fact that sometimes during an argument one “understands what one’s adversary likes, and suddenly likes it oneself, and immediately agrees with him, and all proofs become superfluous and unnecessary” [поймешь то, что любит противник, и вдруг сам полюбишь это самое и тотчас согласишься, и тогда все доводы отпадают, как ненужные] (PSS 18:417). The theme of understanding “intertwined with love” is discussed by Alexandrov (Limits to Interpretation, 235-238).
55 “—А, Костя! – вдруг проговорил он, узнав брата, и глаза его засветились радостью. Но в ту секунду он оглянулся на молодого человека и сделал столь знакомое Константину судорожное движение головой и шеей, как будто галстук жал его; и совсем другое, дикое, страдальческое и жестокое выражение остановилось на его исхудалом лице” (PSS 18:92).
house and the sofa! Now mind that you don’t change anything in the house, but marry quickly and set things going again the way they used to be.” Nikolai and Levin share an idealized image of their childhood home, and the same desire that Levin recreate that world with his future wife. These memories focus on details of people, places, and objects, rather than experiences shared by the brothers (like the Rostovs’ reminiscences), making them less intimate.

Nikolai’s illness and impending death become the ultimate zone of pain to be avoided, although at every moment present in what they do not say. Nikolai’s mortality makes Levin agonizingly aware of his own (another feature that has autobiographical roots in Tolstoy’s experience). He convinces Nikolai to go abroad for his health and succeeds in providing money for the trip without offending him (giving money without inducing shame is an essential theme for Dostoevsky as well). Nikolai’s inevitable future visit is a source of dread. “Levin loved his brother, but being with him was always a torment” because his brother is the one who “knows him through and through, who calls forth his innermost thoughts, who forces him to speak everything out in full.”

This closeness is a threat because nothing can be hidden between them and consequently all self-deceptions are likewise stripped away. “These two people were such near kin that the smallest movement or tone of voice expressed for both more than they could say in words.”

The only sincere words of the eventual visit are spoken at parting. Nikolai asks Levin not to

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56 “Да, расскажи мне, что делается в Покровском? Что, дом все стоит, и березы, и наша классная? А Филипп-садовник, неужели жив? Как я помню беседку и диван! Да смотри же, ничего не перемень в дому, но скорее женись и опять заведи то же, что было” (PSS 18:97).
57 This idea is taken almost directly from Tolstoy’s correspondence with his aunt T. A. Yergolskaya, cited in Chapter One (Tolstoy’s Letters, 23-24).
58 Anthony Thorlby argues that: “he embodies so inescapably, by virtue of being a brother with unbreakable ties of blood and memory, those basic facts of illness, misery, and death, which Levin finds so hard to assimilate” (Anna Karenina, 72).
59 “Левин любил своего брата, но быть с ним вместе всегда было мученье” […] “понимает его насквозь, который вызовет в нем все самые задушевые мысли, заставит его высказаться вполне” (PSS 18:365).
60 “Эти два человека были так родны и близки друг другу, что малейшее движение, тон голоса говорил для обоих больше, чем все, что можно сказать словами” (PSS 18:367).
think badly of him, and Levin understands, “that by these words he meant: ‘you see and know that I’m in a bad way and perhaps we will not see each other again.’” The frequency of this wordless understanding is the surest sign of their love and connection. Anna and Vronsky, by contrast, have frequent moments when they wordlessly misunderstand each other (as when Anna announces her pregnancy and Vronsky thinks of a duel), and they have similar zones about which they do not speak.

The themes of communication, understanding, and awareness of mortality that characterize Levin’s relations with Nikolai all climax in the only titled chapter of *Anna Karenina*, “Death.” Here the kinship network also emerges as the key element in humanizing Nikolai’s passing as Kitty steps into her new role as his sister-in-law. While Levin is wracked with pain, guilt, and fears of death, “Katia” alone can understand what the dying man needs. Tolstoy has great admiration for women’s ability to face death naturally, and Kitty’s capacities here are showcased. But when the end arrives, Kitty’s practical and emotional caring are superseded by the spiritual bond of the brothers. Nikolai tells Levin that he went through the “comedy” of his last rites only to make Kitty happy, and when he believes he is dying, he sends her away and asks his brother to remain, holding his hand.

During Nikolai’s final days, Levin attempts to make peace between him and their half-brother Koznyshev, but this is never fully successful. For himself, Levin remains in ambivalent relations with his renowned older brother. Half-siblinghood is clearly not the same as full. Levin feels that Koznyshev is “of the ‘Koznyshev,’ not the ‘Levin’ mould of man,” which

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61 “что под этими словами подразумевалось: «Ты видишь и знаешь, что я плох, и, может быть, мы больше не увидимся»” (PSS 18:371).
62 Additionally, as Malcolm Jones notes, when Karenin starts to “pay heed only to the literal meaning of Anna’s words he is cutting himself off (or has been cut off) from a wide and important range of communication” (“Problems of Communication,” 90).
63 “тот был не Левинского, а Кознышевского склада человек” (PSS 19:123).
raises the issue of whether siblings without a shared childhood or full blood relations can have
the depth of connection Tolstoy idealizes. Why the disjunction between two men who both feel
the desire and duty to love and each other because of their given kinship? Levin and
Koznyshev’s views on the world, approaches to life, and ways of thinking could not be more
different, despite their wish to be close. Yet Levin and Stiva also think quite differently at the
start of the novel and are still close friends. When Koznyshev comes to visit Levin at
Pokrovskoe, the narrator explains: “despite his love and respect for Sergei Ivanovich, it was
uncomfortable for Konstantin Levin in the country with his brother. It was uncomfortable and
even unpleasant for him to see his brother’s relations with the country.”
64 For Levin, the country
is life; for Koznyshev it is relaxation and a pastoral idyll. Tolstoy shows that these surface level
differences cannot destroy the state of kinship that exists between the two men. To love this
half-brother is a call of duty for Levin, not a natural inclination like loving Nikolai (who shared
his idealized past), but nonetheless, the narrator affirms that there is love uniting the two.

Anthony Thorlby sees Levin’s brothers primarily as a textual device. Not considering the
importance of the relationships in their own right, he argues:

Tolstoy has enriched the texture of the novel by giving to Levin a brother, Nikolay, and a
half-brother, Sergey Ivanich Koznyshev. They make little difference to the plot […] but
they contribute considerably to the novel’s realism and theme. It might be said crudely
that their functions are, respectively, to die and to intellectualize; they provide
opportunities for Levin to come to terms with these two fundamental experiences.
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While I do not think Tolstoy is using his characters as crudely as Thorlby suggests, siblings can
be seen as a device for exposing levels of identity to the character, and consequently to the reader
as well. Turning to Mitchell’s psychoanalytic approach, as the ones closest to the self, siblings
have the greatest potential to challenge one’s ideas about oneself and the world. J. B. Schneider

64 “несмотря на свою любовь и уважение к Сергею Ивановичу, Константину Левину было в деревне неловко
с братом. Ему неловко, даже неприятно было видеть отношение брата к деревне” (PSS 18:251).
65 Anna Karenina, 72.
calls the younger brother “a reflection of his fraternal self which has come to life” and consequently “a rival in everything that the brother sees, feels, and thinks.”\textsuperscript{66} This identification and rivalry inherent in the sibling bond impels Levin’s spiritual quest forward. To turn away from Nikolai’s fate is to embrace life (reject suicidal thoughts). To turn away from Koznyshev’s is to seek a more immediate, emotionally driven truth about the meaning of life, rather than the rational truths that Levin finds so unfulfilling.

Koznyshev and Levin frequently engage in philosophical arguments (where Koznyshev always out-reasons Levin), yet true communication does not take place between the brothers. Levin eventually reverts to silence in their debates, struggling with the fact that “what he wanted to say was not comprehensible to his brother, only he did not know why it was not comprehensible—because he was not able to say clearly what he wanted, or because his brother did not want or was not able to understand him.”\textsuperscript{67} Even after Levin’s revelations at the end of the novel, he still cannot relate to Koznyshev as he wishes. When discussing the length of Koznyshev’s final visit, the two look at each other “and despite the desire Levin always felt—and now particularly strongly—to be on friendly and most importantly, simple relations with his brother, he felt uncomfortable looking at him.”\textsuperscript{68} In a text where communication through eyes is primary, this inability to share a look indicates a deep breach. Their bond is based entirely on active love, not any natural affinity. In Tolstoy’s kinship-driven world we must love our brother \textit{despite} all obstacles.

\textsuperscript{66}“Das Geschwisterproblem” (quoted in Rank, \textit{The Double}, 75).
\textsuperscript{67}“То, что он хотел сказать, было не понято его братом. Он не знал только, почему это было не понято: потому ли, что он не умел сказать ясно то, что хотел, потому ли, что брат не хотел, или потому, что не мог его понять” (PSS 18:262).
\textsuperscript{68}“и Левин, несмотря на всегдашнее и теперь особенно сильное в нем желание быть в дружеских и главное, простых отношениях с братом, почувствовал, что ему неловко смотреть на него” (PSS 19:384).
As a final note on Levin’s sibling bonds, it is surprising that we are never introduced to his sister. She is mentioned throughout the novel merely as a pretext for Levin’s trips to Moscow (he is responsible for taking care of her affairs), but we never discover where she lives, what she does, or what kind of relationship they shared as children. Thus the Levins remain essentially a family of three brothers to balance the three Shcherbatsky sisters and the Oblonsky sister-brother pair.

Outside of the major families, Tolstoy depicts other varieties of sibling bonds. Vronsky’s is all for show. He lacked true family life growing up, but he still turns over his inheritance to his older brother so that Alexander can marry Varia Chirkova, a penniless Decembrist’s daughter (his mother brags about this generosity to Anna). Their relationship appears to be based more on form than feeling. Their mother uses Alexander as a go-between to express her displeasure about Vronsky’s affair. Alexander is also upset by it, not from any personal aversion, but because “this love was not liked by those whose liking was needed.”69 That their relations are all for outward appearances is made explicit when they meet at the races. Speaking about unpleasant matters, Aleksei Vronsky maintains a smiling countenance so that observers will think he and his brother are joking together. His affection for his sister-in-law, however, appears to be genuine (and she is grateful to him for his giving up his share of the family estate). When Vronsky attempts suicide, Varia is the one who calls for the doctors and she personally stays to care for him. Unlike a half-sibling, who is half-way outside the family, a sibling-in-law has married in and seems to have the potential for greater intimacy.

Even the cold and seemingly self-sufficient Karenin, it turns out, had a brother who was “the closest person to him spiritually.”70 Only late in the novel, when Karenin is feeling

69 “это любовь, не нравящаяся тем, кому нужно нравиться” (PSS 18:184).
70 “самый близкий ему по душе человек” (PSS 19:77).
abandoned after Anna’s desertion, do we learn of his family past. In an easily overlooked passage, the narrator informs us that Karenin grew up an orphan, losing his father when he was too young to remember him and his mother at age ten. He was not close to any of his acquaintances. His beloved brother lived abroad and died shortly after Karenin’s marriage, leaving him alone in the world. This helps account for his susceptibility to Lidia Ivanovna (who in the first draft was actually his sister).71

In addition to instances of emotional support, sibling and familial connections can have more practical benefits. Stiva’s career is built entirely upon family bonds. He received his position through his brother-in-law, Karenin, but had he not gotten it from this connection, he could have received it through “hundreds of different people: brothers, sisters, relations, cousins, uncles, or aunts.”72

The social and financial life of the Oblonsky family is based on its involvement in this web of connections. Stiva is on informal, ‘ty’ relations with persons older and younger than himself, making these ties equal, more like two brothers than father/son. This is a world based on insider-hood that is deeply linked to kinship. When Levin shows up at the club, even the porter at the door knows who his relations are and how he fits into this web of connection. While Anna’s tragedy highlights the false and judgmental sides of “society,” a point made often in the scholarship on the novel and hardly hidden by Tolstoy himself,73 Stiva’s effortless integration remind us of the supportive benefits of inclusion. The Oblonsky siblings represent opposite ends on this spectrum of belonging.
**Svoi vs. Chuzhoi**

The kinship network is connected more generally with the Russian concepts of ‘svoi’ and ‘chuzhoi.’ Richard Gustafson discusses the opposition of “one’s own, native” and “someone else’s, alien,” calling them part of Tolstoy’s “psychological experience.” This opposition is at the heart of *Anna Karenina*. When Dolly first confronts Stiva after the discovery of his infidelity, her worst insult is to accuse him of being “alien”: “You are vile, loathsome, alien [chuzhoi], yes alien to me!—with pain and spite she uttered this word so terrible for her—alien.” Dolly ends the confrontation by reiterating that even if she and Stiva remain in the same house, they will be forever “alien to one another” [chuzhie]. The quarrel is directly followed by the passage in which Tolstoy explains how Stiva got his post through connections, thus contrasting the breach with his wife to the web of svoi on which he relies. He thrives on pleasantries and is loved by all, but has not learned the type of deeper attachment that involves work and sacrifice.

Tracking the words svoi and chuzhoi throughout the novel shows how family expands and is broken. When Levin becomes engaged to Kitty, her father ceases to be chuzhoi to him. Kitty’s sister, Natalie, and her husband now include Levin in discussing their daily plans because with them he is now svoi. Linguistically, becoming family is an expansion of svoi, while breaking family ties creates chuzhie. After Anna tells Karenin of her affair with Vronsky, they become “alien to each other” [чужды друг другу] and Anna tells Vronsky that her husband is “chuzhoi.” Yet even though Anna can sever this bond with her husband, Stiva remains Karenin’s brother-in-law. When Stiva visits Karenin in Moscow, Karenin tries to break this tie,

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74 This opposition is discussed by Karpushina (“The Idea of the Family,” 72).
75 *Resident and Stranger*, 20. The brother could be seen as svoi par excellence, the ultimate emblem of sameness and belonging.
76 “Вы мне мерзки, гадки, чужой, да, чужой!—с болью и злобой произнесла она это ужасное для себя слово чужой” (PSS 18:14).
claiming there cannot be “those familial relations that used to be between us,” but Stiva refuses to accept this. By the time he leaves the visit, Karenin has agreed to come to dinner and the narrator has returned to calling Stiva Karenin’s brother-in-law [шурин].

While this family tie between Karenin and Anna’s sibling remains strong, Anna is unable to create a new home and family of svoi with Vronsky. When Dolly visits them on their estate, she does not like seeing Anna among these people who are ‘alien’ to her, a comment which indicates that a true family has not been created. Dolly is upset to find Anna’s aunt living with them at Vronsky’s expense because in her view, despite Anna’s connection to Vronsky, he is still chuzhoi for Anna’s family. Vronsky tries to include Anna in his own family, but neither his mother nor his sister-in-law will visit her. Even Stiva, who is friends with Vronsky and happily visits the couple, does not consider Vronsky family. When Stiva reencounters Vronsky on the way to war after Anna’s death, he quickly forgets about Vronsky’s connection to Anna, regarding him only as a war hero and old friend (passage cited above). This is a stark opposition to Stiva’s maintenance of Karenin as a brother-in-law after his separation from Anna.

Thus, while her original marriage to Karenin created expanding ties, Anna is not participating in a larger kinship network through her new relationship with Vronsky. This is more important than the fact that they are not legally married. Tolstoy was not writing another Madame Bovary and was not scandalized by the infidelity per se (though he certainly does not condone it). Marriage in Anna Karenina is important for uniting families, not just individuals. This is emphasized again and again through the importance of in-laws. During Levin and Kitty’s wedding, the relations of the future in-laws are frequently referenced, and Tolstoy notes

77 “те родственные отношения, которые были между нами” (PSS 18:398).
78 “чужих для нее людей” (PSS 19:197).
79 A slight complication to this argument is pointed out by Dostoevsky, who observes that Levin and Oblonsky’s relations get worse once they become brothers-in-law (Writer’s Diary Vol. 2, 873). However, Dostoevsky does not take into account the fact that the souring of their relations is unrelated to the change in their kinship status.
that “all of Moscow was at the church, kin and acquaintances,” reminding us that the couple’s marriage is helping weave a wider web of connection.

Of course, in addition to bringing together existing families and making them svoi, marriage’s other key function in the text is the creation of new family: children. Turner argues: “The given bond of literal brotherhood is inescapable, while the unity that is sought in marriage is elusive; it is however, enhanced by the presence of children.” As Valerie Sanders has noted, there is no way to erase a kinship bond, while there are ways to end a romantic relationship or marriage. Tanner also observes that “the familial identifications of daughter and / or sister that are conferred on a female are not inherent qualities, but they are irremovable categorizations by the irreversible fact of consanguinity […] But the category of being a wife is in no sense given […] It is a totally social and cultural arrangement.” Adding a kinship dimension through having children can strengthen these ties, but does not guarantee their sustainability. Dolly remains with Stiva because of their children, though husband and wife become increasingly chuzhie. Anna and Karenin are completely alienated from each other despite the existence of their son. Anna’s daughter by Vronsky does not miraculously turn them into a family (Annie’s illegitimacy may be partially responsible). Only the “inescapable” given of siblinghood offers the security of permanent svoi in the world of the novel.

Characters who lack these bonds do not form families. Varenka, the model of selfless love and caring, has no roots in a family (she lacks both patronymic and family name) and, as in botany, this rootlessness leads to sterility. When first introducing Varenka, Tolstoy writes:

80 “в церкви была вся Москва, родные и знакомые” (PSS 19:21).
81 “Blood is Thicker Than Champagne,” 141.
82 Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature, 1.
83 Adultery in the Novel, 16.
84 Vronsky’s roots also predict what his outcome will be. He inherits his mother’s propensity for adultery and, like her, is unable to create “family life,” even though he does have a child. The child still bears the Karenin name and his not legally Vronsky’s own.
“She was like a beautiful flower which though not yet in full bloom is already beginning to fade and has no scent.” 

Orphaned Varenka is a dependent and companion for Madame Stahl and calls her “Mama,” but Tolstoy shows us no sense of connection or family between the two women. Rather, Varenka carries out services for Madame Stahl which could be performed by any serving maid. While she is essential to many, she is outside of the web of belonging. In this way she resembles Platon, who is attached to none, but loves all with him he comes into contact. She exemplifies the model of non-reciprocal, non-preference based love that radiates out on all, regardless of what it gets back in return. Varenka’s inability to form a fertile romantic attachment and enter family life climaxes in the mushroom hunt where she fails to elicit a proposal from Koznychev.

Varenka’s unusual combination of positive, giving qualities and sterility again beg the question of whether the family situation one is born into predetermines one’s outcome in Anna Karenina. Can Tolstoy’s characters only recreate the type of family from which they sprang? If one lacks siblings, is one doomed to be forever outside of the connection web? While in many aspects of his writing Tolstoy seems to emphasize human agency and the ability to make life choices that impact one’s fate, sibling bonds provide a deterministic element. Casting a shadow on the glowing ideal of universal brotherhood is Tolstoy’s portrayal of only-children and even half-siblings, who can never gain the intimacy of full-blooded brothers who grew up together.

85 “Она была похожа на прекрасный, хотя еще полный лепестков, но уже отцветший, без запаха цветок” (PSS 18:227). This metaphor is quite similar to the “sterile flower” image Tolstoy uses to describe Sonya—another selfless dependent—in War and Peace.

86 She was the daughter of a chef in Madame Stahl’s house, born on the same night as Madame Stahl’s own daughter who died at birth. The two were switched and Madame Stahl began to raise Varenka, not knowing of the switch. After learning the truth, she continued to raise Varenka, because by that time “Varenka had no one left” [ув Вареньки никого не осталось] (PSS 18:231).

87 Kitty will learn from Varenka in a similar way to Pierre learning from Platon.

88 An excellent analysis of this passage is provided by Mandelker, Framing Anna Karenina, 163-178.
Siblings-in-law can provide an additional source of support, but even they are not as stable as true siblings.

“**I Love Her Like a Sister**: Anna and Dolly

There is one case in the novel where a character inside the web perceives the bonds of kinship to have been cut, and the effect is disastrous. This is the story of Anna and Dolly. At the start of the novel the sisters-in-law consider themselves as intimate as two sisters. As Dolly awaits Anna’s initial arrival to discuss the situation with Stiva, Tolstoy emphasizes their family relationship by using the word *zolovka* [sister-in-law] three times in the span of four sentences to describe Anna. Dolly is agitated about Anna’s arrival. “She knew that one way or another, she would tell Anna everything, and her joy at the thought of how she would tell her everything alternated with anger at the need to speak about her humiliation with her, his sister, and to hear ready-made phrases of exhortation and consolation from her.”

Anna, however, does not use these formulaic phrases and provides Dolly with genuine comfort. She helps to bring about a reconciliation, for which Dolly is sincerely grateful.

Anna is a member of this family. Dolly’s children adore her, and when Kitty arrives Anna is totally at home with the Shcherbatskaia sisters. This is a rare moment of three together where no one feels excluded. Packing to leave Moscow after the visit, Anna has a moment of bonding with her sister-in-law. With tears in her eyes, she tells Dolly: “I so wish that you [Dolly and Kitty] would love me as I love you; and now I’ve come to love you still more.”

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89 “Она знала, что так или иначе, она Анне выскажет все, и то ее радовала мысль о том, как она выскажет, то злила необходимость говорить о своем унижении с ней, его сестрой, и слышать от нее готовые фразы увещания и утешения” (PSS 18:72).

90 As Anne Eakin Moss argues, however, this reconciliation is not ideal, and requires Dolly “to subordinate her self to husband and family, not constitute it harmoniously like Natasha” (“Tolstoy’s Politics of Love,” 581).
replies: “Remember this, Anna: I will never forget what you did for me. And remember that I love and will always love you as my best friend!”

This love between the two sisters-in-law is referred to as a standard throughout the novel. When Stiva visits Karenin in Moscow, he tells Karenin that Dolly loves Anna “like a sister” [как сестра]. When Dolly talks to Karenin, she repeats this same phrase. Of all the respectable women in the novel, she is the only one who will visit Anna. Morson sees Dolly as the hero of the novel and he focuses on this visit as one of the most important episodes. The visit pits Dolly’s style of life against Anna’s by showing Anna’s new life through Dolly’s eyes. Both women struggle with feelings of distance and self-consciousness, and Dolly is particularly alienated from Anna when she realizes Anna uses birth control. But at the same time she remains committed to her sister-in-law despite her dislike of much in Anna’s way of life. And Anna admits her greatest fear to Dolly: the fear of being alone. Mandelker writes that “the reader ought not to place too much emphasis on this visit, since the familial relationship between the two women is sufficient to lift the social taboo against private visits between households.” If Mandelker is correct, this diminishes Dolly’s heroism, but at the same time it heightens the kinship bond between the two women. And Vronsky’s sister-in-law will not visit, suggesting that Dolly was indeed being bold.

91 “Я так бы желала, чтобы вы меня любили, как я вас люблю; а теперь я еще больше полюбила вас, — сказала Анна со слезами на глазах” (the you is plural, referring to both Dolly and Kitty). Dolly replies “Помни, Анна: что ты для меня сделала, я никогда не забуду. И помни, что я люблю и всегда буду любить тебя, как лучшего друга!” (PSS 18:105-6). Using the masculine word for friend (drug) is stronger than the feminine “sister.”

92 Anna Karenina in Our Time, 41-48.

93 Herman calls this “Dolly’s flight from sisterly love,” as she returns home and “shields herself from recognizing her rejection of Anna” (“Allowable Passion,” 24). By contrast, I see not rejection, but Tolstoy emphasizing Dolly’s ability to love Anna despite their differences. Moss, who focuses on women’s friendships, believes Dolly is alienated by the “false friends” Anna cultivates “when she enters Vronsky’s high society sphere” (“Tolstoy’s Politics of Love,” 572). I find this unconvincing because Dolly is unaware of Anna’s behavior in St Petersburg (she does not initially even believe in the affair), and Anna was already friends with Betsy before she fell in love with Vronsky.

94 Framing Anna Karenina, 52.
These earlier visits—Anna going to Dolly at the opening of the novel, and Dolly visiting Anna in the middle—contrast with the final visit on the day of Anna’s suicide. Tolstoy pointedly informs us that driving to Dolly’s after her fight with Vronsky, Anna is not feeling suicidal. Just as Dolly prepared to tell Anna everything at the start of the novel, now Anna exhibits parallel readiness for sharing: “Yes, I’ll tell Dolly everything. She doesn’t like Vronsky. It will be shameful, painful, but I will tell her everything. She loves me and I will follow her advice.”

And a little later she thinks “No, I’ll go to Dolly and say to her directly: I’m unhappy, I deserve it, I am guilty, but even so I’m unhappy, help me.” Anne Eakin Moss calls “the bond of women’s friendship” Anna’s “last hope for salvation” as she drives through Moscow. Tolstoy notes that “thinking of the words she was going to say to Dolly, and deliberately chafing her own heart, Anna went up the steps.” Just as Dolly was ready for Anna’s first visit, Anna is now ready to unburden herself to Dolly.

Had she been able to do this, it is possible that the suicide could have been averted. But Anna does not find Dolly alone and ready to receive her; Kitty is there. Instead of encountering her bosom friend waiting with a ready ear, she finds herself the third in the situation, which immediately sets her up to feel excluded. Tolstoy writes: “when Anna arrived the sisters were having a consultation about nursing.” With these words, he makes Kitty and Dolly the sisters

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95 “Да, я скажу Долли все. Она не любит Вронского. Будет стыдно, больно, но я все скажу ей. Она любит меня, и я последую ее совету” (PSS 19:336).
96 “Нет, я войду к Долли и прямо скажу ей: я несчастьна, я стою того, я виновата, но я все-таки несчастна, помоги мне” (PSS 19:337).
98 “Да, я скажу Долли все. Она не любит Вронского. Будет стыдно, больно, но я все скажу ей. Она любит меня, и я последую ее совету.” And a little later she thinks, “Нет, я войду к Долли и прямо скажу ей: я несчастна, я стою того, я виновата, но я все-таки несчастна, помоги мне.” Tolstoy notes that: “Придумывая те слова, в которых она все скажет Долли, и умышленно растрягывая свое сердце, Анна вошла на лестницу” (PSS 19:337).
99 “Между сестрами, в то время как приехала Анна, шло совещание о кормлении” (PSS 19:337). Liza Knapp emphasizes the importance of nursing at this moment: “For all the genuine pity they may feel for the desperate Anna, these Shcherbatsky sisters are ultimately dedicated to the health of baby Mitya—to the preservation of the [Shcherbatsky] species” (“Tue-la! Tue-le!”, 8).
and cuts Anna out of this bond. Anna’s embedment in the world of women was a central idea for Tolstoy. Looking at a white silk stripe on the sleeve of his dressing-gown while working on the novel in 1876, Tolstoy was led to think:

There exists a whole world of women’s work, fashions, concerns that women live by. It must be very enjoyable, and I understood that women could love it and keep themselves occupied with it. And of course immediately my own thoughts (i.e., thoughts for the novel) Anna…And suddenly this stripe gave me a whole chapter. Anna is deprived of the joys of being occupied with this feminine aspect of life, because she is alone, all the women have rejected her and she has no one with whom to talk about everything that makes up the ordinary, purely feminine round of occupations.  

Bearing in mind the first scene when Anna is completely at home with the two Shcherbatskaia sisters, we now sense the isolation Anna experiences. Instead of being nestled in a heap of nieces and nephews with two women who adore her, she is standing in the entryway as the true sisters consult about family life within. Dolly comes out to see Anna alone, and when she goes back to get Stiva’s letter, Anna can hear “the sisters” talking within.

Left alone, Anna questions why she came and recalls how she has been cut off from all decent society. She decides Dolly could not understand her and that there is nothing to be said. The last window for true communication is closed. Anna is cold with the sisters and leaves in a worse state than when she arrived.

John Bayley appreciates the importance of the sense of isolation that ensues:

What crushes Anna most at the end is not, in fact, her sense of the impossibility of life with Vronsky, but her sense of isolation. And the chilling thing is how completely and how casually Dolly and Kitty, who are genuinely attached to her, have come to accept that isolation. It is her sense of being outcast from the kind of society in which she is most naturally at home, and where at the beginning of the book she was at home, that gives Anna her final despair.

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100 Recorded by Tolstoy’s wife in her diary (20 November 1876). Quoted in Turner, Karenina Companion, 48.
101 “Долли ничего не поймет. И мне ничего говорить ей” (PSS 19:338).
102 Tolstoy and the Novel, 227. Anna’s increasing isolation is also discussed by Hruska (“Love and Slavery,” 643).
While agreeing with Bayley’s diagnosis of the cause of Anna’s pain, I would go further in linking it to family and siblinghood. It is her own family Anna now feels cut off from—the ‘sister’ who loved her like a best friend. The casualness Bayley attributes to Dolly seems unjust.103 Dolly is consistently caring, but Anna’s soul is needy at that moment in ways that Dolly could not fathom. She does what she can, even cajoling Kitty to come out to see Anna; she can hardly be blamed that Anna hardened her heart against her the moment she learned of Kitty’s presence. What makes the incident poignant is how helpless and fragile Anna becomes. The idea of Kitty makes Anna’s feelings about herself shift, and she chooses exclusion.

Having suffered this blow, on the ride from Dolly’s, Anna thinks about the impossibility of sharing one’s feelings with another. She is glad not to have confided in Dolly because she now imagines Dolly would have exulted to see Anna punished for pleasures of which Dolly herself was jealous. This negativity spreads, meeting no resistance, and Anna comes to believe that the natural state of relations is hatred and alienation. “Why these churches, this bell-ringing and this lie? Only to hide the fact that we all hate each other.”104 While the visit to Dolly is often either downplayed or treated as another instance of Anna’s senseless jealousy—remembering how Vronsky once liked Kitty—its impact is vast.105 Anna’s last safety-net has failed her.106 This is where her despair becomes complete.

103Mandelker, too, comes down strongly against Dolly, claiming “when Anna most needs her, Dolly lets her down; she feels it more important to counsel Kitty about breast-feeding than to respond to Anna’s obvious distress” (Framing Anna Karenina, 52). Karpushina defends Dolly (“The Idea of Family in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina,” 73).
104“Зачем эти церкви, этот звон и эта ложь? Только для того, чтобы скрыть, что мы все ненавидим друг друга” (PSS 19:340-341).
105Gustafson leaves the visit out in his discussion of the lead-up to Anna’s death (Resident and Stranger). Anthony Piraino sees the importance of Kitty as a rival for Vronsky’s love (A Psychological Study, 121-122).
106Eakin Moss sees broader implications, claiming: “The failure of women’s friendship to save Anna or Dolly goes hand in hand with Tolstoy’s growing mistrust of family life and the novel itself” (“Tolstoy’s Politics of Love,” 581).
Part VIII: The Shift from Literal Siblinghood to the National Scale

Had the core of the novel been romantic love, another classic Bovary adultery tale, it would have ended with Anna’s death at the end of Part VII. Instead, Tolstoy turns to broader philosophical questions in Part VIII. As Vronsky prepares to join the Russian army in defending their “brother Slavs” in Serbia, Tolstoy explores whether “sibling” bonds and the kinship network can be extended to this abstract extreme. Through debate among the family circle at the Levins’, Tolstoy juxtaposes the opposing scales of the masses versus the intimate, the abstract ideal versus the authentic concepts of siblinghood and family.\(^{107}\) Vronsky acts as a transitional figure. Brought up in the Corps of Pages, he was most at home with his regiment. So his decision to rejoin the army and die with them is a return to his brothers as well as a decision to donate his life to a greater cause (and to escape his grief at Anna’s death).

The enthusiasm of the gentry for helping their Slavic brethren is treated by the narrator ironically, exposing the trivial and self-serving underpinnings of this “loving concern.”\(^ {108}\) “Balls, concerts, dinners, speeches, ladies’ dresses, beer, restaurants—everything bore witness to people’s sympathy with the Slavs.”\(^ {109}\) They can continue indulging in their idle pleasures, but now with a feeling of moral satisfaction that they are helping the poor, besieged Serbians.

Koznyshev, who is recovering from the failure of his recent book and looking for a distraction,\(^ {109}\)

\(^{107}\) Hruska notes that Levin’s search for community with the peasants mirrors his search for family happiness with Kitty (“Love and Slavery,” 637).

\(^{108}\) Barbara Lonnqvist argues that through depicting the personal motivations of the characters caught up in the war effort, Tolstoy “unmasks” the “movement of ‘help the Slavs’” (“Role of the Serbian War,” 38). Despite its promising title, her article does not address what I see to be the fundamental philosophical issues raised in Part VIII—the links between kinship and the idea of “brother Slavs,” which would unite the concerns of Part VIII with the rest of the book (her conclusions have to do with realism and the role of the media). Surprisingly, she is also silent on the issue of Russian imperialism.

\(^{109}\) “Балы, концерты, обеды, спичи, дамские наряды, пиво, трактиры—все свидетельствовало о сочувствии к славянам” (PSS 19:352).
becomes swept up in the fervor.\textsuperscript{110} “He saw that there was much that was frivolous and ridiculous; but he saw and recognized the unquestionable, ever growing enthusiasm that united all classes of society, with which it was impossible not to sympathize […] And the heroism of the Serbs and Montenegrins, fighting for a great cause, generated in the whole nation a desire to help their brothers not in word now but in deed.”\textsuperscript{111} The irony in this passage, of course, is the idea that helping one’s brothers should involve going to war and killing total strangers, who also belong to the “brotherhood of mankind.” Any feeling that inspires men to violence is more than suspect in Tolstoy’s world.

What Koznyshev perceives to be a universal feeling, his brother regards as a luxury for the idle upper classes. This ties into an ongoing argument between the two brothers. As Vladimir Alexandrov summarizes it: “Koznyshev argues consistently from the position of a universal ethical imperative, according to which one must want for others what one considers good for oneself,” while Levin believes only in actions motivated by one’s personal interests.\textsuperscript{112} Levin does not believe that “the people” care in the least about their “brothers” in Serbia. They are not caught up in the romantic rhetoric of the upper class. They do not, and should not rationalize about abstract concepts of duty and connection. Levin learns that true good comes from taking care of one’s immediate concerns.

Formerly […] whenever he had tried to do something that would be good for everyone, for mankind, for Russia, for the district, for the whole village, he had noticed that thinking about it was pleasant, but the doing itself was always awkward, there was no full assurance that the thing was absolutely necessary, and the doing itself, which at the start had seemed so big, kept diminishing and diminishing, dwindling to nothing; while now,

\textsuperscript{110} We have seen a similar pattern of false caring for humanity earlier with Madam Stahl, who claims to be the embodiment of Christian goodness, but is shown to be a sham because she does not love her own relations.
\textsuperscript{111} “Он видел, что много тут было легкомысленного и смешного; но он видел и признавал несомненный, все разраставшийся энтузиазм, содвинивший в одно все классы общества, которому нельзя было не сочувствовать […] И геройство сербов и черногорцев, борющихся за великое дело, породило во всем народе желание помочь своим братьям уже не словом, а делом” (PSS 19:353).
\textsuperscript{112} Limits to Interpretation, 154. Alexandrov also notes the irony that Levin is the positively marked character, though his views go against Tolstoy’s own educational undertakings during the writing of Anna Karenina.
after his marriage, when he began to limit himself more and more to living for himself, though he no longer experienced any joy at the thought of what he was doing, he felt certain that his work was necessary, saw that it turned out much better than before and that it was expanding more and more.113

Immediately preceding this passage Tolstoy mentions Levin’s sister and brother’s affairs, “which were in his hands,” thereby contrasting caring for one’s close ones—which Levin takes for granted—with the unnatural idea of caring for an entire nation. As Gustafson has noted: “In Anna Karenina the realm of relatedness is not abstract patriotism [as in War and Peace], but the mediating structure of the family.”114 This inherently implies limits. According to Liza Knapp, neighborly love in Anna Karenina follows set channels (rather than being dispersed, as in Middlemarch). She suggests that after his revelations at the end of the novel, “Levin will love his neighbor rather than throttle him, but the love will trickle down or radiate outward in a controlled way, to family first, with peasants as an extension and even, as Anne Hruska has argued, part of the family.”115 This trickle is directed by the characters’ understanding of the boundaries of self and svoi.

Speaking of the war, Koznyshev claims that “the people heard of their brothers’ suffering and spoke out.” But Levin replies: “Perhaps, but I don’t see that; I myself am the people, and I don’t feel it.”116 Dostoevsky was so upset by this passage that he devoted a chapter of his Writer’s Diary to refuting it and trying to “assure Mr. Levin that there can be such a feeling” and

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113 “Предде [...] когда он старался сделать что-нибудь такое, что сделало бы добро для всех, для человечества, для России, для всей деревни, он замечал, что мысли об этом были приятны, но сама деятельность всегда бывала нескладная, не было полной уверенности в том, что дело необходимо нужно, и сама деятельность, казавшаяся сначала столь большой, все уменьшиваясь и уменьшаясь, сходила на нет; теперь же, когда он после женитьбы стал более и более ограничиваться жизнью для себя, он, хотя не испытывал более никакой радости при мысли о своей деятельности, чувствовал уверенность, что дело его необходимо, и что оно все становится больше и больше” (PSS 19:372).
114 Resident and Stranger, 205.
116 “народ услышал о страданиях своих братий и заговорил […] Может быть, но я не вижу этого; я сам народ, и я не чувствую этого” (PSS 19:388).
that Dostoevsky himself had witnessed it.\textsuperscript{117} In his analysis of the argument between Levin and Koznyshev, Dostoevsky seems to be talking past Tolstoy, rather than engaging with him directly. For Tolstoy, two issues are central: the right to kill a fellow human being—a right which Tolstoy believed no one ever possesses—and the boundaries of “one’s own” that determine the limits of moral responsibility, linking it to the kinship network.\textsuperscript{118}

In Dostoevsky’s critique of Part VIII, he focuses not on the familial dimension of the question of helping Serbs, but instead on the religious aspect. He writes: “It was not the will of the People that showed itself last year, it was their great compassion, in the first place; and in the second place, it was their zeal for Christ; and in the third place, it was their own repentance, as it were” […] “On the people’s part there was a kind of universal, emotional repentance, a longing to take part in something holy, in the cause of Christ, for the sake of those who were zealously bearing His cross.”\textsuperscript{119} This understanding of the people’s actions bypasses the question of family connection all together. Through focusing on the religious roots of their feelings, Dostoevsky negates the need for pan-Slavic brotherhood in order to prompt compassion for the Serbs.

In Tolstoy’s kinship-oriented vision that structures Anna Karenina, however, we cannot love strangers on the other side of the world. The kinship network Tolstoy so lovingly crafts in the novel is his attempted solution to the problem of expanding love in the 1870s. Love expands because we can love our ‘close ones,’ and although there is no concrete limit to how many people this can include, they must still be somehow connected to the self. According to

\textsuperscript{117}Writer’s Diary II, 1095.
\textsuperscript{118}As Morson summarizes the latter half of Tolstoy’s position: “For Tolstoy, morality may be described in terms of concentric circles. We owe our greatest responsibility to our family, then to our neighbors, relatives, or co-workers, then to people in our community, and, only several circles later to people we have never met on the other side of the world; and only beyond that to “Martians.” When someone bids us to do unto others, ask them \textit{which} others. Because time and energy are limited, demand to know unto which others we will consequently do less. Responsibility never entirely evaporates at any distance, but it does diminish. To be precise, it diminishes not with physical but with what might be called \textit{moral distance}.” (Anna Karenina in Our Time, 217).
\textsuperscript{119}Writer’s Diary II, 1087, 1091.
Gustafson, “Tolstoy’s fiction tells one story, the story of the growth or decline of human relatedness, the increase or decrease of love for all in oneself and the world.”

Arguing that in _Anna Karenina_ the self is defined “not in the starker terms of cultural difference, but in the hazier realm of similarity,” Cathy Popkin suggests that the novel looks for ways “to map out a world of relatedness in which one can find one’s place amidst beings that are not starkly different, but nonetheless not the self.” She dismantles the logic—used by Koznyzhev and others—which suggests that because the Serbians have the same religion and are of the same blood (edinokrovtsy) “therefore they are us.” In Popkin’s words, “resemblance” is not equivalent to “sameness.” Siblinghood is central to this process of defining identity through differentiation within similarity. Popkin calls brothers “proximate and similar others, not selves,” much like Mitchell calls the sibling “someone in what initially seems like the same position as oneself.” Through determining their relations to their Serbian brothers, the characters are defining their own identities as well as their frameworks of moral responsibility.

This framework allows for bounded, but expanding love along the lateral, sibling access. In psychoanalytic terms, siblinghood is the first step into the social. In this respect, it is contrasted with romantic love, which can never become social and must be focused on a single individual, creating jealousy when it hints at expansion (a key to Anna’s tragedy). Similarly, Vronsky’s mother feels threatened by Vronsky’s attachment to Anna and sees Anna as a rival for her son’s affection, indicating that the parental bond can also lack the expansive potential of lateral siblinghood (in _Anna Karenina_, siblings never experience jealousy of each others’

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120 _Resident and Stranger_, 205.
121 “Teaching ‘Literature and Empire’: The Case for _Anna Karenina_,” unpublished manuscript (cited with permission of the author).
122 _Siblings_, 46.
123 Tolstoy had no tolerance for Chernyshevsky’s ideas about three-way unions. Paperno notes Tolstoy’s polemic with Chernyshevsky over this issue in Anna’s dream of being married to both of her Alexeis (_Chernyshevsky_, 154).
romantic partners). Through marriages and the creation of in-laws, the web of family can spread to create ever more svoi. This is gradual expansion of love in a concrete form, still restricted to real, physical beings, not based on abstractions like “brotherhood.” It marks the limits to expanding love.

Although Levin does not feel a sense of duty towards strangers in Serbia, he does believe that people have an innate knowledge that they should love each other. “Was it through reason that I arrived at the necessity of loving my close one and not throttling him? I was told it in childhood, and I joyfully believed it, because they told me what was in my soul […] Reason could not discover love for the other, because it’s unreasonable.”124 This love of “close ones” is real and natural for Tolstoy and he never questions its goodness. And I believe that this love begins in the world of Anna Karenina with siblings.

One touching moment conveys to us how this natural instinct is reinforced in childhood. Dolly’s son, Grisha, is being punished by the governess and made to go without dessert. Walking by the nursery, Dolly sees a sight that “brought such joy to her heart that tears appeared in her eyes.”125 Grisha’s sister, Tanya, has brought her cake to the nursery and is sharing it with her brother. Seeing their mother, they are afraid they will get in trouble, but then from her look they understand that they are doing good.126 The instinct to love and care for a sibling is naturally present in the children, but Dolly’s reaction reinforces what they know to be right. This is the kind of love Tolstoy believes in. And this is not a love that can be applied universally.

124 “Разумом, ли, дошел я до того, что надо любить ближнего и не душить его? Мне сказали это в детстве, и я радостно повери, потому что мне сказали то, что было у меня в душе […] А любить другого не мог открыть разум, потому что это неразумно” (PSS 19:379). The word for close one, blizhnego, is the word used in the Russian Bible for “love they neighbor.”
125 “наполнившую такою радостью ее сердце, что слезы выступили ей на глаза” (PSS 18:278).
126 Morson discusses this passage in terms of Dolly’s mothering, but does not mention the sibling component (Anna Karenina in Our Time, 40). Dostoevsky discusses an opposite example from the real life case of the Dzhunkovsky family in his Writer’s Diary (Vol. II, 1047). The Dzhunkovsky parents beat their son for bringing food to his sister.
Having opened Part VIII with the Serbian war—“brotherhood” on a national scale—and the question of abstract family ties, Tolstoy closes the novel with an intimate visit to the nursery. Kitty takes Levin to see how their baby, Mitya, has learned to recognize “his own,” or svoi. Everyone thrills to see the baby’s face light up for his mother but not for an unknown serving woman. Yet in the context of the work as a whole, and particularly in Part VIII, this idyllic scene has troubling implications for the possibility of universal brotherhood. From earliest childhood we are trained and rewarded for recognizing and loving svoi, but by the same token, by having svoi we are also creating a world full of chuzhie.127 Not everyone can be part of the loving family network. In fact, Freud suggests that it is based on having others there to exclude.128

Tragedy, in Anna Karenina, comes from finding oneself suddenly cut off. This can be a mere matter of contingency. An unexpected visitor at Dolly’s is enough to make Anna feel desperately alone, while in reverse, a chance vision of Kitty in a carriage reawakens Levin’s ideal of family life. Amidst the instability and chance, siblings are the most stable relations on which to build one’s sense of belonging and common purpose. In Anna Karenina, Tolstoy’s answer to the big questions about abstract concepts of duty and brotherhood is found in the private sphere of the home and nursery where true family life exists. In War and Peace, the closing scenes of domestic intimacy hold a promise for continuing family happiness. In Resurrection, the final domestic image of mother and child whom Nekhlyudov visits represents a rejected earlier ideal.

127 Gina Kovarsky links this passage to Anna’s fate, as she is excluded because she “fails to conform.” She links this to a broader pedagogical message about our similarity to the people we judge (“Moral Education of the Reader,” 171).
128 “It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness” (Civilization and its Discontents, 114). In her analysis of the nursery passage, Popkin draws together the personal and national scales on which this principle of discrimination operates in Anna Karenina. She focuses not on Mitya’s experience of belonging, but on Levin’s need to love Mitya, rather than his Serbian “brothers” (“Teaching ‘Literature and Empire’”).
At the time Tolstoy composed *Anna Karenina*, he was somewhere between these two outlooks. Struggling increasingly with existential questions, he was coming to view family love in direct opposition to universal brotherhood. Turner argues that earlier in Tolstoy’s career “mutual understanding and mutual sympathy” were paramount for him, but then “unity of purpose” became more important.¹²⁹ Tolstoy now sought universal moral truths to sustain him in a world whose flaws and vices seemed increasingly apparent.¹³⁰ This search provides the fuel for Levin’s plotline, which dominates the conclusion of the novel. Like Tolstoy, “Levin himself finds the family ideal insufficient for the achievement of a sense of real purpose in life, and the novel gradually charts a course towards his and Tolstoy’s realisation of this.”¹³¹ *Anna Karenina* is the stepping stone between the idealized portrayal of family in *War and Peace* and rejection of this ideal in *The Kreutzer Sonata* or the abstract ideal of brotherhood in *Resurrection*.¹³² As we will see in the next chapter, Dostoevsky went in the opposite direction. Claiming that Tolstoy’s ideal family no longer existed in Russia, Dostoevsky depicted the broken or “accidental” family. Beginning from family breakdown, his characters seek ways to rebuild kinship ties.

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¹²⁹ “Blood is Thicker than Champagne,” 129.
¹³⁰ Slade notes: “Even the finest family love as exemplified by Levin’s love for Kitty—as well as Anna’s disastrous but genuine passion for Vronsky—is insufficient to give purpose to life” (“Family Ideal,” 86).
¹³¹ Slade, “Family Ideal,” 87.
¹³² This trajectory is discussed by Slade (“Family Ideal,” 84).
In the last decade of his life, Dostoevsky became fixated on the interrelationship between the breakdown of the Russian family and of Russian society. One scholar has called the final three novels of the 1870s and the *Writer’s Diary* “one long work about Russia’s spiritual progress as reflected in its decaying families.”¹ In a famous entry of the *Diary* from January, 1876, Dostoevsky proclaims: “For a long time now I have had the goal of writing a novel about children in Russia today, and about their fathers too, of course, in their mutual relationship of today […] I will take fathers and children from every level of Russian society I can and will follow the children from their earliest childhood.”² In addition to this intergenerational theme that Dostoevsky openly advertised, each of the works in this chapter—*Demons* (1872, also translated as *The Possessed* or *Devils*), *The Adolescent* (1875, also translated as *A Raw Youth*), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880)—can be seen to make a statement about the need for positive lateral bonds. While broken parent-child relations provide the darkness Dostoevsky is so famous for depicting, among these failed verticals is a network of sibling bonds that offer a glimmer of light.

**PART I**

**DEMONS: THE FAILURE OF FRATERNİTÉ**

Dostoevsky was drawn to the project that became *Demons* not by its literary potential, but by the pressing contemporary issues he wished to address. Written from self-imposed exile in Dresden, *Demons* was Dostoevsky’s desperate attempt to diagnose the disease he saw plaguing his longed-for homeland. In a letter to Nikolai Nikolaeivich Strakhov (March 24/April 5, 1870),

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¹ Gary Saul Morson, Introduction to *Writer’s Diary 1*, 101.
² *Writer’s Diary 1*, 302; PSS 22:7.
he explained: “I wish to speak out about several matters even if it destroys my artistry. What attracts me is what has piled up in my mind and heart; even if only a pamphlet comes out of it, I shall speak out.”

At the core of the novel is Dostoevsky’s artistic reworking of the Nechaev affair in which the revolutionary Sergei Nechaev incited a group of students to kill another member of their circle, Ivan Ivanov (November 21, 1869). **Demons** is Dostoevsky’s darkest and most explicit depiction of the failure of parents, but it is also a tale of fratricide. It exposes the false path of the socialist revolutionaries, whose theories created not brotherhood, but subjugation of their brothers.

**The Failure of the Fathers**

*Demons* was intended to update Turgenev’s highly influential *Fathers and Sons* (1862) in depicting the conflict of the generation of the 1840s Romantic idealists and 1860s nihilists. The novel would not only show the breakdown in relations between the generations, but also the responsibility of the older generation for the direction in which their children’s ideas developed. In a letter to A. A. Romanov, Dostoevsky claimed: “Our Belinskys and Granovskys would not believe it if you told them that they were the true fathers of the Nechaevs. It is precisely this kinship and close development of thought going from fathers to children that I want to express in my work.”

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3 “хочется высказать несколько мыслей, хотя бы погибла при этом моя художественность. Но меня увлекает накопившееся в уме и в сердце; пусть выйдет хотя памфлет, но я выскажусь” (PSS 29.1:112); quoted in Frank, *Miraculous Years*, 403.


5 For an excellent discussion of this theme in Dostoevsky, see Susanne Fusso, *Discovering Sexuality*, 101-118 (esp. 102).

6 “Наши Белинские и Грановские не поверили бы, если б им сказали, что они прямые отцы Нечаева. Вот эту родственность и преемственность мысли, развившейся от отцов к детям, я и хотел выразить в произведении моем” (PSS 29.1:250). Quoted in Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky*, 112. As Mochulsky notes of Stavrogin:
The social matrix in *Demons* follows directly from this aim. The text opens and closes with its universal father—Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, a classic forties idealist. Stepan Trofimovich is not only the legal, if not biological father (his wife was known to have affairs) of the debased revolutionary Pyotr Stepanovich—a failed father who sent his child away, took no part in his upbringing, and then stole from him—he is also the spiritual father of all the young people in the novel. At the time the narration begins, Stepan Trofimovich regularly holds evenings at his home where he expounds his ideas to a receptive (slightly drunken) young audience. He also served as a tutor for Nikolai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin, Ivan and Darya Shatov, and Lizaveta Nikolaevna Tushina at various points in their childhoods. Given their shared progenitor, I will treat the members of the younger generation as metaphorical siblings.

The type of relationship Stepan Trofimovich formed with his students is indicative of the education these young people received from him. Being “a child himself,” he became friends with the young Stavrogin. “More than once he awakened his ten or eleven-year-old friend at night only to pour out his injured feelings in tears before him, or to reveal some domestic secret to him, not noticing that this was altogether inadmissible. They used to throw themselves into each other’s embrace and weep.” Commenting on this passage, Frank diagnoses the roots of Stavrogin’s future despondency: “The tutor communicated all his own moral uncertainty and

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7 Fusso notes that while other abandoned children in Dostoevsky find surrogate parents or siblings, Pyotr Verkhovenskii has neither, “and this may account for the fact of his almost unalloyed evil” (*Discovering Sexuality*, 108).

8 The narrator claims that Stepan Trofimovich “took a fatherly attitude towards us all” [вообще ко всем нам относился отечески] (PSS 10:29).

9 “Он не раз пробуждал своего десяти- или одиннадцатилетнего друга ночью, единственно чтоб излить пред ним в слезах свои оскорбленные чувства или открыть ему какой-нибудь домашний секрет, не замечая, что это совсем уже непозволительно” (PSS 10:35). R. M. Davison argues that Stavrogin is “a Romantic alive at the wrong time,” making him of the same generation as Stepan Trofimovich. He claims that Stavrogin cannot be part of the conflict of generations (which exists between Pyotr and Stepan Verkhovensky): “he is so closely identified with his ‘intellectual father’ Stepan Trofimovich, even though he is the same age as his ‘intellectual brother’ Pyotr, whom he comes to oppose” (“The Devils,” 100).
instability to his unfortunate pupil without providing anything positive to counteract their unsettling effects, and the result was to leave an aching emptiness at the center of Stavrogin’s being.”

Similar scenes of the tutor throwing himself in his pupil’s arms and weeping together are recounted by Liza. Reencountering Stepan Trofimovich as a young adult with her suitor, Mavriky Nikolaevich, Liza exclaims:

You see, I remember all your lectures by heart. Mavriky Nikolaevich, how he taught me then to believe en Dieu, qui est si grand et si bon! […] And do you remember describing to me how poor emigrants were transported from Europe to America? It was all untrue, I learned it all later, how they were transported, but how well he lied to me then, Mavriky Nikolaevich, it was almost better than the truth!

The teacher was not a source of truth, but of sentiment. To Stavrogin, Stepan Trofimovich bequeathed emptiness, to Liza a romantic sensibility. After destroying herself for a night with Stavrogin, she claims: “my heart was brought up in the opera,” and in a similarly romantic vein, she continues: “I’ve traded my life for a single hour, and I’m at peace.”

This whimsical, self-destructive outlook is the legacy of Stepan Trofimovich, though for him it was a mere matter of rhetoric whereas Liza actually acts upon it.

Complementing Stepan Trofimovich’s weakness as a teacher and authority figure, Dostoevsky sets up a pattern of parents who are scared of and held subordinate to their children. Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina “was obviously afraid” of Nikolai Vsevolodovich and “seemed like a slave before him.” Praskovia Ivanovna Drozdova is an even weaker parent. “Like Stepan

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10 *Miraculous Years*, 478.
11 PSS 10:87.
12 “Видите, я все ваши лекции наизусть помню. Маврикий Николаевич, какую он мне тогда веру преподавал en Dieu, qui est si grand et si bon! […] А помните, как вы мне описывали, как из Евромы в Америку бедных эмигрантов перевозят? И всё-то неправда, я потом всё узнала, как перевозят, но как он мне хорошо лгал тогда, Маврикий Николаевич, почти лучше правды!” (PSS 10:87).
13 “мое сердце в опере воспитывалось;” “я разочала мою жизнь на один только час и спокойна” (PSS 10:400, 401).
14 “очевидно боялась его и казалась пред ним словно рабой” (PSS 10:38).
Trofimovich, this irritable but sentimental lady was in constant need of true friendship, and her chief complaint against her daughter Lizaveta Nikolaevna was precisely that ‘her daughter was not her friend.’”¹⁵ Unable to exert control over her daughter, she rather “withered under her daughter’s flashing eyes.”¹⁶ Stepan Trofimovich is similarly ruled by Pyotr Stepanovich. Pyotr Stepanovich writes to his father once a year or less, but recently “Petrusha’s letters looked decidedly like those letters of instruction that old-time landowners used to send from the capital to the house-serfs appointed to manage their estates.”¹⁷

In each of these cases, hierarchy is reversed and debased, rather than equality being created. While Dostoevsky thirsted for positive lateral bonds, he understood the need for children to have someone higher to whom they could look up. In his *Writer’s Diary*, Dostoevsky explained to fathers what they mean to their children:

Their small, childish souls demand uninterrupted and constant contact with your parental souls; they demand that spiritually you should always be on a pedestal for them, so to say, as an object of love, of great and genuine respect and beautiful imitation. Learning is one thing, but for his children a father should always be like a good, conspicuous example of all the moral conclusions their hearts and minds derive from their learning.¹⁸

This is a different model than the Rostov family “eggs teaching the hen” that Tolstoy admired.¹⁹ Dostoevsky put greater emphasis on the pedagogy and authority aspects of active and present parenting than the orphaned Tolstoy (whose father was distant even while still alive).²⁰ Dostoevsky would also create a family with greater equality between parents and children in the

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¹⁵ “дочь ей не друг” (PSS 10:54).
¹⁶ “осела пред засверкавшим взглядом дочки” (PSS 10:131).
¹⁷ “письма Петруши решительно имели вид тех старинных предписаний прежних помещников из столиц их дворовым людям, поставленным ими в управляющие из имений” (PSS 10:64). Since their first meeting in St Petersburg, they had been on informal relations (the current fashion [по-модному]).
¹⁸ *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1056. Interestingly, like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky did not seem to feel the need to explicitly define what sibling love was in this way.
¹⁹ Count Rostov says this proudly of Natasha when she convinces her mother to unload their carts to take the wounded soldiers from Moscow (see Chapter One).
²⁰ The substitute parent-figures Tolstoy sought, like Aunt Toinette, filled a more maternal, nurturing role, rather than a paternal, pedagogical one.
Snegiryovs of *The Brothers Karamazov* (discussed below), but that family is bound by disabilities that brought forth a depth of love and sentimentality not to be expected of all families.

**In Search of *Demons*’ Sibling Bonds**

While response to *Demons* has naturally focused on the relations between generations, the burning question I see the novel raising is about the relations *among the children* of the new generation. What kind of society can be built on lateral bonds within this new band of brothers? Each of the philosophies put forward by the characters is at some level an attempt to answer this question. Must they recreate hierarchy and raise someone to the level of father? Or can a band of brothers operate communally and fare better than the hierarchically based society they inherited?

Dostoevsky is famous for the duality of his thought—seeing the duality-in-unity [dvuedinstvo] between faith and disbelief, virtue and sin, good and evil. His vision of brotherhood similarly encompasses two antinomial models: Old Testament Cain and Abel and the New Testament brotherhood in Christ. In *Demons*, which offers few moments of spiritual union, the failure to be one’s brother’s keeper is everywhere apparent. Lebyadkin’s speech when he comes to extricate his sister, Marya Timofeevna, from Varvara Petrovna’s parlor might even be taken as a veiled reference to the biblical quotation:

> “Madam, I have come to thank you for the generosity you displayed on the church porch, as a Russian, as a brother…”
> “As a brother?”

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21 Support for this can be found in Susanne Fusso’s observation that in Dostoevsky’s last three novels “the center of attention becomes the sins of the sons, not the fathers” (*Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky*, 109).

22 Ksana Blank provides an excellent summary of the three approaches to Dostoevsky’s dual vision and then offers a new synthesizing approach in *Dostoevsky’s Dialectics* (see esp. 3-7).
“I mean, not as a brother, but solely in the sense that I’m my sister’s brother, madam” [...] 

Lebyadkin’s dative construction—ia brat moei sestre—parallels the construction used in Genesis 4:9—razve ia storozh bratu moemu, though the comic nature of his remark weakens the connection. In this utterance, he denies his common Christian brotherhood with Varvara Petrovna out of embarrassment at his lower social standing. Like his biblical predecessor, Lebyadkin is also failing in his role as brother to his blood sibling. He openly acknowledges that he used to live off the money Marya Timofeevna made as a cleaner, he stole her out of her convent in order to use her pension, and he engages in frequent drunken beatings of her. Marya, for her part, harbors no sisterly feelings. When Shatov asks her about her brother, she replies: “You mean Lebyadkin? He’s my lackey,” essentially nullifying their sibling relationship. She goes on: “It makes no difference to me whether he’s here or not. I shout at him: ‘Lebyadkin, fetch water, Lebyadkin, bring my shoes,’ and off he runs. I sin sometimes thinking how funny he is.”

This is the siblinghood of the destitute, crippled, alcoholic dregs of society. Rather than outpourings of tenderness to soften their misery (the kind of scenes found in Romantic novels or in the Snegiryov household), these siblings pour salt in each other’s wounds. They are each other’s source of shame—Lebyadkin because he cannot openly announce his sister’s marriage and the reason he receives money for her, and Marya because she knows her brother is a scoundrel, not worthy to be kin to her “prince.” In one telling exchange, Lebyadkin and Shatov

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23 “—Сударыня, я приехал отблагодарить за выказанное на паперти великодушие по-русски, по-братски… —По-братски?” (PSS 10:138).
24 “Это ты про Лебядкина? Он мой лакей.” (PSS 10:115). This comment has resonance with Alyosha’s claim: “The lackey killed him [Fyodor Pavlovich], my brother is innocent,” another moment where siblinghood (Smerdyakov) is negated through demoting the brother to lackey status (passage discussed below).
25 “И совсем мне всё равно, тут он или нет. Я ему крикну: «Лебядкин, принеси воды, Лебядкин, подавай башмаки», — он и бежит; иной раз согрешишь, смешно на него станет” (PSS 10:115). Shatov confirms that this disrespectful treatment is the reality, despite the beatings Marya receives.
attack each other through insulting each other’s sisters, Lebyadkin calling Dasha a slave and Shatov accusing him of selling Marya.

The other main blood-siblings in the novel, Darya Pavlovna and Ivan Pavlovich Shatov, share almost no connection. Dasha first appears in the novel in a passing reference to how “rare and distant” Shatov’s communications were with his sister. Although the fact of their siblinghood is frequently noted (often as a way to define one or the other), the pair almost never communicate during the novel and multiple characters note that they do not resemble one another.26 Other sibling pairs appear throughout the novel—Shigalyov is the brother of Virginsky’s wife, Karamzinov is staying at the home of his absent sister, Kirilov is open with the narrator because he is reminded of his dead brother—but there is no emphasis on the kinship that derives from this bond. Blood siblinghood has been essentially rendered an empty marker of identity. Perhaps because the siblings care so little about each other, they fail as “keepers,” but seem immune to Cain and Abel style rivalry and jealousy.

Beyond the failures of literal siblinghood, the clearest illustration of the state of “brothers” coming together occurs at the meeting of the socialist revolutionaries on Virginsky’s name day. The social and psychological dynamics are essential to analyzing this scene because these indicate “our people’s” ability to be together, and in turn the practical implications of their theories about unity. A look at their interactions quickly undermines the ideals of socialism.27 As Edward Wasiolek eloquently describes the meeting:

They have gathered to preach the gospel of social harmony and the universal love of man, and they hate each other intensely and fall into chaotic disharmony over trifles. They are the flower of the town’s liberalism, and never has Dostoevsky exposed more ruthlessly

26 At least they are open with each other and Shatov is even angered by the idea that he might have believed Darya was having an affair with Stavrogin.
27 In his Writer’s Diary (January 1877), Dostoevsky refers to French socialism as “something false and desperate” (Writer’s Diary 2, 827).
the contradiction between the abstract love of humanity men carry in their heads and the reality of their petty wills and vicious actions.\textsuperscript{28}

The real test in Dostoevsky’s fiction is always how an idea is embodied in our world, and thus the socialists’ inability to be in harmony with each other is the most damning mark against their social vision. They are lost until Pyotr Stepanovich steps up and takes charge, and then they are only too happy to submit their wills to his.

According to Berdiaev: “Just as freedom wrongly understood loses itself in tyranny, so a false equality develops into an unheard-of inequality and the despotic supremacy of a privileged minority. Dostoievsky was always of the opinion that, since they relied on an idea of absolute equality, revolutionary democracy and socialism would eventually result in the control of mankind at large by a handful of people.”\textsuperscript{29} This is Shigalyovism. “I got entangled in my own data,” Shigalyov informs the meeting, “and my conclusion directly contradicts the original idea from which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I conclude with unlimited despotism.”\textsuperscript{30} In his system, “one tenth is granted freedom of person and unlimited rights over the remaining nine tenths. These must lose their personality and turn into something like a herd, and in unlimited obedience, through a series of regenerations, attain to primeval innocence, something like the primeval paradise—though, by the way, they will have to work.”\textsuperscript{31} This is the forerunner to the Grand Inquisitor’s society, where it is not one tenth, but one man who stands at the head of the docile masses. Dostoevsky understood that the band of brothers cannot exist in equality without

\textsuperscript{28} Dostoevsky, 116.
\textsuperscript{29} Berdiaev, Dostoievsky, 84.
\textsuperscript{30} “Я запутался в собственных данных, и мое заключение в прямом противоречии с первоначальной идеей, из которой я выхожу. Выходя из безграничной свободы, я заключаю безграничным деспотизмом” (PSS 10:311).
\textsuperscript{31} “Одна десятая доля получает свободу личности и безграничное право над остальными девятью десятymi. Те же должны потерять личность и обратиться вроде как в стадо и при безграничном повиновении достигнут рядом перерождений первобытной невинности, вроде как бы первобытного рая, хотя, впрочем, и будут работать” (PSS 10:312).
something above them. When there is no God in that place, man will take his place, and the result is inevitably despotism.

_Demons_ explores what happens when, scorning their weak parents, the young generation rejects God the father and in his place tries to make their brother into God. All the characters in the younger generation are desperate for something to believe in, and Stavrogin, with a mask for a face, is a screen onto which they can project all their desires for someone higher and more authoritative. Stavrogin himself is empty and convictionless. He rejects each idea once it has been firmly lodged in another being. This is a warped version of lateral transfer from brother to brother, in which the ideas to be propagated are aborted visions. At one and the same time, Stavrogin taught Shatov Russian messianism and Kirilov the bitterest nihilism. These ideas then grew in their new owners, or as Stavrogin tells Shatov: “you took it ardently, and have altered it without noticing.”

Through making Stavrogin “the sun,” the “chief,” his “brothers” again create the inequality they were wishing to escape. Tortured by this, Shatov begs Stavrogin to “speak in a human voice.” He cannot tear Stavrogin out of his heart, and Stavrogin cannot love him; there is nothing mutual in this relationship. Kirilov, on the other hand, turned Stavrogin’s thinking into a belief that through taking his own life, he would become the man-God, and consequently he no longer has any need of Stavrogin. Therefore, he is the one person in the novel with any influence over his former teacher. Pyotr Verkhovensky is also in a vertical power relation with Stavrogin (which is mirrored by the other revolutionaries’ relationship to him). He has both

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32 Mochulsky writes of the four men around Stavrogin—Shatov, Kirilov, Pyotr Verkhovensky, and Shigalyov: “They all live by his life; they are his ideas, which have received independent existence” (_Dostoevsky_, 435).
33 “вы пламенно приняли и пламенно переиначили, не замечая того” (PSS 10:199). There have been numerous excellent studies of the philosophies Shatov and Kirilov absorbed from Stavrogin, so I will not analyze these philosophies here. See for example: Frank, _Miraculous Years_, 470, 482-3; Mochulsky, _Dostoevsky_, 444-451; Wasiolek, _Dostoevsky_, 120-131.
34 “Оставьте ваш тон и возьмите человеческий” (PSS 10:195).
35 Kirilov’s philosophy and its links with Feuerbach are discussed by Carter, _Political and Social Thought_, 169.
inherited Stavrogin’s aborted ideas and fashioned his own Stavrogin who fits back into those ideas. As he ultimately confesses: “I’ve been inventing you since abroad.” Keeping himself subordinate so as not to “compromise Stavrogin with comradeship,” he wants his master [хозяин] to be at the head of a revolutionary movement as an Ivan Tsarevich. He has made the empty Stavrogin into an imposter—an ideal that gains power through its very emptiness and the consequent possibility of filling it at any moment with different potentials.

None of these relationships between the members of the younger generation represent true brotherhood. In fact, Demons is notable among Dostoevsky’s works for the absence of this ideal. The word “brotherhood” appears only twice in the novel, both times as part of the French revolutionary slogan: “Liberté, égalité, fraternité” (once in Russian translation, once in French).

In his Writer’s Diary, Dostoevsky explains his disgust at the French conception of fraternité:

> With the end of the revolution (after Napoleon I) there were fresh attempts to express new aspirations and new ideals. The most advanced minds understood all too well that this had only been despotism in a new form and that all that had happened was “ôte toi de là que je m’y mette”; that the new conquerors of the word, the bourgeoisie, turned out to be perhaps even worse than the previous despots, the nobility; that Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité proved to be only a ringing slogan and nothing more.

This “despotism in a new form” characterizes the false “brotherhood” of Demons. The word first appears in a crude revolutionary tract, “The Shining Personality” [Светлая личность]. In the poem, a student appears before the people to prophesize [вещать] “brotherhood, equality, and freedom” [Братство, равенство, свободу]. What he is really calling for is destruction and vengeance against “the church, marriage, and family—the old world of evil.”

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36 “Я вас с заграницы выдумал” (PSS 10:326).
37 *Writer’s Diary 1*, 510.
38 Dostoevsky wrote as a parody of Nikolai Ogaryov’s poem, “The student.” Ogaryov dedicated the poem to Nechaev when it was printed as a tract. See footnote 5 to p. 351 in the English translation (Vintage, 2006, 726).
39 The word order is probably switched to facilitate the rhyme scheme.
In a later *Writer’s Diary* entry, Dostoevsky goes further with his dismantling of French *fraternité*, beginning with a sentence that he would ultimately reuse in *The Brothers Karamazov* (in the speech of Zosima’s mysterious visitor, Mikhail):

> If there were brothers, then there would be brotherhood. If there are no brothers, then you will not achieve brotherhood through any sort of ‘institutions.’ What sense is there in setting up an institution and inscribing on it: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*? You will achieve nothing at all worthwhile here through an ‘institution,’ so that it will be necessary—absolutely, inescapably necessary—to add to these three ‘institutional’ words a fourth *ou la mort, fraternité ou la mort*—and brother will set forth to chop the head off brother so as to achieve brotherhood by means of this ‘civic institution.’

This passage exactly describes the way the French slogan appears in *Demons*. When Kirilov writes his suicide note taking credit for the murder of Shatov—who had been like a brother to him in America—he “delightedly” adds “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité ou la mort!*” below his signature. The crime at the heart of the novel is the brothers’ murder of their brother; Freud’s band of brothers has been lateralized; French revolutionary *fraternité* is revealed to be nothing other than fratricide.

**The Rejection of Family**

Not only is brotherhood absent in *Demons*, the whole idea of family is brought under assault. None of the biological families in the novel offer a positive model of caring and support. In a telling exchange between Lebyadkin, who wants to keep receiving money for his sister, and his brother-in-law Stavrogin, who is preparing to make his marriage public and cut Lebyadkin off, Lebyadkin claims: “After all, I’m your relation,” to which Stavrogin replies: “People run from such relations.”

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41 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1319.
42 PSS 10:473.
43 “Да ведь я же родственник,” “От таких родственников бегут” (PSS 10:211).
The socialists see no place for family in the future order. According to the female student at their meeting (who represents the worst of their ideology), family rights are an old superstition, like primitive man’s belief that thunder and lightning came from vengeful gods. She questions where family came from and is horribly offended when Stavrogin mocks her by claiming that “the answer to such a question would be immodest.” He makes family into pure biology; she makes it into an outdated social convention. Rejecting her uncle’s claims on her based on having cared for her as an infant, she snaps: “What do I care what you used to tote around? I didn’t ask you to tote me around, which means, mister impolite officer, that you yourself got pleasure from it. And allow me to remark that you dare not use the informal thou [ты] with me, unless it’s from civic feeling, and that I forbid it once and for all.”

Dostoevsky presents the socialists’ rejection of family as comically ignorant and misguided. The female student misquotes Exodus 20:1-17 so that it suggests that one should honor one’s father and mother in order to be granted long life and wealth, and from that concludes: “If God found it necessary to offer a reward for love, it means your God is immoral.” In attempting to correct her, a local high school student makes the equally ridiculous claim: “About the commandment: ‘Honor thy father and mother,’ which you didn’t

44 “ответ на такой вопрос нескромен” (PSS 10:306).
45 “Какое мне дело, что бы вы там ни таскали. Я вас тогда не просила таскать, значит, вам, господин неучтивый офицер, самому тогда доставляло удовольствие. И позвольте мне заметить, что вы не смеете говорить мне ты, если не от гражданства, и я вам раз навсегда запрещаю” (PSS 10:306).
46 “Если бог нашел необходимым за любовь предлагать награду, стало быть, ваш бог безнравствен” (PSS 10:307). The significance of characters’ misquotations of the Bible (in the context of The Brothers Karamazov) is discussed by Thompson (Poetics of Memory, 15). Meerson also argues that “when Dostoevsky cites or stylizes the Scriptures directly, without transforming either the style or the context, he aims much less at conveying a pious message, or correlating his message with that of the Bible, than when he actually ‘distorts’ the style of the Biblical intertext or alters its context” (Dostoevsky’s Taboos, 188).
know how to recite, and its being immoral—since Belinsky everyone in Russia has known that.”

The romantic conception of family is equally discredited in Demons. Stepan Verkhovensky, who failed on all fronts as a father, still imagines emotional scenes of reunion with his son. Similarly, the novel Von Lembke is writing ends with a exaltation of family happiness. Pacifying von Lembke with flattery that he crudely disguises, Pyotr Stepanovich exclaims: “What is it you’re pushing there? Why it’s the same old deification of family happiness, of the multiplying of children, of capital, and they lived happily ever after, for pity’s sake! You’ll charm the reader, because even I couldn’t tear myself away, but so much the worse.” Von Lembke’s novel is presenting family as Tolstoy and Turgenev viewed it. But for Dostoevsky, this romantic view of the 1840s generation was outdated and had been replaced by something far more sinister.

A World Without Love

Happy families are an impossibility in Demons because love does not exist. Parents need their children as sources of selfish pride; children are ready to throw off their parents. There are no well-functioning marital couples. In lieu of romantic love, Dostoevsky offers cerebral discussion about the place love should have held. The book leads up to an amorous liaison between Liza and Stavrogin, but when the climactic moment finally comes, it is over.

47 “О заповеди: «Чти отца твоего и матерь твою», которую вы не умели прочесть, и что она безнравственна, — уже с Белинского всем в России известно” (PSS 10:308). Dostoevsky could not forgive Belinsky for his words against Christ (see: Frank, Miraculous Years, 420).
48 “Ведь вы что проводите? Ведь это то же прежнее обоготворение семейного счастья, приумножения детей, капиталов, стали жить-поживать да добра наживать, помилуйте! Читателя очаруете, потому что даже я оторваться не мог, да ведь тем сквернее” (PSS 10:271).
49 The one major exception is Shatov’s love for his returned wife, Marie, but this love is quickly extinguished by his murder.
before it began. The narration is framed such that all we see is the conversation between the two “lovers” the morning after. There is nothing in their speech but cold, impersonal rationalism. Liza tells Stavrogin: “At least our pride doesn’t suffer.” Brushing aside his half-hearted suggestion that they move to Switzerland together, she coolly reminds him: “If we were to go, it should be to Moscow, to pay calls there and receive people—that’s my ideal, you know [...] Since it’s not possible for us to go to Moscow and pay calls, because you’re married, there’s no point in talking about it.” Stavrogin ultimately admits that he knew Liza would leave him the next day.

We see hints here of what Florovsky describes as the danger of “unfree love” in Dostoevsky, which is not really love at all. “Unfree love degenerates into passion, it becomes the basis of enslavement and violence, both for the beloved and for the lover.” Stavrogin and Liza seem to have been acting not entirely by free will; both knew their liaison was doomed, yet proceeded as if compelled. Afterward, they speak dispassionately, and behind their words is Stavrogin’s awareness that his wife and brother-in-law have probably been murdered for the sake of this “love.” His tacit complicity in their murders unsettles him, but does not deter him from pursuing his passing passion.

The other great love affair of the novel that does not happen is that between Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Petrovna. Instead, the couple has a twenty year “romantic friendship,” (to draw on the terminology of Chapter Two). In Mochulsky’s words: “the knight-romantic’s

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50 Some critics read this as a case of literal, physical impotence (for example: Carter, Political and Social Thought, 170). I am not convinced by this, given Liza’s comment afterward that she traded her life for a single hour and is “at peace.” Instead, I see Stavrogin’s impotence on a spiritual plane. Tikhon refers to him as “lukewarm,” a reference to Revelation 3:16.
51 “Если ехать, то в Москву, и там делать визиты и самим принимать—вот мой идеал, вы знаете […] Так как нам невозможно ехать в Москву и делать визиты, потому что вы женаты, так и нечего о том говорить” (PSS 10:399).
52 “Несвободная любовь вырождается в страсть, становится началом порабощения и насилия,— и для любимого, и для влюбленного” (“Religioznye temy Dostoevskogo,” 387).
chief love was his twenty-year-long platonic feeling for Varvara Petrovna, composed of habit, vanity, egoism, and the most lofty and sincere attachment.”53 This is a balanced assessment, although I would question how purely platonic Stepan Trofimovich’s feelings are, as he admits on several occasions to being in love with Varvara Petrovna. And she in turn seems to fluctuate between fury at his impotence in not turning their “friendship” into a romance, and offence at his timid hints in that direction.

While Stepan Trofimovich focuses on the poetic sentiments of the attachment, his son focuses cruelly on the “vanity and egoism,” breaking down the relationship and removing love from it altogether. “I proved to her like two times two that you’d been living for your mutual profit: she as a capitalist, and you as her sentimental clown.”54 Polluted by Pyotr Verkhovensky’s rhetoric, or perhaps emboldened by it, Varvara Petrovna tells Stepan Trofimovich: “You and these twenty years of ours! Twenty years of reciprocal self-love, and nothing more. Your every letter to me was written not for me but for posterity. You’re a stylist, not a friend, and friendship is merely a glorified word, essentially a mutual outpouring of slops…”55 I believe Varvara Petrovna is ashamed that the object of her love does not live up to her standards and therefore attempts to deny this love in herself and to leave their relations intentionally unfinalized. Only after Stepan Trofimovich’s death, when she can no longer be ridiculed for her attachment, does she finally acknowledge that she has nothing and no one else for whom to care.

Among both generations “triplicate love” is rampant in Demons. However, unlike in Dostoevsky’s pre-1870 works, here it is based not on affection and passion, but on pride and

53 Dostoevsky, 441.
54 “Я ей доказал, как дважды два, что вы жили на взаимных выгодах: она капиталисткой, а ты при ней сентиментальным шутом” (PSS 10:239).
55 “Дались вам наши двадцать лет! Двадцать лет обоюдного самолюбия, и больше ничего. Каждое письмо ваше ко мне писано не ко мне, а для потомства. Вы стилист, а не друг, а дружба – это только прославленное слово, в сущности: взаимное излияние помой…” (PSS 10:263).
power. Unwilling to admit to herself that she loves Stepan Trofimovich, Varvara Petrovna uses Dasha Shatova as a mediator. She pushes a marriage to Dasha on Stepan Trofimovich and at the same time is upset by how quickly he acquiesces (feeling this shows a lack of love for her).\(^{56}\) Triplexity has become necessary here because the characters are unable to love directly. The third provides them an outlet to enact feelings their pride does not allow them to express to each other.\(^{57}\)

In another triangle, Pyotr Stepanovich insinuates himself into the amorous relations of Liza and Stavrogin, using Liza as a conduit to gain greater access to his idol. After their tryst, Liza tells Stavrogin of how Pyotr convinced her to go to Stavrogin and adds: “he absolutely wanted it to be the three of us together.”\(^{58}\) The third is enabling not love or even passion, but a power play. Pyotr explains to Stavrogin: “I brought her to you solely to amuse you, and to prove that with me you won’t be bored.”\(^{59}\) But Stavrogin sees a darker reason, challenging: “And not to make me kill my wife?” He understands that Liza is just a forfeited pawn in Pyotr’s attempt to win Stavrogin over to his plans. Meanwhile, Mavriky waits outside for his unfaithful fiancée, himself caught in another triangle with Stavrogin.\(^{60}\)

Mavriky understands the most painful aspect of love in Dostoevsky: its antinomian relation to hatred. As he explains to Stavrogin before Liza’s betrayal: “From behind her ceaseless, genuine, and most complete hatred for you, love flashes every moment, and…madness…the most genuine and boundless love and—madness! On the contrary, from

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\(^{56}\) She fully integrates herself into the relationship as a third, not even allowing the couple to speak to each other while she takes care of the betrothal. In explaining the scheme to Stepan Trofimovich, Varvara Petrovna goes so far as to suggest that she will accompany him and his bride on their honeymoon.

\(^{57}\) And the issue of pride is further complicated by the monetary arrangements that will accompany the marriage.

\(^{58}\) “Он непременно хотел втроем” (PSS 10:401).

\(^{59}\) “Я вам повез ее единственно, чтобы вас позабавить и чтобы доказать, что со мною вам скучно не будет” (PSS 10:406).

\(^{60}\) Liza and Dasha form another triangle around Stavrogin, just as Stavrogin and Shatov form one with Stavrogin’s wife, Marie.
behind the love she feels for me, also genuinely, hatred flashes every moment—the greatest hatred!” According to Dmitri Karamazov, only erotic love can coexist with hatred. He tells Alyosha: “to fall in love does not mean to love. One can fall in love and still hate.” This suggests that a love that is not “fallen into,” one based on the more sustaining love of kinship, for instance, would not be mingled with elements of darkness.

For Stavrogin, the different aspects of his “love” are divided among four women who each fill different roles: Dasha is like a faithful sister, ready to care for him when he has been deserted by everyone else; Liza is his poetic, romantic lover; Maria (Shatov’s wife) is a sexual partner to be exploited; and finally Marya Timofeevna is his virgin bride. Thus split, Stavrogin’s feelings for the women are not love, which must involve some concern for the beloved; he is self-centeredly using them to fill different needs. Love must have at least some lateral element of mutual caring, but here it has been verticalized into power and pride. In this configuration, the women are just placeholders and their identities are irrelevant to Stavrogin.

The Positive Light

In Demons the positive ideal of love and Christianity appears only weakly. Dostoevsky leaves it to the selfish romantic, Stepan Trofimovich, to proclaim faith in the face of destruction. “The free-thinker, who had felt himself a pagan, in the likeness of the great Goethe, discovers in

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61 “Из-под беспрерывной к вам ненависти, искренней и самой полной, каждое мгновение сверкает любовь и… безумие… самая искренняя и безмерная любовь и — безумие! Напротив, из-за любви, которую она ко мне чувствует, тоже искренно, каждое мгновение сверкает ненависть, — самая великая!” (PSS 10:296). Mochulsky also notes that Dostoevsky’s “people are drawn to one another by love-hatred” (Dostoevsky, 436). This comment is reminiscent of Rogozhin’s relationship with Natasya Filippovna.

62 “любить не значит любить. Влюбиться можно и ненавидеть” (PSS 14:96). For a psychoanalytic analysis of this aspect of love in Dostoevsky (as embodied in Notes from the Underground) see: Murav, “Dora and the Underground Man,” 421.

63 The marriage allowed Stavrogin to prove to himself his force of will and ability to humiliate himself, but in Marya’s presence, he is reminded of his weakness, as she is the one person who “pierces through the ‘mask’ of Stavrogin” (Frank, Miraculous Years, 485). Mochulsky says these women, “like mirrors, reflect various images of the charming demon” (Dostoevsky, 434). For another interpretation of the four women around Stavrogin, see: Straus, “Every Woman Loves a Nihilist.”
death the pledge of eternal life. The aesthetic idea of the novel is crowned by triumphant, mystical assurance.”

On his deathbed Stepan Trofimovich explains:

God is necessary for me if only because he is the one being who can be loved eternally […] My immortality is necessary if only because God will not want to do an injustice and utterly extinguish the fire of love for him once kindled in my heart. And what is more precious than love? Love is higher than being, love is the crown of being, and is it possible for being not to bow before it? If I have come to love him and rejoice in my life—is it possible that he should extinguish both me and my joy and turn us to naught? If there is God, then I am immortal! Voilà ma profession de foi.

Despite its ridiculously romantic formulation, Stepan Trofimovich’s statement is the most powerful counter to Kirilov’s theory of the man-God. Not will, but love—and specifically love of God—creates immortality.

Dostoevsky links the healing powers of religion specifically with Russian Orthodoxy in its messianic national variant. In his Writer’s Diary (1876), he claims that Orthodoxy “is precisely a matter of human progress and the humanization of all humanity, as understood by the Russian People. The People derive everything from Christ; they incarnate their whole future in Christ and Christ’s truth and cannot even conceive of themselves without Christ.” As Berdyaev explains: “The conclusion that he [Dostoevsky] came to was that true liberty and true equality are possible only in Christ, in following the way of God-made-man. Antichrist and self-will involve tyranny; any idea of world-wide happiness and the common unity of mankind from which God is excluded means disaster for man and the loss of his freedom of spirit.”

64 Mochulsky, Dostoevsky, 443.
65 “Бог уже потому мне необходим, что это единственное существо, которое можно вечно любить […] Мое бессмертие уже потому необходимо, что бог не захочет сделать неправды и погасить совсем огонь раз возгоревшейся к нему любви в моем сердце. И что дороже любви? Любовь выше бытия, любовь венец бытия, и как же возможно, чтобы бытие было ей неподклонно? Если я полюбил его и обрадовался любви моей – возможно ли, чтоб он погасил меня и радость мою и обратил нас в нуль? Если есть бог, то и я бессмертен! Voilà ma profession de foi.” (PSS 10:505).
66 Dostoevsky’s messianism (and its parallel expression by Shatov) are discussed by Carter, Political and Social Thought, 168.
67 Writer’s Diary 1, 597-598.
68 Berdyaev, Dostoievsky, 84.
This vision of human unity without God is explored in the censored chapter, “At Tikhon’s,” where Stavrogin explains his idea of the Golden Age [Золотой век]. Dostoevsky then recycled and expanded this idea in The Adolescent, putting it in the mouth of Versilov. Both Stavrogin and Versilov are inspired by Claude Lorrain’s painting of “Acis and Galatea,” and from it, derive a vision of humanity living on a pristine Greek archipelago in unity and bliss.69 Versilov goes further than Stavrogin, explaining to his son that in his vision of the Golden Age, “people suddenly understood that they were left completely alone, and at once felt their great state of orphancy.” Without God: “the orphaned people would begin at once to cling more closely and lovingly to each other; they would hold hands, understanding that now they were the only thing left to each other.”70 All love that had been directed toward the eternal would now be directed toward each other; with the loss of the Father, people would embrace their brothers. “They would wake up and hasten to kiss one another, hurrying to love, knowing that their days were numbered and that that was all that was left to them […] Every child would know and feel that each person on the earth was like a father and mother to him.”71

Versilov’s faith is based on universal love, but a love that comes only with the loss of God.72 Dostoevsky, however, rejected humanistic brotherhood, believing only in the ideal of “brotherhood in Christ—through love of Christ—and of one’s “close ones” in Christ.”73 He fought vigorously against Versilov’s liberal, western idea of substituting culture for God, which

69 Wasiolek notes that by placing the dream in antiquity and on a Greek archipelago, he reinforces its paganism (Dostoevsky, 145).
70 “люди вдруг поняли, что они остались совсем одни, и разом почувствовали великое сиротство;” “Осиоротевшие люди тотчас же стали бы прижиматься друг к другу теснее и любовнее; они схватились бы за руки, понимая, что теперь лишь они одни составляют все друг для друга” (PSS 13:378-9).
71 “Они просыпались бы и спешили бы целовать друг друга, торопясь любить, сознавая, что дни коротки, что это – все, что у них останется […] Каждый ребенок знал бы и чувствовал, что всякий на земле – ему как отец и мать” (PSS 13:379).
72 Wasiolek calls Versilov the embodiment of Dostoevsky’s belief that “the sin of the fathers lay in the belief of human life and human virtue without God” (Dostoevsky, 141).
73 “братство в Христе,— через любовь к Христу — и к ближним в Христе” (Florovsky, “Religioznye temy Dostoevskogo,” 388).
he believed helped bring about the rise of figures like Nechaev, his fellow radicals, and their destabilizing influence on Russian society. In Florovsky’s words, Dostoevsky saw “the impossibility of loving man in the name of man. That would mean loving man in his empirical stinking state, not in his freedom.”

How possible then did Dostoevsky believe brotherhood to be? Versilov himself acknowledges his Golden Age to be a fantasy. A similar idea appears in Dostoevsky’s fantastic story, “Dream of a Ridiculous Man” [Сон смешного человека] (1877). Although the ridiculous man acknowledges that the harmonious paradise he dreamed of will never exist, he still claims: “But meanwhile, it’s so simple: in one day, in one hour, everything could be built at once! Most important is to love others as you love yourself, that’s what’s most important, and that’s all, beyond that nothing at all is needed: you’ll find out at once how to build paradise.” This refusal to give up the hope of brotherhood is essential to Dostoevsky’s worldview. Although brotherhood will not be achieved, still there is always the possibility that it could be.

Florovsky explains that brotherhood remains an idea [zamysel] for Dostoevsky, something he “wishes for, but does not see,” not only because it has not existed in the empirical world, but because his holy characters who embody the love, freedom, and brotherhood he believed in—Tikhon, Makar Dologoruky, Zosima—are not “historical figures or demiurges” [istoricheskie deiateli i stroitel’]. “Dostoevsky dreamed of ‘Russian socialism,’ and saw ‘the

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74 Wasiolek’s discussion of the “Golden Age” highlights the distinction in Dotsoevsky’s thinking between a “vision of regeneration in Christ or the vision of degeneration in the imitation of Christ” (Dostoevsky, 145).
75 “одной симпатии или жалости недостаточно для братства” (“Religioznye temy Dostoevskogo,” 387).
76 “Невозможность полюбить человека во имя человека. Это означало бы полюбить человека в его эмпирической смрадности, не в его свободе” (“Religioznye temy Dostoevskogo,” 387).
77 “А между тем это просто: в один бы день, в один бы час—всё бы сразу устроилось! Главное—люби других как себя, вот что главное, и это всё, больше ровно ничего не надо: тотчас найдешь как устроиться” (PSS 25:119).
Russian monk.” Similarly, Soloviev delineates three kinds of Christianity and argues that the kind Dostoevsky believed in—universal Christianity [вселенское христианство]—was only a mission [задача], while the other two existed in fact. In Dostoevsky’s novels, his highest ideals are embedded in spiritual people, not in the structure of the material world he created (as was the case for Chernyshevsky). Dostoevsky’s positive characters are not trying to rebuild society. In his view, this is not the way to brotherhood.

**PART II**

**THE ADOLESCENT AND THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV: ACCIDENTAL FAMILIES AND THE RESTORATION OF FAITH**

*The Adolescent* shifts from *Demons*’ focus on societal level break-down to the break-down of the family. It is here that Dostoevsky most forcefully formulates his idea of the “accidental family,” an idea that he came to in response to the writing of Tolstoy. Unlike Tolstoy’s harmonious, domestic scenes of jam-making, Dostoevsky portrays the harsh realities of poverty, depravity, and families that lack the ties that traditionally bind.

In his *Writer’s Diary* Dostoevsky explains:

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79 “Tri rechi,” 42. The other two forms of Christianity he describes are temple Christianity [храмовое христианство], focused on the rituals within the Church, and individual Christianity [христианство домашнее], which focuses on the faith of the individual believer.
80 Mochulsky points out that the characters are joined to Versilov by blood ties, to Stavrogin by ideas and concludes: “The conflicts of *The Devils* are expressed in the disciples’ struggle against their teacher; the conflict of *A Raw Youth*, in discord between father and children. The ideational drama passes over into a family tragedy” (*Dostoevsky*, 506).
81 In his analysis of the drafts and notebooks for *The Adolescent*, Frank finds that Tolstoy was central to Dostoevsky’s artistic aims (*Mantel of the Prophet*, 167). Mochulsky notes that *The Adolescent* “was conceived by Dostoevsky as an answer to Lev Tolstoy” (*Dostoevsky*, 525). William Leatherbarrow compares Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s depictions of family and discusses the influence of the former on the latter (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 21-24).
82 “While Turgenev, Goncharov, and Lev Tolstoy painted grand epics of the impregnable order of the Russian ‘cosmos,’ Dostoevsky cried out that this cosmos was unstable, that beneath it chaos was already beginning to stir. In the midst of general prosperity, he alone spoke of the cultural crisis and of the unimagined catastrophes that awaited the world” (Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, xvii).
Never has the Russian family been more unsettled, more disintegrated, more disarranged and unformed than it is now. Where could you now find such *Childhood and Youths* as were recreated so harmoniously and distinctly by Count Leo Tolstoy, for instance, in depicting *his* era and his family or as he did in *War and Peace*? All these poems are now *no more than historical portraits of the distant past.*

Dostoevsky then goes on to lay out his idea of how to update Tolstoy:

The contemporary Russian family is becoming more and more an *accidental* family. Specifically an *accidental family*—that’s the definition of contemporary Russian family. It seems to have suddenly lost its old features, unexpectedly even, while the new ones…will it be capable of creating for itself new, desirable features that satisfy the Russian heart? Some even very serious people say frankly that the Russian family of today ‘doesn’t exist.’

Certainly the limits of what could be defined as family are stretched in Dostoevsky’s works. *The Adolescent* is the first-person narrative of an illegitimate child—the son of a married serf and her master—who was raised by strangers and then, as a young adult, comes to know for the first time his biological parents, legal father, sister, and gentry half-siblings. With no common past, no shared name, nor even a common social-class to bind them, these “family members” must navigate the meaning of kinship in contemporary Russia.

Rather than society being a metaphorical family as in *Demons*, *The Adolescent* builds outward from the family to make its statement about Russian society. Dostoevsky’s words to...

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83 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1034 (July and August 1877). Dostoevsky thought about all of Tolstoy’s fiction as depicting essentially one world. Discussing *Anna Karenina* in his February 1877 *Writer’s Diary*, he noted: “I kept thinking that I had read this somewhere before, namely in *Childhood and Youth*, by the same Count Tolstoy, as well as in his *War and Peace*; and in these works it was even fresher. Here we have the same story of a noble landowning family, although, of course, the plot is different” (*Writer’s Diary* 2, 870).

84 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1034–1035.

85 At the end of *The Adolescent*, Arkady includes the response of his former tutor to the narrative he has written (i.e. the book the reader just finished), which includes the following remark: “Tell me now, Arkady Makarovich, that this family is an accidental phenomenon, and my ear will rejoice. But, on the contrary, would it not be more correct to conclude that a multitude of such unquestionably hereditary Russian families are, with irresistible force, going over *en masse* into accidental families and merging with them in general disorder and chaos? In your manuscript you point in part to the type of this accidental family. Yes, Arkady Makarovich, you are a member of an accidental family, as opposed to our still-recent hereditary types, who had a childhood and youth so different from yours.”
fathers in the *Writer’s Diary* highlight this link: “I am speaking in the name of society, the state, the fatherland. You are the fathers, they are your children; you are today’s Russia, they are tomorrow’s: what will happen to Russia if Russian fathers shy away from their civic duty and begin seeking seclusion or, to put it better, a secession, lazy and cynical, from society, from their People and their most basic duties toward them?”

The family generates society and accidental family generates a fractured, decomposing social world.

Although *The Adolescent* is not Dostoevsky’s strongest work, it is a “workshop” and sheds light on the development of many of his ideas about family and society that reached maturity in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). In fact, some material moved back and forth between the two novels during composition, making it difficult to examine them entirely in isolation from each other. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will focus on Dostoevsky’s stronger work, *The Brothers Karamazov*, drawing on *The Adolescent* where that text helps elucidate Dostoevsky’s thinking about the central themes.

In a famous 1877 entry from *Writer’s Diary* that critics often analyze in relation to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky states: “The accidental nature of today’s Russian family consists in the loss among contemporary fathers of any common idea about their families—an idea common to all fathers that binds them together, an idea in which they could believe and could teach their children to believe, passing on to them this faith for the rest of their lives.”

Critical attention to this passage and to *The Adolescent* and *The Brothers Karamazov* has focused on the father/son aspect of Dostoevsky’s interest. More significant in this passage, however, is

Аркадий Макарович, вы—член случайного семейства. В противоположность еще недавним родовым нашим типам, имевшим столь различные от ваших детство и отрочество.] (PSS 13:455).

86 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1059.
87 For a discussion of the composition, see Frank, *Mantel of the Prophet*, 149-170.
88 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1041 (PSS 25:178).
89 Susanne Fusso posits that “Dostoevskii’s last three novels are devoted to exploring the ways in which the fathers of Russia have failed in their obligations to the sons, and therefore to the nation’s future” (“Dostoevskii and the
the need for a common idea among fathers. This instance typifies a pattern of critics overlooking Dostoevsky’s emphasis on lateral bonds.

Unlike in *Demons*, as the vertical relations between fathers and sons fail in *The Adolescent* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, sibling bonds offer an alternative model of love, support, and understanding. As Fusso notes: “The orphaned children in these novels cope with their abandonment in two major ways: by finding surrogate fathers who provide the love and moral guidance their biological fathers have deprived them of, and by seeking closeness and solidarity with their siblings.”

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, lateral sibling bonds not only provide an answer to failed father-son relations, they are also intimately connected to Dostoevsky’s ideas at the ideological heart of the novel—Ivan’s rebellion and “The Grand Inquisitor.” I see “The Grand Inquisitor” as a conflict between the hierarchical, highly suspect paternal “love” of the Inquisitor vs. the lateral, brotherly love of Christ.

**The Central Ideological Struggle**

As traditionally defined, the one of the central conflicts in *The Brothers Karamazov* is between faith and the rejection of God’s world. This struggle reaches its peak in Ivan’s revolt in Part II, Books Five and Six—“Rebellion” and “The Grand Inquisitor.” Ivan’s rebellion has received endless critical attention, but focusing on the role of siblings brings to light a new understanding of what is at issue in this passage.

Throughout the novel, Ivan struggles with the idea of being his brother’s keeper, attempting to reject this role, yet at the same time never fully letting go of his sense of

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Family,” 176-177). William Leatherbarrow, too, writes: “The Karamazov family relationships are invested with a symbolism designed to imply a breakdown in the transmission of values and mutual responsibility between the generations” (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 25).

Discovering Sexuality, 107. Fusso does not develop this idea of sibling replacements in great depth.
responsibility. Significantly, he chooses to narrate his rebellion to his little brother. At the beginning of their conversation, when Alyosha asks what will happen between their father and Dmitri if Ivan leaves, Ivan angrily replies: “Am I my brother Dmitri’s keeper or something? [...] Cain’s answer to God about his murdered brother, eh? Maybe that’s what you’re thinking at the moment? But, devil take it, I can’t really stay on here as their keeper!” Yet despite his words, Ivan has not reached an ultimate rejection of this role, and his actions show that he still has an element of faith in him. Zosima tells Ivan that the question of his faith is not yet decided and that “Even if it cannot be resolved in a positive way, it will never be resolved in the negative way either.”

Ivan begins his rebellion by telling Alyosha: “I never could understand how it’s possible to love one’s neighbors. In my opinion, it’s precisely one’s neighbors that one cannot possibly love. Perhaps if they weren’t so nigh.” Stewart Sutherland calls this a “perhaps deliberately inconsequential way of introducing one of the central problems of the novel.” I would argue that there is nothing inconsequential about this beginning because the question of loving the abstract neighbor is a central concern for Dostoevsky. He saw love for humanity as inextricably linked to faith. As he noted in the Writer’s Diary: “love for humanity in general is, as an idea, one of the most difficult ideas for the human mind to comprehend. Precisely as an

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91 “Сторож я, что ли, моему брату Дмитрию? [...] Каннов ответ богу об убитом брате, а? Может быть, ты это думаешь в эту минуту? Но черт возьми, не могу же я в самом деле оставаться тут у них сторожем?” (PSS 14:211). In a later conversation he makes a similar comment about Lise: “If she’s a child, I’m not her nanny,” and also about Katerina Ivanovna (PSS 15:38, 39).
92 “Если не может решиться в положительную, то никогда не решится и в отрицательную” (PSS 14:65).
93 “Я никогда не мог понять, как можно любить своих ближних. Именно ближних-то, по-моему, и невозможно любить, а разве лишь дальних” (PSS 14:215).
94 Sutherland, Atheism and the Rejection of God, 73.
95 In his Writer’s Diary entry discussing the concluding chapter of Anna Karenina and the war in Serbia, Dostoevsky challenges Tolstoy’s views about how far our love for humanity can extend. Beginning from Tolstoy’s question of whether we should love our “brother Slavs,” Dostoevsky claims that we do feel compassion for distant people we do not know. He takes issue with the ethical message at the end of Anna Karenina, where it is suggested that we do not have a duty to care beyond our immediate sphere (Writer’s Diary 2, 1080-1099).
idea. Feeling alone can justify it.”

Versilov, the archetypal westernized liberal, tells his son, Arkady:

To love your close one [biblical neighbor] and not to despise him is impossible. In my opinion, man is created with a physical inability to love his close ones. There is some kind of mistake in the words here from the very beginning, and “love for humanity” must be understood only as for that humanity which you yourself created in your soul (in other words, you created your own self and the love for yourself) and which, therefore, will never be in reality.

One can only love one’s own idea of humanity, but true love of humanity cannot come through reason; it is a feeling that defies reason.

In his Writer’s Diary Dostoevsky claims that “love for humanity is even entirely unthinkable, incomprehensible, and utterly impossible without faith in the immortality of the human soul to go along with it. Those who deprived humanity of its faith in its own immortality want to replace that faith, in the sense of the highest purpose of existence, by ‘love for humanity.’ Those people, I saw, are raising their hands against themselves; for in place of love for humanity they plant in the heart of one who has lost his faith the seed of hatred for humanity.”

For Dostoevsky’s over-rationalizing characters like Versilov and Ivan, the jump from reason to faith is the most difficult step to take. It seems at first counter-intuitive that reason takes them away from the realities of the world in which they live, while faith calls for their active engagement with that world. They have not learned that ideas must be replaced with individuals; love can only be based on experience with others.

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96 Writer’s Diary 1, 736.
97 “Любить своего ближнего и не презирать его – невозможно. По-моему, человек создан с физически невозможностью любить своего ближнего. Тут какая-то ошибка в словах с самого начала, и «любовь к человечеству» надо понимать лишь к тому человечеству, которое ты же сам и создал в душе своей (другими словами, себя самого создал и к себе самому любовь) и которого, поэтому, никогда и не будет на самом деле” (PSS 13:175). This is the teaching being passed down from father to son! The scene has obvious parallels to Ivan’s meeting with Alyosha; father-son is replaced with brother-brother.
98 Writer’s Diary 1, 736.
99 This theme appears as well in the story Zosima tells Madame Khokhlakova about the doctor who claimed: “the more I love mankind in general, the less I love people in particular, that is, individually, as separate persons” [чём
The inability to love is at the heart of what is troubling Ivan. Since moving back to Skotoprigonevsk, Ivan has deliberately been keeping his distance from Alyosha. Alyosha quickly becomes close with Dmitri, but he is confused that “his brother Ivan, though Alyosha noticed how he looked long and curiously at him at first, soon seemed even to have stopped thinking about him.” This remains the case for over two months, and then suddenly and significantly, Ivan reaches out to Alyosha, asking him for a meeting. “Alyosha felt that his brother had stepped a step towards him, and that he must have done so for some reason, with some purpose in mind.”

After Ivan initiates this first step, the brothers meet at a tavern and Ivan begins the conversation with his words about the impossibility of loving “one’s neighbors,” though as noted earlier, the Russian is “one’s close ones.” This distinction is significant because Ivan is not just thinking about the abstract neighbor, but also about the very real little brother sitting before him. By setting up the scene in this way, Dostoevsky shows the connection between what could be seen as abstract philosophical ideas and the closely personal. When love of a brother is at stake in a discussion of religious values, those values become immediately concrete and relevant. I believe Ivan’s deliberate step towards his brother is his test of all the ideas that follow.

The main issue Ivan is wrestling with is not faith vs. reason in the traditional sense, but its practical implications in the question of how man can love his fellow men. Ivan’s rejection of

100 "брат Иван, хотя Алеша и подметил вначале на себе его длинные и любопытные взгляды, кажется, вскоре перестал даже и думать о нем” (PSS 14:30).
101 "Алеша почувствовал, что брат сам первый шагнул к нему шаг и что сделал он это для чего-то, непременно с каким-то намерением” (PSS 14:132).
102 Martinsen would concur that “for Dostoevsky, truth is never merely statically factual. Truth is spoken or lived; it is embodied and dynamic; it always matters who says things and to what end” (Surprised by Shame, 127).
God’s world is not based on atheism (Ivan says that he accepts God), but rather out of love for all the individual sufferers he enumerates to his brother. Stewart Sutherland suggests that the conflict in “Rebellion” could be paraphrased as: “If this world is the expression of the love of God for man, what hopes can one hold out for the love of man for man?” Ivan is so horrified at man’s inhumanity to man—epitomized by the torturing of children—that he questions the love of a God who could set up a world where such atrocities take place. Framing the problem in terms of love opens the way for Zosima’s answer—that faith is restored through active love. In Sutherland’s paraphrase of Ivan’s question, we see clearly the parallel Ivan draws between his doubts about God’s love and his fear of men’s inability to reach out to each other in love. Zosima will pick up on this idea later, when he claims that hell is “the suffering of being no longer able to love.”

This preliminary discussion sets the stage for “The Grand Inquisitor,” which I read as a continuation of Ivan questioning how people can fulfill Christ’s teachings of love. Ivan is struggling with two different conceptions of what it means to love: paternal authoritarianism vs. brotherly equality. The Inquisitor’s model is one of nurturing and benevolent despotism and Ivan presents him as a totalitarian father. He describes his (and his colleagues’) relationship with the people: “They will become timid and look to us and cling to us in fear, like chicks to a hen.” This is the logical conclusion of Shigalyovism as Pyotr Stepanovich explains it: “Each

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103 Sutherland notes that Ivan’s questions “do not relate to either the omnipotence of God, or the omniscience of God, they relate to the love of God for his creation” (Atheism and the Rejection of God, 74).
104 “The keenness of Ivan’s reasoning lies in that he renounces God out of love for mankind” (Mochulsky, Dostoevsky, 616, italics in original).
105 Sutherland, Atheism and the Rejection of God, 74.
106 “страдание о том, что нельзя уже более любить” (PSS 14:292). This could be seen as a diagnosis of Stavrogin’s condition.
107 Any reader may see that it does not reflect the ideal of true fatherly love, which involves respect and grants freedom based on that respect.
108 “Они станут робки и станут смотреть на нас и прижиматься к нам в страхе, как птенцы к наседке” (PSS 14:236).
belongs to all, and all to each. They’re all slaves and equal in their slavery […] Slaves must be equal: there has never yet been either freedom or equality without despotism, but with a herd there must be equality, and this is Shigalyovism.”

The tone of these two thinkers is what differentiates them. While Pyotr Stepanovich is cynical and unfeeling toward the masses, the Inquisitor’s actions are more sinister because he truly believes he is acting for people’s good. He tells Christ: “Have we not, indeed, loved mankind, in so humbly recognizing his impotence, in so lovingly alleviating his burden and allowing his feeble nature even to sin, with our permission?”

The vertical model promises happiness, while the lateral model promises freedom. Christ’s love is based on a challenge to adults—offering a model of goodness that people must freely choose, and for which they must be prepared to suffer. A sample of some of the passages Dostoevsky marked in his Bible may make his intentions in *The Brothers Karamazov* clearer:

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (John, 13:34)

He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling him. (1 John, 2:10)

We love, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he

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109 “Каждый принадлежит всем, а все каждому. Все рабы и в рабстве равны […] Рабы должны быть равны: без деспотизма еще не бывало ни свободы, ни равенства, но в стаде должно быть равенство, и вот шигалевщина” (PSS 10:322).

110 “Неужели мы не любили человечества, столь смиренно сознав его бессилие, с любовию облегчив его ношу и разрешив слабосильной природе его хотя бы и грех, но с нашего позволения?” (PSS 14:234).

111 The Inquisitor tells Christ: “You thirsted for love that is free, and not for the servile raptures of a slave before a power that has left him permanently terrified” (PSS 14:233). As Berdyaev notes: “In Christ there is no forcing of conscience […] He used no coercion to make us believe in him as in God […] Therein lies the radical secret of Jesus Christ, the secret of freedom” (Dostoievsky, 78-79).

112 From examining the marks Dostoevsky made in his copy of the New Testament, we know that he was particularly struck by passages that talk of brotherly love. In Geir Kjetsaa’s study of Dostoevsky’s markings, he finds that Dostoevsky (like all Russian Orthodox), prefers the writing of St John, and hypothesizes that this is due to “the fact that it knows only one commandment, namely the commandment to love thy neighbor” (Dostoevsky and His New Testament, 9).
hath not seen. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also. (1 John, 4:19-21)

In this last passage, Dostoevsky added the word “бы” after the word любил at the end of verse 21 “to denote ‘should love,’ thereby making the verse a commandment.”113 As illustrated in the first biblical quotation above, in asking others to love each other as he loves them, Christ makes himself another brother in the universal brotherhood for which he calls. The Inquisitor points explicitly to the lateral nature of Christ’s love when he asks Christ: “whom have you raised up to yourself?”114 This runs in stark opposition to Stavrogin among his “brothers,” whom he does not love, and whom he cannot place on the same level as himself. It also contrasts with Shigalyovism, where all are to be brought down to the lowest common denominator. Christ, not Shigalyov, “creates equality” (Pyotr Stepanovich’s claim) because Christ’s is a reciprocal bond of mutual attachment. And it offers hope for the masses because it can be expanded indefinitely to include the whole of humankind.

The Inquisitor argues that Christ asked too much of people and showed them too little compassion and that he, the Inquisitor, has a truer love for humanity. He tells Christ: “I left the proud and returned to the humble, for the happiness of the humble.”115 The Inquisitor presents himself as a necessary peacemaker: “They will finally understand that freedom and earthly bread in plenty for everyone are inconceivable together, for never, never will they be able to share among themselves.”116 This quotation aptly describes the main vertical, father-sons relationships in the novel, bringing to mind Dmitri’s struggle with Fyodor Pavlovich over his inheritance and the way the latter abandoned his children without giving them a penny as they were growing up.

114 “кого ты вознес до себя?” (PSS 14:233).
115 “Я ушел от гордых и воротился к смиренным для счастья этих смиренных” (PSS 14:237).
116 “Поймут наконец сами, что свобода и хлеб земной вдоволь для всякого вместе немыслимы, ибо никогда, никогда не сумеют они разделиться между собою!” (PSS 14:231).
It also appears in crude architectural form in the merchant Samsonov’s selfishness in relation to his children: “Both his children and his clerks were cramped in their quarters, but the old man occupied the upper floor by himself and would not share it even with his daughter, who looked after him and at regular hours or at his irregular summons had each time to run up to him from downstairs, despite her chronic shortness of breath.”

Not all fathers must be authoritarian tyrants, however. The sentimentalized, carnivalized Snegiryov family does not fit this pattern because Captain Snegiryov does not place himself above his children as an authority figure. At the heart of the novel is the struggle to find a love that does not stifle as it supports, but is instead compatible with freedom. None of the fathers in the novel fully succeed in this love. Perhaps Snegiryov comes closest—managing to love his children while leaving them free—but he does so at the expense of fulfilling many of his fatherly duties. Placing himself beside his children as an equal, and allowing them to tell him when he is playing too much of the buffoon, he eliminates hierarchy but at the same time, he fails to provide the material support and moral authority that children need from a father (as described in the Writer’s Diary passage quoted above). Something similar could be said of Versilov, in The Adolescent. Versilov and Arkady only come to know each other when Arkady is grown, and during their first real conversation, Arkady is pleased to note that: “We spoke like two friends, in the highest and fullest sense of the word,” but his father has provided nothing in terms of guidance.

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117 “И дети, и приказчики теснились в своих помещениях, но верх дома занимал старик один и не пускал к себе жить даже дочь, ухаживавшую за ним и которая в определенные часы и в неопределенные зовы его должна была каждый раз взбегать к нему наверх снизу, несмотря на давнишнюю одышку свою” (PSS 14:333).

118 Hierarchy is also subverted as Mama acts like a child and Ilyusha gives her his toy cannon as if he were her father.

119 “Говорили мы как два друга, в высшем и полном смысле слова” (PSS 13:372).
In essence, Captain Snegiryov blends the roles of father and brother to his children, a type of mixing that will become an important theme throughout the novel. V.E. Vetlovskaia discusses this blending, pointing out that Snegiryov refers to Ilyusha as “Father, dear father” [Батюшка, милый батюшка]. A similar kind of name-mixing goes on in the Karamazov family. Fyodor Pavlovich calls both Smerdyakov and Alyosha “brother” at various points. Ivan, on the other hand, is in many ways the authority figure of the family. “Fyodor Pavlovich suddenly and almost accidentally calls his son Ivan ‘my own father.’” Unlike in the Karamazov family, however, Captain Snegiryov creates a model of equality based on disability, humility, and on mutual, unconditional love: “If I die, who will so love them, sir, and while I live, who will so love me, a little wretch, if not them?"

The contrast of Snegiryov-style parenting vs. the Inquisitor’s authoritarian model is what Michael Holquist sees at the heart of the “Grand Inquisitor.” He writes: “The Legend pits two theories of parenthood against each other,” with Christ’s resurrection of the little girl as “a metaphor for the view that fathers must deliver children from the killing effects of parental oppression.” Viewing it instead as a hierarchical father/child model vs. a non-hierarchical brother’s allows us to see that Christ’s model mirrors the sibling love present in the rest of the text.

A parallel exists between Christ’s love of mankind and Alyosha’s treatment of the boys he befriends. The equality that fails to materialize in Demons is attained in The Brothers Karamazov. Alyosha wins the love of Kolya Krasotkin by treating him as an equal. At the

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120 Vetlovskaia, Poetika Romana «Brat’ia Karamazovy», 121.
121 Vetlovskaia, Poetika Romana «Brat’ia Karamazovy», 121.
122 PSS 14:183. This line is very similar to a comment Arkady’s mother makes in The Adolescent: “there will be intelligent people without us, but who will love you, if we don’t have each other?” [умные-то люди и без нас с тобой будут, а вот кто тебя любить-то станет, коли нас друг у друзей не будет?] (PSS 13:212).
123 Holquist, Dostoevsky and the Novel, 183.
beginning of their first conversation, Kolya is struck that Alyosha spoke “as if he were talking to someone of the same age or even older than himself.” This treatment inspires Kolya to speak openly with Alyosha and to confess his shortcomings. Given Kolya’s nature, Alyosha would certainly have brought out his proud, cynical side had he attempted to speak down to Kolya and form a vertical bond. At the end of the conversation Kolya proves this when he exclaims: “You know, what delights me most of all is that you treat me absolutely as an equal. And we’re not equal, no, not equal, you are higher!”

Here again, we see the blending of roles. The difference between sibling relationships and father-son relationships in *The Brothers Karamazov* is not always clearly defined. Alyosha acts as both a brother and a father/teacher in his relations with Kolya and the group of boys around Ilyusha. At the end of their first conversation, Kolya announces: “I’ve come to learn from you,” to which Alyosha replies: “And I from you.” While Alyosha’s reply restores the lateral nature of the connection, at the same time, Kolya’s remark shows how the boys view Alyosha as their teacher. Kolya has no father, so Alyosha fills that role for him, as well as being like an older brother. This blending suggests the position of an uncle, who is both a brother and yet at the same time belongs to the generation of the father. In his final “speech at the stone” after Ilyusha’s funeral, Alyosha refers to the twelve boys in front of him as “my little doves” and “my dear children” as a father would, yet he walks off hand in hand as a brother.

This lateral bond between Alyosha and Kolya is linked with brotherly love through the repetition of a key phrase used in conversation earlier between Ivan and Alyosha. At the end of

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124 “как бы разговаривая с себе равным по летам или даже со старшим летами человеком” (PSS 14:500).
125 “Знаете, меня всего более восхищает, что вы со мной совершенно как с ровней. А мы не ровня, нет, не ровня, вы выше!” (PSS 14:504).
126 “Я пришел у вас учиться” […] “А я у вас” (PSS 14:484).
127 Like Kolya Krasotkin, Arkady is honored to be treated as an equal by his father. The morning after their first serious conversation, he notes: “He only did me a great honor, turning to me as his only friend at such a moment and I will never forget it” [Он только сделал мне великую честь, обратившись ко мне, как к единственно другу в такое мгновение, и этого я никогда ему не забуду] (PSS 13:388).
“The Grand Inquisitor,” when the two are preparing to part, Ivan tells Alyosha that the memory of Alyosha will be enough to make him go on living until his thirtieth year. He then adds: “If you wish, you can take it as a declaration of love.” Kolya repeats this phrase at the end of his conversation with Alyosha, saying: “You know, Karamazov, our talk is something like a declaration of love.”

Christ’s answer to the Inquisitor could be seen as just such a declaration: “Suddenly he approaches the old man in silence and gently kisses him on his bloodless, ninety-year-old lips. That is the whole answer.” The detail of his bloodless ninety-year-old lips suddenly reminds us of how human and fragile the Inquisitor is. Thus the kiss not only affirms Christ’s love, but also heightens our awareness of humanity’s shared mortality. Ivan’s addition of “that is the whole answer” emphasizes that the whole answer is love. We see that this love overcomes the resolve of the Inquisitor because after the kiss, instead of having Christ executed the next day as planned, he sets Christ free.

The question, then, is what kind of love this kiss offers, and I would argue that it is the love of a brother for a brother. When Ivan finishes his poem and sees Alyosha’s suffering over his beliefs, he says with great feeling: “I thought, brother, that when I left here I’d have you, at least, in all the world, […] but now I see that in your heart too there is no room for me, my dear hermit. The formula, ‘everything is permitted,’ I will not renounce, and what then? Will

128 “Если хочешь, прими хоть за объяснения в любви” (PSS 14:240).
129 “Знаете, Карамазов, наше объяснение похоже на объяснение в любви” (PSS 14:504).
130 “Он вдруг молча приближается к старике и тихо целует его в его бескровные девяностолетние уста. Вот и весь ответ” (PSS 14:239).
131 The kiss has often been likened to that of Judas, which can be seen as a brother’s betrayal. But as Elaine Pagels has convincingly argued, Judas can also be seen as the most faithful of the disciples. By giving his kiss, he knowingly allowed his name to be cursed for all of history in order to fulfill God’s plan. See: Pagels and King, Reading Judas, esp. 8, 16, 17.
you renounce me for that? Will you?”

Alyosha’s response is a silent kiss on Ivan’s lips, exactly modeling the kiss Christ gave to the Inquisitor. Ivan immediately calls Alyosha’s kiss “literary theft,” cementing the parallel between the two. If Alyosha’s kiss for his brother was literary theft, then it follows that the model of Christ’s kiss for the Inquisitor must also be a brother’s kiss.

At the beginning of his “rebellion,” Ivan tells Alyosha: “In my opinion, Christ’s love for people is in its kind a miracle impossible on earth.” But when Alyosha—after having heard his brother’s rebellion and his rejection of God’s world, listened to the list of atrocities against innocent victims Ivan has enumerated and heard Ivan declare that he will not give up his formula of “everything is permitted”—when Alyosha is still able to kiss Ivan in love, Ivan has his most powerful proof that brotherly love modeled on Christ’s is possible, even in this imperfect world and even up close.

Right after Alyosha’s kiss, Ivan makes his “declaration of love,” showing that he, too, can feel brotherly love. As it is Christ’s brotherly love (in the form of the kiss) that overcomes the Inquisitor, Ivan’s declaration of love right after telling his poema implies that Alyosha’s kiss—his brotherly love—has already overcome the Inquisitor in Ivan’s heart. Ivan goes into the meeting with Alyosha, telling his brother: “perhaps I want to be healed by you,” and this is exactly what happens.

Of course with a character as deliberately contradictory as Ivan (and with an author as complex as Dostoevsky), this healing cannot be instantaneous, but we do see symbolic indications of its beginnings. At the start of their meeting in the tavern, Ivan tells Alyosha

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132 “Я, брат, уезжая, думал, что имею на всем свете хоть тебя, […] а теперь я вижу, что и в твоем сердце мне нет места, мой милый отшельник. От формулы «всё позволено» я не отрекусь, ну и что же, за это ты от меня отречешься, да, да?” (PSS 14:240).
133 “По-моему, Христова любовь к людям есть в своем роде невозможное на земле чудо” (PSS 14:216).
134 “я, может быть, себя хотел бы исцелить тобою” (PSS 14:215).
horrible stories until Alyosha agrees that a man who has loosed a pack of dogs on an innocent child deserves to be shot. Ivan is terribly pleased to hear this unchristian answer from Alyosha and tells him: “You are dear to me, I don’t want to let you slip, and I won’t give you up to your Zosima.” Here, Ivan seems like the Devil tempting Alyosha and trying to seduce him. However, after the kiss Ivan releases Alyosha with the words: “Well, go to your Pater Seraphicus,” a direct parallel to how the Inquisitor releases Christ after his kiss. It seems that love can help to restore faith. More specifically, the love of a brother wins out over the tyrannical, fatherly love offered by the Inquisitor.

The struggle taking place within Ivan is itself is a sign of the goodness in him. Alyosha addresses this good part of his brother when he kisses him, and in the end, Ivan does make an attempt to be his brother’s keeper. Dostoevsky shows that at every moment, one has a choice about how to act, as when Dmitri leaves Fyodor Pavlovich’s window without killing him. Ivan, too, at his crucial moment chooses for the good, turning around when leaving the courtroom and handing over Smerdyakov’s money in an attempt to prove Dmitri’s innocence.

This is the end of the novel’s central struggle. The bonds of brotherhood between Ivan and Dmitri prevail during Dmitri’s hour of need, even as they are placed in stark contrast with the failed brotherhood of Smerdyakov. This moment also counters the failures of the father that have been expounded throughout the court case. This is Christ’s lateral model of love taking the place of the Inquisitor’s hierarchical model. As Anne Hruska argues: “The novel proposes a solution to the vicious cycle of abuse: people need to be willing not to strive for the top of the

135 "Ты мне дорог, я тебе упустить не хочу и не уступлю твоему Зосиме” (PSS 14:222).
136 “Ну иди теперь к твоему Pater Seraphicus” (PSS 14:241).
137 This radical moment of choice is reminiscent of Rogozhin asking to exchange crosses with Myshkin instead of using the knife, choosing brotherhood over fratricide.
138 Morson shows how Smerdyakov’s suicide note is an intentional attempt to ruin his brothers by lying (through its silence) about his murderous guilt. Morson, “Verbal Pollution,” 240.
hierarchy, but rather to put themselves in the position of historical victims. If everyone becomes like a child or like a serf, then power structures become meaningless and the whole violent system dissolves.”

While I believe she is correct in her analysis of the problem—people striving to be at the top of a hierarchy—I do not think *The Brothers Karamazov* offers a model of the world in which everyone should be serfs and children. Instead, what Christ’s kiss shows, and what the actions in the book illustrate, is that brotherhood will overcome hierarchy. It is through actively loving others as siblings that the violent abuses described in Ivan’s rebellion will come to an end.

As discussed in relation to *Demons*, the mature Dostoevsky was not a socialist and did not advocate the leveling of society. He believed in people’s interdependence that comes through material and spiritual inequality. The model of brotherly love and support does not require that all brothers be equally endowed, but instead that they treat each other as equals in the eyes of God. Chapter Two discussed the role of alms in linking this mutual dependence to brotherhood in *The Insulted and Injured* and *Crime and Punishment*. In *Demons* alms are rejected by the discredited Pyotr Stepanovich and by Varvara Petrovna, who parrots his words. Pyotr tells his father that Stepan Trofimovich has been a sponger and a lackey. He claims “there’s something eternally depraving in alms” and that Stepan Trofimovich is “a clear example of it.”

Viewing Stepan Trofimovich’s relationship with Varvara Petrovna as alms, rather than friendship, discounts the importance of human connection. Pyotr does not understand that it is in fact *good* and not debasing to need other people. Absorbing his thoughts, Varvara Petrovna says that “the pleasure of charity is an arrogant and immoral pleasure, a rich man’s pleasure in his riches, his power, and in the comparison of his significance with the significance of a beggar.

140 “В милостыне есть нечто навсегда развращающее – ты явный пример!” (PSS 10:239).
Charity corrupts both him who gives and him who takes.”¹⁴¹ These characters have not learned the lesson of mutual dependence and the humility that must accompany it. This lesson comes only in *The Brothers Karamazov*. There, brothers learn that they should be prepared to both give and receive aid.¹⁴² The Inquisitor’s model, in which both material and spiritual sustenance (forgiveness) come from above, fails at this type of reciprocity.

**Active Love: the Restoration of Faith**

The active love that can restore faith is embodied in the life and words of the Elder Zosima. Early in the novel Zosima lays out his basic philosophy when talking to Madame Khokhlakova, who confesses to having doubts about the existence of God. Zosima assures her that although one cannot prove God’s existence, one can be convinced by the experience of active love. Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. The more you succeed in loving, the more you’ll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul. And if you reach complete selflessness in the love of your neighbor, then undoubtedly you will believe, and no doubt will even be able to enter your soul. This has been tested. It is certain.¹⁴³

Alyosha focuses on this theme in his *zhitie* of Zosima. While writing *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky told Konstantin Pobedonostsev that Zosima’s words in Book Six were designed as an answer to Ivan’s rebellion.¹⁴⁴ These words are permeated with the importance of siblings. Zosima begins by telling of his older brother, Markel, who died when Zosima was still a child,

¹⁴¹ “наслаждение от милостыни есть наслаждение надменное и безнравственное, наслаждение богача своим богатством, властью и сравнением своего значения с значением нищего. Милостыня развращает и подающего и берущего” (PSS 10:264). This line reads like a corrupted inversion of Shylock’s famous speech about Mercy in “The Merchant of Venice” (Act IV, scene 1): “It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.” Although the parallel may well have been unintentional, Shakespeare is referenced frequently throughout the text.

¹⁴² Meerson notes that Mitya quotes from the Lazarus song in jail when he refers to Smerdyakov (*Dostoevky’s Taboos*, 190).

¹⁴³ PSS 14:52. In an earlier draft of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Zosima says: “God gave us relatives so that we could learn how to love. People in general hate people in particular.”¹⁴³ Although this statement did not make it into the final version, it indicates how Dostoevsky saw family love (which in the novel mostly takes the form of sibling love) as a model for loving “one’s close ones.”

¹⁴⁴ PSS 30:1:66.
and whom Zosima credits with putting him on the spiritual path that led him to his theology of love. Thus, before the narrator even presents Alyosha’s *zhitie* of Zosima, Zosima has already established the primary importance of a sibling in his life.

It is significant that Zosima’s preaching of love was not passed down to him from a father, but instead came laterally from his brother. With Markel, Dostoevsky offers an alternative to the breakdown of the transmission of values between generations—lateral transmission from brother to brother (a positive version of what Stavrogin fails at with Shatov and Kirilov). Zosima bequeaths his last words to Alyosha, and this again can be seen as a brother passing on his teachings to a brother. While Zosima in many ways plays the role of a spiritual father for Alyosha, calling him “little son” (сынок), at the same time, Zosima claims that his love of Alyosha stems from the fact that Alyosha reminds him of his brother: “many times I have actually taken him, as it were, for that youth, my brother, come to me mysteriously at the end of my way.”

Zosima fills the blended role of father/brother not only for Alyosha, but for all the listeners in his cell during his final speech. His role for them is similar to the one Markel held for him—both as their brother and the teacher of their theology. Zosima alternates between calling his listeners (other monks) “brothers” and “fathers and teachers,” suggesting that their roles are both to be brothers to the rest of mankind, and at the same time to teach in the manner of fathers.

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145 “много раз считал я его как бы прямо за того юношу, брата моего, пришедшего ко мне на конце пути моего таинственно” (PSS 14:259). This is somewhat like Kirilov opening up to the narrator in *Demons* because his is reminded of his dead brother.
One great lesson Zosima shares that he learned from Markel is love for all God’s creation. Markel is almost a parody of goodness, envisioning a world in which all people are equals and should love each other as brothers. His vision is conditioned by his invalid state; it is easier to love and pity one who is young and dying, so he experiences the world around him as full of love toward him and responds in kind. Markel does not understand that equality does not automatically bring love. I believe Dostoevsky’s idealized depiction of Markel’s dying philosophy is partly a response to the death of his own son as he began work on the novel. He did not want children to understand the complex realities of hatred and envy that equality can bring. Markel tells his mother that although there are servants and masters, “but let me also be the servant of my servants.” While accepting the practical need for these roles, in his naïve simplicity, he overcomes hierarchy by suggesting that all people should be treated as equals.

This sets up a lateral model, which Zosima will turn to later in his life. Zosima’s spiritual awakening comes after he strikes his servant and then remembers the words of his brother, asking the servants what he has done to deserve their services. Zosima’s awakening is an awareness of people’s shared humanity, as he thinks: “how did I deserve that another man, just like me, the image and likeness of God, should serve me?” Although he does not use the word “brother” at this point, Zosima is articulating his first awareness of the brotherhood of all

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146 This part of his speech has echoes of Kirilov’s words on love of the world and the goodness of a leaf (PSS 10:188). Malcolm Jones and Steven Cassedy note that Zosima’s worldview is not that of Orthodox Christianity (Jones, “Death and Resurrection,” 156). According to Cassedy: “It represents a strange blend of almost pagan earth worship and religious nationalism” (Dostoevsky’s Religion, xiii).

147 Robin Feuer Miller stresses the importance of Dostoevsky’s personal grief at the death of his three-year-old son, Alyosha, in shaping his portrayal of childhood mortality in The Brothers Karamazov (Worlds of the Novel, 5, 39-40).

148 “Но пусть же и я буду слугой моих слуг” (PSS 14:262). This contrasts with Fyodor Pavlovich’s statement: “there have always been and always will be boors and gentlemen in the world, and so there will always be such a little floor scrubber, and there will always be a master over her, and that is all one needs for happiness in life!” [всегда есть и будут хамы да баре на свете, всегда тогда будет и такая поломоечка, и всегда ее господин, а ведь того только и надо для счастья жизни!] (PSS 14:126).

149 “чем я так стою, чтобы другой человек, такой же, как я, образ и подобия божие, мне служил?” (PSS 14:270).
mankind. He is not just calling for love, but more specifically for lateral love among equals. “Its duties […] are entirely horizontal: to love and beg forgiveness of nature and of fellow human beings.”

Later in life, when he has become a monk, Zosima reencounters this same servant he hit, and now receives fifty kopeks from him in alms. This gesture raises them to the same level, just as the Inquisitor says Christ wanted to raise people to his level.

In narrating his life, Zosima not only tells his own story, but also several from the Bible and from the lives of others he has met. These stories often center on the theme of siblings. Zosima calls for village priests to read the scriptures to the peasants, focusing on the story of Joseph and his brothers. In his interpretation of the story, Zosima focuses almost exclusively on the relationships between Joseph, his brothers, and their father, showing how Joseph is spiritually regenerated by his love for his brothers that overcomes his anger against them. Zosima is showing the clergy how to deliver “one essential message, that through active love man at the same time serves his fellow man and fulfils the divine purpose […] such is the power of active love, and such, if we follow Zosima’s interpretation, is the lesson to be learned from the story of Joseph.”

This lesson does seem to take root in Alyosha, who is responsible for which stories to include in Zosima’s zhite and how to present them.

One of Zosima’s most important stories concerns his mysterious visitor, Mikhail. Like Zosima, Mikhail also talks of the importance of seeing all men as brothers. He tells Zosima: “Until one has indeed become the brother of all, there will be no brotherhood.”

Mikhail believes the time of universal brotherhood has not come about yet because “first the period of

150 Caryl Emerson, “Zosima’s ‘Mysterious Visitor,’” 158.
152 This idea is discussed by Miller, “The Biblical Story of Joseph,” 663-664, and Diane Oenning Thompson, The Brothers Karamazov and the Poetics of Memory, 96.
153 “Раньше, чем не сделается в самом деле всякому братом, не наступит братства” (PSS 14:275). This line comes from the Writer’s Diary entry quoted above.
human *isolation* must conclude.” Mikhail lays out the problems with society, in what could be seen as a description of the relations between fathers and sons in the novel.

For everyone now strives most of all to separate his person, wishing to experience the fullness of life within himself, and yet what comes of all his efforts is not the fullness of life but full suicide, for instead of the fullness of self-definition, they fall into complete isolation. For all men in our age are separated into units, each seeks seclusion in his own hole, each withdraws from the others, hides himself, and hides what he has, and ends by pushing himself away from people and pushing people away from himself. He accumulates wealth in solitude, thinking: how strong, how secure I am now; and does not see, madman that he is, that the more he accumulates, the more he sinks into suicidal impotence.\(^{154}\)

While this image resonates with the Grand Inquisitor’s depiction of people who are unable to share bread among themselves (and, according to him, needed the Inquisitor to rule over them), it was worked out in greater depth in *The Adolescent*. Arkady’s big “idea” at the opening of the novel is to become a Rothchild (i.e. as rich as Rothchild).\(^ {155}\) He explains to his reader: “The whole goal of my ‘idea’ is solitude.”\(^ {156}\) Money and power [могущество] are important to this aim not in their own right, but “solitary and calm awareness of strength! There’s the fullest definition of freedom that the world so struggles over! Freedom!”\(^ {157}\) As an abandoned child who does not trust in the care of others, it follows logically that he would

\(^{154}\)“Ибо всякий-то теперь стремится отделить свое лицо наиболее, хочет испытать в себе самом полноту жизни, а между тем выходят изо всех его усилий вместо полноты жизни лишь полное самоубийство, ибо вместо полноты определения сущности своего впадают в совершенное уединение. Ибо все-то в наш век разделились на единицы, всякий уединяется в свою нору, всякий от другого отделяется, прячется и, что имеет, прячет и кончает тем, что сам от людей отталкивается и сам людей от себя отталкивает. Копит уединенно богатство и думает: сколь силен я теперь и сколь обеспечен, а и не знает безумный, что чем более копит, тем более погружается в самоубийственное бессилие” (PSS 14:275). Emerson points out that Mikhail’s “regeneration” begins “not with penance [i.e. repentance over the murder he committed] […] but with this declaration of interdependence” (“Zosima’s Mysterious Visitor,” 167).

\(^{155}\)Wasiolek points out the parallel to Ganya’s thinking in *The Idiot* (Dostoevsky, 139).

\(^{156}\)“Вся цель моей «идей»— уединение” (PSS 13:72).

\(^{157}\)“уединенное и спокойное сознание силы! Вот самое полное определение свободы, над которым так бьется мир! Свобода!” (PSS 13:74).
believe that “my ‘idea’ is the fortress in which I can always and in any case hide myself from others.”

The flaws in this thinking, however, are laid bare in a passage in the *Writer’s Diary* (February 1877):

The way the world conceives freedom today is as license, whereas real freedom lies only in overcoming the self and the will so as ultimately to achieve a moral condition in which one at each moment is the real master of himself. But giving license to your desires only leads to your enslavement. That is why almost the whole of today’s world supposes that freedom lies in financial security and in laws guaranteeing that financial security: ‘I have money and so I can do whatever I like; I have money and so I will not perish and will not have to ask help from anyone; not having to ask for anyone’s help is the highest freedom.’ Yet in essence this is not freedom but slavery once again, a slavery that comes from money. On the contrary, the very highest form of freedom is not laying up money and seeking security in it, but ‘dividing up all that you have and going off to serve everyone.’

This provides a fascinating point of concurrence between Dostoevsky’s thinking and Tolstoy’s. Tolstoy’s ultimate ideal—expressed in “Father Sergius” and partially carried out in his departure from home—was just this shedding of property and service to all. Yet for Tolstoy, this idea was linked not with freedom but with guilt at his gentry privilege. His impetus comes from focus on the self, rather than on the others whom he purportedly aims to assist.

Dostoevsky’s ultimate ideal was mutual dependence and mutual aid. He believed that just this kind of human connectedness would create true freedom. Arkady’s development in *The Adolescent* leads him away from isolation and into family and belonging. Ultimately he, like Zosima’s visitor Mikhail, must come to understand the power of uniting with others. Mikhail claims that the time of isolation will end when people come to understand that “a man’s true security lies not in his own solitary effort, but in the general wholeness of humanity.” His answer, which the rest of *The Brothers Karamazov* seems to reinforce, is that brotherhood can

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158 “моя «идея» – это та крепость, в которую я всегда и во всяком случае могу скрыться от всех людей” (PSS 13:76).
159 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 883.
overcome this isolation (and he places his duties towards an abstract brotherhood higher even than his responsibilities as a father). Zosima explicitly states that brotherhood will allow people to live in harmony: “Where there are brothers, there will be brotherhood; but before brotherhood they will never share among themselves.” Here sharing, which is inherent in the sibling relationship, is extended to the entire human family.

Although Dostoevsky claimed while working on the novel that Zosima’s words were meant as a reply to the Grand Inquisitor, after finishing, he wrote in his notebook that the whole book was meant as a reply. Throughout, Zosima’s preachment of active love often takes the form of sibling love or connection. Sharing neither mothers (in the case of Dmitri), nor childhood homes (except for a few years Ivan had with Alyosha), the three legitimate Karamazov brothers have almost no relationship when they meet as young adults; thus the bonds they form are not based on their pasts, but on present, active love (much like Arkady and his sister, Liza, in *The Adolescent*).

For both Dmitri and Ivan, Alyosha serves as their primary object of love, and he in turn loves both brothers intensely. At their meeting in the neighbor’s yard, Dmitri tells Alyosha: “I could take you, Alyoshka, and press you to my heart until I crushed you, for in all the world… I really… re-al-ly… (understand?)… love only you!” Later Dmitri contemplates suicide, then sees Alyosha and thinks: “so there is a man that even I love, here he is, here is that man, my dear

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160 “Были бы братья, будет и братство, а раньше братства никогда не разделятся” (PSS 14:286-287). The meaning of the second clause is somewhat ambiguous because of the word разделятся, but given how Dostoevsky uses this word elsewhere in *The Brothers Karamazov*, I believe this translation comes closest to the meaning he intended.

161 PSS 27:48.

162 Fusso notes: “Throughout *The Brothers Karamazov* Alyosha strives to provide for his brothers the love and caring their father has denied them, and often succeeds” (*Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky*, 108).

163 “Я бы взял тебя, Алеша, и прижал к груди, да так, чтобы раздавить, ибо на всем свете… по-настоящему… по-на-сто-яще-му… (вникни! Вникни!) люблю только одного тебя!” (PSS 14:96).
little brother, whom I love more than anyone in the world, and who is the only one I love!”

Before his trial, Dmitri tells Alyosha: “I love you more than anyone. My heart trembles at you, that’s what.” Dmitri makes his brother an ideal, but not like the false siblings who elevate an empty Stavrogin. He brings Alyosha close to himself and loves Alyosha for his ability to love him back without judging.

Although Alyosha tries hard to provide what his brother needs and never intentionally wrongs him, there are instances when he fails. Shaken after hearing Ivan’s rebellion, Alyosha forgets to go find Dmitri as he planned. Also, in his moment of despair after the death of Zosima he allows himself to be taken to Dmitri’s lover, Grushenka. In both of these instances, Alyosha is in a condition of extreme vulnerability, and he has no ill intentions (in the second case, Rakhitin bears all the guilt), so I believe that these lapses in his role as his brother’s keeper cannot be seen as deliberate betrayals and do not touch the underlying sense of connection between the pair.

Dmitri shares his most precious ideas with his brothers. On the night before his trial, he tells Alyosha: “I’ve been waiting till this last time to pour out my soul to you.” Dmitri explains his ideas about the resurrection of his soul, and how, deep in the mines in Siberia: “we, the men underground, will start singing from the depths of the earth a tragic hymn to God, in whom there is joy! Hail to God and his joy! I love him!”

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164 “Да ведь есть же, стало быть, человек, которого и я люблю, ведь вот он, вот тот человек, братишка мой милый, кого я всех больше на свете люблю и кого я единствено люблю!” (PSS 14:142).
165 “Я тебя больше всех люблю. Сотрясается у меня сердце на тебя, вот что” (PSS 15:28).
166 In Diane Thompson’s discussion of Alyosha’s “memory lapse” when he fails to go to Dmitri, she argues against the scholars who claim that this is “evidence of his repressed wish for the murder of his father” (Poetics of Memory, 195). I agree with Thompson, but both she and the scholars she disagrees with overlook the sibling aspect of this forgetting.
167 “Дождался теперь последнего срока, чтобы тебе душу вылить” (PSS 15:30).
168 “И тогда мы, подземные человеки, запоем из недр земли трагический гимн богу, у которого радость! Да здравствует бог и его радость! Люблю его!” (PSS 15:31).
mentions in passing, almost as if he takes it for granted, that Ivan too understands him. “I’m talking to you, Alexei, because you alone can understand this, and no one else, for the others it’s foolishness, raving—all that I was telling you about the hymn […] Ivan too, understands about the hymn, oof, he understands.”169

Dmitri’s openness with Ivan is not just a momentary whim, but a pattern throughout the novel (and of a deeper nature than his spontaneous sharing with others). When first describing their relationship, the narrator writes: “His [Alyosha’s] brother Dmitri Fyodorovich spoke of their brother Ivan with the deepest respect; he talked about him with a special sort of feeling. It was from him that Alyosha learned all the details of the important affair that had recently joined the two older brothers with such a remarkable and close bond.”170 This is a particularly telling passage in light of the fact that the narrator later tells us Ivan dislikes Dmitri. Here we see that this bond can exist in spite of Ivan’s personal feelings. Later, when confessing to Alyosha the story of his engagement to Katerina Ivanovna, Dmitri says: “I’ve never told anyone, you’ll be the first, except for Ivan, of course, Ivan knows everything. He’s known it for a long time before you.”171 Dmitri can confess the feelings and ideas most precious to his soul to his brothers alone.

On the surface, it appears that Ivan detests Dmitri. In reference to the quarrel between Dmitri and their father, Ivan tells Alyosha: “Viper will eat viper, and it would serve them both right!”172 and he not infrequently refers to Dmitri as a “monster” [измвр]. Despite the potential disaster brewing in his family, Ivan leaves for Moscow, failing to provide support in a critical

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169 “Потому ведь говорю тебе, Алексей, что ты один понять это можешь, а больше никто, для других это глупости, бред, вот всё то, что я тебе про гимн говорил […] Понимает про гимн и Иван, ух понимает” (PSS 15:34-35).
170 “Брат Дмитрий Федорович отзывался о брате Иване с глубочайшим уважением, с каким-то особым проникновением говорил о нем. От него же узнал Алеша все подробности того важного дела, которое свяжало в последнее время обоих старших братьев замечательною и тесною связью” (PSS 14:30).
171 “Я никому никогда не рассказывал, тебе первому сейчас расскажу, конечно Ивана исключая, Иван всё знает. Раньше тебя давно знает” (PSS 14:101).
172 “Один гад съест другую гадину, обоим туда и дорога!” (PSS 14:129).
moment of need. When Ivan returns from Moscow after the murder, the narrator states explicitly that he “decidedly disliked him [Dmitri], and the most he occasionally felt for him was compassion, but even then mixed with great contempt, reaching the point of squeamishness.”

If we take the narrator’s word as the ultimate truth, then there would be little to discuss, but a close reading hints at another level to this relationship that goes unseen. Although Dmitri and Ivan both refer to conversations they have had, the narrator shows us none of these conversations. Robin Miller, Deborah Martinsen, and Olga Meerson all discuss the subjectivity of Dostoevsky’s narrators and the discrepancy between their views and those of the author. Martinsen warns that “by creating a subjective, ambivalent narrator, Dostoevsky forces the authorial audience to be wary.” I believe *The Brothers Karamazov* is shaped by the strange paradox that the narrator and author disagree on the fundamental belief underlying the novel: the narrator does not believe in brotherhood, while it is Dostoevsky’s highest ideal. The narrator hides many of the positive instances of brotherly connection; Dostoevsky allows hints of them to peak through. By choosing a narrator whose views were so opposed to his own, Dostoevsky set himself the ultimate challenge of affirming brotherhood in the text.

While we do not get to see Ivan’s reactions when Dmitri confides his deepest feelings and secrets, we do find out that he is affected by Dmitri’s words. Ivan tells Katerina Ivanovna a great deal of what Dmitri has said about the underground hymn they will sing in Siberia. This hymn is the most important idea to Dmitri after his arrest, and it is closely linked with his salvation. We have proof that Ivan is deeply moved by it, because Katerina Ivanovna tells

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173 “Он его решительно не любил и много-много что чувствовал к нему иногда сострадание, но и то смешанное с большим презрением, доходившим до гадливости” (PSS 15:42).
174 Miller, *Dostoevsky and The Idiot*; Martinsen, *Surprised by Shame*, 104; specific to *The Brothers Karamazov*: Meerson, *Dostoevsky’s Taboos* (Chapter Six); Miller, *Worlds of the Novel*, 15.
175 Martinsen, *Surprised by Shame*, 104. This comment is made in reference to *Demons*, but it holds true for *The Brothers Karamazov* as well.
176 Meerson claims the narrator “taboos” the idea of Smerdyakov’s brotherhood with the other Karamazov brothers. I will explain later in the chapter why I disagree with the idea of taboo.
Alyosha: “if you knew how he spoke [about the hymn]!” adding, “If you knew how he loved the wretched man at that moment, as he was telling about him, and how he hated him, perhaps, at the same moment!” Here the antinomian relation of love/hate extends even into the sibling bond. But Ivan is able to overcome his feelings of dislike and relate to his brother on a deeper level, despite their outward differences. This is active love.

The positive importance of brotherhood is most explicitly stated by Alyosha when he tries to give Captain Snegiryov two hundred rubles from Katerina Ivanovna. She lets Alyosha decide how to deliver the money so that Snegiryov will not feel ashamed to take it, and Alyosha chooses to give it from a “sister.” He tells Snegiryov that he and Katerina Ivanovna have both been offended by the same man and concludes: “It means that a sister is coming to the aid of a brother… She precisely charged me to persuade you to accept these two hundred rubles from her as from a sister.” Alyosha views a sibling as closer to the self—someone with whom one need not feel pride, and from whom one can therefore accept help without shame. He tells Snegiryov: “you must accept them, otherwise… otherwise it follows that everyone in the world must be enemies of each other! But there are brothers in the world too… You have a noble soul… you must understand, you must…!”

Here Alyosha sets up an opposition between siblings and enemies, suggesting that if we cannot allow brothers to help us, then we are truly isolated as individuals, and everyone will become enemies (an idea parallel to Mikhail’s). Alyosha uses the word “must” [должны] four times in this short speech, suggesting that accepting brotherhood is a duty necessary for the

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177 “Если бы вы знали, как он говорил!“ “Если бы вы знали, как он любил этого несчастного в ту минуту, когда мне передавал про него, и как ненавидел его, может быть, в ту же минуту!” (PSS 15:182).
178 “Это значит, сестра идет к брату с помощью… Она именно поручила мне уговорить вас принять от нее вот эти двести рублей как от сестры” (PSS 14:190).
179 “Вы должны принять их, иначе… иначе, стало быть, все должны быть врагами друг другу на свете! Но ведь есть же и на свете братья… У вас благородная душа… вы должны это понять, должны!…" (PSS 14:190).
improvement of mankind. Snegiryov takes heed of Alyosha’s rhetoric of siblinghood, and in fact seems to share Alyosha’s views on the privileged status siblings have. He asks twice: “And she says that a sister… and it’s true… really true?” and: “here you are persuading me to accept it because a ‘sister’ has sent it?” The Adolescent provides a contrasting case in which a poor girl accepts monetary aid from Versilov as a person “who could be my father.” Later, overcome with guilt and shame, she commits suicide.

The sibling bond can extend beyond literal, blood relatives, and throughout the novel characters call others “brother” or “sister” in order to change the way they can interact with them. Katerina Ivanovna calls Alyosha “brother” when seeking intimacy with him. Grushenka, too, forms a sibling-like bond with Alyosha. After Zosima’s death, when Alyosha is in grief, he lets Rakitin bring him to Grushenka, expecting her to corrupt him. When, instead, she reacts with compassion on learning of Zosima’s death, Alyosha tells her: “I came here looking for a wicked soul—I was drawn to that, because I was low and wicked myself, but I found a true sister, I found a treasure—a loving soul…” At this pivotal moment in his life, Alyosha thinks of the one who understands him and treats him with compassion as a sister. And again, in her response, the word “sister” does not go unrecognized or unacknowledged: “He called me his sister, I’ll never forget it!” From this moment on, Grushenka confides in Alyosha like a true

180 “И говорит, что сестра... и вправду это, вправду?” “Вы ведь угрожаете меня принять тем, что «сестра» посылает” (PSS 14:190, 191).
181 “который бы мог быть моим отцом” (PSS 13:145).
182 Snodgrass analyzes the harm caused by giving money in Crime and Punishment, emphasizing the feeling of intentional injury some characters experience when accepting money. “One can almost sum up this novel as a structure of financial and emotional debts which the debtors try to pay off with charities, on one hand, or self-punishments on the other” (“Crime for Punishment,” 226). I believe Dostoevsky is looking for a way around this model of debt, so that giving and receiving can actually foster equality, rather than reinforcing hierarchy.
183 “Я шел сюда злую душу найти — так влекло меня самого к тому, потому что я был подл и зол, а нашел сестру искреннюю, нашел сокровище—душу любящую…” (PSS 14:318).
184 A very similar speech occurs in The Adolescent when Arkady goes to Katerina Nikolaevna, the woman who has captivated both father and son: “Coming in here, I thought that I would go away with Jesuitism, cunning, a worming-out serpent, but I found honor, glory, a student!” [Входя сюда, я думал, что унесу незуитство, хитрость, выведывающую змею, а нашел честь, славу, студента!] (PSS 13:208). Significantly, Arkady does not call her a sister, and she never forms that kind of close relationship with him.
brother. The narrator tells us that after Dmitri’s arrest, “Grushenka opened her heart to him [Alyosha] alone and constantly asked his advice.”

In providing the examples of active love, the sibling bond also challenges the idea that love must be earned or deserved, an idea significantly associated with fathers. Stepan Trofimovich claims on multiple occasions that because of his failures he has “so little right” or is “unworthy” “to be called a father.” In his original isolationist phase, Arkady, too, tells his mother: “What’s immoral about family love, mama, is that it’s unearned. Love must be earned.” This idea of needing to earn love is put forward convincingly in Dmitri Karamazov’s trial, when the defense attorney speaks of parricide and suggests that to be a real father one must not only beget a child, but also love and make sacrifices for that child and share his joys and pains. He argues that Fyodor Pavlovich has done nothing to deserve this title, and concludes: “Love for a father that is not justified by the father is an absurdity, an impossibility. Love cannot be created out of nothing: only God creates out of nothing.”

The defense attorney’s claim is reminiscent of Ivan’s claim (quoted above): “Christ’s love for people is in its kind a miracle impossible on earth.” We have seen that sibling love, embodied in Alyosha’s kiss, disproved this claim. Therefore, by the same logic, the defense attorney must also be mistaken about the possibilities of active love. And to remove all doubt, Dostoevsky titles the chapter “An adulterer of thought” [Прелюбодей мысли]. In falsifying the idea that love must be earned, Dostoevsky draws a parallel to Grace (Romans 9-11). Like Grace, sibling love does not have to be earned, but should be bestowed unconditionally upon a brother.

185 “Грушенька только одному ему доверяла свое сердце и беспрерывно просила у него советов” (PSS 15:6).
186 “так мало нахожу себя вправе называться отцом; “я недостоин называния отца” (PSS 10:75, 101).
187 “Тем-то и безнравственна родственная любовь, мама, что она – не заслуженная. Любовь надо заслужить” (PSS 13:212).
188 “Любовь к отцу, не оправданная отцом, есть нелепость, есть невозможность. Нельзя создать любовь из ничего, из ничего только бог творит” (PSS 15:169).
Another discredited character, Rakitin, also fails to understand this. When accused of not loving Grushenka or Alyosha, Rakitin asks angrily: “What’s there to love you for? [...] One loves for some reason, and what has either of you done for me?”189 Grushenka’s reply, “You should love for no reason, like Alyosha,” comes just after Alyosha has called her a sister, again linking selfless love to the sibling bond.

Dostoevsky does not explicitly explain how this unearned sibling love is supposed to work. In Tolstoy’s fiction, characters love their siblings because of long association; they are bound by their shared past. Lacking this, Dostoevsky’s characters need a spiritual component to their siblinghood. Soloviev argues this at the abstract, philosophical level in his “Three Speeches in Memory of Dostoevsky” (1881-1883). He distills three truths Dostoevsky learned from his time in Siberia: 1) individuals (even the best) do not have the right to dominate [насиловать] the community in the name of their superiority. 2) Societal truth [общественная правда] does not come from individual minds, but is rooted in national feeling [всенародное чувство]. 3) This truth has religious meaning necessarily connected with belief in Christ and the ideal of Christ.190 The leap to this third truth—the need for Christ—is never explained by Dostoevsky, but I agree with Soloviev that it is fundamental to his thinking about brotherhood. I would go further and link it to his ideas about literal siblinghood in his late novels. Faith allows people to see beyond another’s exterior and “to recognize [признавать] in him the strength and freedom which connect him with the Divine.”191 This is why Dostoevsky’s finest characters are men of God, and why his socialists fail to love each other as brothers.

189 “Да за что мне любить-то вас? [...] Любят за что-нибудь, а вы что мне сделали оба?” (PSS 14:319-320).
190 “Три речи,” 39.
191 “признавать в нем ту силу и ту свободу, которая связывает его с Божеством” (Soloviev, “Три речи,” 51).
Smerdyakov

By far the most troubling aspect of the status of brotherhood in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the role of Smerdyakov. Although the topic has already received a thoughtful and persuasive treatment by Olga Meerson, which I will rely on here as a jumping off point, I conceive the problem of Smerdyakov’s brotherhood in fundamentally different terms than Meerson, and therefore, while I agree with the specifics of her argument, we arrive at different conclusions.

For Meerson, the central issue is taboo: “The chief taboo in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the idea that Smerdiakov is the fourth son of Fedor Pavlovich—or more precisely, an equal to the other brothers in his blood-sonship.” While Smerdyakov is acknowledged by many to be an illegitimate child of Fyodor Pavlovich (this is even stated publicly in Dmitri’s trial), “A related idea […] is not mentionable, and this is the possibility of Smerdiakov’s being the fourth brother to the three brothers Karamazov.” If Smerdyakov’s brotherhood were tabooed, as Meerson argues, then the big question that would need to be answered is why. Meerson does not answer this question, and I believe that it cannot be answered because *brotherhood cannot be tabooed*. And certainly in *The Brothers Karamazov*, it does not make sense for it to be so, because that would go against Dostoevsky’s main principle of the novel.

This problem disappears, however, if we view Smerdyakov’s brotherhood not as taboo, but as a test. There is no ultimate law saying others cannot see Smerdyakov as a brother. If he is not loved as one, it is because of human failure alone. As Zosima tells Madama Khokhlakova, “active love is a harsh and fearful thing compared with love in dreams […] Active love is labor and perseverance.” Through his vileness, Smerdyakov makes this labor all the more difficult.

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192 Meerson, *Dostoevsky’s Taboos*, 183.
193 *Dostoevsky’s Taboos,* 186.
194 „Любовь деятельная сравнительно с мечтательною есть дело жестокое и устрашающее […] Любовь деятельная – это работа и выдержка“ (PSS 14:54).
Loving Smerdyakov is a test that Dostoevsky presents to his characters in order to link the main action of the novel back to the central ideological struggle in the Grand Inquisitor. As discussed above, the Inquisitor’s love for mankind removes the burden of free choice, while Christ’s love offers a challenge—a model of goodness that people must freely take upon themselves despite the suffering it may entail. If we are to choose Christ over the Inquisitor, then we must be prepared to accept the challenge of actively choosing to love others as our brothers. As Nicholas Berdyaev writes, “free goodness [...] entails the liberty of evil.”195 The harder Dostoevsky makes it to love Smerdyakov, the greater he makes this choice. Precisely because Smerdyakov is so contemptible, he makes the concept of universal brotherhood more powerful by showing how far it must be able to go. Loving Alyosha is easy and proves little.

The real question is: how does this ultimate test of brotherhood work, and why does everyone fail? First, Dostoevsky makes seeing Smerdyakov as a brother an extreme challenge. This begins with Smerdyakov’s foster father, Grigory, who himself regards Smerdyakov as something less than human. Grigory strikes Smerdyakov when he questions biblical teaching, and Smerdyakov grows up hearing words of abuse. “‘He doesn’t like us, the monster,’ Grigory used to say to Marfa Ignatievna, ‘and he doesn’t like anyone. You think you’re a human being?’ he would suddenly address Smerdyakov directly. ‘You are not a human being, you were begotten of bathhouse slime, that’s who you are…”196 As Grigory is in many ways portrayed as a positive figure by the narrator, his voice is given a certain amount of authority, so that we as readers trust his ill opinion of his foster child and are lulled into accepting that this harsh treatment is Smerdyakov’s just due.

195 Dostoievsky, 70.
196 “Не любит он нас с тобой, этот изверг,— говорил Григорий Марфе Игнатьевне,— да и никого не любит. Ты разве человек,— обращался он вдруг прямо к Смердякову,— ты не человек, ты из банной мокроты завелся, вот ты кто…” (PSS 14:114).
The least reflective of the brothers, Dmitri never questions the justice of the role he puts Smerdyakov into as his obedient servant, thereby not only slighting a brother, but also going against Zosima’s teaching that we should be the servant to our servants. Dmitri refers to Smerdyakov as “lackey” and seems oblivious to the implications of their shared paternity. Strangely, Alyosha too falls into this pattern. He is very concerned about his other two brothers and spends most of the book running between them, but he only speaks with Smerdyakov once, and then quite briefly. Despite hearing Smerdyakov wish that he had never been born, Alyosha does not notice the “harsh reality of his life.” In conversation, Alyosha, too, refers to Smerdyakov as a lackey. After the trial, Alyosha tells Kolya: “The lackey killed him [Fyodor Pavlovich], my brother is innocent.” He creates a radical separation between the lackey and his brother, proving his inability to see that the lackey is his brother too. Dostoevsky offers no explanation of this failure on Alyosha’s part, and the present author is likewise unable to explain it.

Of the Karamazov brothers, Ivan is the most aware of Smerdyakov. Though he does not acknowledge the latter as a brother, his behavior towards Smerdyakov suggests that somewhere in his subconscious Ivan is struggling against this relationship. With very few words, Smerdyakov can raise such a fury in his aloof and self-contained brother that Ivan even contemplates fratricide. Ivan’s reaction is in keeping with that of a sibling, as it is those who are closest to us who can hurt us most. After telling Alyosha his poema, “The Grand Inquisitor,” Ivan finds himself in inexplicable anguish until he sees Smerdyakov and realizes “that the lackey Smerdyakov was also sitting in his soul, and that it was precisely this man that his soul could not

198 “Убил лакей, а брат невинен” (PSS 15:189).
199 This comment is noted by Meerson (Dostoevsky’s Taboos, 197).
bear."\textsuperscript{200} Ivan seems to find Smerdyakov upsetting because he represents the negative aspects Ivan wishes were not present in himself. To acknowledge Smerdyakov as a brother would thus be to acknowledge a link with these ugly parts of his nature.

Smerdyakov is also aware and resentful of his brotherly bonds. Meerson argues that he “actively dissociates himself from the Karamazov brotherhood—so actively, in fact, that it becomes clear that he is sure he is one of them.”\textsuperscript{201} Smerdyakov makes a veiled biblical reference to Cain’s “Am I my brother’s keeper,” yet alters the statement so as not to use the word brother. When Alyosha asks Smerdyakov if “brother Dmitri” will soon be returning, Smerdyakov answers: “Why should I be informed as to Dmitri Fyodorovich? It is not as if I were his keeper.”\textsuperscript{202} The significance of this reference is heightened, when, a few pages later, Ivan makes a similar comment (quoted above) and then catches himself and points out the biblical parallel. It seems that Smerdyakov is deliberate in his attempt both to point out his awareness of the sibling relationship he has to Alyosha, while at the same time, through removing the word brother, to show his active rejection of this sibling bond. Smerdyakov foregrounds the Cain and Abel story which, while about the first sibling pair, actually tells of the absence of sibling bonds. Cain and Abel are only linked by their competing relations with a higher being and do not interact until Cain invites Abel to the field to murder him.

The one brother with whom Smerdyakov seeks a connection is Ivan, though he never calls Ivan a brother. Juliet Mitchell writes that “The sibling […] is the figure which underlies such nearly forgotten concepts as the ego-ideal – the older sibling is idealized as someone the

\textsuperscript{200} “в душе его сидел лакей Смердяков и что именно этого-то человека и не может вынести его душа” (PSS 14:242).
\textsuperscript{201} Dostoevsky’s Taboos, 187.
\textsuperscript{202} “Почему ж бы я мог быть известен про Дмитрия Федоровича; другое дело, кабы я при них сторожем состоял?” (PSS 14:206). This passage is discussed by both Meerson (Dostoevsky’s Taboos, 187-188) and Morson (“Verbal Pollution,” 241).
subject would like to be, and sometimes this is a reversal of the hatred for a rival." Mitchell’s work provides an important reminder that fathers are not the only models to be emulated and struggled against in the search to define oneself. I believe this idea of the ego-ideal helps explain Smerdyakov’s feelings about Ivan, feelings demonstrated in the first half of the novel and then discussed during the pair’s three encounters after the murder. Unlike Dmitri and Alyosha, whom Smerdyakov hates, Ivan has become Smerdyakov’s ideal and model because of their mutual admiration for Europe. Fyodor Pavlovich points out that Smerdyakov is showing off his intelligence for Ivan, and that he has started coming to lunch every day since Ivan arrived. In the first of the post-murder meetings, Smerdyakov tells Ivan: “I thought you were like I am,” and then a moment later, in reference to their conversation before Ivan left for Moscow: “I loved you very much then, and acted in all simplicity.” This is the sole time Smerdyakov claims to have loved someone, and it counters Grigory’s harsh statement that he “does not love anyone.” Bearing in mind Zosima’s statement that hell is the inability to love, it is significant that this one ray of love from Smerdyakov is for a brother.

Before the murder, Smerdyakov fantasizes that he shares a connection with his admired brother, and though he never speaks plainly, he truly believes that Ivan understands the underlying meaning of his words. Over the course of their three meetings after the murder, however, Smerdyakov comes to understand that he has not understood his brother, nor Ivan him. During their second meeting, Ivan strikes Smerdyakov, at which the latter dissolves into tears. This is a harsh awakening for Smerdyakov to the fact that he and Ivan have not been working together, a message affirmed again in their final meeting, when Ivan calls Smerdyakov “viper”

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203 Mitchell, Siblings, 4.
204 "подумал, что я, как и я” “Полюбил я вас тогда очень и был с вами по всей простоте” (PSS 15:46, 47).
and then tells him: “I don’t care about you.”205 In the light of this loss of the one positive connection Smerdyakov believed he had, I think his suicide can be seen as one of utter hopelessness, as the only flicker of love in his life goes out. Holquist writes that Smerdyakov commits suicide “from the despair of a twice-abandoned orphan,” considering Ivan to be his second father-figure.206 Abandonment by a brother can be even more devastating.207

This failure of the brothers’ relations with Smerdyakov has implications far beyond his personal tragedy or the immediate family. To fully appreciate this, we must remove his brotherhood from the realm of taboo and see it as it actually is—the ultimate challenge of the novel, perhaps greater even than the Inquisitor. For the Karamazov brothers “he is the first step from the concrete and mundane blood brotherhood to the universal one,”208 and Dostoevsky makes him the most difficult step imaginable. In failing to love Smerdyakov, the Karamazov brothers are failing to enter this larger brotherhood. Even Alyosha, who is described as “simply an early lover of mankind,” manages to overlook one of the “brothers” closest to him. Remembering Mikhail’s teaching (“Until one has indeed become the brother of all, there will be no brotherhood.”), it could be argued that by rejecting Smerdyakov, not only Dmitri, Ivan, and Alyosha, but all the characters in the novel fail at Zosima’s central commandment to love all of God’s creation.

Furthermore, as Meerson shows, not only the characters fail to see Smerdyakov as a brother, but also the narrator. “Dostoevsky makes his narrator demonize Smerdiakov because he, the real author, taboos the idea that Smerdiakov is a human being (i.e., a brother to other

205 “Мне до тебя нет и дела” (PSS 15:58).
206 Dostoevsky and the Novel, 182.
207 Arkady’s most painful moment in The Adolescent is going to meet his gentry half-brother and finding himself treated as a servant, rather than as a brother.
208 Meerson, Dostoevsky’s Taboos, 194. Ivan and Alyosha are full brothers, but Dmitri is only their half brother, so in a sense Dostoevsky has already created several steps from fully shared blood/ancestry, to half-shared, to no legally acknowledged sharing with Smerdyakov, who would also be a half-brother.
humans) not only for the purposes of his characters but for the purpose of his narrator as well.”

While each of the legitimate brothers gets an entire chapter devoted to him in Book I, Smerdyakov’s first mention in the novel is when Dmitri, arriving late for the meeting at father Zosima’s cell, explains that “the servant Smerdyakov” gave him the wrong hour. Smerdyakov is next mentioned in Book III chapter 1: “In the Servants’ Quarters,” immediately placing him on a lower level than the “true” brothers. This chapter focuses entirely on Grigory and Marfa, so Smerdyakov is again slighted by lack of notice. At the end of the following chapter, “Stinking Lizaveta,” the narrator finally tells us: “I ought to say a little more about him in particular, but I am ashamed to distract my reader’s attention for such a long time to such ordinary lackeys, and therefore I shall go back to my narrative, hoping that with regard to Smerdyakov things will somehow work themselves out in the further course of the story.”

Using the narrator in this way—both to reject Smerdyakov and to obscure positive instances of brotherhood between Dmitri and Ivan—Dostoevsky expands the scope of this test of brotherhood, making it a test for the reader as well. If we are lulled into believing the narrator that Smerdyakov does not deserve to be part of universal brotherhood and that Dmitri and Ivan hate each other, then Dostoevsky implicates us, his readers, as well as the Karamazov brothers in the oversight of Smerdyakov and the failure of brotherhood. This reinforces the idea that everyone is guilty before everyone, making the guilt for the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich a truly universal phenomenon. Smerdyakov acts as the lynchpin of the novel, the overlooked brother

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209 Meerson, *Dostoevsky’s Taboos*, 190 (italics in original).
210 “Очень бы надо примолвить кое-что о нем специально, но мне совестно столь долго отвлекать внимание моего читателя на столь обыкновенных лакеев, а потому и перехожу к моему рассказу, уповая, что о Смердякове как-нибудь сойдет само собою в дальнейшем течении повести” (PSS 14:93).
211 Martinsen concurs with this; “In shocking us, Dostoevsky forces us to realize how we collaborate in the status quo, how we exclude shame-filled and shameless characters like Pavel Fedorovich Smerdiakov and Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov from our sense of universal brotherhood” (*Surprised by Shame*, 60).
in a world based on forming lateral bonds. He is the reminder of the price we pay for choosing Christ over the Inquisitor.

**Alyosha’s “Speech at the Stone”: Universal Brotherhood Built on Sibling Bonds**

Despite this troubling message, Dostoevsky chooses to end the book by affirming brotherly love. By closing with Alyosha’s speech at the stone, critics like Vladimir Golstein have suggested that “the description of a failed family that opens *The Brothers Karamazov* is juxtaposed with the image of a new kind of family in the novel’s conclusion.” While both Golstein and Fusso call this new family an ideal foster father (Alyosha) and his twelve boys, I would argue that this new family is a family of siblings.

Indeed, the entire speech has its roots in a literal sibling bond. Much of it comes almost word for word from *The Adolescent*. On a sunny afternoon in that novel, Arkady pays a visit to a Prince, and is shocked to notice his sister seated in the next room. He hurriedly takes his leave, and as he is walking down the street, Liza overtakes him. The conversation that ensues is the siblings’ first moment of intimacy, yet when Arkady asks Liza what she was doing at the Prince’s, she tells him she was visiting the Prince’s female relative instead of admitting that she is having an affair with the Prince (by whom she soon becomes pregnant). Liza’s deception allows Arkady to experience the scene as a time of childhood innocence; they are in the sun, Liza is joyful and laughing, and her mood quickly infects her brother. “Look, what a day, look,

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213 Fusso claims that “the novel ends by emphasizing the love that exists between fathers and sons” (*Discovering Sexuality*, 69).
214 Because of this deception, Arkady spends much of the book regularly borrowing money from the Prince, thinking it is given as a token of friendship and oblivious to the fact that he is profiting from his sister’s shame, a theme we have seen already in *Crime and Punishment*.
215 At least this is how he describes it in the memoir we read. However, there are hints that his hindsight knowledge when writing may have seeped back into how he describes the day; the word “ужасно” appears eight times in the passage, “страшно” comes up several times, he says Liza’s look had something “ужасно веселое, а на капельку и лукавое” in it. Yet this language does not to relate to how Arkady experiences the meeting at the time.
how good! How beautiful you are today, Liza. However, you’re a terrible child,” Arkady tells her.

Arkady is uncomfortable around women, but he feels close to his sister and makes Liza a platonic declaration of love: “Liza, I’ve never had a friend, and I look upon the idea as nonsense; but with you it’s not nonsense… Do you want to be friends? Do you understand what I want to say?” Although they were not raised together and do not have a shared past to unite them, their siblinghood—being illegitimate children of the same family—creates a bond. Arkady asks if Liza understands his request for friendship and she replies:

“I understand very well.”
“And you know, without any conditions, any contract—we’ll simply be friends.”
“Yes, simply, simply, only with one condition: if we ever accuse each other, if we’re displeased with something, if we ourselves become wicked, bad, if we even forget all this—let’s never forget this day and this very hour! Let’s promise ourselves. Let’s promise that we will always remember this day, when we walked hand in hand, and laughed so, and were so merry… Yes? Yes?”

Arkady swears. Liza, of course, is alluding to the time when Arkady will learn of her affair. She does not know if her brother will reject her when he discovers her disgrace, and her speech is preparing him for this eventuality.

Although scholars rarely comment on this passage, anyone familiar with *The Brothers Karamazov* will recognize it as the precursor to the “speech at the stone.” At the end of *The Brothers Karamazov* Alyosha tells the boys: “let us never forget how good we once felt here, all together, united by such good and kind feelings as made us, too, for the time that we loved the

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217 “Лиза, у меня не было друга, да и смотрю я на эту идею как на вздор; но с тобой не вздор… Хочешь, станем друзьями? Ты понимаешь, что я хочу сказать?” (PSS 13:161).
218 “– Очень понимаю. – И знаешь, без уговору, без контракта,— просто будем друзьями! – Да, просто, просто, но только один уговор: если когда-нибудь мы обвиним друг друга, если будем в чем недовольны, если сделаемся сами львами, дурны, если даже забудем всё это,— то не забудем никогда этого дня и вот этого самого часа! Дадим слово такое себе. Дадим слово, что всегда припомним этот день, когда мы вот шли с тобой оба рука в руку, и так смеялись, и так нам весело было… Да? Ведь да?” (PSS 13:161).
poor boy, perhaps better than we actually are.”219 He concludes with the words: “And we go like this now, hand in hand,” just like Arkady and Liza—accidental siblings drawn together by active love.220

Just as Liza warns of a time when she and her brother may offend each other or become angry, Alyosha also prepares his loving audience of boys for a time when they may become wicked and “be unable to resist bad action.” Several scholars have gathered all the circumstantial evidence to suggest that Alyosha might have committed a political crime and possibly even attempted to kill the tsar in the proposed sequel to The Brothers Karamazov.221 Viewed in that light, Kolya’s cry—“And eternally so, all our lives hand in hand! Hurrah for Karamazov!”222—can be seen as the force meant to bind society and prevent such violence and destruction.223 But looking at the model for this idea of committing a bad action (Liza’s affair with the Prince) we see that the source could actually be something much closer to home. The rift Liza fears is based on personal relations and a test to active love between people who are already close.

Liza asks about a girl who recently committed suicide and adds: “You know, it’s even sinful that you and I go along so merrily, and her soul is now flying somewhere in the darkness, in some bottomless darkness, sinner that she is, and offended… Arkady, who’s to blame for her

219 “Не забывайте никогда, как нам было раз здесь хорошо, всем сообща, соединенным таким хорошим и добрым чувством, которое и нас сделало на это время любви нашей к бедному мальчику, может быть лучшими, чем мы есть в самом деле” (PSS 15:195).
220 “Вот мы теперь и идем рука в руку” (PSS 15:197). “For a brief moment, the boys transcend hierarchy, no longer struggling to be older and to establish supremacy over each other” (Hruska, “The Sins of Children,” 489).
221 For one such study, see: James Rice, “Dostoevsky’s Endgame.” Blank synthesizes the various scholarly view of the proposed sequel and suggests that in addition to psychological and political motivations for Alyosha’s conversion, there are artistic motivations as well (Dostoevsky’s Dialectics, 58-61).
222 “И вечно так, всю жизнь рука в руку! Ура Карамазову!” (PSS 15:197).
223 Or more negatively, it can be taken as an echo of the fraternité of the French Revolution.
Liza’s references to the suicide find their analogy in Alyosha’s words about Ilyusha, whose funeral the boys have just attended. Alyosha tells the boys: “And yet, no matter how wicked we may be—and God preserve us from it—as soon as we remember how we buried Ilyusha, how we loved him in his last days, and how we’ve been talking just now, so much as friends, so together, by this stone, the most cruel and jeering man among us […] will still not dare laugh within himself at how kind and good he was at this present moment!” It is in the face of death that life and human connection are being affirmed. Aleksei, man of faith, creates brotherhood on the grave of a dead innocent, while his doubting brother used the suffering of a child to stir rebellion against God.

Alyosha offers hope that he and the boys may be saved from an evil time of rupture through the power of memory. Both Alyosha and Liza capture the current moment of unity and command that it be preserved in memory as a source of positive feelings for some darker future time. Alyosha explains to the boys: “You must know that there is nothing higher, or stronger, or sounder, or more useful afterwards in life, than some good memory, especially a memory from childhood, from the parental home […] If a man stores up many such memories to take into life, then he is saved for his whole life. And even if only one good memory remains with us in our hearts, that alone may serve some day for our salvation.”

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224 “Знаешь, даже грешно, что мы идем такие веселые, а ее душа где-нибудь теперь летит во мраке, в каком-нибудь бездонном мраке, согрешившая, и с своей обидой… Аркадий, кто в ее грехе виноват?” (PSS 13:160).
225 “А все-таки как ни будем мы злы, чего не дай бог, но как вспомним про то, как мы хоронили Илюшу, как мы любили его в последние дни и как вот сейчас говорили так дружно и так вместе у этого камня, то самый жестокий из нас человек и самый насмешливый […] не посмеет внутри себя посмеяться над тем, как он был добр и хорош в эту теперешнюю минуту!” (PSS 15:195).
226 This observation is the starting point for Robert Jackson’s comparison of Alyosha’s speech and Ivan’s rebellion (“Alyosha’s Speech at the Stone”). See also: Miller, Brothers Karamazov, 133.
227 “Знайте же, что ничего нет выше, и сильнее, и здоровее, и полезнее вперед для жизни, как хорошее какое-нибудь воспоминание, и особенно вынесенное еще из детства, из родительского дома […] Если много набрать таких воспоминаний с собою в жизнь, то спасен человек на всю жизнь. И даже если и одно только хорошее воспоминание при нас останется в нашем сердце, то и то может послужить когда-нибудь нам во спасение” (PSS 15:195). See Thompson for a discussion of positive childhood memories (Poetics of Memory, 107) and for memory in the “speech at the stone” (120-122). See also: Jackson, “Alyosha’s Speech at the Stone,” 243.
We actually see this happen in *The Adolescent*. As noted above, the moment on the street is framed as a time of childhood innocence, before Liza’s pregnancy and before Arkady’s foray into foppish extravagance and scandal. Later, after many things have gone wrong, Arkady returns to the memory of this meeting on two occasions. The first time is when Liza goes to see him after he learns of her pregnancy. Arkady starts by reproaching her for deceiving him, but quickly stops himself and instead questions how he failed to guess. The answer is simple: he idealized Liza. As he tells her: “I considered you the sun, Liza. How could something like that enter my head?” He then reminds her of their meeting on the street outside the Prince’s and asks if the affair was already going on. Her affirmative nod makes him reconsider. “This was not from my stupidity, Liza, more likely my egoism and not stupidity was the reason, my egoism of heart and—and perhaps faith in what is holy. Oh, I was always sure that you all were infinitely higher than I and—now look!” This is the problem with verticalizing relations and seeking to make a sibling “the sun,” as others do with Stavrogin. A person held as a holy ideal will inevitably prove to be only human. The memory of their sunny street meeting softens Arkady and although he says some harsh things during the interview with Liza, the pair end by reaffirming their mutual love, which is even strengthened by the test it has undergone.

Using *The Adolescent* as background for Alyosha’s speech at the stone, we can see how Dostoevsky uses the connection between literal siblings in his earlier novel as a model for his

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228 “я тебя за солнце считал, Лиза, и как могло бы мне прийти что-нибудь в голову?” (PSS 13:237).
229 “тут, скорее, мой эгоизм, а не глупость причиной, мой эгоизм сердца и — и, пожалуй, уверенность в святость. О, я всегда был уверен, что все вы бесконечно выше меня и — вот!” (PSS 13:237).
230 The second time Arkady remembers the sunny street meeting is at the very end of his memoirs, after all the scandals have passed and he can narrate how everything turned out. He closes with the sad fate of his sister. The Prince has died, Liza fell down the stairs and had a miscarriage, and she has become silent and withdrawn. Arkady writes: “All these last days there has been a bright, high spring sun, and I kept remembering that sunny morning last autumn when she and I walked down the street, both rejoicing and hoping and loving each other.” [Все эти последние дни стояло яркое, высокое, весеннее солнце, и я все припоминал про себя то солнечное утро, когда мы, прошлую осенью, шли с нею по улице, оба радуясь и надеясь и любя друг друга.] (PSS 13:451). The scene has now unmistakably come to represent lost innocence.
ideal of universal brotherhood in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Liza and Arkady do not have a shared past as most biological siblings do, so their bond is based on active love, much like the love between the Karamazov brothers, or the love Alyosha is trying to forge between the boys. As scholars have pointed out, Alyosha gives his speech at the stone to twelve boys, like the twelve apostles. So the scene has religious connotations of brotherhood in Christ as well. Both Liza and Alyosha’s speeches in the two novels refer to walking hand in hand, the ultimate image of unity, equality, and love. Arkady ends the scene with Liza by kissing her for the first time. This kiss is mirrored by Alyosha’s kiss for Ivan after his rebellion and Christ’s kiss for the Inquisitor—two of the most important instances of active love in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Arkady and Liza’s scene on the street is but a brief sunny moment in a long, dark, complicated novel, but it represents the hope and joy that find their full expression in Alyosha’s words at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*. By understanding the roots of that scene in the literal siblinghood of two illegitimate children in the most “accidental” of all Dostoevsky’s families, we gain a better understanding of Dostoevsky’s vision of universal brotherhood and of its links to the literal sibling bond. The accidental quality of family in Dostoevsky already makes literal family one step closer to the gathering together of disparate children, the offspring of different parents, in the brotherhood of humankind. This is Dostoevsky’s answer to the question of expanding family love that Tolstoy wrestled with unsuccessfully in *Anna Karenina*. Family can expand when the ties that bind it are active love which can be bestowed on all, not something shared—childhood memories, clan, race, nationality—which will ultimately prove to be a restricting and dividing force.

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231 Jackson, “Alyosha’s Speech at the Stone,” 237. Miller, *Brothers Karamazov*, 132. Similar to Christ’s love in Ivan’s *poema*, Alyosha’s brotherly love is offered in place of a hierarchical model.

232 Soloviev makes a parallel comment about Dostoevsky’s Christianity: “All panhuman actions and relations should be definitively controlled by the same moral principle to which we bow in our temples and which we acknowledge
Conclusion

One simple underlying principle unites all the works discussed in this chapter: the need for vulnerability. Dostoevsky’s characters, unlike Tolstoy’s, suffer from an inability to make themselves vulnerable before others. This may at first seem ironic, given how weak and insecure many of them are, but they all seek to hide that fact. The sentimental romantics of the 1840s, like Stepan Trofimovich, who wear their hearts on their sleeves, are bitterly mocked. The new revolutionaries have rejected family and love; they need nothing from anyone.

The inability to be vulnerable before others explains the characters’ difficulties with accepting alms or aid. If one is not vulnerable, then one does not need anything from others, but in this state, one cannot give assistance without creating a vertical power structure. Aid must be reciprocal—material charity in exchange for a spiritual blessing. Vulnerability is at the heart of the mysterious visitor Mikhail’s speech about isolation vs. brotherhood. People horde money and hole up in their fortresses alone as a way to avoid needing others. Brotherhood involves giving up independence and accepting mutual dependency. But this is not the “mutual profit” to which Pyotr Stepanovich reduces friendship. Nor is it the mutual slavery of Shigalyovism; it is the elevating brotherhood of Christ, who has raised his brothers up to his level.

This theme points to another unexpected point of convergence with Tolstoy. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Richard Gustafson argues that Tolstoyan heroes move between two stances (like the writer himself): the Resident—one who is embedded in the world of human

in our home lives, i.e. the principle of love, free consent, and brotherly unity” [Все дела и отношения общечеловеческие должны окончательно управляться тем же самым нравственным началом, которому мы поклоняемся в храмах и которое признаем в своей домашней жизни, т.е. началом любви, свободного согласия и братского единения] (“Tri rechi,” 42). Here Soloviev links the temple and domestic spheres.
connection—and the Stranger—one who feels alienated from that world. A typical Tolstoyan plotline involves the shift between these two poles, and this is actually the plotline of several of Dostoevsky’s novels. Both The Adolescent and Crime and Punishment tell the same story: a young man is obsessed by an idea that has cut him off from the rest of the world (Arkady’s: to become a Rothchild; Raskolnikov’s: to become a Napoleon). His development involves a renunciation of this idea and a painful progression from isolation into belonging. Each must gradually come to terms with his alienated but loving family and accept their care, and for each of the young men, this process necessitates making themselves vulnerable. In Demons, the replacement of love with pride and power—Varvara’s relations with Stepan Trofimovich, Liza’s relations with Stavrogin, Pyotr’s relations with his revolutionary “brothers”—is in essence a way of avoiding the vulnerability that could actually unite people.

Dostoevsky revels in threshold moments for the potential they hold, both psychological and dramatic. These moments of extreme vulnerability also hold the potential for the forging of sibling-like bonds. When Alyosha goes to Grushenka after Zosima’s death, he is in a weakened state with all defenses down, and he finds a sister’s caring. When Dmitri pours out his soul to both Alyosha and Ivan, they take his words about salvation to heart. When the boys cry at Ilyusha’s death, their vulnerable hearts are open to Alyosha’s words that will bind them in brotherly love. The essential element of brotherhood is mutual dependence and mutual caring, and this cannot come to individuals in their isolated fortresses.

Dostoevsky saw the isolationist tendency as a western development and believed that it was Russia’s mission to foster brotherly love. In “Winter Notes on Summer Impressions”

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233 Gustafson, Resident and Stranger, 8-22.
234 As noted in Chapter 2, the young men have the same family structure: a younger sister and a dead baby brother.
235 Bakhtin writes: “Dostoevsky always represents a person on the threshold of a final decision, at a moment of crisis, at an unfinalizable—and unpredicteterminable—turning point for his soul” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 61).
(1863), describing his first trip abroad to Europe, Dostoevsky explained why brotherhood was not possible in the West. “Western man speaks of brotherhood as of a great force that moves humanity and does not realize that brotherhood cannot be achieved anywhere if it does not exist in reality.”

He believed that brotherhood is naturally occurring and cannot be artificially created. “In the French nature—and in the western nature in general—this principle [of brotherhood] has not appeared. What has appeared is the principle of individuality, the principle of privacy, of urgent self-preservation, self-interest, self-determination in one’s own I [...] Well, brotherhood could not come from such a self-conception.”

When western socialists tried to create brotherhood, they failed because brotherhood must be an instinct based on love, not reason, and westerners lacked this instinct.

Not so the Russians. Over a decade later in his *Writer’s Diary*, Dostoevsky wrote this prophecy for Russia:

And subsequently, I am certain, we (I mean not we, of course, but Russian people to come) will realize to the very last man that to become a genuine Russian will mean specifically: to strive to bring an ultimate reconciliation to Europe’s contradictions, to indicate that the solution to Europe’s anguish is to be found in the panhuman and all-unifying Russian soul, to enfold all our brethren within it with brotherly love, and at last, perhaps, to utter the ultimate word of great, general harmony, ultimate brotherly accord of all tribes through the law of Christ’s gospel!

Brotherhood, according to Dostoevsky, was the natural condition of the Russian soul. Tolstoy would go farther in his late works, making it the condition of the human soul.

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236 “Западный человек толкует о братстве как о великой движущей силе человечества и не догадывается, что негде взять братства, коли его нет в действительности” (PSS 5:79).
237 “А в природе французской, да и вообще западной, его в наличии не оказалось, а оказалось начало личное, начало особняка, усиленного самосбережения, самоопределения в своем собственном Я […] Ну, а из такого самопоставления не могло произойти братства” (PSS 5:79).
238 *Writer’s Diary* 2, 1294.
Chapter Five
Tolstoy and Brotherhood

We all know, and we cannot help knowing [...] with our whole heart, [...] the fundamental truth of the Christian doctrine, that we all are sons of one Father, wherever we may live and whatever language we may speak; we are all brothers and are subject to the same law of love implanted by our common Father in our hearts.¹

Tolstoy was committed to the ideal of brotherhood his whole life. In his memoirs he writes that when he was five, his brother Nikolenka announced that he possessed a secret “by means of which [...] all men would become happy: [...] no one would be angry with anybody, all would love one another, and all would become ‘Ant-Brothers.’” Tolstoy continues: “We even organized a game of Ant-Brothers, which consisted in sitting under chairs, sheltering ourselves with boxes, screening ourselves with handkerchiefs, and cuddling against one another while crouching in the dark.”² So profound was this image that in his seventies Tolstoy wrote: “The ideal of Ant-Brothers lovingly clinging to one another, though not under two arm-chairs curtained by shawls, but of all mankind under the wide dome of heaven, has remained the same for me.”³ Tolstoy sought to expand the feeling of family love he and his brothers shared to encompass all humanity. Gary R. Jahn claims that the feeling of the Ant Brothers “seems to epitomize the true and full meaning of ‘brotherhood’” for Tolstoy.⁴ The roots of his ideas about brotherhood stem from his literal sibling bonds.

¹ Kingdom of God, 86.
² “посредством которой [...] все люди сделаются счастливыми [...] никто ни на кого не будет сердиться и все будут любить друг друга, все сделаются муравейными братьями [...] Мы даже устроили игру в муравейные братья, которая состояла в том, что садились под стулья, загораживали их ящиками, завешивали платками. И сидели там в темноте, прижимаясь друг к другу” (PSS 34:386). See also: Maude, The Life of Tolstoy, 18 and Gustafson, Resident and Stranger, 8. Nikolai had clearly overheard talk of the Christian denomination called the Moravian Brothers, for the word for ant in Russian is muravei and most likely mixed this with whatever he had heard about the Freemasons and their quest to unite mankind with a universal wisdom.
³ Quoted in: Maude, Leo Tolstoy, 4.
⁴ “Brother or Other,” 71. As Tolstoy became more self-assured in his later years, his writing about brotherhood became more emphatic, making brotherhood not only an ideal, but a natural law or fact of our existence. In The Kingdom of God is Within You, Tolstoy writes of the “contradiction between the Christian law of the brotherhood of men existing in the conscience and the necessity under which all men are placed by compulsory military service of being prepared for hatred and murder—of being at the same time a Christian and a gladiator” (99).
This ultimately led Tolstoy to a paradox, as the type of love that unites brothers under a blanket is not commensurate with the love that can unite all mankind under the dome of the heavens. Because the concept of siblinghood can encompass intense, personal affection based on everyday experience (Ant Brothers) and the impersonal unity of all as children of God (mankind under the heavens), the sibling bond became an essential link for Tolstoy that helped mask from him a general problem in his thinking. He wanted siblinghood to be both personal and impersonal—to be based on the intense affection and intimacy he felt for his own brothers, yet be expandable to every being on earth, regardless their personal qualities. As discussed in Chapter Three, while writing Anna Karenina in the 1870s, Tolstoy had already come to understand that the expansion of the literal kinship network has limits. Not everyone can be svoi, just as there is not room under the blanket for all of mankind.

I believe that Tolstoy’s depiction of family shifts across the trilogy of his major novels in part as a response to this problem. Moving from the bounded families of War and Peace through the expanding (but ultimately limited) kinship network of Anna Karenina to Resurrection (1899), Tolstoy developed an increasingly abstracted conception of family. The ideal he ultimately arrived at is exemplified by Simonson’s religion of interconnectedness (discussed below) in which everything in the world is part of an organic whole. While Dostoevsky shifted his focus from society in Demons to the family in The Adolescent and The Brothers Karamazov, Tolstoy went in the opposite direction; the family ideal that motivated War and Peace and was challenged in Anna Karenina recedes in Resurrection as larger societal and pan-human concerns come to the fore. Family becomes the whole human family for Tolstoy, and consequently he

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5 In their recent narratological approach to Tolstoy’s conception of brotherhood, Ilya Kliger and Nasser Zakariya emphasize the importance of “organicism.” Specifically, organic approaches “tend to privilege the reality of the world as a whole over and above that of the elements or parts within the world” (“Poetics of Brotherhood,” 755).
claims every relationship should resemble a sibling bond. This chapter traces the evolution of Tolstoy’s thoughts about love and brotherhood, exploring how he attempted to derive universal brotherhood from the literal sibling bond.

**PART ONE**

**MOVING FROM INDIVIDUAL TO UNIVERSAL LOVE**

From earthly romantic love to selfless love and sacrifice, to divine, objectless love, Tolstoy’s fiction explores the links and leaps between individual, preference-based love and all humanity united by an undifferentiated feeling of attachment. Tolstoy understood that love often grows from close personal contact and a deep understanding of another being, but he wanted universal love from all for all, which must inherently exist without regard to the individuality of the beloved. He explains this fundamental paradox in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*: “The necessity of extending the sphere of love is beyond dispute. But in reality the possibility of this love is destroyed by the necessity of extending its object indefinitely. And thus the insufficiency of personal human love is made manifest.” Focused entirely on the role of the lover who should beam out love on all equally, his theory takes no account of the beloved and his or her needs or desires. If the Kingdom of God is truly *within*, then the other does not matter. This single-minded focus on the self as source of love would plague all Tolstoy’s writings about love and brotherhood.

Freud offers a compelling explanation of this phenomenon in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). According to Freud, sexual love provides the “strongest experiences of satisfaction” but makes man “dependent in the most dangerous way on a portion of the external world, namely, his chosen love object,” who could be lost through rejection, unfaithfulness, or

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6 Even marital relations, which he modeled on sibling bonds in early works like *War and Peace*, were to become literally like “sister and brother” by the time of *The Kreutzer Sonata* and his rejection of sexual love in marriage.

7 *Kingdom of God*, 79.
death. Freud suggested that “a small minority,” however, are able to find happiness through a safer form of love:

These people make themselves independent of their object’s acquiescence by displacing what they mainly value from being loved on to loving; they protect themselves against the loss of the object by directing their love, not to single objects, but to all men alike; and they avoid the uncertainties and disappointments of genital love by turning away from its sexual aims and transforming the instinct into an impulse with an inhibited aim. What they bring about in themselves in this way is a state of evenly suspended steadfast, affectionate feeling, which has little external resemblance any more to the stormy agitation of genital love, from which it is nevertheless derived.8

Freud’s explanation of undifferentiated love is more balanced than Tolstoy’s because it acknowledges the reduced strength of this love in comparison to sexual (or other preference-based) love. At the same time, it lays bare the fundamental difference between Freud and Tolstoy; Freud believed all loves were at base sexual (see Chapter Two), while Tolstoy argued furiously against the place of sexuality in any love. Freud does not attempt to hide from himself the fact that “inhibited” love which can be applied broadly is beneficial for the lover, not the beloved, who no longer figures into the equation. His two main objections to universal love are first, that “a love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value, by doing an injustice to its object; and secondly, not all men are worthy of love.”9 Tolstoy ignores the first of these critiques and rails against the second.

Many people have found Tolstoy’s whole project of universal love and brotherhood paradoxical coming from the “troglodyte” who was constantly in conflict with his family and friends.10 As Tolstoy discovered in his personal life, undifferentiated love may be appropriate for a chance acquaintance or neighbor, but it is not appreciated by one’s child or one’s wife of

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8 Civilization and its Discontents, 101-2.
9 Civilization and its Discontents, 102.
10 Troglodyte was Turgenev’s nickname for Tolstoy, based on his difficult personality (Wilson, Tolstoy, 126).
forty odd years, to whom this “love” looks more like indifference. Yet for Tolstoy, it became the only form. In a letter to Mohandas Gandhi two months before Tolstoy’s death, he states his definition of love as if it were universally accepted, relegating it to a sub-clause: “love, i.e. the striving of human souls towards unity and the activity resulting from such striving.” Contentiously, Tolstoy took this love as a given, telling Gandhi it was already “known by every person in the depth of his soul.”

Tolstoy saw art’s role as bringing this feeling of universal love to consciousness and thereby fostering universal brotherhood. In his treatise, What is Art? (1896), Tolstoy writes:

The task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one’s neighbor, now attained only by the best members of society, the customary feeling and the instinct of all men […] And universal art, by uniting the most different people in one common feeling, by destroying separation, will educate people to union, will show them, not by reason but by life itself, the joy of universal union reaching beyond the bounds set by life.

Tolstoy’s art sought not only to depict, but also to cultivate universal brotherhood by giving people a unifying experience as they read his fiction. Yet he was torn about the way to reconcile this kind of broader attachment with the intense love between individuals that he also valued (if it was of the correct sort).

The following three sections of Part One explore three ways that Tolstoy moved from individual love to universal—first with his stages of love, then with the Bildung of Pierre in War and Peace, and finally with Platon Karataev’s philosophy of connection. In each case, as with the Ant Brothers, Tolstoy is trying to equate two fundamentally different forms of love. Part

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11 Freud claimed it would be wrong to love a stranger, because “my love is valued by all my own people as a sign of my preferring them, and it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on a par with them” (Civilization and its Discontents, 109-110).
12 In an early diary entry (1847) he commands: “sacrifice all other feelings of love to universal love,” suggesting that the seeds of his later views were already present in youth (Tolstoy’s Diaries I, 13).
13 7 September 1910 (Tolstoy’s Letters II, 706).
14 Tolstoy’s Letters II, 706.
15 Tolstoy, What is Art?, 190-191.
Two of the chapter will explore the same shift from individual siblings to universal brotherhood, but on the macro-scale by tracing the development of siblinghood across Tolstoy’s major novels.

**Stages of Love**

While much has been written on Tolstoy’s concept of brotherhood,\(^\text{16}\) brotherhood’s links to literal siblinghood have not been explored. This is a striking omission in the scholarship, given how explicitly Tolstoy lays out his ideas about the expansion of love—beginning with family, passing through nation, and ultimately aimed towards humanity.\(^\text{17}\) As this is central to the focus of the chapter, I will quote at length one of the key passages from *The Kingdom of God is Within You*:

> The doctrine of love for humanity alone is based on the social conception of life. The essence of the social conception of life consists in the transference of the aim of the individual life to the life of societies of individuals: family, clan, tribe, or state. This transference is accomplished easily and naturally in its earliest forms, in the transference of the aim of life from the individual to the family and the clan. The transference to the tribe or the nation is more difficult and requires special training. And the transference of the sentiment to the state is the furthest limit which the process can reach.

> To love one’s self is natural to everyone, and no one needs any encouragement to do so. To love one’s clan who support and protect one, to love one’s wife, the joy and help of one’s existence, one’s children, the hope and consolation of one’s life, and one’s parents, who have given one life and education, is natural. And such love, though far from being so strong as love of self, is met with pretty often.

> To love—for one’s own sake, through personal pride—one’s tribe, one’s nation, though not so natural, is nevertheless common. Love of one’s own people who are of the same blood, the same tongue, and the same religion as one’s self is possible, though far from being so strong as love of self, or even love of family or clan. But love for a state, such as Turkey, Germany, England, Austria, or Russia is a thing almost impossible. And though it is zealously inculcated, it is only an imagined sentiment; it has no existence in reality. And at that limit man’s power of transferring his interest ceases, and he cannot

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\(^{16}\) See, for example, Andrew Donskov and John Woodsworth (Ed.). *Lev Tolstoy and the Concept of Brotherhood*, several papers from which are cited in this chapter.

\(^{17}\) Freud describes the same progression in *Civilization and its Discontents* to make the point that “civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind” (122). He claims it is libido, not just “the advantages of work in common” that holds them together.
feel any direct sentiment for that fictitious entity. The Positivists, however, and all the apostles of fraternity on scientific principles, without taking into consideration the weakening of sentiment in proportion to the extension of its object, draw further deductions in theory in the same direction. “Since,” they say, “it was for the advantage of the individual to extend his personal interest to the family, the tribe, and subsequently to the nation and the state, it would be still more advantageous to extend his interest in societies of men to the whole of mankind, and so all to live for humanity just as men live for the family or the state.”

Theoretically it follows, indeed [...] This would be most logical, and theoretically nothing would appear more natural to its advocates, who do not observe that love is a sentiment which may or may not be felt, but which it is useless to advocate; and moreover, that love must have an object, and that humanity is not an object. It is nothing but a fiction. 18

This passage illustrates Tolstoy’s keen awareness of the difference between abstract philosophy and real, lived experience. He expresses his skepticism about a “scientific” view of life because—as he demonstrates so brilliantly in War and Peace—people are motivated by their close personal interests, not just the large historical motives which we later attribute to them (and which are most visible). People can only love something they can conceive of, and this becomes the limiting factor in the expansion of love. As Tolstoy goes on to note: “It would, doubtless, be very advantageous if men could love humanity just as they love their family.” 19 This comment reinforces Tolstoy’s use of family as the stepping stone on the way to love of all, yet at the same time, his awareness that this leap—which would be so “convenient”—is not actually possible for human beings. Freud actually sees family standing in opposition to love of all, noting that while civilization strives to “bring people together into large unities,” the family “will not give the individual up. The more closely the members of a family are attached to one another, the more often do they tend to cut themselves off from others, and the more difficult is it for them to enter

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18 Kingdom of God, 76-77.
19 Kingdom of God, 78.
into the wider circle of life.\textsuperscript{20} The evolution of Tolstoy’s portrayal of family, which I discuss in the second half of this chapter, seems to bear out that claim.

The view that we cannot love all humanity is expounded by Prince Andrei during his depression after Lise’s death. When Pierre challenges Andrei’s claim that one must live for oneself and not worry about others (a rejection of Andrei’s earlier idea of living for glory), he reminds Andrei of his son, sister, and father, and Andrei replies: “That’s just the same as myself, that’s not others” [Да это вовсе тое, это не другие]. Andrei draws a distinction between his family—which is part of himself—and one’s “close ones” (biblical “neighbors”): “others, one’s neighbors, le prochain, as you and Princess Marya call it, are the chief source of error and evil. Le prochain—that’s your Kiev peasants whom you want to do good for.”\textsuperscript{21} While actively rejecting the Christian ideal that all men are brothers, Andrei expands the boundaries of self enough to encompass his immediate family, the most natural first step.

This expansion of love, like other aspects of Tolstoy’s philosophy, relies on a progression through fixed stages. Unlike Dostoevsky’s characters who can attain truth through a sudden conversion—like Zinovy, who becomes Zosima after a planned duel leads to a radical spiritual awakening—Tolstoy’s “seeker” figures progress with much equivocation and backsliding through various stages of consciousness, at each stage believing that they have reached an ultimate truth. For Tolstoy, moments like Zinovy’s conversion are never the last word and do not lead to permanent shifts in outlook. Gustafson convincingly argues that a key aspect of Tolstoy’s thinking is the assumption that life is “a series of definable ‘phases’” that are more or less universal, so that describing them (in his art and non-fiction) “would have a psychological

\textsuperscript{20} Civilization and its Discontents, 103.
\textsuperscript{21} “а другие, ближние, le prochain, как вы с княжной Марьей называете, это главный источник заблуждения и зла. Le prochain – это те твои киевские мужики, которым ты хочешь делать добро” (PSS 10:111). Freud argues that this idea that one should love one’s neighbor as oneself is “bewildering” and that such love is not only unnatural, but even harmful (Civilization and its Discontents, 109).
and moral purpose, for the readers would see themselves in it [the description] and discover their oneness with others.”

This is an essentially neo-classical understanding of truth and experience that Tolstoy wished to impose on a society steeped in the idea of Romantic individuality. Regarding his personal truths as universal, Tolstoy rejected the Romantic view of the lone soul forging its own course, and envisioned all people on the same spiritual trajectory as himself. He sought to hurry them along by raising their awareness of the stages through which they were passing and to give them a sense of commonality.

Tolstoy envisioned three ages of man—personal/savage, political/social, Christian/divine—through which human society was passing, and saw each individual as personally going through a parallel progression in his own life. The personal, embodied in savage man, is based on personal well-being and meeting the demands of the self. From this, man gradually progresses to the social stage, in which he sees the need to subordinate the needs of the self for the good of others: family, race, country (as discussed in the passage quoted above). This led to the creation of society based on a political order that called for sacrifice of personal liberties to the State. Gustafson notes that in this stage, man “recognizes life only in others, in ‘an aggregate of personalities’ (sovokupnost’ lichnostej), such as tribe, family, clan, church, state, or ‘humanity.’”

This is the stage humanity had reached at Tolstoy’s time.

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22 “Three Stages of Man,” 481. Gustafson bases this comment on a passage Tolstoy wrote at age sixty-six (1894) about wishing to compose a work that would define the ‘ages’ of life: “There is so little time left, that I don’t know if I would ever succeed in describing the various phases, the spiritual ages which we have all gone through … It would be good to describe them [though] because if they were described accurately, then everyone going through those ages, those crises, would not be frightened, but rather they would be awaiting the next stage and they would know that the same thing was also happening to others” [Не знаю, удастся ли мне когда-нибудь — уж мало осталось времени, описать те различные фазы, возрасты духовные, которые мы все проходили […] Описать это хорошо эти вреасти, эти кризисы, не будет пугаться, а будет ждать следующего состояния, будет знать, что то же было и с другими] (PSS 67:214).

23 Kingdom of God, 81-84.

24 Resident and Stranger, 84.
Ultimately, however, Tolstoy believed man progresses beyond this to the Christian or divine stage. “The time will come—it is already coming—when the Christian principles of equality and fraternity, community of property, nonresistance of evil by force, will appear just as natural and simple as the principles of family or social life seem to us now.” While Tolstoy claimed love could expand through family, clan, and race to nation, he believed divine love is needed to attain the final step of love for all humanity. In this third stage, Tolstoy posited that man would recognize that the other and the self were part of one whole—God—that comprised everything in the world. Therefore, instead of living for others, one would now live for God, which for Tolstoy meant living for self and others together. As Gustafson explains the new conception: “This God includes the self. This everything is not everything else. This everything is what I belong to and what belongs to me.”

While the third stage of love should have brought self and other out of opposition, Tolstoy continued to make living for oneself vs. living for others a case of “either/or.” By keeping these two opposed, he made a rigid distinction between the two different forms of love he associated with them; living for oneself called for individual, potentially possessive love and living for others depended on broader, impersonal love which is hardly recognizable as love because it has lost all specificity. To live for others one must love them, but for love, the object must have some influence on the feeling it evokes. Just beaming out “love” with no care or

25 Kingdom of God, 84.
26 Resident and Stranger, 86.
27 Edward Wasiolek presents an intriguing and counterintuitive reading of War and Peace, in which “living for oneself” is the ideal, rather than living for others, as scholars commonly assert (Tolstoy’s Major Fiction, 112). Tolstoy valued sincerity and immediacy of response, as embodied by Karataev, Natasha, and at times Pierre. Their joyful vitality and living for themselves in the moment allow for genuine love that is never false or simulated. Wasiolek argues that the faults of living for others can be seen in Boris’ “hypocritical, sycophantic, self-seeking” which is not his true feelings, but “the feelings society approves of” and also in Hélène’s living to inspire desire in men (Tolstoy’s Major Fiction, 104). While this is true, Wasiolek conflates living for others’ good opinion with living for others’ good, a distinction Tolstoy definitely intended. At the start of the novel, Andrei makes a similar mistake when he believes that his ideal of living for glory is living for others. He has not realized that wishing them to think well of him is not the same as devoting himself to their good out of love.
concern for the other party is neither loving nor conducive to unity. Tolstoy’s view accounts no value to giving pleasure to others, which is predicated on concern for their feelings. His model lacked reciprocity; he did not acknowledge the possibility that something could be beneficial for both self and others. This would seem to be necessary for truly universal love.

In essence, the third stage—divine love—was Tolstoy’s new conception of Christian brotherhood. In his diary of 1909 Tolstoy notes: “in Christ’s words ‘love God and your neighbour’, love of God has always seemed to me superfluous, incompatible with love of one’s neighbour; incompatible because love of one’s neighbour is so clear, clearer than anything can be, while love of God on the contrary is very unclear.” For Tolstoy, Divine love still needs to focus on concrete objects. While he can accept that God exists, he questions whether one can love him.

God is love – that is so. We know Him only because we love Him; but that God in Himself exists is a rationalization, and often a superfluous and even harmful one. If I am asked: ‘Does God in Himself exist?’ I am bound to say and I will say ‘yes, probably, but I don’t understand anything about Him, this God in Himself’. But it isn’t so with the God of love. Him I know for certain. He is everything for me, the explanation and the purpose of my life.

In this diary entry Tolstoy makes loving one’s neighbors equivalent with Divine love, because the two cannot exist separately. It is impossible to love all men without experiencing God in everything. As noted in Chapter One, Tolstoy believed that: “The Christian doctrine shows man that the essence of his soul is love—that his happiness depends not on loving this or that object,

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28 Tolstoy’s Diaries II, 641.
29 Tolstoy’s Diaries II, 641.
30 In this, Tolstoy’s views are very similar to Father Zosima’s ideas about “active love,” as discussed in The Brothers Karamazov. It is not surprising, therefore, that Tolstoy was highly impressed with the Zosima passages of Dostoevsky’s novel.
but on loving the principle of the whole—God, whom he recognizes within himself as love, and therefore he loves all things and all men.”

However, at least at the time of writing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy did not see how to make this impersonal, divine love compatible with life. Lying wounded in the hospital, Prince Andrei experiences love for all in a more traditional Christian formulation. “Compassion, love of our brothers, for those who love us and for those who hate us, love of our enemies; yes, that love which God preached on earth and which Princess Marya taught me and I did not understand—that is what made me sorry to part with life, that is what remained for me had I lived.”

Tolstoy will go on to show that this kind of love is not possible for the living. When Andrei is dying in Mytishchye, before Natasha finds him, he reflects again on love:

“Yes, love,” he thought again quite clearly. “But not love which loves for something, for some quality, for some purpose, or for some reason, but the love which I—while dying—first experienced when I saw my enemy and yet loved him. I experienced that feeling of love which is the very essence of the soul and does not require an object. Now again I feel that bliss. To love one’s neighbors, to love one’s enemies, to love everything, to love God in all His manifestations. It is possible to love someone dear to you with human love, but an enemy can only be loved by divine love.”

31 *Kingdom of God*, 80. This has resonances with the Neoplatonic thinking of Ficino, who believed that “a proper love of things and persons in the world is itself a love for God” (Singer, *The Nature of Love* 2, 167). We can see how far Tolstoy’s thinking has developed from his 1847 diary entry: “All feelings which have love of the whole world as their source are good; all feelings which have self-love as their source are bad” (*Tolstoy’s Diaries I*, 12-13).

32 “Сострадание, любовь к братьям, к любящим, любовь к ненавидящим нас, любовь к врагам—да, та любовь, которую проповедовал Бог на земле, которой меня учил князь Марья и которой я не понимал; вот от чего мне жалко было жизни, вот оно то, что еще оставалось мне, ежели бы я был жив” (PSS 11:256). His list has similarities to Natasha’s prayer. Notably, Anatole stands in for love of our enemies.

33 Significantly, the love he comes to value was taught to him by his sister, not his father whom he always looked up to and emulated.

34 “Да, любовь (думал он опять с совершенной ясностью), но не та любовь, которая любит за что-нибудь, для чего-нибудь или почему-нибудь, но та любовь, которую я испытал в первый раз, когда, умирая, я увидел своего врага, и все-таки полюбил его. Я испытал то чувство любви, которая есть самая сущность души и для которой не нужно предмета. Я и теперь испытываю это блаженное чувство. Любит ближних, любить врагов своих. Всё любить — любить Бога во всех проявлениях. Любит человека дорогого можно человеческой любовью; но только врага можно любить любовью Божеской” (PSS 11:383-4).
This objectless love is not compatible with grasping life; the love of Natasha holds Andrei in our world, while divine love can only be fully achieved in death. Tolstoy writes of Andrei: “To love everything, everyone, always to sacrifice oneself for love meant to love no one, meant not to live this earthly life.” Richard Gustafson provides an excellent analysis of what goes on in the death passage:

Prince André’s new conception of love precludes exclusivity because for him to love everything and everyone is ‘to love God in all manifestations’ (III, iii, xxxii); he loves no one particular person or thing, only the manifestation of God in them, the ‘force of soul’ he sees in Natasha. Thus on his death-bed Prince André discovers the limitations of eros and the freedom and truth of agape.

These limitations are what Tolstoy tried to overcome with his sibling alternative to Eros.

**Pierre’s Quest for Brotherhood**

Pierre Bezukhov’s trajectory through *War and Peace* illustrates the link Tolstoy attempted to draw between literal sibling bonds and universal brotherhood. As an illegitimate son who has just returned from abroad and does not fit into polite society, Pierre is an outsider and his search for love and connection takes the form of a quest for siblings. Perpetually philosophizing, he is concerned with the idea of belonging to a larger whole. Pierre does not know what this feels like in the immediate, and therefore he seeks the broader connection of all men in brotherhood which remains a tantalizing abstraction.

As an orphaned only-child who falls into a disastrous marriage with a woman who does not love him and chooses not to have children, Pierre has no experience of familial love in the present. Instead, people are drawn to his wealth and status, not his person, and he must seek

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35 Soloviev is in agreement here. He writes that “a supposedly spiritual love is not only an abnormal phenomenon, but also completely aimless, because the very best outcome of the separation of the spiritual from the sensual, to which it aspires, occurs with death” (“Meaning of Love,” 116).
36 “Всё, всех любить, всегда жертвовать собой для любви, значило никого не любить, значило не жить этой земной жизнью” (PSS 12:61).
37 “Three Stages of Man,” 500.
sibling bonds in various social institutions. It is this promise that initially attracts him to Freemasonry. Encountering Osip Alekseevich Bazdeev at a halting point on the road, Pierre is impressed by the old man’s introduction: “I belong to the *brotherhood* of Freemasons […] And from myself and in their name I offer you a *brotherly* hand.” Masonry’s offer of sibling bonds and its basis on grandiose ideals of self-perfection and perfecting society appeal greatly to Pierre. When Pierre asks Bazdeev for help in reforming his life, Tolstoy notes: “He firmly believed in the possibility of the brotherhood of people, united with the purpose of supporting each other on the path of virtue, and that was how Masonry presented itself to him.” In short, Pierre’s turn to Freemasonry is a quest for brothers, but based in abstractions and grandiose language.

From the time of his initiation, however, Pierre’s abstract ideal of brotherhood clashes with the reality of Russian Freemasonry. During the initiation, “he felt himself eye to eye with a person who was a total stranger in the circumstances of life, yet close in the brotherhood of people,” but then is disappointed to realize the man before him is a society acquaintance, not an abstract brother. He cannot synthesize the abstract with the concrete. There is an initial moment of joy when he is accepted and “he did not recognize any acquaintances; in all these people he saw only brothers.” But this moment quickly passes and Pierre cannot repress his awareness that these men are not siblings, but members of high society with their own petty intrigues and desires. When Boris joins the Masons, Pierre is pained to see that he is just using the society as a

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38 “Я принадлежу к братству свободных каменщиков […] И от себя и от их имени протягиваю вам братскую руку” (PSS 10:68, my italics).
39 “Он твердо верил в возможность братства людей, соединенных с целью поддерживать друг друга на пути добродетели, и таким представлялось ему масонство” (PSS 10:72-73).
40 “он почувствовал себя с глазу на глаз с совершенно чужим по условиям жизни и с близким по братству людей человеком” (PSS 10:75).
41 “он не признавал никаких знакомств; во всех людях этих он видел только братьев” (PSS 10:82).
way to make connections with men of power.\textsuperscript{42} Boris is thinking about hierarchy, while Pierre seeks lateral bonds.

Despite disenchantment with the realities of Masonry, Pierre does not give up on the ideals of the organization. His ability to separately evaluate the ideal and its enactment and to be guided by one despite the failure of the other is something Tolstoy would explicitly advocate in his “Afterward to the \textit{Kreutzer Sonata}.” There, Tolstoy challenges the predominant view that “the ideal of Christ is unattainable, and so it cannot serve us as a guide in our lives.”\textsuperscript{43} “To argue in this way,” Tolstoy claims, “is to be like a navigator who tells himself that since he cannot follow the course indicated by his compass he will throw his compass away or stop paying attention to it (abandon his ideal, in other words), or else that he will fix the needle of his compass on the point that corresponds to the course of his vessel at any given moment (lower his ideal to the level of his weakness, that is).”\textsuperscript{44} Pierre understands that human failures do not negate divine teachings.

Although the narrator shows how little is truly accomplished by Pierre’s attempts at Masonic inspired philanthropy, Pierre is delighted with the feeling of doing good for others. He tells Andrei that Masonry is “a teaching of equality, brotherhood and love” [учение равенства, братства и любви] and that in joining “I felt myself a part of that vast, invisible chain the beginning of which is hidden in heaven.”\textsuperscript{45} This chain causes him to feel connected to his

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\textsuperscript{42} Morson notes the unfortunate connection between social equality and social climbing (\textit{Hidden in Plain View}, 239).
\textsuperscript{43} Христов идеал недостижим, поэтому не может служить нам руководством в жизни (PSS 27:88).
\textsuperscript{44} Рассуждать так—всё равно, что мореплавателю сказать себе, что так как я не могу идти по той линии, которую указывает компас, то я выкину компас или перестану смотреть на него, т. е. отброшу идеал или прикреплю стрелку компаса к тому месту, которое будет соответствовать в данную минуту ходу моего судна, т. е. принизи идеал к моей слабости (PSS 27:89).
\textsuperscript{45} “я почувствовал частью этой огромной, невидимой цепи, которой начало скрывается в небесах” (PSS 10:115).
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suffering serfs, but the reality of “loving thy neighbor” is falsified as Pierre is blissfully oblivious to the actual conditions of the serfs’ lives or the effects of his reforms.

While focusing on the grandiose idea of brotherhood, Pierre fails to appreciate that the real sense of belonging he seeks is embodied in the home with family. While visiting Andrei at Bald Hills, Pierre is taken into the household first by Marya and then by the Old Prince. Marya tells him: “I have known you for a long time and love you like a brother.” This is a truer siblinghood than any abstraction the Masons can offer. The narrator claims that the “charm” of Pierre’s friendship with Andrei “was expressed not so much in his relations with him as with all his family and with the household.” Pierre is like a member of the Rostov household as well. After Natasha’s aborted elopement and attempt to poison herself, he establishes himself on brotherly footing and is the one person who can provide her with solace. Pierre also connects with his tezka [person with shared name], Petya, indulging him by listening to his plans to join the army. The Rostov parents, too, treat Pierre as a trusted member of the family. Caught up in the philosophical, Pierre has not yet understood that relationships like these with real flesh and blood people are needed for belonging.

As the Russian people are brought together by the invasion of a foreign foe, Pierre is drawn to the heart of this uniting force: the army. Portly Pierre shows up at the Battle of Borodino in a white hat and green frock coat, physically marked as out of place among the

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46 Pierre enjoyed a similar status as a member of the family at Andrei’s home in Moscow at the start of the novel. Arriving before his friend, Pierre “like a member of the household” [как домашний человек] goes straight to the study and lies down on the couch. Later, when Lise speaks to Andrei in a flirtatious manner (as she speaks with all men), the narrator notes that her tone “did not belong in the family sphere, where Pierre was like a member” [не шел к семейному кружку, где Пьер был как бы членом] (PSS 9:32).
47 “я вас давно знаю и люблю, как брата” (PSS 10:122).
48 Pierre has a pattern of forming connections with women that resemble their connections with their brothers. With Hélène, this means a sexual relationship (as she has with Anatole). With Marya, both men draw out her spiritual side. While Andrei often seems skeptical of Marya’s spirituality, at his moments of greatest self-awareness he appreciates her teaching, as when he is lying on the battlefield wounded looking at the sky, and when he is dying and asks for the Gospels.
49 “выразилась не столько в его отношениях с ним самим, сколько в отношениях со всеми родными и домашними” (PSS 10:123).
soldiers. While everyone else has a purpose as part of one huge organism, Pierre can explain his presence only: “I’m just here” [я так].

When the fighting begins, Pierre finds himself by a battery at the heart of the battle. At first he does not belong, “feeling out of place and having nothing to do,” and the soldiers eye him with hostility. To Pierre, they resemble a “family-like circle of men (separate from all others)” and he is on the outside. As they grow accustomed to Pierre, the soldiers begin to soften towards him.

Then gradually the feeling of hostile perplexity towards him started to turn into an affectionate and lighthearted sympathy, similar to what the soldiers felt for their pets: dogs, roosters, goats, and animals generally that live with military units. These soldiers now received Pierre mentally into their family, made him their own, and gave him a nickname. “Our gentleman” they nicknamed him and affectionately laughed about him among themselves.

When the fighting gets too heated and the men must retreat, they tell Pierre: “Eh gentleman, there’s no place for you here,” [Эх барин, не место тебе тут], using the informal ты. Although he gains acceptance, Pierre is not an equal brother in this family, but a pet. He has no function and does not experience his role as true belonging.

Reflecting back on the battle, Pierre sees being a soldier as a way of being part of a larger whole: “to enter that common life with my whole being, to be pervaded by what makes them that way.”

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50 PSS 11:193. His first taste of war bringing people together comes when Dolokhov asks his forgiveness for their past and then embraces him, leaving Pierre in tears.

51 “чувствуя себя не на своем месте и без дела” (PSS 11:228)

52 “семейным (отделенным от всех других) кружком людей” (PSS 11:232). In War and Peace Nikolai’s experiences show that the regiment can be just as much a family as one’s childhood home (esp. PSS 10:123). Tolstoy splices together and juxtaposes different scenes to bring out links and parallels in War and Peace; thus it is significant that he jumps from the scene of Pierre at home with the Bolkonsky family to a parallel situation of connection to ‘family’ for Nikolai Rostov in the army.

53 “Тогда понемногу чувство недоброжелательного недоуменья к нему стало переходить в ласковое и шутливое участие, подобное тому, которое солдаты имеют к своим животным: собакам, петухам, козлам и вообще животным, живущим при винских командах. Солдаты эти сейчас же мысленно приняли Пьера в свою семью, присвоили себе и дали ему прозвище. «Наш барин» прозвали его и про него ласково смеялись между собой” (PSS 11:231).

54 PSS 11:234.

55 “Войти в эту общую жизнь всем существом, проникнуться тем, что делает их таким” (PSS 11:290).
at a table with lots of men who all fit into the category of “they” [они]. Pierre looks at these men while his benefactor speaks about goodness and the possibility of being like them. All the while, none of the men look at or know Pierre. In his next dream a voice explains to Pierre: “they are simple, they don’t speak, but do.”56 The voice tells Pierre he needs “to unite in his soul the meaning of all things” and this leads to the word “hitch together” [сопрягать] and ultimately Pierre awakens to the words “need to harness” [запрягать надо].57 These dreams express Pierre’s underlying desire to connect without the philosophizing that so complicates his thought that it paralyzes his actions.58 His seeking eye overlooks the violence of war and makes the army a family of brothers, indicating that he is still searching for siblinghood.

During the siege of Moscow Pierre escapes from home, wanting both to take part in the people’s defense of the city and to distinguish himself by personally killing his former hero. He wants to belong, yet at the same time to maintain agency. Jahn sees the problem as “union and individuality” being “mutually exclusive of one another.”59 He concludes that “strangely enough, brotherhood leads not to belonging but to isolation,” citing Pierre’s mystical calculations. I believe Jahn is looking in the wrong place. Pierre’s idea about killing Napoleon or sharing in the suffering of the Moscow population is artificial and misguided. He actively seeks to share in the suffering which his station would allow him to avoid because he sees suffering as a bond, but there is no reason for a nobleman to be running around the burning city in disguise (much like his experience at Borodino). Brotherhood must be organic, and the text offers plenty of moments when it is attained. Only with his arrest and captivity by the French

56 “они просты, они не говорят, но делают” (PSS 11:291).
57 “соединять в душе своей значение всего” (PSS 11:292).
58 He is like Friedrich Schiller’s sentimental wishing to return to the state of the naïve. See: On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature (1794-95).
59 “Brother or Other,” 77. As Jahn describes Tolstoy’s problem with brotherhood, on the one hand, it was a strategy “to valorize […] the surrender of the self to the other” that Tolstoy believed was necessary for “right living,” yet on the other hand “Tolstoy seemed unable fully to accept the complete renunciation of self which seemed to him to be the crucial enabler of brotherhood” (73).
does Pierre finally find himself forced into a group existence where he is made equal with those around him. Through the loss of freedom Pierre is released from the paralyzing philosophizing he is prone to and given the experience of belonging.

When Pierre is freed from captivity, he has a moment of love for all. The soldiers who free the Russian captives are calling out “Brothers! My own dear ones, little doves!” [Братьцы! Родимые мои, голубчики!] and “Pierre sobbed as he sat among them, and could not say a word: he embraced the first soldier who came up to him and, crying, kissed him.” The ultimate epiphany in War and Peace is not wisdom or knowledge of the mysteries of the world, but seeing all people as good and worthy of love. Although Pierre does not remain in this extreme state, during his convalescence he continues to look on those around him with a loving eye.

In light of Pierre’s origins, he is perhaps more suited than any other character to see family ties with unknown people around him. Pierre is one of Count Bezukhov’s countless illegitimate children. His mother is never mentioned, nor are any siblings described, which suggests that he was not raised with any, but this does not change the fact that out in the world such people most definitely exist, and Pierre would never necessarily know who they are. Like a member of a Dostoevskian “accidental family,” he has the potential to be a literal, biological brother to strangers.

This potential is metaphorically realized when Pierre’s life is on the line as he awaits sentencing by the French. During Pierre’s trial, the French General, Davout, shares a look with him that saves Pierre. “In that one minute they both vaguely felt a countless number of things...”

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60 His happy marriage to Natasha will have a similar element of bondage.
61 “Пьер рыдал, сидя посреди их, и не мог выговорить ни слова; он обнял первого подошедшего к нему солдата и, плача, целовал его” (PSS 12:160).
and understood that they were both children of humanity, that they were brothers.” According to Robert Louis Jackson, “the act of two people genuinely looking at each other, Tolstoy suggests, is at root an ethical act [...] To see truly, in Tolstoy’s conception, is to know; and to know deeply is to love and unite.” This moment of brotherhood with an unknown Frenchman confirms the Masonic teachings of brotherhood in which Pierre wants to believe. His time with Platon Karataev will then teach him to expand this sense of connection beyond people of his own class. The secret society Pierre joins at the end of the book after finding true belonging in family life is a continuation of his quest to actualize this kind of abstract brotherhood and expand it to all Russia.

From the Hand to the Whole: Platon Karataev

In addition to Pierre’s quest and the “Ant Brothers,” Platon Karataev offers another model of sibling bonds as the path to universal brotherhood. Both Platon’s name and his roundness are immediate markers linking him with Aristophanes’ speech in *The Symposium*. Aristophanes tells of originally round people who were split in two by Zeus and are looking for their other halves to reunite. However, the merger Platon represents is not two halves looking to reunite through coitus. Instead, he sees himself as part of a whole with his family, using the metaphor of fingers on a hand. Platon stands behind what his father said when Platon went to the army in place of his brother: “All children are equal: whichever finger gets bitten, it hurts.”

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62 “Оба они в эту одну минуту смутно перечувствовали бесчисленное количество вещей и поняли, что они оба дети человечества, что они братья” (PSS 12:39). It also shows their class connection, which is stronger than national difference.
64 For a concise summary of critics’ interpretations of “Karataev’s role in Tolstoy’s concept of brotherhood,” see: Munir Sendich, “‘War and Peace’ in English Literary Criticism,” 204-7.
65 Soloviev echoes this in his claim that “a true human being in the fullness of its ideal personality obviously cannot be only male or only female, but must be the highest unity of both” (“Meaning of Love,” 102).
66 “все детки равны: какой палец ни укуси, все больно” (PSS 12:47).
Instead of a one-to-one merging, this metaphor describes many parts of one body, which echoes the Christian ideal of unity in the body of Christ: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body […] If one part suffers, every part suffers with it […] Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Yet while Platon’s image of fingers on a hand bears great similarity to this passage from 1 Corinthians, it is more restricted in scale. He begins with the people who have most in common with the self, who are part of a cooperative unit. Despite the fact that Platon loves all, he still privileges family and is visibly disturbed to learn that Pierre has no parents or children. Platon’s model demonstrates Tolstoy’s non-doctrinal form of Christianity infused with Platonic ideals.

The unity Platon represents for Pierre is appealing because it is tantalizingly abstract: “His life, as he looked upon it, had no meaning as an individual life. It had meaning only as part of a whole which he constantly felt.”67 Platon cannot understand words outside of their context, nor does he differentiate among people. He loves all without distinguishing. “Karataev had no attachments, friendships, love, as Pierre understood them, but he loved and lived lovingly with everything that came into contact with his life, and especially with people—not with specific individuals, but with whichever people happened to be before his eyes.”68 Vladimir Ermilov pushes the implications of this, arguing that Karataev “is not capable of living love [не способен к живой любви], not able to love a person as this person. He does not see himself as a separate personality, and therefore he is unable to see another person as an individual, unrepeateable

67 “Жизнь его, как он сам смотрел не нее, не имела смысла как отдельная жизнь. Она имела смысл только как частица целого, которое он постоянно чувствовал” (PSS 12:51).
68 “Привязанностей, дружбы, любви, как понимал их Пьер, Каратаев не имел никаких; но он любил и любовно жил со всем, с чем его сводила жизнь, и в особенности с человеком—не с известным каким-нибудь человеком, а с теми людьми, которые были перед его глазами” (PSS 12:50).
personality.” This helps to explain why Karataev cannot serve as a practical model for Pierre; he is more of a principle than a person. “He was not a living individual; his love was not love of someone; and Pierre’s love for Karataev was not the living love of a real, living personality, but love of the whole that Karataev felt impersonally and that Pierre feels personally, as an earthly, real this person.” Fingers on a hand seem to suggest the potential of particularity (each finger can be unique, though united to the others), but Karataev’s inability to love specific individuals makes him a better model of freedom and happiness than of love.

Another fascinating aspect of Platon’s metaphor of fingers connected to one body is the context in which it recurs in the First Epilogue. Several years into Nikolai and Marya’s marriage when she tells him she fears he cannot love her because she is ugly, Nikolai replies that he does not love for beauty. “But do I love my wife? I don’t love [her], but just, I don’t know how to tell you. Without you or when there’s some falling-out between us, it’s as if I’m lost and can’t do anything. Well, do I love my finger? I don’t love [it], but try cutting it off…” Here the metaphor that first appeared in a familial context is used for a romantic relationship (and one that affirms the patriarchal order, rather than the lateral equality of brothers). Tolstoy has des erotized Plato and fused him with Christian theology. Using this new kinship version of merging—many united into a single body—for both siblings (Platon) and a marital bond (Nikolai), draws a parallel between these two seemingly opposed relations.

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69 “не способен к живой любви, не способен любить человека как этого человека. Он не видит себя как отдельную личность, и поэтому не способен увидеть другого человека как единственную, неповторимую личность” (Tolstoi-khudozhnik, 340).
70 “Он не был живою личностью; его любовь не была любовью к кому бы то ни было; и любовь Пьера к Каратаеву не была живою любовью к реальной живой личности, а была любовью к тому целому, которое Каратаев чувствовал безлично и которое Пьер чувствует лично, как земной, действительный, этот человек” (Ermilov, Tolstoi-khudozhnik, 341).
71 “А жену разве я люблю? Я не люблю, а так, не знаю, как тебе сказать. Без тебя и когда вот так у нас какая-то кошка пробежит, я как будто пропал и ничего не могу. Ну, что я люблю палец свой? Я не люблю, а попробуй, отрежь его…” (PSS 12:264).
From this kinship merging in one body, Tolstoy would like to make the difficult step to Divine love and merging with all as parts of God. Pierre’s dream of a living globe after Karataev’s death provides the transition from the hand to the Whole in Tolstoy’s search for expansive love. In the dream, Pierre is shown a living globe with expanding and shrinking droplets on the surface and is told: “In the center is God, and every drop tries to expand so as to reflect Him to the greatest extent. And it grows, merges, shrinks, and is obliterated on the surface, goes down into the depths and again floats up. There’s Karataev, there, he spread and vanished.” Gustafson calls this dream “the culmination of Pierre’s metaphysical quest” and “one of Tolstoy’s most important fictional images of his metaphysics of life.” Pierre’s realization is at once an inner understanding of self and an outward understanding of relatedness. The globe gives Pierre a personalized and palpable appreciation of universal interconnectivity. He sees the literal fluidity of the boundary between self and other and recognizes again that each being is a droplet in this dynamic whole that is God. The passage also has resonances with Andrei’s death. Rimvydas Silbajoris calls Andrei’s dying a “process of expanding love,” an image that mirrors the globe dream. Total expansion means becoming one with God, which is how Tolstoy envisions death in War and Peace.

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72 Hooper argues that while both Tolstoy and Soloviev want unity, Tolstoy’s involved merging, while Soloviev’s was “a dynamic system of relations” (“Forms of Love,” 372). I am not sure this is entirely fair to Tolstoy because even when all beings are part of one body, they still retain their own unique form (i.e. the finger is still discrete from the arm) and similarly, on Pierre’s globe the drops exist in a dynamic unity in which they can merge, but can also retain their boundaries.

73 “В середине Бог, и каждая капля стремится расшириться, чтобы в наибольших размерах отражать его. И растет, сливается, и сжимается, и уничтожается на поверхности, уходит в глубину и опять всплывает. Вот он, Каратаев, вот разлился и исчез” (12:158).

74 Resident and Stranger, 81.

75 “The Brotherhood and Solitude of Death,” 98.
PART TWO
UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD: RECONCEIVING THE FAMILY IDEAL

From these specific examples of Tolstoy’s attempts to build to universal brotherhood from literal sibling bonds, I now step back to trace how the evolution of Tolstoy’s idea of family across his major novels led him to his ultimate conception of human connectedness. In essence, the progression that each “expanding droplet” goes through is repeated on the macro scale in the development of Tolstoy’s thought as the family ideal expands and abstracts.

The Progression of the Trilogy

Gustafson has demonstrated a thematic unity to Tolstoy’s works, a repeated psychological progression that embodies his experience of shifting between outsiderhood and belonging. I will build on this idea for the remainder of the chapter. In Gustafson’s words:

The trilogy Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth rehearses the paradigmatic action of the three major fictions [War and Peace, Anna Karenina, and Resurrection] because it imitates, as do they, the psychological drama of the Tolstoyan crisis. This drama unfolds in three scenes: the idyllic past, the barren present, and the future of hope. In the center of this drama stands the Stranger, but it commences and concludes with the Resident.”

This progression—which also occurs at the micro-level within each work—helps to explain the evolution of Tolstoy’s treatment of family across the three major novels. One begins in family (i.e. connectedness), this unity is threatened and one finds oneself cut off from others, but ultimately there is hope for the future restoration of unity and a regained sense of belonging.

In War and Peace characters begin embedded in their harmonious world of family life. They face the menace of an invading force that threatens the harmony (on the macro-level the French; in the domestic sphere, the seduction of Natasha), and then ultimately regain the unity and stability of their idealized past. As Gustafson writes, the “world of human relatedness is lost

76 Resident and Stranger, 51-52.
and then restored to a new maturity.” More than the later novels, *War and Peace* focuses on childhood, looking back to a time of innocence, and it concludes with a similarly idyllic unity in the First Epilogue. This innocence and family harmony then comes under threat in *Anna Karenina*. There, the characters face the breakdown of a formerly stable order. The novel begins with a rupture in the Oblonsky household and moves increasingly toward entropy, only to have order partially restored at the conclusion. Anna begins in family and moves toward isolation. Levin is rejected and despairs of creating a family and must rebuild his dream. Princess Shcherbatskaia no longer knows how marriages are to be arranged and Kitty must forfeit love in order to gradually regain it. “In *War and Peace* moments of harmony are genuine; in *Anna Karenina* harmony is elusive and often illusive.” *War and Peace* ends with family unity. *Anna Karenina*’s closing nursery is a source of *chuzhie*; rupture is already present in a seeming moment of belonging.

In *Resurrection*, the breakdown has already occurred before the novel opens. Nekhlyudov has been debauched by his time in the army and has already ruined the innocence of Katyusha. His sister is in a lustful marriage and all their childhood ideals have slipped away. As Nekhlyudov’s eyes are gradually opened to the horror of his situation, he looks ahead to the hope of a future where the rifts in human connection can be restored. He turns away from the nursery, where family life is sustained and chooses a path of service to the human family that will not make him a beneficiary of the corrupt social order. The initial stirring that prompts him to this new path comes from reading the Gospels, where he finds his answers in Matthew.

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77 *Resident and Stranger*, 41.
Concluding in the Home: Family Debates about the Limits of Love

The final scenes of *War and Peace, Anna Karenina,* and *Resurrection* all pit the primacy of family against universal love. The conclusion of the fictional portion of *War and Peace* embeds the characters in the world of home and family. The Rostovs and Bezukhovs are joined together on one estate living out the domestic ideal, untainted by societal conventions or pressures.79 While Natasha’s children now satisfy her need to care for others (motherhood being Tolstoy’s final goal for women at this time), Pierre is still much as ever the philosopher, thinking on a more global scale as his Masonic side reemerges. He appears in the First Epilogue having just returned from a meeting of a secret society in Petersburg whose aim is that “as many as possible must join hands as tightly as possible […] we join hands with one goal of welfare and general safety.”80 Settled in his own family life, Pierre still dreams of a wider brotherhood. His early life seeking connection set him on the trajectory toward joining the Decembrists, one of the ideas that motivated Tolstoy to write *War and Peace.*81 Concern for the immediate versus the abstract becomes the central topic of discussion and even sparks an argument between Pierre and his now brother-in-law, Nikolai, who advocates a smaller sphere of duty and activity on the family estate.82

The debate continues even after the two couples split off into their separate rooms. Natasha asks Pierre if Platon would have approved of his society. At first Pierre is uncertain: “He would not have understood, or rather, I think yes,” but then after further reflection he concludes: “No, he would not have approved […] What he would have approved of is our family

79 This kind of greater family unity has resonances with Rousseau’s *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse.*
80 “надо как можно теснее и больше народа взяться рука с рукой […] беремся рука с рукой, с одной целью блага и общей безопасности” (PSS 12:283).
81 For a description of how Tolstoy gradually shifted backward from the Decembrists to the generation before them, see Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Sixties,* 115-128.
82 Natasha sides with her husband over her brother, highlighting the shift in her allegiance from sibling to spouse.
life.”83 Pierre’s acknowledgement ultimately brings him in line with the conclusion the Rostovs reach back in their room. Assessing Pierre’s words about the duty to help those who are suffering and also one’s close ones, Marya comments: “Of course he’s right […] but he forgets that we have other duties nearer to us that God himself gave us, and that we can risk ourselves, but not our children.”84 Like her husband, Marya puts family before the abstract neighbor, but she believes in the necessity of caring for both.

Marya’s struggle at the end of War and Peace embodies this tension. “In her soul she promised to mend her ways and to do the impossible – that is, in this life to love her husband, and her children, and [her nephew] Nikolenka, and all her close ones [всех ближних] as Christ loved mankind.”85 That even Marya—Tolstoy’s most spiritual female character—seems unable to achieve both exclusive and inclusive love highlights Tolstoy’s inability to create a synthesis between the two. Indeed, even Christ in his Gospel in Brief (1883) does not accomplish this, but instead insists: “He who wishes to be my disciple, let him count for nothing father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and all his goods, and let him at every hour be ready for anything.”86 By the 1890s, Tolstoy would choose impersonal service to humanity over the family, but in the 1860s when he wrote War and Peace, motherhood and family life was still Tolstoy’s highest ideal for Marya.

Tolstoy creates a similar ending for Anna Karenina. The discussions between the Rostovs and Bolkonskys are paralleled by the closing discussion in the Levin household. There too, the topic under debate is one’s duty to family vs. the abstract brother, as embodied by the

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83 “Он не понял бы, а впрочем я думаю, что да”… “Нет, не одобрил бы […] Что он одобрил бы, это нашу семейную жизнь” (PSS 12:292-293).
84 “Разумеется, он прав […] но он забывает, что у нас есть другие обязанности ближе, которые сам Бог указал нам, и что мы можем рисковать собой, но не детьми” (PSS 12:288).
85 “в душе своей обещала себе исправиться и сделать невозможное – то есть в этой жизни любить и своего мужа, и детей, и Николеньку, и всех ближних так, как Христос любил человечество” (PSS 12:290). In the English this sounds much more limited because the Biblical reference to “Love thy neighbor” is absent.
86 Gospel in Brief, 345. This is a paraphrase of the Gospel of Mark 3:34-35, which I discussed in Chapter Two.
fellow Slavs in the Serbian war. As in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy sides with love of one’s family in *Anna Karenina*, rather than a more universalized form of brotherhood. But by this point, family has developed from the bounded nuclear families of *War and Peace* to an expanding network of kin. The group assembled at the Levins includes a half-brother, Koznyshev, in addition to Levins and Shcherbatskys and lacks the harmony of *War and Peace*. The ending of *Anna Karenina* highlights a problem in Tolstoy’s thought. As Gromova-Opul’skaya notes: “by the time he completed his ‘family’ novel, Tolstoy already knew that man is not saved by a family, even a ‘happy’ family.” Tolstoy is gradually shifting away from his bounded family ideal of the 1860s, yet he has not yet found an alternative that he can comprehend loving in concrete terms.

Tolstoy arrived at an answer in *Resurrection*, where the family ideal gave way to a broader conception of duty and connection at the societal level. There, Tolstoy represents the contrast between family and societal unity as an internal struggle for Nekhlyudov, rather than as a debate in a family circle. Tolstoy’s alter-ego becomes the primary focus of spiritual seeking, unlike in the earlier novels, where Tolstoy had a multiplicity of seekers. At the close of *Resurrection*, before his final visit to Katyusha, Nekhlyudov dines with a general and his family and re-experiences the comforts of home life among his own class. Lulled by good food, comfortable couches, interesting conversation, and a four-hands piano recital of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, “Nekhlyudov fell into a state of perfect self-satisfaction, to which he had long been a stranger, as though he had only just found out what a good person he was.” The comforts of domestic life foster a false sense of self-worth. The experience of being in this warm, comfortable house reawakens Nekhlyudov’s awareness of the sacrifices he has made and

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88 “Нехлюдов почувствовал давно не испытанное им душевное состояние полного довольства собой, точно как будто он теперь только узнал, какой он был хороший человек” (PSS 32:429).
the life he has given up. At the end of the visit, the general’s daughter invites him into the nursery to admire her children, a moment paralleling Levin’s visit to the nursery at the end of *Anna Karenina*. The view of the children’s peaceful, sleeping faces again sparks Nekhlyudov’s awareness of the contrast between this life and the life of the prisoners he has been following. “Nekhlyudov remembered the chains, shaved heads, fighting, debauchery, the dying Kryltsov, and Katyusha with all her past. And he became envious and wished for what he saw here, which now seemed to him pure, refined happiness.” Yet even while desiring what he sees, Nekhlyudov does not entirely idealize the scene, fully aware that the mother is “greedy” for praise of her children.

After going from this haven of domestic tranquility through a snowstorm to the prison, Nekhlyudov has another pang of longing for the family ideal. As Katyusha enters the room, he experiences a “heavy feeling” [тяжелое чувство] and thinks: “I want to live, I want a family, children, I want a human life.” Katyusha rejects Nekhlyudov’s “sacrifice” (the offer to marry her), freeing him to return to such a life of comfort. However, having opened his eyes to the injustice and suffering his society is creating, Nekhlyudov can no longer turn his back on it and return to his old life where he participates in and benefits from the systematic oppression of innocents. Nekhlyudov’s awareness of the contradiction between seeing men as brothers and profiting from the organization of society is captured explicitly in a passage from *The Kingdom of God is Within You*:

> We are all brothers—and yet every morning a brother or a sister must empty the bedroom slops for me. We are all brothers, but every morning I must have a cigar, a

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89 “Нехлюдов вспомнил цепи, бритые головы, побои, разврат, умирающего Крыльцова, Катюшу со всем ее прошедшим. И ему стало завидно и захотелось себе такого же изящного, чистого, как ему казалось теперь, счастья” (PSS 32:430).

90 “Я жить хочу, хочу семью, детей, хочу человеческой жизни” (PSS 32:431).

91 As Josef Metzele notes: “examples of lack of brotherly love are found in descriptions of the unjust judicial system and its related manifestations of inhuman behavior by representatives of church and state, as well as in the portrayal of various scenes of violence, degradation and exploitation” (“Tolstoy’s Late Prose,” 165).
sweetmeat, as ice, and such things, which my brothers and my sisters have been wasting their health in manufacturing, and I enjoy these things and demand them. We are all brothers, yet I live by working in a bank, or mercantile house, or shop at making all goods dearer for my brothers. We are all brothers, but I live on a salary paid me for prosecuting, judging, and condemning the thief or the prostitute whose existence the whole tenor of my life tends to bring about, and who I know ought not to be punished but reformed [...] We are all brothers, yet I take a salary for being ready to commit murder, for teaching men to murder, or making firearms, gunpowder, or fortifications.  

Nekhlyudov has seen too much of suffering to believe in the possibility of pure family happiness built upon this system. This rejection of the status quo is much like Ivan Karamazov rejecting eternal harmony if it were built on the tears of a single child. The difference is their responses to this feeling; Nekhlyudov turns to the help of suffering innocents, while Ivan turns against God’s world in rebellion.

**Resurrection: the Lost Family Ideal**

While *Resurrection* marks the last stage in Tolstoy’s progression—hope for the future—the novel also encapsulates the whole progression within itself in Tolstoy’s treatment of family. Throughout the novel, the family ideal is connected with a lost, but idealized past. Sibling bonds provide the only access to this childhood time of innocence. Nekhlyudov experiences this when he visits his older sister, Natalia, before departing for Siberia. The scene resonates with the span of Tolstoy’s past fiction. Describing the period before Natalia’s marriage when they felt closest to being equals (she twenty-five, and he fifteen), Tolstoy writes: “At that time, she was in love with his friend Nikolenka Irtenev, since deceased. They both loved Nikolenka, and loved in him and in themselves that which is good and which unites all people.” Here Tolstoy brings back his semi-autobiographical hero from *Childhood*, making him the emblem of unspoiled

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92 *Kingdom of God*, 88-89.
93 “Она тогда была влюблена в его умершего друга Николеньку Иртенева. Они оба любили Николеньку и любили в нем и себе то, что было в них хорошего и единящего всех людей” (PSS 32:314).
innocence. Since Nikolenka died before reaching adulthood, he remains frozen in memory at a
time before corrupting influences would have entered his life as they entered Natalia and
Nekhlyudov’s.

Tolstoy immediately contrasts this time of innocence with the fall that followed:

Since then they had both been depraved: he by military service and a vicious life, she by
marrying a man whom she loved with a sensual love, and who not only did not care for
the things that had once been so dear and holy to her and to her brother, but did not even
understand the meaning of those aspirations toward moral perfection and the service of
mankind which once constituted her life, and put them down to ambition and a wish to
show off—that being the only explanation comprehensible to him.94

Natalia’s husband is named Rogozhinsky, a clear reference to the passion-driven Rogozhin of
Dostoevsky’s *Idiot.*95 For women, the corrupting influence is sexual passion. Nekhlyudov hates
his brother-in-law not primarily because of “the vulgarity of Rogozhinsky’s feelings and his self-
assured narrowness,” but because in spite of this, Natalia “was able to love him so passionately,
so selfishly, and so sensually, stifling for his sake all the good there had been in her.”96

Family—which Nekhlyudov now sees as corrupted by sex—is no longer his ideal. “It
always hurt Nekhlyudov to think of Natalia as the wife of that hairy, self-assured man with a
shiny bald patch on his head. He could not even master a feeling of revulsion towards their
children, and when he heard that she was again going to have a baby, he felt a kind of sorrow
that she had once more been infected with something bad by this man who was so foreign

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94 “С тех пор они оба развратились: он – военной службой, дурной жизнью, она – замужеством с человеком,
которого она полюбила чувственно, но который не только не любил всего того, что было когда-то, для нее с
Дмитрием самым святым и дорогим, но даже не понимал, что это такое, и приписывал все те стремления к
нравственному совершенствованию и служению людям, которыми она жила когда-то, одному, понятному
ему, увлечению самолюбием, желанием выказаться перед людьми” (PSS 32:314).
95 There are several references like this to Dostoevsky novels in the second half of *Resurrection.*
96 “Антипатичен он ему был своей вульгарностью чувств, самоуверенной ограниченностью и, главное,
антипатичен был ему за сестру, которая могла так страстию, эгоистично, чувственно любить эту бедную
натуру и в угоду ему могла заглушить все то хорошее, что было в ней” (PSS 32:315).
Nekhlyudov’s hatred of Rogozhinsky borders on the pathological; sex for procreation, even in a loving, happy marriage is now abhorrent to him. Ashamed of his own sexual conduct and the fact that it produced an illegitimate child and destroyed the life of Katyusha, Nekhlyudov is unable to accept sexuality and pregnancy in his sister. Her sexuality reminds him that their childhood innocence has been lost.

When Natalia comes to Moscow to visit Nekhlyudov before his departure for Siberia, they are united by their past. Each of the objects Natalia sees when entering his rooms is “familiar to her” and associated with their early years together. As with Tolstoy’s best sibling pairs, the two communicate wordlessly through glances. “There passed between them that mysterious exchange of looks, full of a meaning and truth which cannot be expressed in words, and then the exchange of words began which lacked that truth.” His tender feeling for her is “woven of innumerable childhood memories.” Despite this affection and deep understanding with his sister, Nekhlyudov is ruptured from her by all the animosity he holds toward her husband. His brother-in-law, who should be close to him, becomes the first stumbling block on the path to loving mankind. After a heated argument with Rogozhinsky, Nekhlyudov leaves, acknowledging to himself: “How little I must have changed if I could be so carried away by ill-feeling as to offend him and hurt poor Natasha.”

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97 “Неклюдову всегда было мучительно больно думать, что Наташа – жена этого волосатого, с глянцевитой лысиной самоуверенного человека. Он не мог даже удерживать отвращения к его детям. И всякий раз, когда узнавал, что она готовится быть матерью, испытывал чувство, подобное соболезнованию о том, что опять она чем-то дурным заразилась от этого чуждого им всем человека” (PSS 32:315). This reaction is striking because we learn that the children play at the same games Natalia and Nekhlyudov did, evoking the same sense of childhood innocence in them as existed for Nekhlyudov and his sister (PSS 32:322).

98 “Совершился тот таинственный, не выразимый словами, многозначительный обмен взглядов, в котором все было правда, и начался обмен слов, в котором уже не было той правды” (PSS 32:317).

99 “сплетенное из бесчисленных детских воспоминаний” (PSS 32:318).

100 “Мало же я изменился, если я мог так увлечься недобрым чувством и так оскорбить его и огорчить бедную Наташу” (PSS 32:325).
The present is discord, but with hope for the future. In a final intimate conversation at the train station the next day, Nekhlyudov apologizes for his angry words and Natalia gives a jumbled, half-sentence reply that communicates everything Nekhlyudov needs to hear. “The phrase was not clear, but he understood it completely and was touched by what it meant. Her words meant that besides her love for her husband, which ruled the whole of her, her love for him, her brother, was also important and dear to her, and that every misunderstanding with him caused her deep suffering.”¹⁰¹ Despite the obstacles that part them, the spark of what is good in them has not been extinguished.

The problems Nekhlyudov finds with his sister’s life are part of a broader rejection of romantic love in *Resurrection*. Nekhlyudov is disgusted by the lust in his sister’s love, and also by its “selfishness,” hinting at the two problems he finds with romantic love: sex and exclusivity. In rejecting sexual conjugal love, Tolstoy also rejects the family ideal for which it serves as the base (pregnancy becomes being “infected”). Freud is instructive on this point: “both—fully sensual love and aim-inhibited love—extend outside the family and create new bonds with people who before were strangers. Genital love leads to the formation of new families, and aim-inhibited love to ‘friendships’ which become valuable from a cultural standpoint because they escape some of the limitations of genital love, as, for instance, its exclusiveness.”¹⁰² Even though Natalia has produced innocent children and is a devoted mother, her love is still too narrow for Tolstoy’s new taste. It leaves no place for the anonymous suffering prisoners her brother is helping. It does not seek to benefit anyone outside of her restricted sphere.

¹⁰¹ “Фраза эта была неясна, но он понял ее вполне и был тронут тем, что она означала. Слова ее означали то, что, кроме ее любви, владеющей всюю ею,— любви к своему мужу, для нее важна и дорога ее любовь к нему, к брату, и что всякая размолвка с ним — для нее тяжелое страдание” (PSS 32:346).
¹⁰² *Civilization and its Discontents*, 103.
By contrast, Nekhlyudov turns away from the possibility of marriage and family life (his idea of marrying Missy) and attempts to learn compassionate love for humanity in whatever form he finds it. Toward the end of *Resurrection* Nekhlyudov reaches this state of love for all, sparked by a tender, brotherly feeling of love he holds for Katyusha. The passage is illustrative of the progression love undergoes in Tolstoy’s art and thought, so I quote it in full:

He experienced now a feeling for her that he had never experienced before. This feeling had nothing in common with his first poetic love for her, still less with the sensual love that he experienced after, or even with the feeling of fulfilling a duty (mixed with self-admiration) with which, after the trial, he had decided to marry her. This feeling was the simplest feeling of pity and tenderness, which he experienced for the first time at the meeting with her in prison and then, with new force, after the hospital when, conquering his repugnance, he forgave her for the imagined intrigue with the medical assistant (the unfairness of which was revealed later). It was the same feeling he now had, only with this difference: that whereas formerly it was momentary, now it became permanent.

Whatever he thought of now, whatever he did, a feeling of pity and tenderness dwelt with him, and pity and tenderness not only for her but for all people. 103

We see here the progression from living for self—the poetic and sensual loves he began with—to the second stage of living for others—duty and the idea of self-sacrifice—to the tender love of all people, which acknowledges the presence of God in everything. 104

The object of love no longer matters, only the feeling within him. Significantly, Nekhlyudov’s love in this passage is not on the abstract plane of philosophy, but deeply connected with the suffering humanity around him; it is embedded in Tolstoy’s social vision. *Resurrection* can be read not as a rejection of the

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103 "Он испытывал теперь к ней чувство, никогда не испытанное им прежде. Чувство это не имело ничего общего не с первым поэтическим увлечением, ни еще менее с тем чувственным влюблением, которое он испытывал потом, ни даже с тем чувством сознания исполненного долга, соединенного с самолюбованием, с которым он после суда решил жениться на ней. Чувство это было то самое простое чувство жалости и умиления, которое он испытывал в первый раз на свидании с нею в тюрьме и потом, с новой силой, после болницы, когда он, поборов свое отвращение, простил ее за воображаемую историю с фельдшером (несправедливость которой разъяснилась потом); это было то же самое чувство, но только с тою разницею, что тогда оно было временно, теперь же оно стало постоянным. О чем бы он ни думал теперь, что бы ни делал, общее настроение его было это чувство жалости и умиления не только к ней, но ко всем людям" (PSS 32:372).

104 Although there is no mention of God, this does not negate the presence of Divine love. In *Father Sergius*, Tolstoy shows that one does not always know when one is performing actions for God. The protagonist’s ultimate realization is that he lived for people on the pretext of living for God, while Pashenka lived for God, imagining that she was living for people.
family ideal, but as a re-envisioning: family has become all of humanity. There are no longer specific roles of parents and children, husbands and wives; instead all relationships resemble that of siblings.

A Turn to the Social

In *Resurrection* sexual love and other forms of exclusive love appear as complicating factors that destroy the potential for unity if acted upon. Tolstoy explores this idea through detailing the complicated relations among the political prisoners on the march to Siberia, as “almost all of them were in love.” What emerges is a comic satire. Novodvorov loved Grabets, whose sole interest since her imprisonment had been her success in attracting men. Vera Bogodukhovskaya fell in love with others—often Novodvorov or Nabatov—but did not elicit love herself. Kryltsov was almost in love with Marya Pavlovna, but hid the nature of his affection under the guise of friendship, knowing that she was against romantic attachments. Meanwhile, Nabatov had “complicated ties” with Rantseva, the wife of his friend. He “tried to treat her as a sister, but something more appeared in his behavior to her, and this rather frightened them both, yet gave color to their life of hardship.” We are told that of the whole circle, only Marya Pavlovna and Kondratyev were free of love affairs. The passage reads like a parody of the tradition of romantic love novels. Clustering all of these complicated human

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105 Ronald LeBlanc has shown that this same theme is present in *Kholstomer* (1885). Describing the opposition between sexual love and brotherhood in Tolstoy’s vision of Christianity, he argues: “he believed that it was largely carnal desire that prevented true brotherly love and Christian compassion from manifesting themselves” (“Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstoi’s *Kholstomer,*” 553). LeBlanc notes that after Kholstomer’s castration, he “proceeds to a lead a life devoted to selfless service of others,” and suggests that the story may be read as “the expression of ascetic desire on the part of the author to be unburdened of what he saw as the affliction of sexual lust and thus to be freed to pursue a more spiritual, less carnal existence on earth” (547). This is essentially the process Nekhlyudov is undergoing, and like the gelding, he will end up in a life of selfless service.

106 “Они почти все были влюблены” (PSS 32:396).

107 “Старался обращаться с ней как с сестрой, но это нечто большее путало их обоих и вместе с тем украшало теперь их трудную жизнь” (PSS 32:397).
emotions and entanglements into three paragraphs, Tolstoy belittles them, showing them to be nothing more than childishness that gets in the way of true union. The highest ideal that emerges is sibling love; all other forms should be sublimated and converted into this highest spiritual and emotional union. It alone allows entry into social consciousness.\footnote{See: Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Mind}, 477 (quoted in Chapter One).}

Katyusha chooses this social vision over romantic love. She begins as the classic innocent maiden of a romantic seduction novel. After her fall, taking on the persona of the prostitute Liubov (“love”), she embraces her ability to attract men as her defining trait. Over the course of her time in prison, under the influence of the chaste Marya Pavlovna, Liubov gradually becomes Katyusha once more, but no longer with the same innocent dreams of her youth. In her ultimate rejection of Nekhlyudov, he can see from her eyes that “she loved him, and thought that by uniting herself to him she would be spoiling his life.”\footnote{“она любила его и думала, что связав себя с ним, она испортит его жизнь” (PSS 32:433)} Not denying that this love is felt, Tolstoy shows that Katyusha is able to transcend it (a notion that has echoes of Rousseau’s \textit{Julie}). Instead of amorous love, she chooses the love of Simonson, a man who has explained his attachment to her as anything but romantic. “You must not think I am in love with her […] I love her as a splendid, unique human being who has suffered much. I want nothing from her. I have only a profound longing to help to lighten her […] to lighten her position […] I only wish that this suffering soul should find rest.”\footnote{“Вы не думайте, что я влюблен в нее […] Я люблю ее как прекрасного, редкого, много страдавшего человека. Мне от нее ничего не нужно, но страшно хочется помочь ей, облегчить ее положение […] мне ведь нужно только, чтобы эта пострадавшая душа отдохнула” (PSS 32:404-405).}

Simonson frames his love in impersonal terms, like the universal love Tolstoy came to espouse in his later years. His love is explained by the religion he creates for himself, which is reminiscent of the passage from 1 Corinthians cited above. “This religious teaching consisted in the idea that everything in the world lives, that nothing is dead, and that all objects we consider
dead, or inorganic, are but parts of an enormous organic body which we cannot compass, and
that therefore the task of man, as part of that huge organism, consists in sustaining the life of this
organism and of all its living parts.”\(^{111}\) Simonson sees himself as a human phagocyte [фагоцит],
whose job is to help the sick and ailing parts of the universal organism. His love for Katyusha
fits into this vision, as he treats her as part of the whole. In essence, he works backward to
individual love from love of the whole, a reversal of Tolstoy’s progression.

Nekhlyudov turns to religion as well at the end of the novel, finding a new purpose after
Katyusha’s rejection through reading the Gospel of Matthew. He begins at a random passage
and from this allows his thoughts to wander, until he reaches the simple truth “to forgive always,
everyone, to forgive an infinite number of times, because there are none who are not themselves
guilty and therefore none who can punish or reform.”\(^ {112}\) Then “hoping to find a confirmation of
this thought in the Gospel” he begins reading from the beginning. Thus the truth that he comes
to is in him before he finds justification for it in the Gospel (just as Levin realizes the truth is
already in him at the end of Anna Karenina). This is in keeping with Christ’s own view in
Tolstoy’s Gospel, where he tells his followers: “My teaching is true, not because I declare, like
Moses, that God spoke with me on Sinai, but it is true because it is in you also.”\(^ {113}\) Tolstoy’s
Jesus—like Tolstoy himself—derives his authority from the assurance that his personal truths are
universally felt, if not acknowledged. This highly problematic view leads Christ to chastise the
people, much as Tolstoy chastises his readers: “And if I alone say this, yet I am right; because I
know whence I came, and whither I go. According to my teaching, there is reason in life;

\(^{111}\) “Религиозное учение это состояло в том, что все в мире живое, что мертвого нет, что все предметы,
которые мы считаем мертвыми, неорганическими, суть только часть огромного органического тела, которое
мы не можем обнять, и что поэтому задача человека, как частицы большого организма, состоит в
поддержании жизни этого организма и всех живых частей его” (PSS 32: 369-370).

\(^{112}\) “прощать всегда, всех, бесконечное число раз прощать, потому что нет таких людей, которые бы сами не
были виновны и потому могли бы наказывать или исправлять” (PSS 32:442).

\(^{113}\) Gospel in Brief, 336.
whereas, according to yours, there is none.”¹¹⁴ In essence, Tolstoy has made Christ another self-assured Lev Tolstoy.¹¹⁵

In Nekhlyudov’s closing reading of the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount becomes a moral compass for him, much as Tolstoy describes in the “Afterward to the Kreutzer Sonata” (cited above). Now Nekhlyudov sees “not beautiful abstract thoughts, setting forth for the most part exaggerated and impossible demands, but simple, clear, practical laws, which if carried out in practice (and this is quite possible) would establish perfectly new and surprising conditions of social life, in which […] the greatest blessing attainable by men—the kingdom of heaven on earth—would be reached.”¹¹⁶ As in Tolstoy’s rewrite of the Gospels, everything is condensed for Nekhlyudov into five practical rules that he takes from the Sermon on the Mount: do not be angry with your brother, avoid lust, do not bind yourself with oaths, forgive everything, and love your enemies. Each one is meant to be taken literally.

Accepting these laws involves a shift of consciousness—acknowledging that “we were sent here by someone’s will and for someone’s purpose” and rejecting the belief that “we live only for our own enjoyment.”¹¹⁷ This shift is much like the “Copernican revolution” Tolstoy calls for in the final lines of War and Peace, when he claims we must “renounce a freedom that does not exist, and recognize a dependence of which we are not conscious.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Gospel in Brief, 356.
¹¹⁵ Another immodest moment of parallel comes just before this: “At the middle of the feast, Jesus entered the temple, and began to teach the people that their service of God was wrong; that God should be served not in the temple and by sacrifices, but in the spirit, and by deeds. All listened to him and wondered that he knew the whole of wisdom without having learnt” (Gospel in Brief, 354).
¹¹⁶ “не отвлеченные, прекрасные мысли и большую частью предъявляющие преувеличенные и неисполнимые требования, а простые, ясные и практически исполняемые заповеди, которые, в случае исполнения их (что было вполне возможно), устанавливали совершенно новое устройство человеческого общества, при котором не только само собой уничтожалось все то насилие, которое так возмущало Нехлюдова, но достигалось высшее доступное человечеству благо – царство Божие на земле” (PSS 32:443).
¹¹⁷ “мы посланы сюда, то по чьей-нибудь воля и для чего-нибудь,” “она дана нам для нашего наслажденья” (PSS 32:444).
¹¹⁸ “необходимо отказать от несуществующей свободы и признать неощущаемую нами зависимость” (PSS 12:341).
are designed to make us aware that we do not exist independently, but are part of a larger whole and governed by forces outside of ourselves—in the first case historical, in the second, spiritual. The concrete way to experience this oneness is through universal brotherhood, or literally acknowledging all people as siblings.

Although we do not see the route Nekhlyudov’s future takes, the conclusions he draws are clearly preparing him not for family life that serves a small group of loved ones, but service of the human family through humble alleviation of others’ suffering. Josef Metzele writes: “Nekhljudov’s radical Christianity is opposed to the teachings of the official Russian Orthodox Church […] and to the political system of tsarist Russia, showing greater similarities with socialist or communist ideologies.”^119 Brotherhood, paradoxically, means a rejection of belonging to any of the existing social bodies. In order to experience true unity, one must break away from others’ ideals and seek the personal truth within oneself. This problematic contradiction remains unresolved in Tolstoy’s thought. Like Father Sergius, Resurrection concludes with a shift to the present tense, suggesting that Nekhlyudov’s path is still unfolding. In both of these late writings, individuality gets stripped away—Sergius even loses his name—as the ultimate ideal is utterly impersonal. Tolstoy seems to suggest that one should serve all without distinguishing and partake in all tasks, regardless of personal inclinations or talents.

**Women in the Brotherhood**

Tolstoy’s primary “seekers” who reflect on universal brotherhood are all men. But what of women? What is their role in the larger, impersonal whole? In the tension between family and society as a whole—bounded love vs. universal—Freud saw men and women on opposing sides: “Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization

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^119 Tolstoy’s Late Prose,” 164

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has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable.”

In Tolstoy’s early works, this distinction seems to hold, as he defines women by motherhood, which means being loving wives and fertile creators of family with no interests beyond the home. Gradually, however, Tolstoy sought to bring women into the brotherhood of mankind, and this attempt lays bare the gendering of his beliefs about universal love.

While more options are open for men to participate in the broader social sphere, across the trilogy of great novels we can trace a progression in Tolstoy’s portrayal of unmarried, self-sacrificing women. As they move further from the family ideal, their spheres of action broaden and their portrayals become increasingly positive. Sonya has the strongest desire for love and marriage, is the most rooted to the home, and has the most limited possibilities. Originally described in positive terms of self-sacrifice and goodness, she tells Natasha: “I am so grateful to you [the Rostov family] that I would willingly sacrifice everything, only I have nothing . . .” Tolstoy writes that Sonya “was so meek, so kind, so devotedly grateful to her benefactors, and so faithfully, unchangingly and unselfishly in love with Nikolai, that there were no grounds for finding fault with her.”

Yet while one would expect Tolstoy to glorify such fidelity, instead he ultimately shows that this love for Nikolai is Sonya’s fault. It keeps her from being fully a Rostov sibling. In Part II, Sonya attempts to deny her true feelings and suggest that she does not presume to desire romantic love and marriage. Placing no demands on Nikolai, she tells him: “I love you as a brother and always shall, and I want nothing more.”

If this had been true and Sonya really only wanted a brother, then she would have already reached Tolstoy’s later ideal of

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120 *Civilization and its Discontents*, 103.
121 “Я так благодарна вам, что рада бы всем пожертвовать, да мне нечем...” (PSS 9:80).
122 “была так кротка, так добра, так преданно-благодарна своим благодетелям и так верно, неизменно, с самоотвержением влюблена в Николая, что нельзя было ни в чем упрекнуть ее” (PSS 10:271).
123 “Я люблю вас как брата, и всегда буду любить, и больше мне ничего не надо” (PSS 10:47).
the 1890s. But in reality, she is a product of his 1860s thinking and at heart she desperately desires romantic love and marriage.

Instead of receiving a happy marriage, Sonya is ultimately relegated to being a “have-not,” continuing to live in Nikolai’s home after his marriage to Marya. Forced to sacrifice the one thing she wished for, Sonya appears to make peace with her lot as an Aunt Toinette figure. “She seemed to be fond not so much of individuals as of the family as a whole.” Having given up on the idea of forming her own family, she contents herself with a helping role in another’s home, “like a cat […] attached […] not to the people but to the home.” She has a purpose and duties to others as a marginal figure in this family unity, “always ready to render the small services for which she had a gift, but which were unconsciously accepted from her with insufficient gratitude.” This seems a poor replacement for the romantic love and motherhood Sonya sought.

For Varenka, in Anna Karenina, romantic love is not sought in the present; she has relegated it to her past. She claims not to be upset that her beloved was forbidden to marry her because she had no money, and instead married another woman. Living as a dependent with Madame Stahl, she devotes herself to helping the invalids at the German waters where Madame Stahl is convalescing. Varenka “looked after Madam Stahl, and also, as Kitty noticed, became intimate with all those who were seriously ill (of whom there were many in the place) and waited on them in the most natural way.” We see through Kitty’s admiring eyes that Varenka “seemed always occupied with something there could be no doubt about, and therefore it seemed that no

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124 For a discussion of Sonya’s fate, see: Moss, “Tolstoy’s Politics of Love,” 576.
125 “Она дорожила, казалось, не столько людьми, сколько всею семьей” (PSS 12:260).
126 “как кошка, прижилась не к людям, а к дому” (PSS 12:260).
127 “всегда была готова оказать те мелкие услуги, на которые она была способна; но все это принималось невольно с слишком слабою благодарностью…” (PSS 12:260).
side issue could interest her.”128 Svetlana Grenier notes that “Varenka, whose field of activity is not confined to a single family, is much more appreciated—and appears happier—than Sonia, who stays within the family.”129

Despite the positive role she has created for herself, Varenka still believes marriage and family is a higher ideal. During the mushroom hunt when expecting a proposal, she thinks that “to be the wife of a man like Koznyshev after her difficult life with Madame Stahl seemed to her the height of bliss.”130 However, this thought seems to stem from a wish to escape unpleasantness, rather than a genuine desire for marriage and family life, and she is ultimately relieved, not disappointed, when Koznyshev fails to propose. Varenka has found fulfillment in a life of service to others and is not dependent on romantic love, moving her beyond the model of Sonya. But Tolstoy still portrays her lot as inferior to that of the fertile, vital Kitty, a point that is reinforced in the conversation about women’s rights at the Oblonsky’s.

In Resurrection, Tolstoy pressed for impersonal, expansive love that could work on a societal level. This left no special place for women, as their sphere of family melded into the broader social order. In order to enter this broader social sphere, women must become sexless, as exemplified by Tolstoy’s most positive female character, Marya Pavlovna. Unlike Sonya and Varenka who (to differing degrees) both desire marriage and family, Marya Pavlovna is actively against marriage, with its basis on sexual love (as Tolstoy had come to see it). She was “pleased to know that she was beautiful, yet the effect her appearance had on men was not at all pleasing

128 “ухаживала за мадам Шталь и, кроме того, как замечала Кити, сходилась со всеми тяжелобольными, которых было много на водах, и самым натуральным образом ухаживала за ними […] Она всегда казалась занято делом, в котором не могло быть сомнения, и потому, казалось, ничем посторонним не могла интересоваться” (PSS 18:229).
129 Representing the Marginal Woman, 101.
130 “быть женой такого человека, как Кознышев, после своего положения у госпожи Шталь представлялось ей верхом счастья” (PSS 19:137).
to her: she was even afraid of it, and had an absolute disgust and fear of all falling in love.\textsuperscript{131} Tolstoy writes that she is on “brotherly terms” [братских отношениях] with all, choosing the male form (and also calling her tread “manly” [мужской]), as if Marya Pavlovna were truly of a neutral sex.\textsuperscript{132} This suggests that the universal brotherhood Tolstoy attempted to foster had a place for women, but only in so far as they could become brothers, not sisters, or in other words, only when there was no sexual distinction.\textsuperscript{133}

Tolstoy’s ideal for women becomes the same as his ideal for men. Instead of seeking family, Marya Pavlovna devotes herself entirely, and almost aggressively, to living for others, much like Nekhlyudov himself. “She never thought about herself, but was always concerned only with how to serve, to help someone in things small or great […] The whole interest of her life consisted in searching for opportunities to serve others, just as the hunter searches for game.”\textsuperscript{134} Like Sonya, “she did it all so naturally that those who knew her were no longer grateful, but simply expected it from her.”\textsuperscript{135} Yet while this makes Sonya seem exploited, Marya Pavlovna clearly possesses agency and emerges as a strong character. She has created the broadest sphere of action for herself, devoting her energy to revolutionaries and political prisoners, people attempting to reform the existing order and bring an era of harmony and brotherhood.

\textsuperscript{131} “ей приятно было знать, что она красива, но что она не только не радовалась тому впечатлению, которое производила на мужчин ее наружность, но боялась этого и испытывала прямое отвращение и страх к влюбленню” (PSS 32:367).
\textsuperscript{132} PSS 32:182. Calling her relations “brotherly” sounds more awkward in English, and Constance Garnett actually translates it as “sisterly.”
\textsuperscript{133} In Russian, the highest forms of connection are gendered masculine: брат (brother) is stronger than сестра (sister) and друг (friend, masc.) is stronger than подруга (friend, fem.). Unlike in English, the male forms can be used for women.
\textsuperscript{134} “она никогда не думала о себе, а всегда была озабочена только тем, как бы служить, помочь кому-нибудь в большом или малом […] Весь интерес ее жизни состоял, как для охотника найти дичь” (PSS 32:368).
\textsuperscript{135} “И делала она это так естественно, что все, зная ее, уже не ценили, а требовали этого” (PSS 32:368).
In his later writings, Tolstoy becomes increasingly positive about selfless love of all as an alternative for both men and women. In an 1889 journal entry he writes: “Masha is worth a lot; serious, clever and kind. People reproach her for not having any exclusive attachments. But it’s this that shows her true love. She loves everyone and makes everyone love her—not just as much as, but even more than people who love their own family exclusively.”136 Thus Tolstoy moves women beyond the family, giving them a role in the broader quest for universal brotherly love.

Conclusion: Brotherhood’s Ubiquity

Tolstoy’s belief in universal brotherhood is present throughout his fictional works, lying just below the surface and ready to burst through at any moment. Indeed, it is the seemingly insignificant moments when characters experience their common brotherhood with strangers that most truly embody Tolstoy’s views. Nikolai’s joyous interaction with his host in a German village where his regiment stays in October of 1805 is just such a moment. Exchanging morning greetings, Nikolai gives his host a “brotherly smile” and declares: “Hoch Oestreicher! Hoch Russen! Kaiser Alexander hoch!” to which the German replies: “Und die ganze Welt hoch!” Rostov calls back: “Und vivat die ganze Welt!” Tolstoy comments:

Although neither the German cleaning his cowshed nor Rostov back with his platoon from foraging for hay had any reason for rejoicing, they looked at each other with joyful delight and brotherly love, wagged their heads in token of their mutual affection, and parted smiling—the German returning to his cowshed and Rostov going to the cottage he occupied with Denisov.137

137 „Хотя не было никакой причины к особенной радости ни для немца, вычищавшего свой коровник, ни для Ростова, ездившего со взводом за сеном, оба человека эти с счастливым восторгом и братскою любовью посмотрели друг на друга, потрясали головами в знак взаимной любви и, улыбаясь, разошлись – немец в коровник, а Ростов в избу, которую занимал с Денисовым” (PSS 9:155-156).
This moment has no lingering impact on the outcome of the story. The German is never seen again and Rostov never recalls the incident (unlike in a Dickens novel, where there would be some significance in such a chance encounter that would come back to haunt the characters years later). Yet this interaction is crucial because it is a moment when the characters are suddenly reminded of their common humanity. Needing neither nationality, race, nor religion to bind them, Nikolai and the German understand that they are brothers and they transcend national divisions, glorifying first Austria and Russia and then the whole world.

The potential for this spark of brotherhood is always present. What is less clear is how to make it a sustained feeling. As Ilya Kliger and Nasser Zakariya rightly point out, universal brotherhood is represented by Tolstoy through “a mystical image, an idyllic epiphany, a final illumination. What we do not see, however is a robust narrative of that brotherly whole.”\(^\text{138}\) The reliance on images and moments that interrupt or conclude a narrative demonstrates that brotherhood existed outside of continuous time for Tolstoy. Although brotherly unity should be of this world—not a future spiritual state, as for Dostoevsky—Tolstoy failed to demonstrate it as a practice. Kliger and Zakariya point out that in Resurrection: “brotherhood in its broadest sense comes to offer an alternative vision for social organization as a whole, one where all individuals are concerned primarily with cultivating in themselves a loving attitude toward others,” but they go on to note that “there is no suggestion either of how to effect this disposition in all individuals, or how human organization can be sustained on such a vision.”\(^\text{139}\) Tolstoy pointedly ignores issues of societal organization, beyond rejecting all existing institutions. He does not address the question of how power should be distributed among equal brothers or what kind of self-governing structures they can create to maintain order.

\(^{138}\) “Poetics of Brotherhood,” 754.
\(^{139}\) “Poetics of Brotherhood,” 771.
Kliger and Zakariya note that in his organic approach, Tolstoy relies on synecdoche: one part of the universal whole containing within itself the whole unity (all as part of God and God in all). If Nekhlyudov loves and lives in harmony with all, this can stand in for the relations all people should have, though it tells us little about how to force/coax/coerce others into this loving state that they must voluntarily choose. On the plane of literary device, synecdoche parallels my point about literal siblings as stand-in or part that encapsulate the whole of universal brotherhood.

I believe that the sibling bond is a structural answer that allows Tolstoy to stretch from love of “close ones” to love of a random German met in a chance encounter. But labeling the latter brotherly love—just as Pierre experiences the awareness of shared brotherhood with the Frenchman, Davout—does not ultimately solve the underlying paradox in Tolstoy’s thinking. Common brotherhood may be recognized in a moment of joy or pathos, but Tolstoy offers no model for how this feeling of oneness with all may be maintained. Try as he might, Tolstoy never found a way to expand the love he felt for his Ant Brothers huddled together under the blankets to all of mankind under the dome of the heavens. Universal brotherhood remained for him a tantalizing, but sought after abstraction. Yet even unattained, this ideal was powerful enough to direct the course of his fiction throughout his career and to provide a moral compass for his ideas about art and religion in his late nonfiction works.

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140 “Poetics of Brotherhood,” 756.
141 In Christianity, this unity comes through Holy Communion—partaking of the body and the blood of Christ—but Tolstoy rejected the Eucharist.
Conclusion

The preceding chapters have argued for a new way of reading the family in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s fiction through a “sibling lens.” This lens brings into focus the importance of lateral bonds and the forms of familial love and affection that offer an alternative or counterbalance to erotic desire as well as to vertical hierarchies. But in addition to providing this lens, the dissertation has also been suggesting that what we find by applying it to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is different from what we would find if we were to apply a sibling lens to other authors. I would like to close by exploring this secondary claim more directly. To do so, I will discuss Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s works in relation to the nineteenth-century English family novel, the genre where siblings have been explored with the most regularity.¹ I focus my analysis on the issues and authors that have been of primary concern to scholars of the English family novel in order to show how my findings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky differ from theirs.² Some of the conclusions I draw would apply to Russian literature more broadly and some are specific to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. I begin with a discussion of family more generally in order to situate the importance of the role played by siblings.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were avid readers of English family novels, and their works expand upon and complicate this genre. In part due to the differences between Russian and English society, and in part because of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s different ideological missions, they use the family to fulfill different functions than their British counterparts. Critics of the English novel emphasize the family’s importance in determining social standing and shaping the

¹ In other genres, only the theme of sibling incest has received regular attention. While I restrict the focus of my comparison to the English novel, some of my findings would apply to French and German literature as well.
² I am drawing examples primarily from Jane Austen (1775-1817), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), and George Eliot (1819-1880) because they are among the most frequently discussed authors in criticism on siblings in the English novel. Neither Tolstoy nor Dostoevsky are known to have read Austen, but Dickens was important to both authors. Dostoevsky never wrote about George Eliot and there is no evidence of his having read her, but Tolstoy’s interest in Eliot has been widely documented. The connections between the two are catalogued by Edwina Blumberg: “Tolstoy and the English Novel,” 562 (note 3).
role of women. In English novels of the nineteenth century, families are the fundamental units that structure society, containing within themselves all the concerns of society as a whole. The family is organized by the same patriarchal structure as society—which determines roles within the family—and the type of family one belongs to determines one’s social standing—the relations between families.

Property, wealth, inheritance: these are among the central concerns that the family must navigate. In a nineteenth-century English novel it is almost seen as a black mark on one’s reputation to lose status or wealth (though not shameful to begin poor). Owning an estate was the requisite for being considered a gentleman. As Austen assures us at the start _Persuasion_ (1818) in describing Mr. Elliot’s fall from prosperity: “he had condescended to mortgage as far as he had the power, but he would never condescend to sell. No; he would never disgrace his name so far.” The eyes of society—the every-present neighbors—are always felt watching the family and providing censure if it does not conform to ideals of propriety and good taste. This is not true in Tolstoy. The Rostovs’ fall from wealth is not seen as an affront to good morals. Having money was not linked to social class in Russia as it was in England. The nobility was an estate, not a class, and was not defined by wealth or bloodline. Tolstoy concerned himself with the hereditary nobility, not the mobile middle class that provided subject matter for authors like Eliot and Dickens. Many of Tolstoy’s families own serfs. Dostoevsky’s heroes are often of a lower class, but for them, too, money may be coveted, but it is not directly linked with family dignity. Arkady’s dreams of wealth in _The Adolescent_ are about his individual freedom and unrelated to issues of family status. Raskolnikov wishes to help his mother and sister by acquiring wealth, but he is thinking of their material and spiritual well-being, not of family honor.

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3 For a discussion of this slippery question of defining the nobility, see: Tovrov, 9-37.
In the English novel, kinship networks are responsible for maintaining each link of the nuclear and extended family chain so that the whole might not suffer disgrace if one of its members were to come to shame. Thus Mrs. Tulliver’s sisters must come to the rescue when her property goes to auction in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860); in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mr. Darcy must track down Lydia Bennet so that Elizabeth (whom he wishes to wed) is not permanently disgraced; in a more negative instance in *David Copperfield* (1850), Mrs. Micawber is cut out of her family completely after marriage to Mr. Micawber leaves her penniless and she waits in vain for her relations to welcome her back into the fold. Shame and disgrace happen at the level of the family as well as the individual, while Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s more psychological novels focus only on individual shame.4

We take concerns over property and propriety for granted in the English novel, yet who could imagine a Dostoevskian hero worrying about what the neighbors will say about matters of family honor and social standing? Does Rogozhin think for an instant about how society views him? Is Ivan Karamazov or Versilov concerned about town gossip? *Demons* is saturated with rumors and gossip (given the mode of narration, the whole novel could be seen as gossip), but the characters never worry about protecting their family’s status. Dostoevsky is famous for his scandal scenes, and Myshkin’s epileptic fit during the party at the Epanchins would seem to offer a perfect opportunity for social censure. Yet in *The Idiot* there is no lasting impact; instead the guests pass judgments and depart, allowing their criticism to dissipate. The Epanchin’s social standing is ultimately untouched. Everyone in the community becomes intimately involved in the Karamazov family drama during Dmitri’s trial, but the idea of the *family* being shamed carries no significant weight; no one loses respect for Alyosha because his brother is convicted

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4 Martinsen never makes this point explicitly in her study of shame in Dostoevsky, but she treats shame only at the individual, as opposed to familial level (*Surprised by Shame*).
of murder. The one significant exception to this pattern is sons’ need to admire their fathers (a theme prominent in the English novel as well). Ilyusha Snegiryov feels his father’s shame after Dmitri’s mistreatment. Arkady is saved from feeling ashamed of his father when Versilov rejects the money from his lawsuit. But these instances have more to do with the personal pride of fathers and sons, and less to do with the idea of the family name being disgraced.

We find a similar pattern in Tolstoy’s works. Everyone in Moscow hears rumors of Natasha’s attempted elopement, yet there are no lingering consequences of this potential scandal (except in Natasha’s personal development). The trajectory of the Rostov family is unaltered. Anna Karenina causes a scandal when she shows up at the theater, but the lasting impact of this is purely on her own psychology not on her “good family name.” Old Prince Bolkonsky tells Andrei not to disgrace their family name by being cowardly in battle, but this is an issue of pride and patriotism, not social status.

Part of this difference between the English and Russian novels may be accounted for by the types of social networks the authors are depicting. Austen and Eliot’s characters, for example, are embedded in homesteads that exist in communities—Netherfield Park and Lucas Lodge, Dorlcote Mill by St. Ogg’s, Tipton Grange and Freshitt Hall in Middlemarch—places that root characters to a family lineage and traditional way of life, even if that way of life is soon to come under threat (as in Eliot). Bakhtin’s idea of the family novel chronotope is instructive here because he links the family novel back to the earlier genre of the family or pastoral idyll. In that earlier genre the “little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world.” In many English novels these “little

5 For a discussion of the role of the “minor characters” around Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice and the importance of the community in shaping our perception of the heroine, see: Woloch, The One vs. the Many, 43-124 (esp. 66-67).
6 Dialogic Imagination, 225. Of the family novel, he goes on to claim: “What is important here is precisely the stable family and material goods belonging to the heroes, how they overcome the element of chance […] in which
spatial worlds” attest to the stability of English society at the scale of the town or rural community; not only do neighbors know each other’s business in the present, they also share generations of history.

In the world of War and Peace the rural estate is not embedded in a community. Tolstoy’s characters can be equally rooted to a homestead, but it exists as a self-contained unit in some unidentified countryside space with little or no reference to any generation before the immediate predecessors. We know nothing of the world right outside Bald Hills. The Rostovs receive visitors at Otradnoe, but they do not have a regular community of prying neighbors. Instead, Tolstoy shows that these self-contained units of family life are connected to a much broader world of Russia, tracing how each is affected by Napoleon’s invasion. He expands the locus of concern from the purely domestic to the national, bypassing the neighborhood, and thereby reshapes the genre of family novel through its merger with national epic.

Dostoevsky, like Dickens, concerned himself more with the urban environment than the rural estate. His characters are often cut off from the traditional family homestead of an idealized (or at least more stable) past (Insulted and Injured, Crime and Punishment, The Adolescent). They may have spectators in the city or temporary neighbors (the Marmeladovs in Crime and Punishment being a prime example), but never a stable community passing judgment on the fate of the family. Dmitri Karamazov has not been a consistent member of the community where he is put on trial (having just returned shortly before the murder), and the lawyers are less concerned with his family than with making a statement about the fate of the “contemporary Russian family” in general. Given the frequent coincidences in Dickens’ world, even a large city

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they had initially found themselves, how they create fundamental, that is, family connections with people, how they limit their world to a well-defined place and a well-defined narrow circle of relatives, that is, to the family circle” (232).

7 Given the pervasive presence of hangers-on and long-term guests on a Russian estate, the outside world has, in a sense, been made part of the inside life of the family.
like London can feel like a small community where the right person is destined to turn up at the right moment with knowledge of a hero’s past (*Old Curiosity Shop, David Copperfield, Our Mutual Friend*).

In addition to mediating concerns about social standing, the family is also the site for working out ideas of gender and sexuality. Much has been written about the evolution of the family as England moved from an agrarian society with extended kinship networks to an industrial society that emphasized the nuclear family. In the English family novel—as in the Georgian or Victorian society it mirrored—women served a special function at the heart of the newly defined domestic sphere that arose as a result of these shifts. As one commentator notes: “Women were expected to make the Victorian home a sanctuary to which men could retreat from the economic battlefield.”

While literary criticism has traditionally focused on the role of wives and mothers in creating this domestic ideal, some more recent scholars have pointed to the central role of the sister.

Noting the incongruity of using a wife and mother as the ideal of purity, Leila Silvana May suggests that the sister is actually the pivotal figure in defining the family ideal. “In contrast to the mother, who has already been sullied by the unwholesome desire of another who has himself been contaminated by his contact with the world beyond the walls of the home, the sister is a sanctum sanctorum of moral virtue.”

The sister is valued for her purity, her devotion to her brother (and father) and her role as the ideal helpmate. Reviewing the scholarship on siblings in the English novel, one is immediately struck by the prevalence of sisters. Indeed,

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8 Leila Silvana May, *Disorderly Sisters*, 16.
9 *Disorderly Sisters*, 18.
almost all of the critical studies of siblings have a feminist leaning and concern themselves primarily with women.

More striking than this critical focus on sisters, however, is the reality underlying it: there are almost no significant brother-brother relationships in the nineteenth-century English novel.\textsuperscript{11} None of the sister-studies acknowledge or account for this absence, but it becomes obvious when put in relief against Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s works where the three types of sibling-dyad—brother-brother, brother-sister, sister-sister—appear with almost equal frequency. Before pursuing the significance of sisters further, I would like to consider this absence of brother-brother bonds, which to my knowledge has not received scholarly attention. Acknowledging the predominantly female readership of the time, it is possible that sister-brother or sister-sister relationships were thought to speak more directly to readers, but I suspect that something more is at stake.

Given the rights of primogeniture in England, only one brother is needed to determine inheritance of a family estate. If one of the five Bennet sisters had been a brother in \textit{Pride and Prejudice}, Longbourn would have remained in the family. In the rare instances when two brothers appear, as in \textit{Mansfield Park} (1814), Tom Bertram’s significance for Edmund is not emotional, but economic: his profligacy is costing his brother any form of inheritance. Brothers can contribute to the property/inheritance plot, but only by doing harm to each other’s prospects. In Russia, estates were divided among children, mitigating this kind of financial tension (Dmitri fights with his father over inheritance, but not with his brothers). In Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s novels, Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Myshkin receive fortunes that are entirely unsought and suddenly bring them a swarm of new acquaintances who would all like to be on “brotherly”

\textsuperscript{11} By significant I mean either emotionally significant to the characters, or structurally significant to the plot and/or central themes.
terms. Blood brothers—Nikolenka and Volodya Irtenev, Constantine and Nikolai Levin, Dmitri, Ivan, and Alyosha Karamazov—share deep emotional and spiritual bonds.

The important plotline for young men in the English novel was the *Bildungsroman*, and for growing up and making a name for oneself, being alone in the world heightens the drama. Dickens loved to depict orphans struggling against the odds. Eliot places Tom Tulliver alone in his uncle’s warehouse to work his way up in the world. Having a sister back home could add poignancy to this story, but perhaps having two brothers working together would seem to blunt or dilute the struggle. Because the male plotline has this individualistic, economic emphasis, brothers do not need brothers for their development plots.¹² They can benefit from caring for their sisters, which helps prepare them for married life.

Young women’s plotlines involved navigating the concerns of the domestic sphere in order to shift from the childhood home into marriage. The lessons they learn in the home and the insights they gain into both themselves and the world around them determine the type of married life they will enter upon. For the sister’s maturation, both sister-sister and sister-brother relationships contributed to her ideological function in the novel. Sister-sister bonds were essential for creating the sense of a women’s sphere in the home. Sisters are often defined in opposition to one another (Dorothea and Celia in *Middlemarch*, Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, etc.), and their differences offered practical and moral lessons about appropriate behavior.¹³ We find something similar in Kitty and Dolly’s interactions in *Anna Karenina* or in a less developed form among the Epanchin sisters in *The Idiot*. Sisters help train each other to be model women.

¹² One very notable exception to this pattern is the brothers in *Adam Bede* (Eliot, 1859). Adam and Seth share a close emotional bond, though in many ways Seth acts as a foil to his superlative elder brother.
¹³ See: Cohen, *Sisters*. 

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Sister-brother plotlines bring us back to the central issue of sexuality. While sisters provide an important emblem of purity in the Victorian novel, this idea also comes under assault. May complicates her point about the pivotal role of sisters in embodying the purity of the domestic sphere, arguing that while the Victorian family ideal hinges on the role of the sister, when we probe Victorian novels we find “a reaction against the myth of the purity of sister-brother love, hence the genesis of a cultural critique of the mid-nineteenth-century idea of the family and, by extension, of the foundational values of society itself.”\(^{14}\) In other words, in sister-brother plots, the sister is the site where English novelists problematized the Victorian ideal of family purity. This could help explain why so much of the scholarship on siblings in English literature focuses on questions of sexuality.\(^{15}\)

The challenge to sibling purity in Victorian literature has its roots in the earlier English literary tradition, where an erotic element to the sibling bond featured in both Gothic and Romantic literature. While in Gothic literature, incest was often unintentional (thus causing a sense of horror), Alan Richardson argues that “for the Romantic poets, however, the emphasis is on a shared childhood, on experience that unites the couple through countless mutual associations built up during the most idyllic stage of life.”\(^{16}\) Indeed, there are sympathetically portrayed instances of incest in both Byron and Shelley.\(^{17}\)

The eroticization May and others find in sister-brother relations in the nineteenth-century English novel is not a feature of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s writing. The two came out of the Russian tradition, where incest was not a concern of the Romantics. Although they are like their

\(^{14}\) *Disorderly Sisters*, 82.

\(^{15}\) In addition to the numerous studies devoted specifically to incest, see for example: Gruner, “Loving Difference”; Hudson, *Sibling Love and Incest in Jane Austen’s Fiction*; May, *Disorderly Sisters*; Perry, *Novel Relations*; Sanders, *Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature*.

\(^{16}\) “Sibling Incest in English Romantic Poetry,” 739.

\(^{17}\) For discussion of the sibling incest theme in Romantic literature, see: Thorslev, “Incest as Romantic Symbol.” Thorslev notes that while parent-child incest is decried, sibling incest is often portrayed sympathetically (47).
English counterparts in using siblinghood as an alternative to erotic desire (as I discussed in Chapters One and Two), they differ from the English writers in their firm assurance of siblinghood’s purity. Susanne Fusso’s *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* has uncovered instances of adolescents wrestling with sexuality throughout Dostoevsky’s works, but not in the home. Perhaps because Dostoevsky’s families are not idealized, self-contained units, his characters are forced to look outward for love. Even in *Crime and Punishment*, where Dunya is passionately devoted to Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky gives no hint of unease about the nature of this love (even Raskolnikov’s relationship to his supposed lover, Sonya, is devoid of Eros). Dunya’s sexuality is a central concern when she is considered in relation to her potential suitors—Svidrigailov, Luzhin, and Razumikhin—but in her relationship with her brother, Dostoevsky emphasizes their similarity, rather than sexual difference.

Tolstoy’s families in *War and Peace* are closer to what we find in the English novel, but as I argued in Chapter One, the intimacy between Natasha and Nikolai Rostov is enabled precisely by Tolstoy’s lack of concern about the possibility of incestuous desire between the pair. The relations between Helene and Anatole Kuragin do not threaten the ideal of the pure home because there is nothing ideal or pure about the family from which they emerged. Marya and Andrei’s relations are completely de-eroticized. For both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the sister is not the locus of concern about sexuality; rather, she is a safe object for and source of intimacy and compassion that brothers often prove unable to bestow or receive outside the home sphere.

Not plagued by all the concerns of the Victorians, the Russian novel comes closer to Hegel’s famous description of brother-sister bonds that I discussed in Chapter One. As eloquently paraphrased by May:

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18 Another potential factor is the separation of the sexes within the Russian gentry family (see Tovrov, *Russian Noble Family*, 114-45). After age seven, brothers and sisters typically occupied separate spheres, although this is not the way Tolstoy chooses to depict the Rostov family.
In the sibling dyad [sister-brother], there is a higher ethical level where a pure relation between male and female as equals can exist, an egalitarian relationship unsullied by desire or power, or the contingencies of history, a bond of difference and sameness: difference in sex and sameness in blood, but blood neither turbulent nor compromised […] Their is the bond that unites true love, obligation, and ethical duty.¹⁹

Siblinghood is “unsullied” by the power inequality inherent in parent-child relations and the desire that exists between husband and wife. The combination of “love, obligation, and ethical duty” make it an ideal ground for Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s missions of fostering brotherly unity. Charles Hatten argues that domestic literature always has a didactic function, “designed to intervene in the social world by molding the sensibilities of individuals and by influencing the families of readers.”²⁰ Ideals of family life are intended to help maintain social norms, specifically social, sexual, and moral hierarchies. Granting this to be one function of family in the novel (though I do not think any of these works are primarily didactic), Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s use of siblings makes a powerful statement about the norms they wish to foster: the same love, obligation, and ethical duty between equals found in Hegel’s ideal. Although men and women belong to a distinct hierarchy in Russian society, in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s families, brothers never dominate over their sisters. Raskolnikov attempts to dictate to Dunya about her marriage, but she reframes the question on her own terms.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky started closer to the English family novel (thus the concerns of Chapters One and Two are similar to those found in criticism of English novels), but in typical Russian fashion, they exploded the potentials of the genre. Moving beyond the Victorians’ concerns with feminine purity in the idealized home sphere and the role of family in establishing social hierarchy, the Russians became increasingly concerned with the family’s decay.²¹

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¹⁹ Disorderly Sisters, 39.
²⁰ The End of Domesticity, 15.
²¹ This theme was not unique to Russia. It appears in German literature as well, for example in Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks: Decline of a Family (1901).
Dobroliubov (1836-1861) focused an 1859 critique of the Russian family on the troubles of the despotic patriarchal order. Analyzing the depiction of the merchant class in Alexander Ostrovsky’s (1823-1886) plays, Dobroliubov concluded that “as long as tyrannical conditions exist at the very foundations of social life, the kindest and most noble personalities will never be able to do anything; and the well-being of the family and even of society as a whole will remain precarious and in no way safeguarded against the most insignificant fortuities.”

In Dobroliubov’s critique, just as in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy’s late novels, the family is in a state of moral decay, so the focus of family depictions must shift to the roots of the breakdown. According to Dobroliubov, tyranny, caused by radical power inequalities, is largely to blame for the problems of the Russian family. Dostoevsky would agree with this, but would add a concern about the rise of atheism. Tolstoy would attack the whole social structure (Resurrection). Dobroliubov’s assessment highlights the dangers of patriarchal authoritarianism, a system that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky both counter with the idea of lateral power-sharing between siblings. While siblinghood as a theme in English literature stays confined to the connection between individuals (primarily addressing concerns about identity and sexuality), for Tolstoy and Dostoevsky it an additional, broader significance, offering an alternative to the patriarchal order.

English family novels stay rooted in the material everyday existence of the family and its members, but Tolstoy and Dostoevsky added a spiritual element to siblinghood. What is at stake for family in their novels is more than preserving or critiquing the status quo of society’s social

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22 Selected Philosophical Essays, 307-8. The essay, “Realm of Darkness,” was published in Sovremennik No. 7, 1859. Tovrov argues that hierarchy was the defining feature of the nineteenth-century Russian family. She links the rigid hierarchy of the family structure to family’s key function, which she suggests was “to integrate its members into a rigidly hierarchical social order that included, among other things, tsar, church, military and civil service” (The Russian Noble Family, 2).
structure (the function of rumors, gossip and concern with the good opinion of one’s neighbors); the family is more than a ground for testing ideals of domesticity and female sexuality. Tolstoy and Dostoevský never concerned themselves with the material plane alone, though they incorporate spirituality and religion in different ways. In Tolstoy’s writing we find what Gustafson calls “emblematic realism.”

The represented reality includes the world as we ordinarily understand it, in all its psychological, social, economic, and historical complexity. It is realism. But the concept of reality is expanded beyond the material and historical world to uncover the Divine within and abroad. History, culture, nature, and human psychology transcend their material bounds, and the spirit is disclosed. In Tolstoy’s emblematic realism, therefore, the signified is this expanded reality which itself embodies and reveals moral and spiritual truth to the characters and the readers.

In emblematic realism the interaction between a sister and a brother operates on two planes: both as a statement about their individual connection and as a reflection of the spiritual principle of brotherhood—the presence of God in all and all in God. In Dostoevsky, each individual relationship is also a test of the ideal of brotherhood in Christ and its embodiment in our world. I believe this double valance is one of the key elements that distinguish Dostoevsky and Tolstoy’s works.

This synthesis of spiritual and material reality enables Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to make the move I have been arguing for throughout the dissertation: linking literal sibling bonds to their ideals of universal brotherhood. By taking the concrete, material idea of the sibling bond—like what we find in English novels—and by moving it into the realm of the philosophical, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky raise it to a higher spiritual plane. On this plane sexual difference does not matter, which may explain why Tolstoy and Dostoevsky distinguish less between sister and

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23 Though I have only been considering England here, other European traditions are also relevant. Priscilla Meyer’s How the Russians Read the French argues that the Russians turned to Orthodox Christianity as the essential Russian virtue and used French literary works as subtexts in their novels in order to establish a distinction between Russia’s pure values and the corrupted West. She notes that Dostoevsky revered Balzac but wanted to “supply the missing spiritual dimension to his novels” (11).

24 Resident and Stranger, 204.
brother relationships. In an English novel if Elizabeth and Jane Bennet love each other, this signifies only at the individual level; it tells us nothing about how two strangers—or even neighbors—should reach out to each other with love. When Ivan Karamazov loves Dmitri, however, it does tell us something about the universal quality of brotherly love.

This distinction is felt clearly if we look at an example from *The Mill on the Floss*, one of the most frequently cited “sibling novels” in the English tradition. At the end of Book Two, when calamity strikes Maggie and Tom’s family, we find a classic image of sibling tenderness and support, as “the two poor things clung closer to each other—both trembling.” This intense sibling connection is immediately contrasted with a moment of neighborly love, when Mrs. Stilling gives them a basket of provisions for the road. As Eliot describes the sentiment this compassion evokes:

Maggie’s heart went out towards this woman whom she had never liked, and she kissed her silently. It was the first sign within the poor child of that new sense which is the gift of sorrow, that susceptibility to the bare offices of humanity which raises them into a bond of loving fellowship, as to haggard men among the icebergs the mere presence of an ordinary comrade stirs the deep fountains of affection.

This powerful instance of “loving fellowship” that “stirs the deep fountains of affection” is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the sibling connection that directly precedes it. And perhaps significantly, Eliot does not call it “brotherhood,” as such moments are often labeled by Tolstoy. Indeed the word “brotherhood” appears only three times in *Mill on the Floss*, twice in direct reference to the Church and only once in reference to a more general sense of human spiritual kinship. *Middlemarch* (1871-2) is famous for its portrayals of fellow

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25 *Mill on the Floss*, 204.
feeling, yet in that novel the word “brotherhood” never appears. Siblinghood and neighborly love remain on different planes.

I would like to propose one more hypothesis for why literal siblinghood takes on a greater symbolic meaning in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky’s works than we find in the English novel, one that has to do with the conditions in which the Russians were writing. Given Russia’s tight censorship, it is a truism that all major ideas were discussed in literature rather than being spread among works of philosophy, political theory, and theology, as was the case in the rest of Europe. As I discussed in the Introduction, in France, universal brotherhood was a matter for philosophers and utopian socialist thinkers like Fourier, in Germany, for political theorists like Marx and Engels. In Russia, confined to a genre in which individual fictional lives can be used to illustrate universal truths, it follows that the sibling bond would take on this second, heightened level of meaning. *The Brothers Karamazov* is not just the story of one troubled family. And as reader reactions showed, the sibling-style workers collective Vera established in *What Is to Be Done?* was seen as a general model to be carried out in life. Like the literature that contained them, siblings in the Russian novel had to carry a heavier ideological and philosophical burden than in English literature.

**Coda: Soviet Siblings**

Looking ahead into the twentieth century, siblinghood continued to be a central metaphor in Soviet literature. There, instead of figuring on the universal, spiritual plane, siblings became part of a national family. Katerina Clark’s seminal study of the Soviet novel brings to light the pervasive pattern of family metaphors used to structure Soviet texts. Soviet writing draws on the

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27 In “Loving Your Neighbor in *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina*: Varieties of Multiplot Novels” Liza Knapp explores the differences in Eliot and Tolstoy’s vision of this type of connection, but she does not consider the idea of siblings.
idea of the “great family” (bol’shaia sem’ia) of the State, which was to work in cooperation with individual nuclear families (the malaia sem’ia). The initial Soviet promise was based on the ideal of brotherly equality, and in its early years this promise was represented in frequent metaphors of fraternity. Yet as Clark demonstrates, the 1930s saw a shift: “The father-and-son paradigm replaced the Five-Year Plan ideal of infinite fraternity and provided a new pattern for determining status within the ‘family’ in terms of a hierarchy of maturity and care.” Clark’s analysis illustrates a shift from the early, hopeful image of brotherhood back to a patriarchal father-son structure as the original ideal of socialist equality was replaced by a far more sinister vision of elite paternalism not entirely unlike Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor. The Soviet Union was anything but the loving, spiritually united band of cooperative siblings Tolstoy and Dostoevsky hoped to see someday. It could not even be called an “accidental family” because it lacked the freedom Dostoevsky believed was needed for active love to emerge. Family members cannot be made to love each other through mandate or coercion.

Both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy turned to the sibling bond because it combined the structure of kinship and the family with a particular kind of love that they believed was the essential glue for uniting all of humanity. Although love is at the center of both of their visions, neither writer is naive to its instability or jealousies. In their view, sibling love avoided the most dangerous, inflammatory types of bonding while maximizing the more patient and compassionate. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky wrote novels where they could explore the ideal of people united in loving fraternity. But all the historical experiments in brotherhood—both before and after their time—have proved that people cannot be governed by this type of love;

28 Soviet Novel, 129.
29 In this model, the sons would never become fathers.
30 Marta Wilkinson provides a more negative reading of What Is to Be Done? that suggests that this ideal could not even appear in the “reality” of the novel, but only in Vera’s dreams (Antigone’s Daughters, 78).
order is inevitably maintained through social contract or power inequality that forces, or inspires obedience. Siblinghood can only act as the path to universal brotherhood in the realm of literature, where all our finest ideals may be realized. In that fictive realm, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky used the sibling as the everyday, ubiquitous, concrete reminder of our shared humanity, the “emblem” of universal brotherhood that is forever dreamt of but that remains tantalizingly out of reach.
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