

Anna A. Berman
September 24, 2021

**BENNET SISTERS AND KARAMAZOV BROTHERS
VERTICAL AND LATERAL APPROACHES TO PLOT IN ENGLAND AND RUSSIA**

This paper comes out of an observation I made ten years ago while finishing my dissertation on sibling in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. In the conclusion I took a step back to show what was unique about Tolstoy and Dostoevsky's use of siblings—which I was arguing served as their model for their broader ideas about universal brotherhood. I was making the point that when Jane and Elizabeth Bennet love each other, the relationship stands only for itself, whereas when Alyosha Karamazov reaches out to his brother Ivan with love, this makes a broader statement about the expansive potentials of brotherly love. Then I realized this was a terrible comparison because I was comparing two sisters with two brothers, so I should swap in a different English example... and then I got stuck. I couldn't think of a single nineteenth-century English novel about a pair of brothers.

A decade later (with much searching) I've found less than a dozen. The absence of significant brother-brother relations in the English novel is all the more striking when we look to the great Russian novels that I'd been steeped in; Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* (1862), Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875-8), Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlyovs* (1875-80), and, of course, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) all feature significant brothers. Russian authors were avid readers of English literature in the nineteenth century. They considered the English the masters of writing about family and often responded directly to English models, so why did they write Karamazov brothers while the English wrote only Bennet sisters?

It is difficult to *prove* the reason for an absence, but by looking at the standard family plots the English wrote, the exceptional novels that *do* include significant brothers, and by comparing to the Russian tradition, where brothers are common, I believe we can identify the factors that contributed to this difference between the two traditions. So I will start by doing that today, and then I will look at what the addition of brothers did for the Russian novel, both in terms of themes and narrative form.

First, the basic question of family plots. Broadly speaking, critics take two approaches to the family plot of the nineteenth-century novel, focusing either on genealogy/paternity or on marriage.¹ Representing the first camp, Peter Brooks calls paternity “a dominant issue within the great tradition of the nineteenth-century novel [...], a principal embodiment of its concern with authority, legitimacy, the conflict of generations, and the transmission of wisdom” (63). For Brooks authority and paternity “provide not only the matter of the novel but also its structuring force, the dynamic that shapes its plot” (65).² The generational plot Brooks traces is vertically oriented and focuses on traditionally male concerns about property, inheritance, and the continuity of the family name and family honor, as it is men who carry on the family name and inherit its wealth or losses.

The marriage plot, by contrast, focuses on the world of women, romantic love, and the domestic sphere and at first seems more laterally oriented than the generational plot, as its key actors are of the same generation.³ Its dramatic arc is guided by amorous desire, which has a clear storyline that leads to a well-defined conclusion: the wedding bells. Trollope even pokes fun at this convention near the end of *He Knew He Was Right*, when he comments: “It is rather

¹ See: Sharon Marcus, *Between Women*, 73. Classic studies that focus on the marriage plot include: Boone, Calder, Hinz, Tanner. Studies that focus on the generational/genealogy plot include: Beizer, Ragussis, Said, Shideler, Tobin.

² See also: Beizer 3.

³ Gorsky analyzes the emphasis on marriage for female vs. male characters (20).

hard upon readers that they should be thus hurried from the completion of hymeneals in Florence to the preparations for other hymeneals in Devonshire; but it is the nature of a complex story to be entangled with many weddings toward its close” (826).

Ultimately, the end goal of both the marriage and generational plots is the same: the creation of an heir who will continue the family line. As Barry McCrea expresses it: “The English nineteenth-century novel from Austen on seems, structurally at least, to be in the thrall of a sort of fertility cult, where all sense of beginnings and endings are predicated upon marriage and procreation.”⁴ To name but a few, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848), Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1850) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1859), Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Middlemarch* (1872), and Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd* (1863) all end with the arrival of the next generation. This pattern indicates that for the English, an important function of the marriage plot is the vertical continuation of the family line.

In the two standard family plotlines I’ve been outlining, the generational plot focuses on parent-child relations and the marriage plot on romantic partners who will become husband-wife, but what of siblings? Do they have their own plot? Unlike romantic love, sibling love has no natural progression—no movement from first acquaintance, to courtship, to wedding, to the birth of an heir. There is no ultimate act or consummation of the bond. It also fails to align with the linear generational plot, not forwarding the succession from generation to generation, but creating lateral complications. There are three possible types of sibling relationship—sister-sister, sister-brother, brother-brother. Although I will not have time to discuss the first two today, I would argue that both sister-sister and sister-brother relations can be accommodated

⁴ McCrea, *In the Company of Strangers*, 7.

within the two family plotlines I have been discussing. These relationships often play a crucial role in helping along (or hindering) the marriage plot, and for the generational plot, since sisters marry *out* of the family, they offer no challenge to its clear linear progression the way a second brother would. Multiple brothers, however, do not have a place, and when I get to the Russian novel, I will suggest that they require their own new kind of plot.

To be clear, I do not mean to imply that brother-brother pairs are entirely absent from nineteenth-century English novels, rather that they are almost never the central focus. Many “minor brothers” lurk in the wings of these novels, sometimes crucial to the outcome of the plot, but barely appearing in the actual narration. For example, Jane Austen keeps her second brothers in the background as minor characters, though their impact may be great. The denouement of *Sense and Sensibility* hinges on the very “minorness” of the second Ferrars brother, priming Elinor (and the reader) to assume that the new “Mrs. Ferrars” *must* refer to the wife of her beloved Edward. In *Mansfield Park*, the minor brother’s significance is economic: Edmund Bertram’s church position must be sold to pay his older brother Tom’s gambling debts. In *Emma* (1815), we see little of Mr. Knightly’s brother, but his marriage to Emma’s sister creates the familial closeness that allows the couple to become intimate. By keeping John in the background, Austen never has to explore his feelings about being deprived of the family estate as “a brother whose home it had equally been the longest part of his life, and whose attachments were strong” (100). George Eliot, too, relies on a minor brother to catalyze the narrative motion of *Silas Marner* (1861), and a brother’s embezzlement of his trustee’s wealth is behind the marital tensions in Craik’s *Agatha’s Husband* (1853).

Acknowledging that brothers are present in the nineteenth-century English novel, it is still striking that significant brother relationships are almost never at the heart of the narration. The

sociocultural context in which the works were written offers possible explanations. For example, the higher proportion of female authors and the large female readership in England than Russia (where brother-plots were common) would make it logical to find more female protagonists and consequently more sisters.⁵ While these factors no doubt played a role, they do not account for male authors not writing about brothers or for the fact that women were not the *only* market for novels. And in Russia, female novelists, as well as male, wrote novels focused on brothers.⁶

I believe it is the inheritance structure—specifically the honoring of primogeniture—that plays the central role in limiting the place for multiple brothers in the English novel. In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy jokingly calls “English happiness” in novels “a baronetcy and a landed estate.” While there is no limit to the number of eligible suitors with such estates who could appear in a novel to marry a group of sisters, only one brother can offer his bride such “English happiness.” Thus, in *East Lynne* (1860-61) the narrator explains of the (briefly mentioned) four sons of Baron von Stalkenberg: “The young Baron von Stalkenberg was at liberty to marry; three Counts von Stalkenberg were not—unless they could pick up a wife with enough money to keep herself and her husband. In this creed they had been brought up: it was a perfectly understood creed, and not rebelled against” (385). A young lady in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* complains of this: “I saw one or two gentlemen in London that I might have liked, but they were younger sons, and mamma would not let me get to know them” (374). Thus, because of primogeniture, only one brother could have a marriage plot.⁷ As Zouheir Jamoussi has observed: “the centrifugal

⁵ Flint notes that female readers were seeking heroines as role models, which helps explain predominance of sisters (esp. Chapters 8 and 9; cited in Shattock 9).

⁶ Ex. Aleeva’s *Two Worlds*, 1875; Smirnova’s *Strength of Character*, 1876.

⁷ Although primogeniture was standard practice, it was not required by law, except in cases where the father died without leaving a will, and this became law only in 1833 (Cecil 53). Deeds of entail, however, were commonly used to assure that a “man of expensive tastes” could not mortgage or sell the family house or reduce the size of land holdings, protecting these fundamentals for future generations (Nelson 73). The custom of honoring primogeniture continued until the Settled Land Act of 1925 (Jamoussi 2).

force exerted by primogeniture” pushed younger sons away from the manor house and they became the heroes of travel or adventure novels like *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gulliver’s Travels* (197).

As with the marriage plot, only one brother was required in the generational plot to continue the family line and inherit the estate or business. A second brother becomes a complication to the un-bifurcated family lineage, and he must find himself a profession outside of the family estate or business (often in the Church or army).⁸ While it is popular to regard the Victorian novel as a case study for self-actualization and the growing force of liberalizing democracy, the fate of second brothers provides a chilling reminder of the power still wielded by the aristocratic lineage system that favored birth over talent or virtue. This is brought into greater focus when we compare with Russia. The Russians did not honor primogeniture and estates were split among siblings (sisters as well as brothers), which immediately opened the possibility for multiple brothers to have marriage plots and removed the need for a single, clear male lineage in the generational plot.

In the English novel, the enforced movement *away* from family for second sons creates an inherent structural problem because it conflicts with the primary values of the English novel, which focuses on maintaining family unity and stability. Second brothers challenge the family ideal of the cozy, safe, domestic sphere. The satire of Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848) cuts through this veneer of family devotion and love, and perhaps for this reason, he includes brothers, revealing the base motivations underlying their relations. Here’s how he explains the “problem”:

[...] as to the feeling of elder towards younger sons. My dear sir, you ought to know that every elder brother looks upon the cadets of the house as his natural enemies, who

⁸ Nelson lists the “acceptable line[s] of work” for younger sons, including service in the diplomatic corps or parliament, the army, or the Church (74). See also Calder (23-4).

deprive him of so much ready money which ought to be his by right. I have often heard George Mac Turk, Lord Bajazet's eldest son, say that if he had his will when he came to the title, he would do what the sultans do, and clear the estate by chopping off all his younger brothers' heads at once; and so the case is, more or less, with them all. (596)

Novels could only portray family harmony if they managed to excise the rivalry and envy that would be caused by a younger brother. Claudia Nelson has observed that the ill-will produced by primogeniture is the subject of Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) and Braddon's *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863), but in both cases, the conflict is between cousins, not brothers. She suggests this is "a literary device likely to be less disturbing to the sentiments of readers conditioned to revere the sibling tie" (118).⁹ As the novel was meant to help form morals, "A literature that only rarely acknowledges the possibility that siblings may feel indifference, jealousy, or hatred for one another is a powerful tool in encouraging readers to repress such feelings in their own lives" (Nelson 107). I would add that by avoiding brothers, many authors essentially enacted such repression in their novels.

So what of the novels that *do* feature brothers? It may be a surprise to discover that the most disparate of novels—from highly-regarded authors like Charles Dickens and George Eliot, to un/little-knowns like Anna Drury, from the Christian moralizing of Charlotte Yonge, to the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon—actually follow the same basic plotline for brothers. At its most essential: two brothers—the "most faithful of friends"—fall in love with the same woman. Stuck in a single marriage plot that cannot contain the two, the one who loses the romantic tussle is ultimately removed from the linear progression of the family plot to restore harmony at the novel's close. Told another way: the novel opens with a pair of brothers as its primary unit and must transform this into a conjugal pairing by its close. The

⁹ Along these lines, Trollope directs the older brother's animosity at his step-mother, not his small half-brother in *Orley Farm* (1862).

three examples I will talk about today are George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), Anna Drury's *The Brothers* (1865), and Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* (1872).

In *Adam Bede* Eliot essentially attempts to include two brothers in the marriage plot, while at the same time upholding her ideals about family and Christian love. Adam and Seth Bede model the affection and support that typifies the fraternal relations in all of these brother-novels, yet the very frequency with which characters and narrator comment on their exceptional closeness suggests that such fraternal harmony *is* exceptional (and this is true in all the brother-novels I've found). Adam and Seth will both end up in love with Dinah Morris. Seth loves her from the start, but Eliot never portrays him as a romantic hero, instead depicting him as less virile and masculine than Adam.¹⁰ He easily slips into domestic roles typically associated with women. While Adam is in the workshop, we see Seth making tea for his mother and telling her "tenderly": "I'll put two or three of these things away, and make the house look more comfortable," all tasks and attributes associated with the female sphere (96). When Adam is infatuated with the beautiful Hetty Sorrel and wishes Seth were as happy as he, Seth claims contentment, cheerfully suggesting: "I'll be an old bachelor, belike, and make a fuss wi' thy children" (351), typically a woman's activity in the Victorian novel. All is well until Adam and Dinah fall in love.

As in all of my examples of English novels that feature two brothers in one marriage plot, the Bedes initially resist becoming rivals. When Adam's mother tells him of Dinah's love and suggests a marriage, his first thought is for Seth: "Would the lad be hurt?" However, he immediately reassures himself: "Hardly; [...] there was no selfish jealousy in him" (449). Eliot attempts to smooth over the most difficult aspect of brotherly rivalry, allowing Adam to believe

¹⁰ John Reed calls Seth a model of "castrated masculinity" (274), and R. E. Sopher suggests that "sympathy like Seth's is incompatible with sexually desirable masculinity like Adam's" (5).

(rightly) in his brother's lack of jealousy. The coexistence of both romantic and brotherly love is made possible only by this lack, which, in turn, is facilitated by Seth's emasculation. In the Epilogue, we find the Bede family living in harmony, with Seth in the role of child-caretaker that he predicted for himself: "to walk by Dinah's side, and be tyrannized over by Dinah's and Adam's children, was uncle Seth's earthly happiness" (479). In essence, he has been turned into a sister, closing the novel in the classic female role of aunt, the sister's usual culmination in the marriage plot (as we see for example, in *The Woman in White*).

The trope of turning a brother into a sister is even more explicit in Charlotte Yonge's *Heartsease or Brother's Wife* (1871). The primogenitor, John Martindale, has recused himself from the marriage plot after the early death of his fiancée and he ends the novel by literally replacing his sister in caring for their mother. He showed his mother "the necessity of relinquishing her daughter [so she could wed], intending to offer himself as her companion and attendant" (486). John is eager for his younger brother's family to live with them, claiming that: "a home is all that I can ever want; and that for Arthur to afford me a share in his, and in his children's hearts, would be the greatest earthly happiness that I can desire" (487). Only one brother marries, and John, like Seth Bede, closes the novel in the role of aunt.

Like *Adam Bede*, Drury's *The Brothers* also shows the lack of a sustainable place for two brothers in the marriage plot. The novel opens with the protagonist, Roland Clarendon, living with his older brother, Harcourt, and managing the family estate, which his brother has inherited. Since their earliest childhood, Harcourt was devoted to Roland's care, "and through the petting of infancy, the protectorate of early school-days, and the guardianship of their orphaned youth, had lavished on him a love that effectually veiled the condition of dependence in which the will

of their father had left his younger son” (1:36). This protective relationship resembles that of the Bede brothers, but Drury already hints at the problem of economic inequality.

The brothers are content with their arrangement, bound by “an affection, whose tenderness was known only to themselves” (1:36), yet from the first pages of the novel, everyone around Roland keeps telling him the situation is unsustainable. A kindly neighbor claims that if Roland ever wants a wife, he will need independence, but Roland sees no problem. The neighbor also worries about what will happen when Harcourt marries, but Roland assures her that “Harcourt says he shall never marry” (1:4). Roland refuses to see the precariousness of his position, arguing: “there is more than enough for Harcourt and me as it is, and Harcourt has often told me he considers I have as good a right to it all as him self [...]. I don’t call it dependent to be at home” (1:13). When the neighbor hints that it might not always be his home, Roland protests: “And what else can it ever be, while it is my brother’s?” (1:14). He puts his faith in brotherly love, ignoring the competition others see built into the social and legal structures that contain the two and makes one the dependent of the other. While they remain a pair without conjugal complications, their affectionate coexistence goes unchallenged.

Of course, in a novel that begins with such warnings, it can be little surprise that circumstances will destroy Roland and Harcourt’s happy coexistence. Brotherly love proves weaker than romantic passion when Harcourt falls in love with Roland’s beloved, Marion Egerton. Only once Roland and Harcourt become acknowledged romantic rivals, does Roland appreciate the distinction between living on a brother’s estate and a father’s:

Did I ever complain to any one of my father’s will? Did I ever grumble because one had all, and the other nothing? I have had it thrust upon my notice perpetually by other people, and I never gave it a thought. It is no disgrace to take an allowance from a father, and I felt it none to receive it from Harcourt. [...] I should as soon have dreamed of a child on its mother’s lap coming to terms and settlement with her, as of being disturbed about his doing me justice. (2:71-2)

Realizing his lack of rights as a second son, he comes to see the estate as truly his brother's home and not his.

The plot gets complicated, but basically Harcourt attempts to woo Marion, is rejected, and leaves England, ceding the romantic battlefield to his brother. Roland and Marion wed, Harcourt is reported to have died in Germany, and Roland inherits the estate, taking over his brother's place. When a weakened and dying Harcourt ultimately returns as a presumed murderer who is believed to be dead (and is thus in hiding), the brothers reunite joyfully with full forgiveness. But this creates the same impossible configuration that lacks an adequate place for both brothers. The situation is resolved by Harcourt's death, and the novel closes with the ultimate act of restoring order to the family plot: Marion bears Roland a son and heir to the estate and they name the child after their departed brother, Harcourt. With this act, the brother-plot is transformed into a father-son plot. Lateral has been made vertical and order—the linear order of family line paralleling story line—has been restored.

Wilkie Collins sidesteps the issue of primogeniture in *Poor Miss Finch* by making his brothers twins who inherit equally. However, the plotline of romantic rivalry between brothers remains the same, suggesting that while the English uneasiness with brothers may have begun with the system of inheritance, it became so deeply ingrained that it shaped the way they viewed brother bonds generally. In *Poor Miss Finch* Oscar and Nugent Dubourg vie for the love of the blind Lucilla Finch. I won't give you all the ins and outs of the plot, but as in both Eliot's and Drury's novels, *Poor Miss Finch* opens with the brothers on very intimate terms, with Oscar calling Nugent "the noblest creature that God every created!" and "an angel!" (49). Lucilla and Oscar fall in love. Then we get a classic case of what Rene Girard would call mimetic desire—a desire that is modeled on *another's* desire. Nugent arrives and is taken with Lucilla too, which

delights Oscar because “[h]is brother’s opinion ranked above all human opinions in his estimation” (143), or in Girard’s formulation: “The mediator’s prestige is imparted to the object of desire” (17). After many twists and turns, Nugent tries to steal his brother’s identity and marry Lucilla in that way, but his perfidy is discovered and Oscar and Lucilla are reunited. In the end, after Oscar has forgiven Nugent, Nugent leaves England, requesting that if Oscar have a boy, “call him by my name—for my sake” (425). In the final pages, he dies at sea and Lucilla’s eldest son is named Nugent. As with Drury’s *The Brothers*, the plot of *Poor Miss Finch* is resolved through the removal of one brother and his replacement by a son. Lateral has again been made vertical and the family line continues without complication. We find essentially the same ending in Yonge’s *Three Brides* (1876), Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, and Braddon’s *Like and Unlike*; a brother pair is turned into a clean, vertical father-son pair.

In the Russian novel there are also cases of brothers loving the same woman, but we never find open rivalry like in the English novel. Perhaps the closest case to the English is Turgenev’s *Fathers and Children* (1862), where Nikolai and Pavel Petrovich (the brothers in the older generation) fall in love with the same woman: Nikolai’s peasant mistress, Fenechka. Unlike their English counterparts—for example the brothers in Drury’s novel—Nikolai and Pavel jointly inherit and chose *not* to split their estate, instead living together without economic inequality or dependence (this not splitting the estate is quite common in Russia novels).

What’s interesting is how the brother-rivalry manifests *differently* in Turgenev than in the English novel. Brothers never wish to be rivals, but in *Fathers and Children*, Pavel Petrovich’s desire to maintain brotherly relations is so strong that he displaces the romantic rivalry plotline onto another character. He literally fights a duel with the young nihilist, Bazarov, over Fenechka, not with his brother. And he shields his brother from ever even knowing that they

were romantic rivals. Pavel Petrovich wishes for Bazarov to be his rival because he can hate Bazarov (they are on opposite sides of all the social and political disputes in the novel). But after being wounded in the duel, he has a probing conversation with Fenechka in which she affirms that she cares nothing for Bazarov and loves only Nikolai Petrovich, making it impossible for Pavel to pretend any longer that Bazarov is his rival. He magnanimously tells Nikolai to marry Fenechka, and decides to go away after the wedding. The narrator comments: “Lit by the bright daylight, his handsome, emaciated head resting on the white pillow looked like the head of a dead man... In effect, he was a dead man” (133). He has essentially sacrificed himself for his brother and proved the power of his brotherly love.

In a more extreme (and troubling) version of this type of sacrifice, the younger brother in a lesser-known novel, Smirnova’s *Strength of Character* (1876), is stuck in an unwanted affair with his brother’s wife (he was basically seduced by her before the novel started). When she realizes he’s trying to end the affair, she blackmails him, threatening to tell his brother. The only thing the younger brother cares about is protecting his brother from learning of his betrayal of their brotherly bond. Driven near insanity, he ultimately murders his sister-in-law and then commits suicide, writing a note that will keep his brother ignorant of the affair. It’s a crazy ending, but as in Turgenev’s novel, the brother is kept unaware of the rivalry. Smirnova’s novel highlights how highly the characters value the brother-bond.

One last Russian example of two brothers entangled with the same woman. In Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), Dmitri and Ivan Karamazov are both connected to Katerina Ivanovna. But in this case Ivan confirms that “[Dmitri] himself solemnly handed her over to me, with his blessing” (14:211 / 232), and it is not clear whether either brother is *truly* in love with her. Dmitri is ready to run off with Grushenka; Katerina Ivanovna, exemplifying true

Dostoevskian psychology, both loves Dmitri and considers him a reptile [*gad*]; and Ivan “loved her madly, though it was true that at times he also hated her so much that he could even have killed her” (15:48 / 611). What this love triangle notably does *not* do is create actual rivalry between the brothers, as in the English novel. If anything, it brings them closer.¹¹

Just as the Karamazov brothers are not rent asunder by women, nor are they in competition over their inheritance—the primary English concern in the generational plot. Dmitri fights with his father about his rights to his deceased mother’s money, but the brothers never seem to even think about their shared inheritance. After their father’s murder, Ivan actually needs the Europe-obsessed Smerdyakov (servant and presumably illegitimate brother) to explain why this could have been a motivation for wishing Fyodor Pavlovich dead. “After your parent, each of you three good brothers [*bratsev*], would then get nearly forty thousand, and maybe even more,” Smerdyakov tells him, adding that if Fyodor Pavlovich had married Grushenka, she would have transfer the money to herself, leaving the brothers with nothing [Note for those who haven’t read it: Dmitri is innocent and Smerdyakov turns out to be the murderer] (15:52 / 615). Ivan is disgusted by this type of thinking, and by the idea that if Dmitri is found guilty of murdering their father, he would be disinherited and his brothers would get his share (so he immediately comes up with a plan to use that extra money to rescue Dmitri should that outcome arise). In other words, Dostoevsky’s characters actively reject the concerns at the heart of the English novel, avoiding rivalry and the plotlines it engenders.

So what are brothers doing in the Russian novel? And why does it look so different from England? I want to take a step back here before going forward. I’ve pointed out the difference

¹¹ Before Dmitri’s trial, Ivan realizes his negative feelings toward Dmitri did not stem “from Katya’s ‘reversions’ to him, but precisely *because he had killed their father!*” (15:56 / 619). In other words, it is his respect for familial bonds and not romantic rivalry that make him dislike Dmitri. By contrast, father and son *are* overcome by jealousy as they struggle feverishly for Grushenka.

in the inheritance systems, but these didn't come a priori; Russia and England created these based on their underlying values. So I want to get back to what this underlying difference was because I think it can explain much about what we find in the novels. For the English, the custom of primogeniture was seen as a safeguard "against the disintegration of patrimony and family," as it was "aimed at perpetuating the power and prestige of families over generations [...]."¹² The Russian nobility took the opposite view. They saw primogeniture as a threat to the family. We know this because in 1714 Peter the Great attempted to introduce a Law of Single Inheritance, but nobles all rebelled against it. To quote the property rights historian Lee Farrow, they considered it "an infringement on their ability to provide for their family members and protect their families' political and social interests. From their point of view, the new law went directly against their concerns for family preservation and the future of their children."¹³ What we're seeing here is two fundamentally different ways of conceiving the family—vertical vs. lateral. While the English saw protecting the family in linear, diachronic, vertical terms—protecting the future of the line—the Russians saw it in terms of protecting *all* the family in the present.

These different conceptions of the family are reflected in the types of family plots we find in the two traditions. By not honoring primogeniture, the Russians opened space for multiple brothers in the family plot, but brotherhood, I will suggest, required a different kind of plot. We think of plotlines in nineteenth-century novel following an Aristotelian progression towards a defined telos, but I believe that with the addition of brothers, the Russians actually created more *laterally* oriented family plots. Scholars of English literature have suggested that such plots arose with the modernist novel. Robert Caserio argues that while the nineteenth-century novel

¹² Jamoussi 16, 41. The custom faced criticisms and was a source of debate, but remained in practice till 1925.

¹³ Farrow 72. Continually thwarted and sidestepped by the hostile nobility while it was in force, the law was ultimately repealed in 1731.

displayed “an analogy between family line and story line,” the modernist novel breaks with this, relying not on “the ‘repressive central authority’ of what we may call the family plot,” but instead making “the parts of a fictional discourse become adjacencies, juxtapositions” (234). He calls these “adjacent parts” “fraternal” (235). I would suggest that the master family plot at the heart of the nineteenth-century Russian tradition was already more focused on adjacent, “fraternal parts” and that brothers in a sense *were* those parts. They focus narrative attention on relations in the present, rather than a movement toward the future. The two novels I will focus on to illustrate this are ones I hope many people will be familiar with: Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy seems to be playing with the quip in Trollope’s *Barchester Towers*: “There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel” (274). Konstantint Levin—Tolstoy’s alter-ego—would appear to have attained his “English happiness” with his beloved Kitty and healthy heir living on his family estate in the final part of the novel, Part VIII. But “English happiness” is not what Levin experiences as: “happy in his family life, a healthy man, Levin was several times so close to suicide that he hid a rope lest he hang himself with it, and was afraid to go about with a rifle lest he shoot himself” (19:371 / 789). His brother, Nikolai, is very much to blame. Nikolai died in Part V of the novel and it was facing Nikolai’s mortality that first brought on Levin’s spiritual crisis. In Part VIII, after describing a loving, domestic scene of Kitty and baby Mitya, the narrator opens a new section with the words: “From that moment when, at the sight of his beloved brother dying, Levin had looked at the questions of life and death for the first time through those new convictions as he called them [...], he had been horrified, not so much at death as at life without the slightest knowledge of whence it came,

wherefore, why, and what it was.” (19:367 / 785) The domestic ideal of the English novel—attained with wife and child—is trumped by the spiritual concerns raised by the brother bond.

Even after Levin’s spiritual awakening prompted by a conversation with a peasant who reminds him of living for God, Levin still struggles to love his other (half-)brother Koznyshev—the immediate test of brotherly love. They encounter one another right after Levin’s moment of revelation: “the brothers’ eyes met, and Levin, despite his usual and now especially strong desire to be on friendly and, above all, simple terms with his brother, felt it awkward to look at him” (19:384 / 802). There is no linear progression to their brotherhood and can be no ultimate resolution, no completed state of unity (like marriage for lovers). Instead, I believe they create a new kind of lateral plot, one that does not develop across time, but links characters to the ongoing challenge of living in harmony with their fellow humans.

Levin’s ultimate realizations—reached through argument with Koznyshev—are about the limits of brotherhood and our duties to legal or biological family vs. the abstract neighbor. As they debate the war that has recently broken out in Serbia, Koznyshev claims that the Turks are “killing our brothers, of the same blood, of the same religion” and that it is a natural response that Russians “run to help stop these horrors.” Levin counters: “there is not and cannot be such an immediate feeling about the oppression of the Slavs,” removing the word “brothers” from the discussion (19:387, 388 / 805). He cannot accept the existence of truly *familial* bonds with perfect strangers. If he struggles to love even Koznyshev as a brother, how could that concept of brotherly love be expanded to such abstract extremes? The question of brotherly love is at the crux of Tolstoy’s moral concerns. The brothers do not ultimately agree about the Slavs; there is no progression from A to B in this argument. It leads to no event. But if we understand plot as I

believe Tolstoy intends it here, in terms of spiritual struggle, then we can see how the brother-brother bond in *Anna Karenina* contribute to this lateral plot.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are often looked at in opposition, but like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky also uses brothers to expand the valence of sibling themes. Of all the novels written in the nineteenth century, *The Brothers Karamazov* probably gives the most central place to brothering. The role of the brothers in the plot is directly related to the type of “accidental” family to which they belong: three legitimate and one illegitimate brother, the children of three mothers (all now deceased) and a buffoon father, who were raised mostly apart and come to know each other only as young adults. [Note: for those not familiar with Dostoevsky, he created his idea of the “accidental family” in part as a response to the happy, gentry families of Tolstoy, which he claimed were “*no more than historical portraits of the distant past*” (25:173)] The plot for the Karamazov brothers hinges on defining the very nature of brotherhood. As in *Anna Karenina*, this task is ongoing. Accidental families remain accidental.

I mentioned earlier that Dostoevsky’s characters reject rivalry plotlines that the English novel offers for brothers. Instead, I believe the real plot for the brothers in *The Brothers Karamazov* is to learn to be one’s brother’s keeper. This adds a spiritual component to the family novel (like we saw in *Anna Karenina*). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the attempts and failures of the Karamazov brothers—and their unacknowledged, illegitimate brother, Smerdyakov—to enact Christ’s teachings of brotherly love amongst themselves are a test of Dostoevsky’s ideals.

The rejected Smerdyakov fails at this test. When Alyosha asks him 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” (14:206 / 226). 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. A few pages later, when Alyosha asks Ivan what will happen between their father and Dmitri if he 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?" (14:211 / 231-2). Ambivalence about his duties to his brother—and by extension to his fellow men—are at the heart of Ivan's spiritual crisis. By contrast, this same biblical passage appears in *Adam Bede*, but there it is Dinah Morris, not one of the brothers, who quotes it. She does not link it to literal siblinghood, while Dostoevsky's characters actively *live* the question.

During Dmitri's trial for murdering their father (an act he did not commit), Ivan *does* attempt to be his brother Dmitri's keeper. Still struggling with himself (and rapidly succumbing to brain fever), Ivan produces the money Smerdyakov stole from their father (and gave to Ivan when he confessed to him just before his suicide). Ivan declares to the court: "It was he who killed father, not my brother. He killed him, and killed him on my instructions..." (15:117 / 686). Encapsulated in this statement is both Ivan's success and his greatest failure as a brother: in the same moment as he defends Dmitri, he radically disavows his fraternal bond with Smerdyakov. Alyosha will make a similar statement: "The lackey killed him, my brother is innocent" (15:189). Indeed, all three legitimate Karamazov brothers fail to recognize that "the lackey" Smerdyakov is also their brother and just as much a part of their "accidental family" as they themselves are.¹⁴

¹⁴ This failure is epitomized by Ivan's statement (just cited) that Smerdyakov killed Fyodor Pavlovich, "not my brother," and by Alyosha's similar claim: "The lackey killed him [Fyodor Pavlovich], my brother is innocent" (15:189 / 768). See: Meerson 197, Berman 126. Although it was never proved that Fyodor Pavlovich was Smerdyakov's father and Lizaveta may well have been violated by many others, everyone—including Fyodor Pavlovich—assumes his paternity.

But the failure of brotherhood goes beyond the Karamazovs, as Dostoevsky implicates the narrator and reader as well. Readers are easily lulled into believing (like the legitimate Karamazov brothers) that Smerdyakov has no place in their family because the narrator does not mention him a single time in Book One, which is called: “The Story of One Little Family” (*Istoriia odnoi semeiki*) and which provides the backstory on the Karamazovs.¹⁵ The whole dramatic thrust of the novel demonstrates the disastrous effects of this failure to be Smerdyakov’s brother, which culminates in his murder of Fyodor Pavlovich. To love Smerdyakov would take “active love,” the kind of love Dostoevsky advocates through the voice of his greatest moral character, the church elder Father Zosima. With siblinghood’s lofty possibilities for unity and compassion and its deep pitfalls of jealousy, rivalry, and rejection, it becomes the battleground on which Dostoevsky plays out his fight to affirm active love and faith.

We don’t find anything like this in the English novel, and I want to suggest that we can’t because, as historian Leonore Davidoff has noted, it’s brothers—not sisters—who provide the more accepted path to universal brotherhood.¹⁶ In novels, they are the ones who can act as a microcosm for universal brotherhood. No number of Bennet sisters around the breakfast table will ever get us there. Since the English don’t write brothers, when brotherhood appears as a theme in the English novel, it is always divorced from actual siblinghood, for example in calls for brotherhood in the workers’ union in Dickens’ *Hard Times* (which is actually a corruption of the ideal as Slackbridge pushes the honorable Steven Blackpool out of the fold).

¹⁵ Here I am in agreement with Greta Matzner-Gore, who calls the question of Smerdyakov’s inclusion “a narrative conundrum,” asking: “Will we recognize Smerdyakov as one of the brothers, and thus one of the titular protagonists of the novel? Or will we dismiss him as nothing more than the villain, a second-tier character?” (422).

¹⁶ “Moving from the single dyad to the group, the idea of a sibling relationship has long figured as *brotherhood* and, less frequently, *sisterhood*” (38).

Dickens reserves the power of spiritual kinship—what I’m suggesting we see in the Russian novel—for the ride to the guillotine in *A Tale of Two Cities*, when Sydney Carton discovers a “gentle sister” in the unknown French seamstress who goes to her death with him. “Eye to eye, voice to voice, hand to hand, heart to heart, these two children of the Universal Mother, else so wide apart and differing, have come together on the dark highway, to repair home together, and to rest in her bosom” (439-40). This is brother with sister (as opposed to brother-brother), but in fact, there *is* a second brother lurking behind this scene; Carton is taking the place of his friend Darnay, his “Double” who looks like his twin (which enabled the swap).¹⁷ And like the other English brothers I’ve mentioned, these two are in love with the same woman. Carton is even given a brother’s plot ending, as she and Darnay name their son after him.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky took this spiritual kinship that his characters ascend to only in the moment of death and made it a part of life, and consequently of plot, not just a plot’s culmination. As part of daily reality, spiritual kinship is linked in their works with more prosaic family themes—the day-to-day task of brotherly love. The attempt to live in harmony with one’s brother (and by extension with one’s fellow humans) is a struggle that must be won anew each day as Levin tries to love Koznyshev and the Karamazov brothers are faced with the horror of Smerdyakov’s fraternity.

¹⁷ After Darnay’s trial where Carton is first introduced, Darnay thinks of Carton as his “Double” (97). Carton’s jealousy for Lucie’s love is also introduced at this juncture (99). He is an accepted member of the household, and is loved by Lucie’s children (249), giving him a bit of an aunt’s role.

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