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Review: *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: The Path to Universal Brotherhood*

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(Intermediate Low), as it relies on knowledge of aspect, conjugation, and cases.

In terms of this, *Poetry Reader for Russian Learners* may be best suited for Russian heritage learners, who are more likely to have a larger lexical understanding of words and their roots. Indeed, for heritage Russian speakers, for whom comprehension is more or less natural and awareness of the grammar and structure of the language is acquired through instruction, Titus's anthology offers a dynamic way to demonstrate the structure of Russian.

Ultimately, *Poetry Reader for Russian Learners* is likely insufficient as a primary textbook but would instead work well as a supplement in intermediate and advanced language classes. In the hands of an experienced pedagogue, *Poetry Reader for Russian Learners* can not only enhance students' passion and interest for Russian literature but also stimulate their knowledge of the Russian language.

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Anna A. Berman, *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: The Path to Universal Brotherhood*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. Index, 2015. 242 pages.

This is a fine book that makes a strong contribution to the study of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, while also demonstrating a framework that could be usefully applied to other literature of the period. It convincingly shows that sibling relations in the works of these two authors have been woefully underexamined, and it demonstrates that time and again, key scenes and ideas in their novels are structured around sisters and brothers. Reading from this perspective repeatedly brings new clarity not only to the scenes in question, but also to entire novels, and indeed, to the oeuvres to which they belong. The analysis also effectively brings the roles of women in these narratives into clearer focus and calls attention to patriarchal bias in the critical tradition. It is refreshing to see the looming fathers of *War and Peace* and the *Brothers*

Karamazov relieved of some measure of their dominance. The “sibling lens,” as Berman calls it, will prove revealing for even the most seasoned scholars of these works and shows what can be gained by examining works with greater attention to their lateral, rather than vertical (i.e., generational or class) relations. The latter perspective is also critical to the problem of universal brotherhood referred to in her title.

Berman’s chapters alternate in their attention to the two authors and proceed chronologically through their major works. Her writing is consistently strong and engaging, and her analysis receives abundant support from the texts themselves. While reading from this perspective could be plagued by an impulse to index or a reliance on overdetermined evidence, she shows a keen eye for the salient material. A good example is her attention to the contrast between Andrei’s parting with his sister and with his wife as he leaves to join the military campaign at the beginning of *War and Peace*. She also shows how inattention to these details has undermined our critical apparatus. The workings of complex sibling relations in *Anna Karenina*, for instance, have been obscured by the focus on the problems of marriage and adultery; critics have glossed over the role that siblings play in filling the void of bad fathers in several of these novels, and work on the love triangle in Dostoevsky has not figured in the important role played by figurative and real siblings. Berman counters with strong assertions, arguing, for instance, that Dunya is more important than Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*, or that sibling relations, and the lack thereof, play a deterministic role for characters in *Anna Karenina* and more generally in Tolstoy.

The latter question—how real sibling relations inflect the formation of figurative ones—is important to her larger argument that blood kinship played a key role in shaping the ideas of universal siblinghood in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The famous “ant brotherhood” of Tolstoy’s childhood is a youthful Utopia that is situated in a real place in Tolstoy’s memory—playing with his brothers under chairs covered with shawls at Yasnaya Polyana. It would be impossible, as Berman writes, to bring all humanity under this blanket, but Tolstoy cites this experience as formative in imagining a world of spiritual siblings “under the wide dome of heaven.” Yearning for this unity motivated much of the later non-narrative writing of both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, and

those who follow Berman's lead might do well to juxtapose her research here with this other body of work. She has opened points of contact in her last two chapters, particularly in her discussion of social institutions, but there is much more to be done.

Another task might be the framing of this analysis in the broader tradition. I greatly appreciated the extent to which Berman approached the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky on their own terms, but also occasionally found myself interpolating *eros*, *philia*, and *agape* into the discussion. Perhaps a more significant discussion of the philosophy of love in the introduction would have contributed to her frame of analysis. A term that she employs from the outset, the "sibling bond," has its own set of implications. It not only suggests the closeness that is so important to her analysis, but also the exclusivity of blood ties. It also evokes a moral bondage that can limit the expression of love to others. Mafiosi, for instance, employ this term with their own conceit. As she writes at the end of chapter two, Tolstoy's families are so strong that he "will need to break down some of these ties." Imagining universal community as "brotherhood" introduces possibilities, but also problems. Berman demonstrates over the course of the book that she understands the latter very well, and indeed she devotes the end of chapter 3 and much of chapter 5 to it. But as we continue to explore the issues she has so effectively raised here, we will find ourselves circling back to this question. How does a closeness that can be described as a bond not constrain our ability to love strangers?

Berman concludes her book with an effective discussion of the context that brought such questions to the fore in Russian literature and allowed writers to explore sibling relations as a philosophical category. Her book demonstrates that these texts form their own philosophies of love with all of the sustaining provocation of art, allowing us to continually gain new perspective on the fundamental questions they pose by shifting our point of approach. Its strongest contribution is to be found in this achievement: the presentation of a highly effective framework for new interpretation of these universally known works.

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