2 Dostoevsky and the (Missing) Marriage Plot

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From the tense relations between Raskolnikov and his mother and sister to the parricidal desires of the Karamazov brothers, Dostoevsky's novels explore kinship relations at their most raw and revealing. While the novels present a wide array of family constructions, spanning from the warm intimacy of the Yepanchins and Snegiryovs, to the neglect, absence, and illegitimacy of the Karamazovs, Versilovs, and Verkhovenskys, Dostoevsky's focus stays primarily on consanguineal kin: parents and children or siblings. Yet in the history of the novel, conjugal relations have arguably been a far greater generator of plots. Getting heroes and heroines to the altar, following adulteresses away from the family hearth, or watching the virtuous wife at risk of straying: these are among the central concerns of the nineteenth-century novel.[1] The Russian tradition, while offering its own twists, shared these concerns.

Critics have generally approached the novelistic family through highlighting one of two generic plots: generational or marriage, with Dostoevsky's critics falling firmly in the first camp.[2] This chapter will take the opposite approach, looking at the first crucial step in the formation of family: the coupling of male and female – traditionally in marriage – that serves as the kernel of each new nuclear unit. The Russian tradition is exceptional in its rate of failures: while courtship is at the heart of many novels, most plots about a prospective romantic couple do not lead to union.[3] Chernyshevsky famously blamed this on Russian men's weakness and indecision, lamenting that: "the hero is very daring so long as there is no question of action and one need merely occupy spare time, fill an empty head or empty heart with conversation and dreams; but when the time comes to express one's feelings and desires directly and precisely, the majority of heroes begin to waver, and are stricken dumb."[4] While his argument applies to many novels by Turgenev (Chernyshevsky was writing specifically about *Asya* [Asia, 1858]), Herzen, Goncharov, Krestovsky

(pseud.), Pomialovsky, Pushkin, Lermontov, etc., it does not explain Dostoevsky's heroes, who *are* capable of acting on their ideas. Nor do Dostoevsky's novels follow the model of authors like Tur, Druzhinin, Smirnova, and Pavlova, who placed greater emphasis on societal pressures and failures in women's education and life experience to explain the unhappy outcomes of their marriage plots.

Dostoevsky's novels are different at a structural level as well as an ideological one. He decentralizes his potential marriage plots in a way that subverts nineteenth-century genre expectations.[5] While many of his characters are involved in prospective courtships, these are rarely their primary concern.[6] His heroes' failure to marry and produce heirs stems not from the inability to act, overly romantic mentality, failure to appreciate the elevated soul of the heroine, or her naivety about her potential suitors (as we find in other Russian novels). Instead, I believe this failure is related to Dostoevsky's distinctive conception of the family and the new relationship he forged between familial and novelistic form. True to the Russian tradition, Dostoevsky emphasized affective ties, rather than blood or legal bonds. But unlike the families of Tolstoy and others, in Dostoevsky's novelized families those ties came not through shared experience and familiarity, but through active love. His novels emphasize kinship ties in the present, not as a means towards a (reproductive) end, restricting the significance of courtship as a narrative propulsion.

How one depicts the family is inseparable from how one constructs a novel. In the words of literary scholar Barry McCrea: "The ideas of narrative and family are so closely interwoven that it is hard to separate them. Narrative and family both attempt to plot a relationship between what came before and what comes after; both organize the unknowable jumble of events and people who preceded us into a coherent array of precedence, sequence, and cause."[7] The family's natural narrative or plotline is that of its own continuity, parents begetting children who will, in turn go on to beget still more, a process Edward Said calls "filiation."[8] Tolstoy draws attention to this in *Anna Karenina* (1878) when describing Levin and Kitty's newborn son: "like a small flame over a lamp, wavered the life of a human being who had never existed before and who, with the same right, with the same importance for itself, would live and produce its own kind."[9] In writing of this process of filiation, Said claims: "This line and this sense of heritage […] stands at the absolute center of the classical novel."[10]

A characteristic explication of this theme appears in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847) when George Osborne's father anticipates his son marrying a rich girl: "His blood boiled with honest British exultation, as he saw the name of Osborne ennobled in the person of his son, and thought

that he might be the progenitor of a glorious line of baronets."[11] As we find in Osborne's reflections, the traditional path that leads us to these glorious lines of progeny is the marriage plot.[12] While the marriage plot may seem synchronic in focus (both actors are of the same generation), explicitly or implicitly, the nineteenth-century marriage union was also designed to produce the much sought-after heir, implicating marriage in the process of family continuity. In McCrea's words: "With its implicit promise of biological reproduction, marriage is the embodiment of the happy end, i.e., an end that is also a beginning."[13]

Neither marriage nor reproduction seems to be of great concern to Dostoevsky's heroes (though their mothers may care). They never fret about having progeny or about the legacy they will pass on to their heirs, aside from intangible family pride or honour.[14] Snegiryov cares about his son's respect *in the present* just as Versilov suddenly seeks intimacy with Arkady "now" after having ignored him for his whole upbringing.[15] Many are poor, but even the wealthy Fyodor Pavlovich concerns himself with money to seduce a concubine, not with the inheritance for his sons. Similarly, young Dostoevskian heroes may obsess about love and passion, but not about matrimony, which carries with it the promise of future obligation. Perhaps following their lead, as noted above, Dostoevsky scholars have focused little on marriage and procreation. To note one illustrative example, Susanne Fusso's brilliant chapter on "Dostoevskii and the Family" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii* (2002) does not mention the marriage plot even a single time. Staying true to Dostoevsky's primary concerns, the essay explores Dostoevsky's vision of the breakdown of the Russian family, centring on the failures of the father–son relationship. Fusso contextualizes Dostoevsky's novelistic depictions of family with his non-fiction pronouncements in his *Writer's Diary* [Dnevnik pisatelia, 1876–7, 1880–1] and notebooks, where statements about "the family" are primarily directed at parents and children, not spouses.

The marriage plot in Dostoevsky's novels seems to (almost) disappear. *Brothers Karamazov* [Brat'ia Karamazovy, 1880] offers an illustrative example. The generational plot has received by far the most attention as its dominant family plot, and certainly one of Dostoevsky's central concerns was to depict the breakdown of the patriarchal order and the failure of the father, a theme he wrote about frequently in his *Writer's Diary*.[16] But as Carol Apollonio reminds us, *Brothers Karamazov* "is so obviously an exploration of the question of fatherhood that the reader may be excused for forgetting that the Karamazov brothers had mothers – two, and possibly even three, of them."[17] A consanguineal family cannot be created without procreation. And for the children to be legitimate, this requires

the conjugal knot, a fact that plagues Smerdyakov throughout the novel. These earlier marriages – or their lack – catalyze the novel's plot.

Just as we forget the mothers who brought the Karamazov family into being, we also tend to overlook the different versions of the marriage plot for the sons that are central to the text and yet have for the most part evaded rigorous scrutiny. There are women in love with each of the Karamazov brothers, each of whom is living out her own courtship drama.[18] Katerina Ivanovna begins in a failed marriage plot, abandoned by her fiancé, Dmitry, yet also entangled in a mutual attraction with Ivan.[19] Lise Khokhlakova, writing her innocent love letter to Alyosha, is living the plotline of an ingénue like Pushkin's Tatyana Larina. Grushenka is in a classic "fallen woman" plot: betrayed by her Polish officer and forced to become a kept woman, while still virtuous and pure at heart.

However, Dostoevsky's psychological focus on pride and suffering creates female characters who invert these standard plotlines, responding to their situations in ways quite unlike a classic family novel heroine would. Katerina Ivanovna's engagement to Dmitry comes after he wins a battle of pride and will, choosing to be magnanimous at the moment he could have taken advantage of her. Her proposal to him – in a letter following this event – is a submission of will: "I love you madly, […] even if you do not love me – no matter, only be my husband. Don't be afraid, I shan't hinder you in any way, I'll be your furniture, the rug you walk on … I want to love you eternally, I want to save you from yourself" (14:107; 116). Despite her reference to household decor, Katerina Ivanovna has no pretensions to setting up house or creating a family with Dmitry. Her proposal of marriage is not about intimacy, affection, or even truly about love (as both later realize), but about an abnegation of will and a wish for suffering.[20] Neither is seeking domestic life and progeny in their potential union; indeed, they have no thought of a concrete future together.

Each of the young women in the novel creates – or contributes to – her own torment. Katerina Ivanovna refuses to accept that her affections truly lie with Ivan; determined to sacrifice herself for Dmitry, she struggles with her (untranslatable) *nadryv*. As Alyosha senses, she and Ivan seem to derive some kind of pleasure from the psychological games they are playing. Katerina uses the informal *ty* in speaking to Ivan in a moment of heightened emotion (15:37) and he acknowledges the truth of Alyosha's assertion that she is in love with him, yet claims: "I don't care for her" [ia do nee ne okhotnik] (15:39; 600). However, readers have every reason to doubt the coolness of his feelings. Meanwhile, after (almost) engaging herself to Alyosha, Lise writes letters offering herself to Ivan, and tells Alyosha, "I want someone to torment me, to marry me and then torment me, deceive me, leave me and go away. I want to

be unhappy" (15:21; 581). This desire for abandonment and suffering goes directly against the reproductive drive of the classic novel. Lise appears to wish she were in a Russian novel with its tradition of failures, or to want to rewrite Pushkin and be Tatyana married to Onegin. And finally, Grushenka torments Fyodor Pavlovich and Mitya as she waits for her "former one" [prezhnii], unlike a traditional meek heroine. Yet even when he returns, one could never imagine her settling down with him into married life and motherhood, and she is only too happy to escape back to Mitya at the first chance.

One unique feature of Dostoevsky's treatment of these marriage plots – which I believe allows them to disappear – is the narrative perspective. Dostoevsky tell them from the point of view of the men. In Tur's *A Mistake* [Oshibka, 1849], we watch the breakdown of Olga's engagement through her perspective, just as in V. Krestovsky (pseud.)'s *Anna Mikhailovna* (1849) we share Anna's understanding of the catastrophe unfolding.[21] The reader's view is aligned with the narratives these women believe they are living. Even in novels with a male hero – like Turgenev's *Rudin* (1857) and *Noble Nest* [Dvorianskoe gnezdo, 1859], or Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859) – the author still leaves us sympathetic to the woman's perspective. However, in *Brothers Karamazov* we learn the stories of the women through men's views of them. Katerina Ivanovna's story is literally narrated to us by her betrayer (Dmitry), not the proud woman herself. We see Lise through Alyosha's eyes and the disparaging comments of Ivan. Dostoevsky even uses the marginalization of these women's plotlines to comic effect at times. Dmitry is so caught up in his generational-rivalry plotline with his father, that he is completely oblivious to the fact that Grushenka is living out a "fallen woman" plot and waiting for her former one, even though she has explicitly told him this!

Another way Dostoevsky can hide these marriage plots in plain view is that they are essentially "plot-less," by which I mean that they do not advance. Ivan and Katerina Ivanovna can play mind games and keep each other both near and at bay, but their "courtship" – if it could even be called that – does not progress. Smerdyakov woos Mariya Kondratyevna with a serenade in the garden, but Michael Katz calls this "a broad parody of a heterosexual courtship," and suggests that Smerdyakov "represents the final and fullest exploration of the male homosexual stereotype in Dostoevsky's fiction."[22] Even if Smerdyakov did prefer the fairer sex, he ends his serenade with the verse: "I don't care what you say / For I'm going away, / I'll be happy and free / In the big cite! / And I won't grieve, / No, I'll never grieve, / I don't plan ever to grieve" (14:206; 226). This is hardly the path to a romantic union. Grushenka has devoted herself

to Dmitry by the end of the novel, but there is too much uncertainty for them to plan a concrete future; he vaguely imagines tilling the soil with her in America, not raising a family.

Alyosha and Lise actually share a chapter titled "Betrothal" [Sgovor], yet everything about their interaction seems out of kilter with such an event. First Lise claims her love letter was a joke, then that it was serious. After Alyosha surprises Lise with an attempted kiss, he admits that "I see it came out silly" and she laughs at him doing it "in that dress!" (14:198; 218). Before five minutes have passed, Alyosha is confessing that he may not believe in God, and the conversation has returned to its usual Dostoevskian (unromantic) themes. Did an engagement actually take place? As Alyosha leaves, he agrees with Lise's eavesdropping mother that her words were "foolishness, foolishness, and more foolishness!" yet he still seems serious that he will someday marry her (14:201; 221). It is hard to tell whether the pair actually became betrothed or not, and their relations never progress beyond this ambiguity, with Lise soon offering herself to Alyosha's brother.

While for many authors marriage and procreation were indelibly intertwined, almost all the babies born in Dostoevsky's novels are illegitimate, breaking this connection.[23] In *Demons* [Besy, 1872], Stavrogin weds an invalid in a marriage that remains unconsummated, while he spreads his seed outside of wedlock.[24] Among his conquests is Shatov's wife, who returns to her husband on the night she gives birth to Stavrogin's illegitimate child. When Shatov announces the baby will not be sent to an orphanage as the midwife had assumed, she asks if Shatov is adopting him, forgetting the child is legally – though not biologically – a Shatov (10:452). In *The Adolescent* [Podrostok, 1875], Arkady's unwed sister Liza is carrying Prince Sokolsky's child, and the reader learns of a whole convoluted back story involving Versilov caring for an infant that turns out not to be his own illegitimate baby but another of Prince Sokolsky's. Dostoevsky's families also include many illegitimate older children or young adults, like Nelli (*The Insulted and Injured* [Unizhennye i oskorblennye, 1861]), Arkady and Liza (*The Adolescent*), and Smerdyakov (*Brothers Karamazov*), who are mature enough to wrestle with the shame of their birth and rejection – or ultimate acceptance – by their biological fathers. These children of accidental families must each determine for themselves what defines a family relationship: is bloodline enough if there has been no contact or acknowledgment?

The link between procreation and family is actively challenged in *Brothers Karamazov* during Dmitry's trial. The defence attorney offers up the pro-forma answer a typical youth is given as to why he should love his father:

> "He begot you, you are of his blood, that is why you must love him." The young man involuntarily begins to think: "But did he love me when he was begetting me?" he asks, wondering more and more. "Did he beget me for my sake? He did not know me, nor even my sex at that moment, the moment of passion, probably heated up with wine, and probably all he did for me was pass on to me an inclination to drink – so much for his good deeds … Why should I love him just because he begot me and then never loved me all my life?" (15:171; 745)[25]

The act of begetting a child is here separated from the creation of a family.[26] Sex is not the originary act. Instead, as Dostoevsky claimed in his *Writer's Diary*: "The family is created by the untiring labor of love" (22:70).[27] In other words, its creation is a continuous process, but not one with a beginning or any kind of progressive movement. It also cannot be completed, keeping the emphasis on the present.

When we consider Dostoevsky's families in the context I have been outlining – that of the standard family plot of matrimony and reproduction – a strange truth emerges: the Dostoevskian family resists the "genealogical imperative." They exist outside of what Bakhtin calls "biographical time" and the spaces of traditional family life: "Dostoevsky was least of all an estate-domestic-room-apartment-family writer. In comfortably habitable interior spaces, far from the threshold, people live a biographical life in biographical time: they are born, they pass through childhood and youth, they marry, give birth to children, die. This biographical time Dostoevsky also 'leaps over.'"[28] Protagonists tend to appear already as young adults whose childhoods we see only in brief snatches. What do we know of the "family life" of Raskolnikov before he came to St Petersburg? In *Demons*, *The Adolescent*, and *Brothers Karamazov* such family life never existed, as the characters spent years apart and only come together when the "children" are already young adults.[29] *Crime and Punishment* [Prestuplenie i nakazanie, 1866], *Demons*, *The Adolescent*, and *Brothers Karamazov* all begin with a family "reuniting" after years apart.[30] And even their family life in the present tends to lack roots, as many families in Dostoevsky's novels are living in rented rooms rather than an ancestral home (*Poor Folk* [Bednye liudi, 1846], *The Insulted and Injured*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Gambler* [Igrok, 1866], *The Adolescent*).

Just as Dostoevsky's families have "leapt over" biographical time, they also resist the narrative propulsion towards a future.[31] None of them produce an heir. The death of Shatov's wife and illegitimate child right after they have been reunited is emblematic of this absolute negation of family continuity. In *The Adolescent*, Liza miscarries the illegitimate child she is carrying. Prince Sokolsky's other illegitimate child survives, but is orphaned

and being raised by Versilov, who is neither legally nor biologically his kin. So this hardly qualifies as family continuity.[32] Jennifer Wilson's study of the *skoptsy* in Dostoevsky's novels reveals a counterintuitive truth: while *skoptsy* might be thought to be resisting futurity through castration, Dostoevsky "often connected [them] to ideas of prophecy, premature aging, accumulation of wealth (all ways of engaging the future), whereas Dostoevsky elsewhere depicts characters focused on questions of family as preoccupied with the present moment."[33] Dostoevsky contrasted the non-reproducing *skoptsy*'s future-oriented greed and hoarding "with the [present-oriented] generosity of those fully enmeshed in family affairs."[34]

Thus, the family drama for Dostoevsky is not the *formation* of new family, but the *re*formation or retention of family, "the untiring labor of love" family requires, to again use Dostoevsky's words. This shifts the emphasis to relations in the present, with no recourse to the future as a point of narrative or moral resolution. Family love can have no aim or goal beyond itself; it is not productive, just as it is not reproductive.[35] What matters in the Dostoevskian family is not the future child who would symbolize the continuity of the family line, but being thy brother's keeper in the here and now. And one cannot love this brother because of a shared past and warm childhood memories – the Tolstoy model – because that past does not exist. The "conflict of generations" plot – so central to Dostoevsky's final three novels – is only about two generations. There is no possibility of a third and no recourse to the ones that preceded the generation of the "fathers."

This does not mean that the family remains static, but growth happens laterally – adding members in the present – rather than extending across time. The Ichmenevs take in first Vanya then Nelli; Pulkheria Alexandrovna announces that Razumikhin is kin; Lizaveta Prokofyevna calls Myshkin her brother; General Ivolgin decides he is a relation of Lebedev; Rogozhin and Myshkin exchange crosses as a sign of their brotherhood; Versilov and his family raise Prince Sokolsky's illegitimate child; Grushenka makes Alyosha her brother … These examples expand the family circle in the present, but do not extend the genealogical line.[36] I do not mean to suggest that Dostoevsky did not care about the future. He was deeply concerned about it, but this future was not about individual families, but about a broader form of unity, the universal brotherhood he ecstatically preached in his Pushkin speech. It is the children who will bring about this dreamed-of brotherhood, but it does not matter specifically whose children. Dostoevsky envisioned a communal future, where family unity would spread to the whole of Russia, and then the Russians could in turn bring brotherhood to Europe. In this vision, there is no significance for the future of an individual family line.

What does it mean to write of the family without reproductive futurity? Dostoevsky's reframing of standard family plots has vast implications for narrative form as well as for the ethics of time in the novel. Bakhtin popularized a view of Dostoevsky's novels as defined by "fundamental open-endedness" and a principled resistance of narrative closure for characters and dialogue, though he acknowledged "a *conventionally literary, conventionally monologic* ending" for most of the novels.[37] Yet Dostoevsky avoided the "conventionally literary" ending of marriage and childbirth. In light of Bakhtin's reading, one might ask: would the birth of a child have provided too much narrative closure for Dostoevsky, or in reverse, would it have added to the "open-endedness" by leaving a future to unfold beyond the novel's pages?

Greta Matzner-Gore explores the tension Bakhtin raises between dialogic openness and monologic endings, revealing the links between Dostoevsky's formal and ethical concerns. Taking *The Adolescent* as her case study, she explains:

> In *The Adolescent* [Dostoevsky] shows that highly open-ended stories leave their audience without ethical or intellectual guidance, uncertain of how to interpret them or what to do next. By contrast, narratives about contemporary life that resolve their tensions too quickly and easily are both unrealistic and potentially dangerous, because they imply that harmony can be achieved without suffering or sacrifice.[38]

A balance must be struck. Matzner-Gore observes that Dostoevsky "wavers from hope to doubt, referring to the possibility of future closure on the one hand and of continued uncertainty on the other."[39] One could say almost the same thing of the complicated families in these novels. Each is still struggling to form itself in the present, and none has an heir to carry it forward into the next generation. In this sense, the future is less than open; we do not know if these families will have a future at all – although the possibility has not been totally foreclosed.

Such a narrative structure that resists futurity has been theorized in a context far removed from the nineteenth-century Russian novel. Recently in literary studies, when faced with family models that do not match the standard of married parents with biological offspring, the theoretical model most often invoked is queer theory.[40] Early pioneers like Jack Halberstam and Lee Edelman – writing from the American context in the wake of the AIDS crisis – defined "queer" in opposition to the family, focusing on its lack of heterosexual reproduction.[41] Halberstam explains that queer time is "about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing."[42] In other

words, such time resists the temporal framework of the traditional nineteenth-century novel, which many scholars have called heteronormative, organized around the rituals of marriage and reproduction (the point with which this essay began).[43]

Clearly, Dostoevsky has resisted this kind of genealogically oriented time in his novels and is exploring life outside "the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing," focusing on relations in the present. Family in his novels is not constructed through heterosexual reproduction, but through active love. Many of the most stable and enduring kinship bonds are "intentional": instances when characters choose to make others kin without blood or legal bonds (as discussed above).[44] This possibility of creating intentional kin is actually facilitated by the "accidental" nature of the Dostoevskian family; without a shared family past, one has little more in common with a biological sibling than with a chosen one. This type of alternative family construction aligns with Holly Furneaux's writings about *Queer Dickens*. Arguing against earlier scholars, who saw queerness as a rejection of the family, Furneaux sees it as an alternative way of constructing kinship: "I define queer as that which demonstrates that marriage and reproduction are not the only, or indeed the dominant or preferred, modes of being, and, in doing so, undoes an unhelpfully narrow model of identity as determined by a fixed point of sexual orientation."[45]

Like the English novels in Furneaux's study, Dostoevsky's similarly explore "other forms of intimacy, affinity, and family formation" than the biological family.[46] So can her conception of queer help us make sense of Dostoevsky's present-oriented family constructions that resist providing narrative closure through marriage and reproduction? There are reasons to be hopeful that it might. Just as Furneaux grounds her study in a re-evaluation of the Victorian family and the Victorian novel that points to "the abundance of non-heterosexual and non-reproductive families in Victorian fiction based around the figure of a single male" or the scarcity of households consisting of married parents, children, and no other relatives, we could look to the way Russians at mid-century were challenging ideas about the traditional, patriarchal structure of the family.[47]

Dostoevsky was deeply concerned about the historical state of the family in the reform decades when he was writing, and sex and gender roles certainly played a role in his engagement with these issues. He critiqued "today's fathers" again and again, yet his fiction failed to offer up a positive model of what the modern Russian father should look like.[48] In both his fiction and non-fiction, Dostoevsky returned time and again to scenes of women and children being abused, and he attacked Russian law and the new courts, which provided so little protection. Barbara Alpern

Engel notes: "As did proponents of the 'woman question,' Dostoevsky highlights the link between women's economic need and their sexual vulnerability."[49] Yet, as she also reminds us: "the term 'woman question' figures ambiguously, at best, in Dostoevsky's work."[50]

Just as Dostoevsky was not blind to issues of sex or gender, nor did he ignore alternative sexual orientations (to the hetero-norm). As many scholars have noted, Dostoevsky explores the issue of same-sex desire in a number of his fictional works, from female love in *Netochka Nezvanova* (1849), to male desire in *Notes from the House of the Dead* [Zapiski iz mertvogo doma,1862] through *Brothers Karamazov*.[51] There are homosexual minor characters in many of the novels, and in *The Adolescent*, even the title character explores feelings of desire for other young men. Fusso has convincingly argued that while "Arkady's experiments with nonstandard sexuality might seem at first to be yet another example of the novel's obsession with the disorder that threatens the Russian family and social structure," ultimately Dostoevsky does not "prosecute" homosexuality "with the same fury as adultery, capitalism, and child abandonment."[52] Fusso even suggests that: "Homosexuality can lead to the creation of 'accidental families' in the best sense, families based on elective affinities, not on blood."[53] I would challenge this because in my reading of Dostoevsky's fiction, his homosexual unions are more fleeting and less stable than the types of bonds he believes the family should embody. The strongest "intentional kinship" bonds in Dostoevsky's novels are non-sexual. But even if they are not based on homosexuality, following Furneaux's definition, families based on elective kinship, rather than biological reproduction, could still be considered "queer."

Yet if the shoe fits, that does not always mean one should wear it. Although this congruence between queer theory and Dostoevsky's praxis exists, I find it potentially problematic to label Dostoevsky's novels "queer." Halberstam calls queer time and space "useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries."[54] One could add that they were designed to assess specifically the American context. So what does it mean to bring them back in time and into a radically different culture? I believe that Furneaux does it successfully in Victorian England, where Dickens's fictional families truly did challenge Victorian ideas about gender roles and sexuality. But "queerness" is always defined in opposition to a norm, and Russian norms were not the same as those in Britain.[55] As noted at the start of this essay, Russian marriage plots tend to fail. Rather than ending with a wedding and baby, most heroines end up single, dead, almost immediately widowed, or unhappily married without children. If Dostoevsky belongs to this broader Russian pattern, is he part of "the norm,"

or is the whole Russian tradition "queer" because it does not follow the Anglo/American reproductive model?

There are additional sticking points. Some scholars now claim "queer temporality" is anything that offers an alternative to "progressive, and thus future oriented, teleologies as aligned with heteronormative reproduction," but most queer theorists believe the term should in some way relate to the realm of sex/sexuality/gender.[56] I do not see gender or sexuality as the burning issue in Dostoevsky's novels that serves as the obstacle to reproductive futurity.[57] As noted above, Dostoevsky may have been concerned about women's limited economic options, but he was not a radical and he was not trying to overthrow patriarchal norms. He attacked Chernyshevsky for his ideas about replacing the conjugal couple with the ménage à trois and for his ideas about emancipated women (see Lebezyatnikov's speeches in *Crime and Punishment* for a scathing parody). Radical socialist rejections of the family in *Demons* are parroted by a female student who makes a mockery of them (10:307). Dostoevsky believed in the family, and he believed in men and women fulfilling different roles within it. I see nothing queer in his calls for increased legal rights and protections for women or his desire to end patriarchal tyranny.[58] His concern was child abuse and the suffering of innocents.

Furthermore, in most of the novels, the presence of non-heterosexual forms of desire seems unrelated to Dostoevsky's resistance to hetero-normative reproductive time. Prince Myshkin, whose doctors have confirmed his unweddable status, is a clear outlier. Dostoevsky draws explicit attention to his sexuality when Myshkin tells Rogozhin "because of my congenital illness I don't have any experience of women at all" (8:14).[59] But for other heroes, this link is absent. If Ivan Karamazov never confesses his love for Katerina Ivanovna and their potential courtship plot does not progress, it is not because Ivan is sexually repressed or challenging gender norms. He has other – arguably weightier – things on his mind. Raskolnikov and Sonya are far from thinking about domestic life and reproductive futurity not as a negation of this kind of time but because of the presence of something else. That *else* is what makes a Dostoevsky novel a Dostoevsky novel … and potentially a Russian novel.

But here again, the issue becomes more complicated, as different conceptions of "queerness" encompass broader conceptions of futurity. An alternative strand of queer theory argues that: "Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing."[60] Scholars like José Muñoz, just quoted, argue for a queer futurity that exists always on the horizon, much like Dostoevsky's Ridiculous Man's vision of a utopia that could

come in a moment through faith and love, yet we know will never be attained. The "prop[ulsion] onward, beyond the romances of the negative and toiling in the present" could describe just about every one of Dostoevsky's heroes: Ivan "turning back the ticket" to God's world because he cannot accept the suffering of innocents, Mitya dreaming of the "wee one" crying in the burnt-out village and of being reborn through suffering, Raskolnikov looking to the future with hope after his spiritual revelation by the river with Sonya, Prince Myshkin trying to share his ecstatic vision before his epileptic fit at the soirée …

Dostoevsky's novels offer a challenge to "the classical frameworks of narrative" that McCrea defines as "the rites and rituals of genealogy – marriage and paternity."[61] He narrativizes family without the "love, marriage, childbearing, a peaceful old age for the in-laws, [and] shared meals around the family table" that Bakhtin deems central to the family novel.[62] But whether this is a queer challenge is – to my mind – still an open question. And the first step in answering it is to give greater credence to the way Dostoevsky subverts our expectations for the marriage plot and to give it its due place alongside the drama of fathers and children in our understanding of the Dostoevskian family drama.

NOTES

1 As E.M. Forster claimed in a 1927 lecture: "If you think of a novel in the vague you think of a love interest – of a man and woman who want to be united and perhaps succeed." See Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 1963), 61. Among the most famous studies that claim the centrality of marriage in the novel tradition, see: Ian P. Watt. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957); Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); and Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

2 The two approaches are discussed by Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 73. Classic studies that focus on the generational plot include: Janet L. Beizer, *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Michael Ragussis, *Acts of Naming: The Family Plot in Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Ross Shideler, *Questioning the Father: From Darwin to Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hardy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Studies that focus on

the marriage plot include: Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition*; Jenni Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Evelyn J. Hinz, "Hierogamy Versus Wedlock: Types of Marriage Plots and Their Relationship to Genres of Prose Fiction," *PMLA* 91, no. 5 (1976): 900–13; and Tony Tanner. *Adultery in the Novel*. A notable exception in Dostoevsky scholarship is Liza Knapp's analysis of *The Adolescent* as a novel of adultery; see Liza Knapp, "Dostoevsky and the Novel of Adultery: *The Adolescent*," *Dostoevsky Studies* New Series, no. 17 (2013): 37–71.

3 Barbara Heldt observes that "Gogol', Turgenev, Goncharov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov all describe marriages that don't happen, often against the background of bad or ordinary ones that do." See Heldt, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 21.

4 N.G. Chernyshevsky, "The Russian at the *Rendez-vous*," in *Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobrolyubov: Selected Criticism*, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1962), 112.

5 Kate Holland has astutely explored Dostoevsky's challenge to the "'noble family novel,' which he saw encapsulated in the works of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and to a lesser extent Goncharov," through looking at the formal issue of fragmentation, tracing parallels between the breakdown of the family and the disintegration of narrative form. See Kate Holland, *The Novel in the Age of Disintegration: Dostoevsky and the Problem of Genre in the 1870s* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 103.

6 As Ilya Kliger notes in chapter 10 of this volume, in *Demons*, the wishes of Stavrogin's mother and former tutor that he "come to his senses, marry a beautiful heiress, and become a brilliant member of society" are completely out of touch with "the novel's more authentic preoccupations" (211).

7 Barry McCrea, *In the Company of Strangers: Family and Narrative in Dickens, Conan Doyle, Joyce, and Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 8.

8 Said, *Beginnings*, xiii. For Bakhtin, time in the family novel is defined by "family-as-genealogy." See "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 231.

9 Lev Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Iubileinoe izdanie)*, 90 Vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Khudozhestvennaia literatura," 1928–59), 19:294. English translation: Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina,* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 716.

10 Said, *Beginnings*, 93.

11 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (London: Penguin, 2012), 250.

12 In Barry McCrea's words: "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," *In the Company of Strangers*, 7.

13 McCrea, *In the Company of Strangers*, 8. Many English novels end with a marriage and the birth of a child in the final pages, epitomizing this ending cum beginning. On the Russian side, the arrival of an heir is not always at the very conclusion of the novel, but Aksakov's *Family Chronicle* [Semeinaia khronika, 1856], Turgenev's *Rudin* (1857), Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859), Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* [Semeinaia schast'ia, 1859], *War and Peace* [Voina i mir, 1869], and *Anna Karenina* (1877), and Stulli's *Twice Married* [Dva raza zamuzhem, 1875] all feature the arrival of children in their later pages. Aksakov's *Family Chronicle* closes with the long-desired heir's name being penned into the family's genealogical tree – bringing the narrative full circle, as this infant would grow up to become the author of the chronicle.

14 This does not mean that Dostoevsky ignored genetic inheritance. The Karamazov brothers, for example, make repeated references to their shared blood, what Ivan calls "the Karamazov force" [karamazovskaia sila] (14:240; 263). All references to Dostoevsky are to F.M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, ed. G.M. Fridlender et al. (Leningrad: "Nauka," 1972–90). Subsequent volume and page number references to this edition will be indicated in the text in parentheses: (vol.:page). Where an English translation is used, the page number is provided following the *PSS* and set off by a semicolon. Translations from *Brothers Karamazov* are from Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans., *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Vintage Books, 2004).

15 In the scene of their coming together, the word *teper'* appears thirty-four times (and *segodnia/shnee* seven times). Yet at the same time, Arkady asks to hear his origin story – how his father and mother first became a couple. He wishes to understand the family past he never had.

16 Dostoevsky's critique responded to the lives and ideas of Herzen and Chernyshevsky, who challenged the traditional, patriarchal family structure, as well as to Turgenev's landmark *Fathers and Children* [Ottsy i deti, 1862]. In his *Writer's Diary*, Dostoevsky explained that *The Adolescent* was his first attempt at writing his own *Fathers and Children* (22:7). See also Susanne Fusso, "Dostoevskii and the Family," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. William J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175, 177.

17 Carol Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets: Reading against the Grain* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 144.

18 I discuss this in "Lateral Plots: Brothers and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Novel," *Slavic and East European Journal* 16, no.1 (2017): 21.

19 Dostoevsky refers to Ivan's passion for her after his return from Moscow, and notes: "it could all serve as the plot for another story, for a different

novel, which I do not even know that I shall ever undertake" (15:48, 610–11).

20 The dynamics of their relationship receive a brilliant treatment by Yuri Corrigan, who points out that "Dmitry's fear of his unexplored interior darkness and his incapacity for self-direction thus make him ideally suited to fall under Katerina Ivanovna's administrative guidance." See Yuri Corrigan, *Dostoevsky and the Riddle of the Self* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 127. Yet at the same time as Katerina plans to "be his god, to whom he will pray," Corrigan notes that "part of her bizarre intention [is] to dissolve herself into Dmitry as a mere extension of his personality: 'I will turn myself simply into a means for his salvation… into an instrument, into a machine for his happiness, and that for my whole life' (14:172)." See Corrigan, *Riddle of the Self*, 127–8.

21 Similarly, in English literature we see the seduction of Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) – the classic English fallen woman – through *her* eyes, just as in Austen we learn that Wickham and Willoughby have no honest matrimonial intentions only when Elizabeth and Marianne themselves discover the truth: *Pride and Prejudice* (1813); *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

22 Michael Katz, "Dostoevskii's Homophilia/Homophobia," in *Gender and Sexuality in Russian Civilization*, ed. Peter I. Barta (London: Routledge, 2001), 249, 247–8.

23 Illegitimacy was a much greater concern in the eighteenth-century English novel than in the nineteenth, and the extramarital affairs could be treated with humour, as in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749).

24 Vyacheslav Ivanov provides a symbolic reading of Stavrogin's marriage to Mariya Shatova, seeing her as the embodiment of Russia and Stavrogin as Russia's betrayer. See V.I. Ivanov, "Ekskurs osnovnoi mif v romane 'Besy,'" in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Brussels, 1987), vol. 4, 442–3.

25 While in *Brothers Karamazov*, this idea that love must be earned is actively challenged (the chapter containing the defence attorney's speech is titled "An Adulterer of Thought"), Fusso notes in his discussion of the Kroneberg trial, Dostoevsky "refuses to admit an *a priori* sacredness for the family": see "Dostoevskii and the Family," 185. The difference, she argues, is that Dmitry's lawyer was trying to help him evade responsibility, whereas in the Kroneberg case, Dostoevsky wanted to *make* the father responsible for torturing his daughter.

26 In *Demons*, Stepan Trofimovich similarly claims: "I find I have so little right to be called a father," after noting how long it has been since he's seen "Petrusha" (10:75; 92). English translation from Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans., *Demons* (London: Vintage, 2006).

27 In her study of memory, Diane Oenning Thompson arrives at this point through its inverse: forgetting one's children as a form of neglect and "a

critical index of morality." See Diane Oenning Thompson, The Brothers Karamazov *and the Poetics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 165.

28 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 169. Robin Feuer Miller notes that *The Idiot* provides an exception to this general rule in *Dostoevsky and "The Idiot": Author, Narrator, and Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 97.

29 See Fusso, "Dostoevskii and the Family," 179. Holland writes that *The Adolescent* "presents an all-pervasive present" and "takes as its starting point a blank slate, the denial of memory, but gradually acknowledges that without memory form is not possible." See *Novel in the Age of Disintegration*, 122. I am grateful to Greta Matzner-Gore for pointing out Arkady's confusion with genealogical time when he refers to Versilov as his "future father" (13:17).

30 As Corrigan has noted: "the dramatic crises of Dostoevskii's major novels […] are all, without exception, catalyzed by his characters' sudden confrontation with the distant past: Raskolnikov's discovery that his mother and sister are coming to Petersburg in *Crime and Punishment*; Myshkin's return to Russia in *The Idiot*; Stavrogin's arrival in his hometown in *Demons;* Arkady's reunion with his family in *The Adolescent*; and the brothers' homecoming in *The Brothers Karamazov*." See Yuri Corrigan, "Dostoevskii on Evil as Safe Haven and Anesthetic," *Slavic and East European Journal* 63, no. 2 (2019): 229. While Corrigan is interested in the characters' "reckoning with the past," these are also important moments of family reunion.

31 Here I am disagreeing with Semenov, who argues that the conflict of fathers and children is a conflict of the present and future. E.I. Semenov, *Roman Dostoevskogo 'Podrostok': problematika i zhanr* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979), 138.

32 The one seeming exception is in Dostoevsky's very first novel, *Poor Folk* [Bednye liudi, 1846], where Bykov's express purpose in marrying Varenka is to produce an heir. But as Varenka reports, his true motivation – that he openly explains to her – is that "he had, as he put it, a 'no-good nephew' whom he had sworn to deprive of his inheritance, and that it was for this very reason – that of acquiring some lawful inheritors – that he sought my hand" (1:100; 118). English translation by David McDuff, *Poor Folk and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1988). He is not actually concerned with creating his own line. Varenka, in turn, departs the novel as if going to her death, her final words to Devushkin being: "My tears are choking me, breaking me. Farewell. God, how sad! Remember, remember your poor Varenka!" (1:106, 127). We have no indication of whether the sought-after heir ever materializes.

33 Jennifer Wilson, "Dostoevsky's Timely Castration," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 5 (2018): 567.

34 According to Wilson, the *skoptsy* "provide an example of queer time that is not belated, delayed, or without a future but one that rushes to the future, unencumbered by the quotidian demands of the present. It is precisely this overwhelming futurity that makes them antisocial to Dostoevsky." Wilson, "Dostoevsky's Timely Castration," 570.

35 There are also no family businesses to carry on as, for example, in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849), or Gaskell's *North and South* (1855). There are, however, family estates that the men must steward for the good of their children. Tolstoy emphasizes this in *Anna Karenina*, contrasting Oblonsky's failures with Levin's successes.

36 This lateral expansion provided Dostoevsky's path towards the universal unity for which he strived. As I have argued elsewhere, for Dostoevsky: "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." See Anna A. Berman, *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: The Path to Universal Brotherhood* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 130.

37 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 39. Italics in original.

38 Matzner-Gore, *Dostoevsky and the Ethics of Narrative Form*, 44.

39 Ibid., 62.

40 Duc Dau and Shale Preston discuss the implications of applying a queer theory lens to Victorian depictions of the family in their "Introduction" to *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

41 Edelman, for example, specifically objects to "the trope of the child as figure for the universal value attributed to political futurity," and the "absolute privilege of heteronormativity" that accompanies it. See: "The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive" *NARRATIVE* 6, no. 1 (1998): 18–30 (here 19); *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

42 Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

43 Halberstam defines "the time of inheritance" as an "overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability." See *In a Queer Time and Place*, 5.

44 'Intentional kin" is explained by the sociologist Margaret K. Nelson in her "Fictive Kin, Families We Choose, and Voluntary Kin: What Does the Discourse Tell Us?" *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 5 (2013): 269. In relying on a conception of family that is not based on biology or legal state

sanction, Dostoevsky is closer to twenty-first-century sociologists' social constructionist definitions of the family. These definitions approach family as a social construct and set of behaviours, shifting the emphasis to the affective bonds, actions, and activities that *create* familial relationships rather than bloodline or legal unions (e.g., Dostoevsky's claim that "family is created by the untiring labor of love."). See Braithwaite et al., "Constructing family: a Typology of Voluntary Kin," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27, no. 3 (2010): 388–407.

45 Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

46 Ibid., 10. According to Barry McCrea "the rites and rituals of genealogy – marriage and paternity – are the basis for the classical frameworks of narrative." See *In the Company of Strangers*, 8.

47 Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, 26.

48 While not specifically concerned with family roles, Connor Doak sees masculinity as a central issue in Dostoevsky's novels. His study of Prince Myshkin offers an early attempt to use queer theory to make sense of some of the ambiguities in Dostoevsky's treatment of gender in *The Idiot*. See Connor Doak, "Myshkin's Queer Failure: (Mis)reading Masculinity in Dostoevskii's *The Idiot*." *Slavic and East European Journal* 63, no. 1 (2019): 1–27.

49 Barbara Alpern Engel, "The 'Woman Question,' Women's Work, Women's Options," in *Dostoevsky in Context*, ed. Deborah A. Martinsen and O.E. Maiorova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 59.

50 Ibid., 61.

51 For a thoughtful, meticulously researched and historically grounded treatment of the subject, see Suzanne Fusso, *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 42–54. Her footnote 7 on p. 45 includes a list of relevant scholarship on homosexuality in Dostoevsky's novels.

52 Indeed, Fusso goes further in suggesting a positive place for homosexuality, noting that the moments of "tender friendship" between (homosexual) Trishatov and other men "stand out from the generally bleak landscape of human relationships in [*The Adolescent*]." See *Discovering Sexuality*, 54.

53 Ibid.

54 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 4.

55 In support of this, David M. Halperin argues explicitly that "queer" "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm," and must be thought of as "a positionality vis-à-vis the normative." See Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

56 The issue is summarized in Carla Freccero, "Queer Times," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 489.

57 Connor Doak does see Dostoevsky as critiquing masculinity, arguing that (in *Demons*) "Dostoevsky found it impossible to imagine a masculinity that could unite an active sexuality with moral goodness in his fictional world." See Connor Doak, "Masculine Degeneration in Dostoevsky's *Demons*" in *Russian Writers and the Fin de Siècle: The Twilight of Realism*, ed. Katherine Bowers and Ani Kokobobo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 116. Although moral exemplars like Father Zosima and Prince Myshkin are celibate, I would question whether the issue is combining sexuality with moral goodness, or just conceiving of a true moral model who is also active in the world. Razumikhin is one of Dostoevsky's most positive and active figures and he clearly has no lack of sexual passion for Dunya.

58 For a feminist reading of Dostoevsky's views on women that treats the question of women's rights, see Nina Pelikan Straus, *Dostoevsky and the Woman Question* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994).

59 See Doak's discussion of Myshkin's queer challenge to norms of masculinity ("Myshkin's Queer Failure," 1–27).

60 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

61 McCrea, *In the Company of Strangers*, 8.

62 Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," 232.