

Title: Plotting the Family and Failed Marriage Plots
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Abstract:

Given how highly Russians valued the family in the nineteenth century, it is surprising how few novels from the period have a “successful” marriage plot that culminates with wedding bells and the birth of an heir to carry on the family line (as we find in the English tradition). Examining marriage plots in the works of Tur and the Khvoshchinskaia sisters (with additional examples from Aleeva, Paneeva, and Smirnova) alongside their better-remembered male colleagues, this paper addresses two related patterns. First it explores the failure of the marriage plot to create family, looking at the variety of outcomes that most often leave the heroine either unwed or in a loveless marriage that does not produce heirs. Second, the paper analyzes the pattern of blended or untraditional family structures that appear in these novels and suggests that Russian authors offered an alternative route to family through intentionally choosing to make others “kin.” Recontextualizing Dostoevsky’s “accidental family” as part of this broader pattern of “intentional” family, the paper argues that this pattern of rethinking traditional kinship ties helped to create a new Russian family plot.