



RESEARCH INTO THE DEPICTION OF FAMILY IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Over the past centuries, the subject of family and family relations has been the object of study of psychology, philosophy, sociology, history and other humanities. The formation, development and crisis of family relationships have been manifested as one of the main themes in many works of art and literature. Especially in Russian literature, this topic is covered through deep psychological analysis. This article analyzes how Family Psychology is reflected in Russian literature, the authors' approach to family relations and the role of the family in a socio-historical context.

Keywords: Family Psychology, Genesis, household image, mentality, concept, mother, female image, Family Values

Introduction

The concept of family and home occupies a central place in Russian literature, often serving as a symbolic and spiritual anchor in periods of profound social upheaval. These motifs are not only representative of the inner psychological and moral state of literary characters but also reflect deeper cultural values tied to Russian identity. From oral folklore and proverbs to classical novels and contemporary narratives, family and home function as both setting and moral compass, shaping personal destinies and collective consciousness alike. The prevalence of family imagery underscores its role as a site of emotional refuge and moral formation, as well as a microcosm of broader societal structures.

This article explores how the themes of family and home are represented and evolve in Russian literature across different historical epochs, from Old Russian



texts to 19th-century psychological realism and 20th-century sociopolitical critiques. Special attention is given to the linguistic, symbolic, and psychological functions of family images, drawing from a variety of texts and critical perspectives.

Literature Review

The scholarly exploration of family and home in Russian literature spans multiple disciplines including literary studies, psychology, and cultural anthropology. M. Kulabukhova (2020) investigates how M.A. Bulgakov's novel *The White Guard* uses familial imagery as a response to post-revolutionary disorientation, portraying the home as a sanctuary amid chaos. She emphasizes the symbolic merging of individual and collective familial identities, particularly within the intelligentsia.

Y.S. Pavlova (2024) addresses the 19th-century literary transition from patriarchal to more autonomous family structures. In the works of A.S. Pushkin, N.V. Gogol, and L.N. Tolstoy, the family becomes a site where societal duties and personal desires often conflict. Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in particular, exemplifies the moral and cultural significance of familial institutions, centering on the Rostov and Bolkonsky families to articulate spiritual and moral ideals.

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels such as *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*, the family becomes a theological and philosophical arena wherein good and evil, salvation and despair, interact. Dostoevsky uses family structures to critique both secular and religious ideologies, presenting the home as both sanctuary and battleground.

Scholarship on I.A. Goncharov has historically overlooked family dynamics, but more recent analyses—such as those by Melnik and Kondrashova—highlight how his trilogy (*Ordinary Story*, *Oblomov*, *The Abyss*) delves into maternal roles and the psychological complexity of familial relationships. Similarly, Kulinchenko's work underlines the moral centrality of family in shaping character and national ethos, tracing its literary treatment through Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Saltykov-Shchedrin.



Methods and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, integrating literary hermeneutics, comparative analysis, and cultural semiotics. Primary texts from various periods of Russian literature—oral folklore, medieval narratives, and 19th- to 20th-century prose—are subjected to close reading in order to identify recurring motifs, symbolic functions, and thematic evolutions of family and home.

The study classifies representations of family under four analytical categories:

1. **Moral-symbolic function** (e.g., Tolstoy's idealized family models)
2. **Psychological function** (e.g., Chekhov's and Dostoevsky's depictions of inner conflicts)
3. **Social-critical function** (e.g., Ostrovsky's *The Thunderstorm*)
4. **Narrative-spatial function** (e.g., Bulgakov's use of domestic space as narrative refuge)

Sources in Russian, English, and translated critical literature were reviewed to trace interpretive traditions, with additional attention paid to folk proverbs and their moral dimensions.

The Main Part

In Russian literature, images of family and home, local traditions are the most important issues. Especially in the most difficult periods of history, images of family and home have acquired special importance in Russian literature and culture. The spiritual and psychological state of the heroes, their inner experiences, and their relationships are revealed through images of family and household. Sacred images of family and home in the oral literature of the Russian people play an important role in forming the moral foundations of the individual and the people, ensuring national development. In particular, in Russian folk proverbs, the image of family and family relationships occupies a leading place. For example, in these proverbs, such as "In a family where everyone is together, the soul is also in place," and "If there is a family, there is no need for treasure," [3, 19] the strength and sanctity of the family are especially praised, while in proverbs such as "A child is God's grace," and "God does not forget those who



have many children," [3, 31] the importance of the role of children in the true happiness of the family, its strength, and its continuity is emphasized.

The theme of home and family is one of the interrelated themes in world literature in general, and in Russian literature in particular. Its echoes are also visible in ancient Russian literature.

One of the main works of ancient Russian literature, which brings the idea of family values to the forefront, is the "Tale of Peter and Fevronia", in which the love of the heroes passes all life tests, and at the end of their lives, the heroes, having accepted monasticism and living in different monasteries, even die on the same day, and their bodies, as the legend says, are in one coffin. This legend reflects the Christian views on family life and marriage, and Peter and Fevronia will forever remain in history as a symbol of a truly harmonious family [14].

The family in 19th-century Russian literature serves as a symbol of society and, at the same time, a center for the formation of spirituality.

In her article "Images of Family and Home in Russian Literature and Audiovisual Art of the 20th-21st Centuries," [6, 85-99] M. Kulabukhova analyzed the images of family and home in M.A. Bulgakov's novel "The White Guard." In it, after the revolutionary events of 1917, images of family and household begin to confront the socio-historical and spiritual-moral decline, and images of familylessness, orphanhood and homelessness in literature and art. Conflicts arise between the heroes against the disappearance of nationalism, family values. Bulgakov combined the concepts of personal family and common family. He tells about the civil war, which he witnessed and participated in. He focused not on the details of the war, but on the families of the Russian intelligentsia as the best stratum in the country. In particular, "the image of an intellectual and noble family, a family thrown into the White Guard camp during the Civil War by the will of an unchangeable historical fate. In the novel, the writer did not seek to evaluate the recent tragedies, but rather proved that in fact the only salvation for a person in this world is his family and home. In the novel, there are only notes from the mother, who left a will before her death, saying "Live together...". According to the will, the children live in one house, which is described as follows. "Apartment 13 on Aleksevskaya Loop, rented, but figuratively speaking, is a "house" in the city, a real house, its features: December, a Christmas tree, Santa Claus, shining



with snow and happiness, a tiled stove in the kitchen, warming little Elenka, big Alexey and very little Nikolka. "Old red velvet furniture, shiny conical beds, worn carpets, a black wall clock, the best books in the world, the mysterious smell of old chocolate, gilded mugs, portraits, curtains, a piano with Faust, still shiny floors, a tablecloth that confirms the beauty and strength of life, and sad and vibrant roses in a silver vase" [1, 98]. Through the image of the house above, the writer not only refers to space and place, but also connects it with the image of a mother who always embraces them warmly.

Another researcher, Y.S. Pavlova, in her article "The Theme of Family in the Works of Russian Writers of the 19th Century," [10] [2024-]notes that in the 19th century, Russia experienced many social and economic changes, which also affected family values. In the works of writers such as Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol and Leo Tolstoy, one can see the evolution of the perception of the family: the formation of personal and family freedom from patriarchal foundations. For example, in Tolstoy's novels "Anna Karenina" and "War and Peace", relations within the family often reflect the conflict between duty and personal aspirations. In the epic novel "War and Peace", as L.N. Tolstoy himself described it, family relations are leading. The writer noted that "people are like rivers": each of them has its own source, its own channel. From the mother's womb, from the warmth of the hearth, from the care of relatives - human life begins. And which path it takes largely depends on the family, family structure and traditions. At the center of the work are two families - the Rostovs and the Bolkonskys. The main qualities of the Rostov family members are absolute sincerity, trust, and purity of heart. It is no coincidence that both mother and daughter have the same name - this emphasizes their closeness.

Tolstoy says about his father, Grafilya Andreyevich: "He behaves well." Sensitive, with the ability to "read the secret" of people and nature; enthusiastic and vulnerable – Natasha; charming with simplicity and sincere generosity – Petya; open, simple – Nikolai - all of them inherited from their parents the ability to sympathize, benevolence, sincerity. The Rostovs are a real family where peace, harmony, love reign. In the literature of the 19th century, especially in the work of Dostoevsky, the family is a concept that has sacred significance, reflecting not only the personal, but also the culture of the entire nation. In the novels "The



Brothers Karamazov” and “Crime and Punishment”, the family symbolizes the struggle between good and evil, the secular and religious worlds. Dostoevsky shows how family relationships shape a person and how they influence the choice of a life path, and at the same time serve to perfect religious values in the life of society. Family relations in 19th-century literature are a kind of society that expresses Russian traditions and values. Writers use images of home, father, mother as symbols of reliability and stability.

Researchers of the 20th century are united by the following: they all analyze the family from a sociopsychological or psychobiological perspective. Psychological analysis can be shallow or deep, but the common feature is that a person is self-reforming, which is analyzed in the research.

I. Melnik “The Problem of the Ideal Family in I.A. Goncharov’s Trilogy [2, 146-169] ” The problem of the family is very common in the works of A. Goncharov, especially in the novels “Ordinary History”, “Oblomov” and “The Abyss”, it includes images of women, the maternal principle, family relationships. However, the theme of the family in Goncharov’s work has received special attention from literary critics relatively recently. Published until the 1990s, and later, Rybasov, Pikhanov, Prutskov, Postnov and others studied various aspects of the writer’s work. There has been almost no research on the image of the family in Goncharov’s works. Both Mark and Vera in the novel “The Abyss” equally understand that the family is a great unifying force. But Mark hates this force. The maternal instinct awakened in Faith implies the opposite belief: family is good relations. Marriage, family, children - all these are considered natural processes. For the first time in Goncharov's novels, the family theme was reflected in the article by E.A. Krasnoshchekova, which contains a parallel between "ordinary history" and "family history". Strictly speaking, so far only the article by T.M. Kondrashova "The image of a friend at home in I.A. Goncharov's novel "Oblomov" and the typology of the family" and the article by N.G. Komar "The problem of the family in I.A. Goncharov's novel "Oblomov" in the context of the traditions of ancient Russian literature (Oblomov and Olga) [7, 195-204]" are devoted to the theme of the family.

Y. Kulinchenko's study "The Concept of "Family" in Russian Classical Literature of the 19th Century: Based on the Works of A.S. Pushkin, L.N. Tolstoy, and M.E.



Saltykov-Shchedrin [8]" reflects the fact that the family is the moral foundation of human life in the traditions of Russian classical literature. "Family psychology" is one of the leading themes of Russian literature, which permeates almost every work. Leading Russian writers of past centuries, such as A.S. Pushkin, D.I. Fonvizin, L.N. Tolstoy and others, have always seen the family as the main social entity that shapes the character, beliefs, life and fate of the country. The importance of the family issue in Russian literature is explained by the fact that respect for family traditions, the past, and memory is an indicator of the level of culture and development of a person as a person. The love of parents for children, as well as the mutual feelings of children for their parents, are the foundations of family upbringing, which are inherently more important than any other upbringing. The family actively influences the development of spiritual culture, the social orientation of the individual, and the motives of behavior. Therefore, it is the most important factor in raising a highly moral person.

In 19th-century Russian literature, the Larin family in A.S. Pushkin's novel "Eugene Onegin" can be called one of the ideals of family life, where there was always agreement and mutual understanding between husband and wife. The Larin family is an ideal embodiment of a patriarchal family. In the novel, Pushkin emphasizes that when the landowner Dmitry Larin went to the world of eternal peace, he mourned his children and ex-wife more sincerely than others. Perhaps such a family was not enough for Eugene Onegin, he did not know the true love and affection of his parents: after all, his father was absorbed in high-society life, "he lived in debt ... every year he gave three balls and finally went around", the author of the novel does not mention the hero's mother at all, Eugene from a young age was given to the care of a "lady", and then "took the place of a gentleman ...". Perhaps the absence of a real family in childhood and adolescence did not allow Onegin to respond to the feelings of the village "modest girl" Tatyana.

The conversation about unhappy families should begin with the play by A.N. Ostrovsky "The Thunderstorm". The main characters of the play are the family members of the merchant Kabanova, who strictly and forcefully controls her son, daughter-in-law and daughter. Against such a family structure, where everything is based on blind obedience and fear, Katerina decides to commit suicide, because



for her it is impossible to live in the house of a tyrant mother-in-law and a willful, unloved husband, Y. Kulinchenko increases the value of the study by comparing a happy and unhappy family.

Relationships and connections within the family, in general, are the main themes in the work of any writer. In Russian fiction, there is no writer who would not turn to the theme of the relationship between father and child, mother and child, brother, sister, spouses, the image of the household. However, it is precisely the artistic function of family psychology that has not been studied in fiction. The study revealed that in works of fiction on the theme of family (starting with Old Russian literature), a number of traditions were observed, which were not lost with the development of literature. The evolution of the theme can be traced in works of different eras: each era brings something new to the "eternal" theme of family. It was found that in our time, when people practically do not read, works about family show how to avoid difficult family situations, how to behave with a loved one, what to pay attention to when raising children. We are sure that reading such works is a priority task for modern youth.

Family psychology has always been one of the central themes in Russian literature. The family was seen not only as a social unit, but also as the main mirror of the human psyche, moral standards, and relations with society. The philosophical and religious approach of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, the psychological realism of Chekhov, the social perspective of Soviet writers - all this reveals various aspects of family psychology. Even today, this rich heritage of Russian literature is an important source in the study of family psychology.

Conclusion

The theme of family and home serves as a persistent, evolving cornerstone in Russian literary tradition. It functions not merely as a narrative device but as a reflection of philosophical, spiritual, and psychological paradigms that define Russian cultural identity. From the sanctity expressed in oral proverbs to the complex character studies in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the Russian literary canon constructs family as a sacred institution that both mirrors and shapes the individual and collective soul.



Moreover, the representation of the family in Russian literature transcends temporal and ideological boundaries, affirming its relevance in both traditional and modern narratives. The domestic sphere becomes a site of existential struggle, moral fortitude, and cultural continuity, reinforcing the belief that the family is both a private refuge and a national symbol.

Future research could further expand this inquiry by examining contemporary Russian literature and media to explore how the meanings of family and home continue to evolve amid modern sociopolitical transformations.

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***Modern American Journal of Linguistics,
Education, and Pedagogy***

ISSN (E): 3067-7874

Volume 01, **Issue** 03, June, 2025

Website: usajournals.org

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