

Marriage and Family Relations in V. P. Krymov's Trilogy *Out for a Million*

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Abstract The literary legacy of writer Vladimir Krymov (1878-1968), born in Dinaburg (Daugavpils), comprises twenty-seven books, seven of which have been translated into English. In 1933, the trilogy “Behind the Millions” was published in Berlin, rightfully considered one of the author’s most important works. The novel represents a variant of the family chronicle, a genre particularly popular in Russian literature from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. The history of the family often reflects the main issues of its time, stemming from the contradictions of bourgeois culture that permeated all levels of personal and socio-economic existence.

Within V. Krymov’s artistic realm, three generations of characters are clearly delineated: the older generation, the middle generation, and the younger generation. Considering the daily behaviour and customs of the Old Believers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is noteworthy that the problem of marriage and family life organization constituted one of the most significant challenges. Each generation of Old Believers possesses a set of values that aids survival in unfavourable circumstances, particularly during periods of persecution and repression by official authorities and the Orthodox Church. For the Old Believers, the family plays an ontologically significant role in terms of both cultural and confessional aspects, serving as a key to preserving identity and transmitting cultural values.

The older generation, guided by ancestral experience and revered norms presented in texts, largely adheres to the features of traditional family relationships, reminiscent of a medieval model. This model is characterized by a hierarchical internal structure, clear role divisions, a traditional approach to education, and a pursuit of economic self-sufficiency. The family’s role here lies in the stable and reliable organization and implementation of religious upbringing and education, as well as in the establishment and assimilation of prohibitions.

Despite the seclusion of the Old Belief, it has never existed in complete isolation

but rather in a perpetual “culturally different” environment. Representatives of the middle generation, while maintaining religiosity, develop a new value system. Their aim is wealth accumulation and the pursuit of financial success, viewed as an opportunity to achieve higher social standing and prestige. Categorical attitudes toward prohibitions no longer hold sway over this generation. While sinful behaviour pervades everyday life in the capital city of St. Petersburg, it remains unnoticed and unrecognized as a sin. Consequently, none of the younger generation members manage to create a happy family.

Keywords Old Believers; Dvinsk; Russian literature; family; marriage ¹

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Introduction

The trilogy *Out for a Million* can rightly be considered the central work in the rich creative legacy of Vladimir Pimenovich Krymov. The trilogy, originally conceived in the early 1920s and initially titled “God and Money,” had its first two volumes completed by 1926. According to the author, “As I wrote, I found myself becoming less and less satisfied with what I had written” (Krymov 5). Krymov then began rewriting and revising the previously written and published material. He explains, “Consequently, slightly over half of the content from the first and second volumes remained, rendering the title “God and Money” unsuitable as it no longer aligned with the revised content (Krymov 5).

By the time the trilogy was published in 1933, alongside the Berlin edition of “Petropolis,” it had become increasingly clear that a series of episodes from an individual’s life or a biography alone could not fully portray the socio-cultural and political changes in society. Starting from the second half of the 19th century, there

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was a growing inclination to consider social phenomena within a diachronic context, leading to the emergence of a distinct type of novel prose known as the family chronicle. In these novels, real historical time and individual psychological time are inseparable. Furthermore, the objective course of history dominates and absorbs the ideas and emotions of various characters.

In the trilogy *Out for a Million*, Krymov endeavours to depict not only the transformation of the protagonist, Arseniy Aristarkhov, but also to present a comprehensive portrayal of various aspects of everyday life in the first third of the 20th century. The theme of marriage and sexual relations holds particular significance. The writer imbues the trilogy's protagonist with episodes from his own biography. The inserted chapter, *The Childhood of Aristarkhov*, stands out as the most extensive section across all three parts. Throughout the trilogy, the main character constantly writes a book, comparing the experiences and knowledge acquired during his childhood and adolescence in the provincial Dinaburg/Dvinsk with the realities of life in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and during exile. One of the most renowned facts from Krymov's biography is associated with his father and mother's conversion from the Old Believers to Orthodoxy, and the subsequent death of his father, which was perceived by relatives as divine punishment for apostasy.

Methodology

The article analyzes the features of the Old Believers' understanding of the tasks and functions of the family as a tool for preserving, conserving, and perpetuating the religious and cultural Old Believer tradition, using V. Krymov's trilogy "Out for a Million" as an example. The Old Believers entered into marital relations at an early age. Various forms of marriage existed: marriages without church wedding prevailed among the Bespopovtsy, while among the Old Believer priests, church weddings took place. An intriguing form of marriage was considered the "withdrawal (escape)" marriage, which took place without parental consent. It is important to note that most marriages were contracted based on personal feelings or with consent.

The history of studying the emergence and development of Old Believer communities in Latvia has a long tradition. Among the notable recent works published are *The Old Believers in Imperial Russia: Oppression, Opportunism, and Religious Identity in Tsarist Moscow* by Peter De Simone and *Old Believers in a Changing World* by Crummey. In recent decades, there has also been increased interest in the study of Old Believer culture in Latvia, as evidenced by works such as "Old Believers in Latvia: Yesterday and Today" ("Staroobrjadchestvo v Latvijā: včera i šodņā"), *Old Believers in Latvia (Vecticība Latvijā)* by Podmazovs, *Old Believers of*

Jekabpils. People. Years. Events: 19th-21st Centuries (Vecticībnieki Jēkabpilī. Cilvēki. Gadi. Notikumi: XIX-XXI gadsimts) by Zimova, *Old Belief in the Baltics and Poland: A Concise Historical and Biographic Dictionary* (Staroverie Baltii i Pol'shi: Kratkij istoricheskij i biograficheskij slovar) by Baranovsky and Potashenko, and *The Old Believers of Latgale: Essays on the History of the Old Believer Societies of the Rezhitsa and Lucin Counties (2nd Half of the 17th - 1st Half of the 20th Centuries)* (Staroverie Latgalii: ocherki po istorii starovercheskih obshhestv Rezhickogo i Ljucinskogo uezdov (2-ja polovina XVII - 1-ja polovina XX vv.) by Nikonov.

Special attention should be given to the works that study the phenomenon of the Old Believer family and the attitudes of Old Believers toward the institution of marriage. Many modern Russian scientists have dedicated monographs and articles to this issue, such as “Family and Marriage Relations in the Traditional Society of the Kama Region in the 19th - Early 20th Centuries” by Agafonova, “Old Believer Family: Religious and Cultural Dominance” by Kupriyanova, and *Family in the Old Believer Culture: Experience of Historical Research* by Veselova.

Peculiarities of the genre of the family chronicle have been quite thoroughly studied by modern literary critics. Starting from the second half of the 19th century, the tendency to consider social phenomena in a diachronic context” became widespread, which was reflected in the emergence of a special type of novel prose, the family chronicle (Nikolsky 60). The history of the family was often traced on the basis of the main problems of its time, caused by the contradiction of bourgeois culture, penetrating all levels of personal and socio-economic existence. Historical time and individual psychological time are inseparable in such works; moreover, the objective course of history subjugates and absorbs the characters’ perceptions and feelings (Zakablukova 4). A characteristic feature is the presence of intra-family conflict and family relations. Of decisive importance for the entire architectonics of the genre is the nature of the relationship of the individual with other family members, the relationship between which, having a number of particular features, is built on the principle of movement from organic unity to rupture (Simonova 8).

Old Believers: Marriage in the Russian Empire

Today, a substantial body of work is dedicated to the study of the Old Believers. It is evident that the Old Believers have never been a unified and territorial community, as they were situated thousands of kilometers apart and had to adapt to regional regulations. According to several researchers, attitudes toward marriage and sexual life have played a significant role, leading to divisions and disagreements. As noted by Alexander Etkind in his monograph *Whip: Sects, Literature, and Revolution*,

“irreconcilable contradictions in matters of marriage (‘permitted sex’)” (Etkind 70) and family law often gave rise to various Old Believer and sectarian groups. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this issue garnered substantial attention from legal experts. It is not surprising since the refusal of the church and state to legitimize the marriage of a significant portion of the population for religious reasons was a legal and juridical incident, placing them in a particularly powerless position compared to other religions.

Following the reform of the church court in 1874, this problem received special attention, as evident in publications such as I. Orshansky's “About Marriage among Schismatics” (1877), A. Borovikovsky's “On the Family Law of Schismatics,” V. Rosenblum's “Punishability of Bigamy among Schismatics,” N. Suvorov's “Civil Marriage,” N. Zaozersky's “What is a Split Marriage,” and others.

Even then, the fundamental distinction between the perspectives of priests and bespopovtsy (priestless Old Believers) was recognized. The priests “did not propose any other form of marriage apart from a church wedding, officiated by a priest who must adhere to the traditional ceremony outlined in old texts and rituals, [...]”. On the other hand, the bespopovtsy demonstrated a remarkable dedication to the Russian church wedding” (Suvorov 77). Within the bespopovshchina movement, the two largest groups, the Fedoseyevites, who reject marriage, and the Pomortsy, who accept it, have spent over a hundred years attempting to convince each other of their respective righteousness but have not reached a consensus on these matters.

Old Believers: Family and Marriage in the Novel

In the first novel, *Sidor's Teachings*, the author pays special attention to depicting the life and cultural characteristics of the Old Believers. The religious worldview of the Old Believers, which influenced the entire traditional everyday culture, is intricately woven into the trilogy and intertwined with the concept of the past. The world of traditional patriarchal values and the relationships built upon these values is set in a provincial town where Aristarkhov spent his childhood, hinting at Dinaburg/Dvinsk. Arseniy Aristarkhov is the main character of the Krymov trilogy. In the first part, he is portrayed as a young man who graduated from a real school in a county town of the Russian Empire, after which he moved to Moscow. Towards the end of his student years, he begins to comprehend the “wisdom” of doing business. By the second volume, he has already become a thirty-five-year-old man who has realized his youthful dream and earned his first million. In the third volume, the protagonist appears as a fifty-year-old adult, increasingly pondering the meaning of human life and reflecting on his own life path.

Arseniy vividly recalls his childhood experiences, such as the “kirmash” and fairs that took place during Christmas time and Shrove Tuesday. He describes, “Across from our house, Gostiny Ryad was bustling with activity. In the covered gallery facing the street, girls lined up in a row, their backs turned towards the passersby. I observed them from the window of our hall, witnessing an endless array of handkerchiefs of various colours and designs. The handkerchiefs swayed as one replaced another. A yellow one would emerge, only to be replaced by blue or orange. Then orange would give way to blue, or there would be a brief empty space before the neighboring handkerchiefs shifted. The handkerchief that stepped out of the row would embark on a stroll with a gentleman along the gallery. The luckiest gentlemen would be invited for a sled ride, with those possessing a horse and sleigh being particularly sought after. The arc and shafts were adorned with ribbons, and the mane of the horse was also woven with ribbons. Bells jingled around the horse’s neck, and the sled itself was narrow, barely accommodating two people. The gentleman’s left leg protruded from the sleigh, revealing the fur-lined interior of his coat, highlighting its opulence. The cavalier elegantly glided the chosen handkerchief back and forth along Gostiny Ryad, from the ice rink to the fish market. The other girls half-turned, observing and keeping count of how many times they passed. If many times—be a wedding” (Krymov 78-79).

Additionally, Arseniy’s uncle Pavel, an old bachelor, delighted the family with his favourite story about how he nearly got married in Torzhok. To emphasize his eligibility as a groom, Uncle Pavel acquired a raccoon coat, arranged for a horse-drawn carriage, and paraded down the main street at a lively pace, “displaying the floor of the coat...so that everyone could see that it was made of raccoon fur—imagine what a remarkable groom he was!” (Krymov 96-97).

In the artistic world of V. Krymov, three generations of characters are clearly distinguished:

1) The older generation - in many respects, this represents the legendary generation of the first Old Believers who fled from Nikon’s reforms. Some of the characters also belong to this generation - the great-grandfather, grandfather, and several elderly household members who zealously preserve the rules of the first Old Believers.

2) The middle generation is the generation of fathers—in many respects, Uncle Arseniy Sidor becomes the spokesperson for the ideas of this generation. It is no coincidence that the first part of the trilogy is called “Sidor’s Teaching.” This generation is characterized not only by the preservation of the Old Orthodox faith and piety but also by the desire to become fully integrated into the surrounding

society. This society is not organized according to the model of the Old Believer community and has long considered the Old Believers to be heretics and schismatics.

3) The younger generation includes the main character, his cousins, metropolitan friends, and companions. Gradually, as the volumes progress, the main character transitions from the younger generation to the older one due to natural aging.

The representative of the older generation, Grandmother Arseniy (old woman Aristarkhova), is primarily interested in whether the family of the potential bride is Old Believer and whether they managed to preserve the faith. After that, she clarifies which Old Believer community the family belongs to, making sure they are not Belokriniks. This is an extremely important clarification since the Belokrinichniks are the Old Believer priestly sect, which is unequivocally unacceptable for Aristarkhova. The old woman herself belonged to the Fedoseyevites—bespopovsky sect. During the events of the novel, there was a gradual transition of the Fedoseevsky communities to the Pomeranian sect.

Grandfather Arseny believes that Grishka should get married “in order to rid himself of a dissolute way of life—to stop laying cuckoo eggs at last” (Krymov), hinting at Grishka's extramarital affairs and possibly illegitimate children. Grandfather Arseniy often spoke on this subject, laughing and making jokes, always the same, known to everyone for a long time. They all revolved around the same sexual question. Business and serious issues were always resolved by the old woman with Sidor; the old man could only verbally tease his wife, who considered such conversations sinful. She constantly pulled her husband away, frightening him with evil spirits but not forbidding him to speak on these topics.

The main exponent of the value system of the middle generation is Arseniy's uncle, Sidor Danilych Aristarkhov. The importance of the bride's affiliation with the Old Believers is emphasized by Uncle Arseny Sidor: “He must absolutely find someone from our circle... born and dying in the same way, so as not to introduce discord into the family” (155). However, wealth becomes the main concern for Sidor: “he only needs to find a suitable match... Those who do not seek goodness and do not run after goodness—money to money... capital to capital, and so on...” (155). Uncle Sidor, who arrived in Moscow, immediately introduces Arseniy to his cousin Grigory. Arseniy accompanies Gregory in all matters, among which the search for a bride becomes the most important. Even the preparation for the trip required considerable effort from its participants. After receiving blessings, parting words, instructions, and prayers, the cousins were ready to go. “Everything was

ready on Saturday, but it was a sin to go on the eve of a holiday; it is also impossible on a holiday; Monday is a hard day - we left on Tuesday" (Krymov 174).

In Moscow, as in all major cities of the Russian Empire at that time, it was necessary to find a person who was willing to start searching for potential brides. Danila Minaevich Shitikov, the mentor of the prayer room at the Preobrazhensky cemetery, served as such an assistant, confirming that: "There are well-born, merchant, and affluent families among our Old Believers in Moscow... They do exist. And they donate a lot to our prayer room, may God save them" (Krymov 175). By donating two hundred rubles to the prayer house, the mentor attracted a well-known matchmaker who visited all the houses and initiated the matchmaking process. The mothers of Moscow brides, who themselves regularly contributed large sums to the needs of the prayer room, asked Mentor Shitikov to find good grooms for their daughters, where "good" means "rich" (Krymov 196).

The central episode of this storyline is the visit of Arseny and Grigory to the Voskoboinikov family, who were millionaires. It is through this family that Krymov decides to illustrate the problems that many Old Believers faced in their daily lives. After the death of the head of the firm, the millionaire Voskoboynikov, all the property was bequeathed to his wife Vassa Prokofievna according to his will. "An unprecedented legal incident occurred with the will... Vassa Prokofievna turned out to be Voskoboinikov's illegal wife, and the court did not approve the will. Distant relatives of her husband interfered, and the million-dollar fortune could have left the family. However, it was discovered that the Voskoboinikov family belonged to a schismatic sect that did not recognize marriage, and therefore, they were not legally married" (Krymov 199). In Krymov's novel, this situation, generated by Russian legislation, is resolved in a non-trivial, one might even say fabulously folklore, manner. Eminent merchants and other influential individuals appeal to the sovereign, and "by the highest order, the property passed, according to the testator's will, to Vassa Prokofievna" (Krymov 199). It is evident that real Old Believers, unlike the fictional characters, could not rely on such a resolution to their problems.

Vassa Prokofievna also belongs to the older generation of Old Believers, zealously observing the traditions and precepts of her ancestors. Addressing Arseny instead of Grigory, she emphasizes this once again: "It might be of interest to you to know that we strictly adhere to the Old Believers and belong to a sect that does not recognize marriage... And I, being unmarried to my late husband, lived in sin, and I won't give my daughters blessings for marriage... They can do whatever they want against their mother's will since times have changed, but I cannot give my blessings for marriage... If the temptation is strong in youth, it's better to live in sin and then

repent with the Lord asking for forgiveness. However, we have no one to officiate marriages; every young woman must remain the bride of Christ... Our mentors are unable to marry, as the grace of the Holy Spirit does not rest upon them. As you may be aware, in accordance with the teachings of the Church Fathers, it is believed that in the last days, marriage cannot be consecrated (Krymov 234).

The most indicative factor is the departure from everyday behaviour patterns of the ancestors among the youth in Moscow, especially in St. Petersburg. In one of the early scenes of the novel, Arseny Okonin's Moscow friend utters the phrase: "We, the Old Believers, know a thing or two about girls. The first libertines in the world" (Krymov 15).

In Krymov's trilogy, besides depicting the traditional model of sexual behaviour in everyday culture, he also recreates at least three additional models.: 1) physical (almost animalistic) sexuality (Dionysian) characterized by passion and the subordination of all actions to the satisfaction of this passion; 2) aesthetic sexuality (Apollonian)—sex viewed as a game or entertainment, prevalent in the bohemian circles of Moscow and St. Petersburg. In this model, sex becomes an important aspect, symbolizing a luxurious lifestyle. Only those with significant wealth can fully embrace this model. 3) The third model is the philosophical (ontological) sexuality of Arseny Aristarkhov (or V. Krymov).

Grigory Aristarkhov personifies the first model: Grishka was excessively focused on women, to the point of it being detrimental to his work, often leading to troubles. The Aristarkhov family, compensating for the absence of vices such as drinking and smoking, was known for their lustfulness. Grishka was no exception within the family. He believed that life without a woman was impossible, and if he did not have a love affair for a day or two, he claimed to be unwell and unable to work. "The head doesn't function properly..." However, the type of woman did not matter to him. It could be a promiscuous woman, a high-society lady, a drunken woman of low social status, an artist, a neighbor's nanny, a city professional, an apple vendor, old or young – it made no difference to him, as long as she wasn't too delicate" (Krymov 155).

During the first part of the trilogy, Arseny becomes a witness, sometimes unwillingly, and occasionally an accomplice to such behaviour exhibited by his cousin. Such behavior by Grishka is condemned by the older generation, but at the same time Uncle Sidor speaks about Grishka's method of interacting with the opposite sex with almost envy: "Putting them in his arms and on the bed, straight away after saying hello, how are you... Why waste time with conversations," he says, "it all comes down to the same thing in the end" (Krymov 155).

However, in the world of the Old Believers, there exists a certain sexual taboo — associating with “inoverki” [belonging to other faiths] — Jewesses and Catholics. Even Grishka, who instructs Arseniy, is forced to abide by this taboo: “You must not get involved with Jewesses... It will bring trouble. Worse than Gypsies... The whole kagal will raise a fuss...” (Krymov 170). Grishka frequently talks about Jews, gypsies, and women in general as commodities. He discusses their allure, as if inquiring about the price of a horse, preferring healthy and voluptuous young ladies.

Gregory’s brother engages in sexual relations with a Catholic girl, but their Old Believer mother blames the pregnant girl rather than her son for what transpired. The only fault of her son is his involvement with a non-Christian: “He found someone to associate with, some confusion, a Polish woman—now he needs to talk to a priest... He can’t handle his own affairs” (Krymov 172). The mother’s dissatisfaction primarily stems from the fact that their sinful relationship (“Afanaska’s dirty tricks”) became public, leading to significant financial expenses, and if the case cannot be resolved, then it will be brought before the court. Such cases are likely to occur in regions with a densely populated multinational and multi-confessional population. Even today, the issue of the religious affiliation of these children is significant for many Old Believers. Marriage permission from religious mentors can only be granted if the child has been baptized into the Old Believers’ church.

Vladimir Nikonov, a researcher of the Latgalian Old Believers, emphasizes that in the western part of the Russian Empire, particularly in Latgale, which was located in the western part of the Vitebsk province, Old Believers could visit a Catholic church to legalize their marriages. However, Nikonov points out that they considered this wedding ceremony to only have legal significance, as they believed that the Catholic Church, being distant from the true faith, could not influence those who entered into marriage. It is worth noting that no compromises were made to accommodate mixed marriages with Catholics (Nikonov 31).

Sexual extramarital relationships, of course, also existed within the traditional household culture of the Old Believers. Direct indications of this can be found in Krymov’s trilogy. From the history of his family, Arseniy cites the fact that, probably, his great-grandfather was the father of Fevronya Feoktista’s daughter, who quietly lived in the Aristarhovs’ house but did not bear their last name. Grandfather turned the domestic wing into a hospital for treating prostitutes, “Even though they are promiscuous women, they still need treatment... Let them get treated, those wretches!” (Krymov 103).

In the first novel, there is an episode in which Arseniy recalls how, as a child,

the “sweeping girls” on the eve of some holiday called him to light a lamp in one of the chambers. The hero wonders why they themselves could not do it. Most likely, we are dealing with popular beliefs rather than church rules. It was believed that prostitutes did not have the right to light lamps so as not to desecrate them.

In the second volume, *We Lived Well in Petersburg*, Krymov describes the time from the start of the Balkan Wars in 1912 to the revolutionary events of 1917 and the emigration of Arseniy Aristarkhov. During this period of his life, Aristarkhov encounters a different order of sexuality. Love and sexual relationships are perceived as a continuation of business meetings, sumptuous lunches, and dinner parties. Gourmet food, expensive drinks, foreign objects, outlandish furniture, and bright decorations fill the space of the privileged. At the same time, it is significant that none of the representatives of the younger generation of Old Believers in Krymov's trilogy had a traditional wedding or followed any other model.

Conclusion

When constructing a model of the artistic world, V. Krymov frequently draws upon the facts of his own biography. Dinaburg, the writer's hometown, can be easily recognized as A. Aristarkhov's native city. The transition of the protagonist's parents from the Old Belief to Orthodoxy is also derived from the writer's actual biography. Considerable attention is dedicated to depicting the Old Believer's way of life. However, the protagonist finds himself in a dual position. On the one hand, he is bound to his extensive family through blood relations; on the other hand, he is no longer an Old Believer and thus cannot be fully embraced as one of their own. This duality in the protagonist's position is mirrored in his perspectives—he possesses a comprehensive understanding of the history, traditions, and superstitions of the Old Believer culture, yet he remains an outsider.

Aristarkhov's views (likely mirroring Krymov's own) further underscore the influence of the religious worldview of the Old Believer groups on the entire traditional everyday culture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, conflicting viewpoints emerge regarding the value system and behavioural norms of the Old Believers. The more radical circles demonstrate conservatism and consistently strive to limit the sphere of rituals, safeguarding it against the infiltration of new elements and, consequently, altering the meaning of ritualistic actions. In contrast, the protagonist exhibits a more adaptable attitude toward the traditional culture and belief system. Gradually overcoming his own preconceptions, he gravitates towards the concept of individual Epicureanism. Under the pressure of the value system of the new capitalist era, the conventional understanding of

marriage and family, which has endured for two centuries, begins to crumble.

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