

The Relevance of George Sand's *Lucrezia Floriani* for Dostoevsky's *Netochka Nezvanova*

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ABSTRACT

Analyses of Dostoevsky's unfinished 1849 novel, *Netochka Nezvanova*, have focused on its connection to Dostoevsky's biography and to his earlier and later works; to the tradition of German Romanticism; to the tradition of the Bildungsroman and that of the confession; to literary depictions of the artist and the dreamer; to ideas about education; to psychological interpretations, including to the issue of codependency.

Scholars have discussed influences on *Netochka Nezvanova*, including, among others, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Vladimir Odoevsky, Balzac, Eugène Sue, Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, Rousseau, Goncharov, Gogol, Pushkin, Herzen, and George Sand. When scholars speak about George Sand in connection with *Netochka Nezvanova*, some suggest that her novels, *Consuelo* and *Lucrezia Floriani*, were important to Dostoevsky in the emphasis of the future trajectory of the novel, in *Netochka*'s future life as a great singer.

In this article, I attempt to prove that some of the major features of *Netochka Nezvanova* that have links to *Lucrezia Floriani* have almost nothing to do with the theme of the singer-to-be, but rather, have to do, almost exclusively, with aspects of psychology.

I focus on these links between the Dostoevsky and George Sand novels: thematic concerns and parallels that are intertwined with major characters' personality traits and behavior; a few subplots; and a dog. Dostoevsky took the core of *Lucrezia Floriani*, a story of obsession, passion, and illusion – in love – that can corrupt; and applied that situation to obsession, passion, and illusion in art and human relationships.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, *Netochka Nezvanova*, George Sand, *Lucrezia Floriani*, psychology.

“...the portrait of the passion... is the
subject of this book...”
(‘...la peinture de la passion qui fait le sujet
de ce livre...’)

--George Sand, “Preface” to *Lucrezia Floriani*
(Sand, 1985b: XII); (Sand, “Notice,” 1980b: 4).

“Did you read *Lucrezia Floriani* [sic] look at
Karol. But you will soon read *Netochka*
Nezvanova [sic].”
(‘Chital li ty *Lukretsiiu Floriani* [sic]
posmotri *Karolia*. No skoro ty prochtesh’
Netochku Nezvanovu [sic].’)

--Fedor Dostoevsky letter to Mikhail Dostoevsky
(Dostoevskii, 1928: 108).

Analyses of Dostoevsky's unfinished 1849 novel, *Netochka Nezvanova*, have focused on its connection to Dostoevsky's biography and to his earlier and later works; to the tradition of German Romanticism; to the tradition of the Bildungsroman and that of the confession; to literary depictions of the artist and of the dreamer; to ideas about education; to psychological

interpretations, including, recently, to the issue of codependency. Scholars have discussed many influences on *Netochka Nezvanova*, including, among others, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Vladimir Odoevsky, Balzac, Eugène Sue, Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, Rousseau, Goncharov, Gogol, Pushkin, Herzen, and George Sand.²¹

Of a Dostoevsky connection to George Sand, Victor Terras (1969: 102), for example, suggests that the author’s depiction of Aleksandra Mikhailovna, in *Netochka Nezvanova*, displays traits in common with Sand’s depiction of the heroine of her novel, *Indiana*.

When scholars speak about George Sand in connection with *Netochka Nezvanova*, some suggest that her 1842 novel, *Consuelo*, and her 1846 novel, *Lucrezia Floriani*, were important to Dostoevsky in the emphasis upon the future trajectory of the novel, in Netochka’s future life as a great singer. As supporting evidence, scholars talk about the fact that in the final section of the published portions of the novel, Dostoevsky describes the discovery of Netochka’s great talent for singing.

Norwegian scholar Erik Krag (1976: 61), for instance, speaks about *Consuelo*, with its emphasis upon a singer, as a possible source for Netochka’s development as a singer. Joseph Frank (1976: 349-350) writes, “...[Dostoevsky’s – E.C.] young heroine, who begins to take singing lessons in the last episode [of *Netochka Nezvanova* – E.C.]...was thus probably intended as a Russian analogue to Lucrezia, or to Sand’s ... *cantatrice* Consuelo (in the novel by that name). The book would have been the Romantic autobiography of an artist... [W]hat he wished to do ... was to portray a character who unites a dedication to art with an equally firm commitment to the highest moral-social ideals.” Speculation about how the novel would have unfolded must, of course, remain as speculation since Dostoevsky was arrested, in 1849, before he could complete the novel. As we know, in subsequent years, he never went back to work on, nor did he finish writing, *Netochka Nezvanova*.

Frank and others have pointed to the characteristics of Sand highlighted in the above quoted words of his. In addition, they have investigated certain aspects of Sand and the “woman question”²² as being influences on Dostoevsky’s novel. The “moral purity” (‘nравstvennaia chistota’) of Sand’s heroines was one of the qualities of her works that Dostoevsky emphasized in his words about her in a June, 1876 entry, in his *Diary of a Writer*, after her death. (Dostoevsky, 1999: 511; Dostoevskii, 1981:35) He wrote, “In actual

²¹ See, for example, J. Frank (1976); L. Grossman (1962), *Dostoevskii* (Moscow: “Molodaia gvardiia”), pp.121-127; M. Jones (1973); E. Krasnostchekova (2007), “The Wounded Young Heart. Dostoevsky’s *Netochka Nezvanova* as Bildungsroman. In M. Levitt and T. Novikov, Eds. *Times of Trouble. Violence in Russian Literature and Culture*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), pp.70-81; T. Marullo (2007), *Heroine Abuse. Dostoevsky’s “Netochka Nezvanova” and the Poetics of Codependency* (DeKalb: Northern University Press; K. Mochulsky (1967), *Dostoevsky. His Life and Work*, trans. M. Minihan, pp.101-102; V. Nechaeva (1979), *Rannii Dostoevskii. 1821-1849* (Moscow: “Nauka”), pp.177-181; L. Steiner (2006), “*Netochka Nezvanova*” on the Path of Bildung. In *Die Welt der Slaven*. Vol.51, 2, pp.233-252; and V. Terras (1969), pp.49-53.

²² In terms of the “woman question,” Lesley Singer Herrmann (Herrmann: 1979) devotes a great deal of attention to the significance, for Dostoevsky, of George Sand. Especially relevant, in this respect, are Chapter Three (pp.80-106) and Chapter Five (pp.129-175). In the portion of Herrmann’s study that deals with the links between Dostoevsky’s works and Sand’s fiction, she focuses on novels other than *Netochka Nezvanova* and *Lucrezia Floriani*. In the dissertation as a whole, Herrmann deals with Sand’s *Indiana*, *Valentine*, *Jacques*, and *Mauprat*. Her research on Sand and nineteenth-century Russian literature and culture, including literary and cultural responses to the French writer’s novels, is noteworthy in that she places the Dostoevsky-Sand connection in a broad context of Dostoevsky’s other works, and in a broad context of Sand’s significance in nineteenth-century Russia.

fact, many, or at least some, of her heroines represented a type of such subline moral purity as could not be imagined without a most thorough moral scrutiny within the poet's own soul..." ('Na samom dele mnogie, nekotorye po krainei mere, iz geroin' ee predstaviali soboiu tip takoi vysokoi npravstvennoi chistoty, kakoi nevozmozhno bylo i predstavit' sebe bez ogromnogo npravstvennogo zaprosa v samoi dushe poeta,...').

In an 1847 letter to his brother, Mikhail, in the same passage in which Dostoevsky (Dostoevskii, 1928: 107-108) describes his own "nasty, repellent character" ('skvernyi ottalkivaiushchii kharakter'), he asks whether Mikhail has read *Lucrezia Floriani*, and asks him to look at Karol, a protagonist in that novel. In the next sentence, he says that Mikhail will soon read *Netochka Nezvanova*: "Did you read Lucrezia Floriani [sic] look at Karol. But you will soon read Netochka Nezvanova [sic]." ('Chital li ty Lukretsiuu Floriani [sic] posmotri Karolia. No skoro ty prochtesh' Netochku Nezvanovu [sic].')

Not long after *Lucrezia Floriani* was first published in France, the novel came out in Russian translation. Kafanova and Sokolova (2005: 91) present the following detailed information about its publication history, in translation, in Russia. It was first published, in a translation by A. Kroneberg, as a "special supplement" ('osoboe prilozhenie'), pages 1-208, to the January, 1847 issue of the thick journal, *Sovremennik*. It also came out in the thick journal, *Otechestvennye zapiski*, Volume 50, 1847, Section 1, pages 65-234, and later in book form, *Lukretsiia Floriani: roman Zhorzha Sanda* (1847), also translated by Kroneberg.

To my knowledge, analyses of *Netochka Nezvanova* have not included detailed discussions of the influence of *Lucrezia Floriani* on Dostoevsky's novel. What is surprising to me is that some of the major features of *Netochka Nezvanova* that have links to the Sand novel have almost *nothing* to do with the theme of the singer-to-be, but rather, have to do, almost exclusively, with aspects of psychology.

For those of you who have not read *Lucrezia Floriani*, here is a brief summary. (By the way, when the novel first came out, readers immediately assumed that it was based on the real-life, several-years-long romance, which ended badly, of Sand and the composer, Frédéric Chopin. Both Sand and Chopin vehemently denied that the novel reflected their romance, but their denials did not deter readers' assertions. [Miller: v].) Prince Karol, who has no contact with reality, is introduced to Lucrezia Floriani, an unmarried former actress who herself lives in illusions. She is now living, in seclusion, with her four children, all of whom were fathered by different lovers of hers. Karol and she fall in love. After a brief blissful period, Karol's jealousy, passion, and obsession with Lucrezia psychologically tear the two apart. Salvator, a mutual friend, advises both of them to sever the relationship before they end up destroying themselves and each other. Each refuses. Lucrezia, worn down by Karol's jealousy and cruel behavior toward her, dies.

In my examination of *Netochka Nezvanova* and what I believe is its indebtedness to *Lucrezia Floriani*, I shall focus on the following links between the Dostoevsky and Sand novels: thematic concerns and parallels that are intertwined with major characters' personality traits and behavior; a few subplots; ... and a dog.

First of all, Karol and Efimov are both obsessed, Karol, by love; and Efimov, by music. A lack of connection to reality destroys each of them. Each has a major negative effect on other people, Karol, on Lucrezia; and Efimov, on Netochka and Netochka's mother. Netochka's mother continues to love Efimov. Lucrezia continues to love Karol. Both die.

In each of the two novels, a kind friend, in each case, a voice of sanity and reason, gives helpful advice, to no avail. In *Lucrezia Floriani*, Salvator points out a way to escape the path to destruction and self-destruction. In *Netochka Nezvanova*, the violinist B. advises Efimov to stop drinking, to start practicing, and to find work.

In *Netochka Nezvanova*, Petr Aleksandrovich, the husband of Aleksandra Mikhailovna, exhibits some of the same cruel behavioral traits in his treatment of her, as does Karol, in his cruel treatment of Lucrezia. The two women are permanently physically and psychologically damaged by the two men.

In both novels, adults, Efimov, Aleksandra Mikhailovna, Lucrezia, and Karol are described, more than once, as being like children. In both works, we learn that neither Karol nor Netochka had childhoods.

Both novels begin in childhood. In *Lucrezia Floriani*, Karol's close relationship with his mother was an exclusive love which, we read, did not prepare him for life. In *Netochka Nezvanova*, we read that Netochka's relationship with her stepfather, Efimov, did not prepare her for life. Moreover, Netochka tells the reader, in terms of her relationship with Efimov, that she was the one acting like an adult even though she was chronologically only a child. In each case, it was this warped relationship which detached the child from reality, which led each of the two – Karol and Netochka -- to live in a world of dreams.

In each of the two novels, major characters, to their own detriment, sacrifice themselves to passion. Lucrezia repeatedly sacrifices her own needs to those of the jealous Karol. Netochka takes the blame for losing the money that her mother had given her to buy provisions, when in fact she had given the money to Efimov, at his request, no doubt so that he could buy alcohol. Netochka falsely takes the blame when it was Katya who had let the dog go upstairs. Netochka falsely takes the blame, instead of Aleksandra Mikhailovna, when she claims that the letter that she had found hidden in a book was a letter addressed to her from a lover, instead of revealing the truth, which was that the letter was addressed to Aleksandra Mikhailovna.

Karol falsely blames Lucrezia for his delusion about what he imagined was her interest in other men. Efimov falsely blames his wife for his failure to become a great musician. Both Karol and Efimov, ultimately, are described as being insane. Both Karol and Efimov are eaten away by their own internal suspicions, by their own paranoia, by their jealousies, by their own inner worlds of obsessions and delusions.

In *Lucrezia Floriani*, and in *Netochka Nezvanova*, we follow the path of Karol's and Efimov's downfall as each is more and more consumed by his obsession. In both novels, the obsession has taken a staggering toll on others. We follow the downward spiral of Lucrezia and in the first part of *Netochka Nezvanova*, of Netochka and of her mother. In the third part of Dostoevsky's novel, we see Aleksandra Mikhailovna's deterioration as the sadistic Petr Aleksandrovich relentlessly keeps on harassing her psychologically.

A few subplots in *Netochka Nezvanova* and *Lucrezia Floriani* are similar. For example, in *Netochka Nezvanova*, Efimov, several times, borrows money from the musician B., who cannot stop him from frittering it and his talent away. Dostoevsky (Dostoyevsky: 18-19; Dostoevskii, 2014: 231-232) writes, “One day, in the gentlest of terms, B. pointed out that it might not be such a bad thing if he [Efimov – E.C.] were to pay a bit of attention to his violin,B. saw through him and knew well in advance how it would all end up.” (‘Odnazhdy B. zametil emu samym krotkim obrazom, chto ne khudo by emu bylo ne slishkom prenebreat’

svoei skripki,B. ... videl ego naskvoz' i preduznaval, chem vse èto konchitsia.')

In Sand's novel, Salvator helps a minor character, Boccaferri, an actor who is perpetually in debt. Lucrezia, who had helped him financially several times, asks Salvator, "Is it impossible then to save the wretched man from his disorderly and improvident way of living?" (Sand 1985a:113). ('il est donc impossible de le sauver de son désordre et de son imprévoyance, ce malheureux!') (Sand 1980a:137) Salvator's reply? "I'm afraid so." (Sand 1985a:113). ('Je le crains.')

(Sand 1980a: 137). Of course, this episode reflects one of the central crises of the novel, for it is Salvator who finds it impossible to save Lucrezia and Karol, from *their* improvident ways of living.

A minor episode, in *Lucrezia Floriani*, becomes central, in its essence, to the unfolding of events in *Netochka Nezvanova*. In the former novel, Vandoni, a former lover of Lucrezia's and the father of one of her children, is described as a mediocre actor who is convinced that his mediocre talent is much greater than it, in fact, is. Vandoni cruelly gossips about famous actors whom he wrongly evaluates as being worse actors than he is. He believes, as Efimov does in Dostoevsky's later novel, *Netochka Nezvanova*, that he is a victim. He lives, as Efimov does in *Netochka Nezvanova*, in an illusion with respect to his art. Of course, we know that in *Lucrezia Floriani*, Lucrezia and Karol live in an illusion with respect to love.

In another way, too, the Vandoni episode will sound familiar to readers of *Netochka Nezvanova*. A subplot in Dostoevsky's novel concerns Karl Fyodorovich, a mediocre ballet dancer who works in a theater. He demonstrates his dancing to Efimov and asks Efimov whether his dancing is any good. Efimov says that it is not good. Karl Fyodorovich, like Vandoni and like Efimov, is a mediocre artist who thinks that he has more talent than he does. (By the way, is it mere coincidence that Karl's first name is similar to that of Karol, and that he, Karl, is the son of Fyodor? And Fyodor, of course, is the first name of the author of *Netochka Nezvanova*.) The comedic Karl Fyodorovich scene reflects a central tragic issue of Dostoevsky's book, the delusion of grandeur from which Efimov suffers.

There is even, it seems to me, a parallel in terms of the dogs in the two books. Lucrezia's dog is called Laertes, the same name, of course, as that of a character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In a scene in which Karol and the dog are returning to the Floriani villa, Karol, for a second time in the book, notices, on an iron gate leading to the villa, a quotation, in Italian, "*Lasciate ogno speranza, voi ch'entrate!*" (Sand, 1985a: 230) (Sand, 1980a: 271), from the third canto of Dante's *Inferno*, that Celio, one of Lucrezia's children, had once written on a stone near the gate. The translation into English are those famous words in the *Inferno*: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

In *Netochka Nezvanova*, the dog in Prince X's household, Friksa, was renamed Falstaff, the name, of course, of a Shakespearean character in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. We are told that one name that had been rejected was Hector. Another was Cerebrus, who, of course, was the multi-headed dog that guarded the underworld. Victor Terras (1969: 53) has connected the Dostoevsky dog scene to an incident that involves Félix, a dog in Eugène Sue's novel, *Mathilde*. In an article on an exploration of Romanticism in *Netochka Nezvanova* and *Mathilde*, Malcolm Jones (1973: 52) argues that the dog, Félix, in *Mathilde*, plays the same role in Sue's novel as Falstaff later plays in *Netochka Nezvanova*. In Sue's novel, according to Jones (1973: 52), Mathilde does not want Ursule to be treated badly. Therefore, Jones (1973: 52) points out that she purposely burns Félix's ear with tongs, so that Mademoiselle

de Maran will treat her badly, too. Mathilde wants to “attempt to demonstrate her love to Ursule,” writes Jones, just as, he continues, in Dostoevsky’s novel, Netochka shows that she cares for Katya by assuming responsibility for the fact that Falstaff had been allowed to go upstairs, where he was not supposed to go. Katya, and not Netochka, had been the one who had allowed the dog to do that, yet Netochka willingly undergoes punishment for the naughty act (Jones: 53).²³

It is obvious that since Dostoevsky’s novel was unfinished, we shall, of course, never know what further turns the life of his heroine would have taken. It is clear, though, that by the end of the final episode of the sections of the novel that Dostoevsky had finished writing, Netochka had already transcended the negative influences upon her life. She had stood up to Petr Aleksandrovich. She had been able to escape from and to get beyond her prolonged state of apathy. In writing the account of her life, Netochka, in hindsight and with insight about her past life, has gained wisdom. It is clear to the reader that she has grown from her experiences. This fate is different from the tragic entanglements from which Lucrezia and Karol could not disentangle themselves. Lucrezia succumbs to those noxious influences. The Sand novel ends with her death.

Salvator, who had always faced and coped with reality, is able to deal with the fact of her death. Lucrezia had fainted. Sand (1985b: 230; Sand 1980a: 271) writes, “Karol did not understand and stood like a statue. But Salvator understood immediately, and ... knew that Lucrezia’s death was the result of Karol’s relentless doing...” (‘Karol ne comprit pas, et resta comme une statue. Salvator comprit tout de suite, et ... il avait bien deviné que la mort de Lucrezia était son oeuvre incessante,...’) Karol, in the immediate aftermath of Lucrezia’s death, is, in Sand’s words, “petrified and dazed” (‘pétrifié, hébété [stupefied – E.C.]’) (Sand 1985b: 230; Sand 1980a: 271).

Given our analysis of parallels with and differences between *Lucrezia Floriani* and *Netochka Nezvanova*, what conclusions can we draw about the importance of Sand’s novel for our understanding of Dostoevsky’s novel? What Dostoevsky has done, it seems to me, is to take the core of *Lucrezia Floriani*, the story of obsession, passion, and illusion – in love – that can corrupt; and to apply that situation to obsession, passion, and illusion in art and in human relationships. We read about Efimov. We read about Netochka’s sick “passion” (“strast”) – she uses that word, -- for her feelings about Efimov. Dostoevsky (Dostoyevsky, 1985:48; Dostoevskii, 2014: 256-257), writes, in his first-person narrative, from the point of view of Netochka, “...little by little my love, or perhaps I should say my *passion* (Italics mine – E.C.) (for I do not know a word strong enough to express fully my overwhelming, anguished feelings for my father), reached a kind of morbid anxiety.” (‘...malo-pomalu ljubov’ moia, -- net, lushche ia skazhu *strast’* [Italics mine – E.C.], potomu chto ne znaiu takogo sil’nogo slova, kotoroe moglo peredat’ vpolne moe neuderzhimoe, muchitel’noe dlia menia samoi chuvstvo k ottsu, -- doshla dazhe do kakoi-to boleznennoi razdrzhitel’nosti.’)

What Dostoevsky has done, then, is to adapt the tale about the cruelty and psychological mind games that Karol plays on Lucrezia, to the cruelty and psychological mind games that

²³ The renaming of Friksa, not as Hector or Cerebrus, but as Falstaff, has also been linked to Sir Walter Scott’s playing with Shakespearean and Classical Greek names in *St. Ronan’s Well*, a book which plays a role in *Netochka Nezvanova*. On this point, see Dostoevskii (2014b:713), which are scholarly “Primechaniia” (‘Notes’) to *Netochka Nezvanova*.

Efimov plays on his wife, on Netochka, and on himself; and to the cruelty and psychological mind games that Petr Aleksandrovich plays on Aleksandra Mikhailovna. Dostoevsky has learned from his reading of Sand's novel, just as he has learned from his reading of other writers' works which have influenced him.

...And in addition, Dostoevsky has even, perhaps as an in-joke, played with the name of a dog, thereby showing us, his future readers, in yet another way, that there *are*, indeed, links of *Netochka Nezvanova* to *Lucrezia Floriani*...

On the basis of the evidence, I conclude that it does make sense to consider the relevance of *Lucrezia Floriani* to *Netochka Nezvanova*, in the ways that I have presented in the above discussion. Of course, as is so often the case in the community of scholars, further scholarly exploration of and research on the topic of the connections between these two novels might very well reveal still other ways in which the two novels, Dostoevsky's and Sand's, can be compared.

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