

## Chapter 1: CREATOR OF TERRORISTS?

Ivan Turgenev and *Fathers and Sons*

Tolstoy once complained that a man so melancholy as Turgenev should not write novels. Even more infuriating to assertive men like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky was the trait that may have defined Turgenev—his lifelong ambivalence.

Turgenev submitted his manuscripts to friends and tried to follow everyone's advice, making changes that he often had to change back again. He answered critics in a meek tone, blaming himself when they missed the point. He was a timidly friendly contributor to the cause of radicals like the exiled Bakunin and Herzen long after he had decided they were impractical dreamers. Paralyzed by liberal guilt at his aristocratic status and totally inept at handling money, he was openly cheated by the peasants on his estates and the managers he hired, including his relatives. For forty years, from age twenty-five to the end of his life, he remained in a devoted but undefined relationship with prima donna Pauline Viardot, a woman whose career, husband, and family came before him. His hatred of the oppressive czarist government of Russia melted in abject, groveling apology at the least sign of disfavor toward his writing. (Of course, consequences could be serious, even fatal.) He hated confrontation and was always trying to mollify writers like the volatile Tolstoy, envious Dostoevsky, and paranoid Gonchorov. He wrote in Russian about Russia, declaring that, short on inventive powers, he must be able to observe closely whatever he wrote about; yet, he could not bear to live in Russia full-time. He was such an easy touch that any Russian exile who approached him in Europe got some money, though he was always short of cash. He declared himself old at thirty-four and worried about his maladies, real (gout, bladder trouble, neuralgia) and imagined (his morbid fear of cholera surfaced with every stomach upset). At the publication of each book, he declared himself finished, washed up, and went into a deep depression. Yet at the very moment he was saying "Enough!" he was being prodded by fresh ideas for a new story.

How could such a wishy-washy liberal end up being accused of fomenting violent rebellion in the young?

Ivan Turgenev was born in 1818, the second son of Varvara Petrovna and Sergey Nikolayevich Turgenev. He spent his childhood at Spasskoye, one of his mother's estates, about 200 miles southwest of Moscow. She owned a vast property, a feudal fiefdom and 5,000 serfs spread across thousands of acres containing twenty villages and enterprises ranging from farms to a paper factory. Ivan's father was a handsome, distant, melancholy man of a long, aristocratic but impoverished line. He had been pressured by his family into marrying for money, but he never let his marriage vows cramp his style. Sergey Nikolayevich died when Ivan was sixteen. He is said to appear in *First Love*, as the austere but passionate man who wins out over his own son in a love triangle.

Ivan's mother, Varvara Petrovna, was ugly and tyrannical, a total despot ruling over her comparatively well-managed estates, her serfs, her relatives, and her sons. Biographies of Turgenev are sprinkled with stories of her brutality during fits of temper that bordered on the psychotic.

When Turgenev was a boy, eighty percent of the population of Russia were serfs, at best minimally fed, housed, and clothed under the rigid rule of gentry like Varvara

Petrovna, at worst starved and brutalized at the whim of greedy managers hired by the indolent nobility. Russia had moved toward more oppressive rule by the Czar and the landed gentry, even as Europe was leaning toward constitutional governments. The rigid Russian bureaucracy was moved—glacially—only by bribery. A strong military enforced the edicts of the Czar. There was no court system, and the wrong word spoken, let alone written, could mean Siberia. All writing passed through the hands of a strict censor. Importing books was illegal. Education was discouraged; it might spread dangerous "foreign" ideas. Travel was restricted, sometimes prohibited entirely, at the will of the czar.

Total oppression continued for another century after Turgenev's birth. He was long dead when the 1917 revolution ushered in a brief phase of hope, soon crushed by war and Stalinist oppression. Yet the entire one hundred years following Turgenev's birth were saturated with the conviction that Russia was on the eve of change, a feeling that everything was teetering on the brink. And there were reform movements, even revolts. Turgenev was a child of seven when a distant relative joined one of the most famous revolts as it swept through the military. "The Decembrists" aimed to abolish serfdom and establish a constitutional government. Their disorganized attempt failed, but they became legendary heroes, the inspiration for numerous secret societies of rebels for the next hundred years.

Turgenev, who grew up to be tall and hefty, graduated from Petersburg University. At twenty he went to Germany to study philosophy. From then on he spent part of each year in Europe, always delaying when his mother wrote to demand that he return to her estate and to her suffocating embrace. His mother hoped he would become a professor of philosophy. To her a writer was no different from a clerk: both simply dirtied sheets of paper with ink. However, she was proud to display his first published work *Parasha*, a narrative poem published in 1843, when he was twenty-five.

1843 was also the year he met Pauline Viardot, a renowned Spanish singer, wife of Frenchman Louis Viardot, a man twenty years her senior. There are unprovable rumors that Turgenev became the father of her fourth child. But sexual interludes, if any, with Pauline, were few and far between. Turgenev lived on friendly terms with Louis and on subservient, devoted terms with Pauline, though he had brief affairs with other women. The theme of hopeless love "like a disease" saturates his stories. But unlike his suffering heroes, he eventually became a member of his beloved Pauline's family. This relationship may have suited Turgenev better than he admitted. Like his friend Flaubert and some other male artists of the time, he (despite his complaints) may not have wanted to be the head of a domestic establishment.

It was during 1847-1850 (as revolts were breaking out all over Europe) at the Viardot's Chateau de Courtavenel, that he had his first effortlessly creative outpouring. Story ideas "presented themselves to me by the dozen." These stories were published one by one in *The Contemporary*, a radical magazine out of Petersburg, and were much admired.

In 1850 his mother died, leaving him everything (she had disinherited his older brother for marrying a lower-class woman). He returned to Russia, split the property with his brother, freed his household serfs, and put the farming serfs on a quitrent basis—that is, they paid him rent in money instead of in labor, a radical innovation at the time. He also built a school and a hospital for them.

In 1852 he wrote a laudatory obituary of Gogol, who had been his professor at Petersburg University, and whose work he admired. The censor banned it (Gogol had been out of favor with the czar when he died), but Turgenev managed to get it into print and landed in jail for a month, then was confined to his estate for two years. At the same time, his stories were published as a book titled *A Sportsman's Sketches*. He emerged from house arrest at Spasskoye to find himself a literary and political hero. This collection of low-keyed slices of life set against his beloved rural landscape was such an effective attack on serfdom that it was considered a major force in bringing about the Act of Emancipation ten years later.

How did he get these stories past the censor? By developing an objective style, far ahead of his times, free of the authorial comments that were a feature of 19th century writing. (Edmund Wilson called it "the noncommittal which is none the less committal." Hemingway advised beginning writers to read Turgenev, whose writing had inspired his own famously deadpan style.) Censors are not noted for their sensitivity to literary nuance. In presenting people, actions, words, and gestures without editorializing—for instance, a landowner beating a serf—Turgenev had persuaded nearly everyone of the evils of serfdom. There was uneasiness in high places, but all factions among the liberals and radicals loved the book.

The effect of this success on Turgenev was a fit of depression. He wrote to friends that he probably had no more to say, that he was getting old (at age 34), that he must write something entirely different (a longer work, a novel, would be expected of him) or stop writing entirely, and so on. He was both pleased at the political effect of the book and repelled. "To a man of letters politics is poison." A few years later he wrote an essay that divided human beings into Don Quixotes, men of action, and Hamlets, self-doubting, observing equivocators. He realized he was a Hamlet who admired the strong-willed if often tunnel-visioned activist—Don Quixote.

The eponymous central character of his first novel *Rudin* talks like a Don Quixote. His wonderful words inspire all the young people he visits—as a long-term, free-loading house guest—but he seems incapable of political action or, in fact, of any action whatever, even of earning his keep. Turgenev's ambivalence toward Rudin splits the novel in two. The story moves as if to expose Rudin as an empty man, then becomes a defense of his sincerity and his inspirational effect on others. The nobility could read the book as an attack on a man of empty words; the liberals could read it as an elegy for a revolutionary born too early. (And the censor, Turgenev must have hoped, would be lulled to sleep.) The book contains one statement that shows the beginning of Turgenev's estrangement from the radicals he had befriended and admired. The character Lezhnyov explains the power of Rudin's empty words over young people. Rudin seemed to make "all that feels disconnected fall into a whole. Try to tell young people that you cannot give them the whole truth and they will not listen to you."

*Rudin* was published (as were all of Turgenev's works) first in magazine installments, then in book form in 1856. In a later edition of the book, Turgenev gives Rudin a noble death on the barricades of Paris in the revolution of 1848 (which Turgenev had actually witnessed). This new ending came down on Rudin's side, implying that Rudin is capable of heroic action when the time and place make such action possible. It was said that Rudin was partly based on his friend Bakunin (hero of future anarchists' movements) languishing in prison at the time, living proof that the time for action in

Russia had not yet come. Turgenev's radical friends, like the exiled Herzen in England, said that Rudin was a self-portrait of its author, a vacillating friend of revolutionaries like Bakunin and himself.

Meanwhile Turgenev went into his usual post-creative depression. He traveled to England, to Italy, and to France, where he visited his illegitimate daughter (by his mother's seamstress) who had been taken in as part of the Viardot family. He wrote to Pauline, who was on tour throughout most of that year. After nearly two years of traveling (his writer's block relieved by some short pieces) and suffering his various illnesses, he returned to Russia and began the novel that became *The Nest of the Gentry*.

This is the story of Lavretsky, who separates from his trivial, unfaithful wife, falls in love, reads a news report that his wife has died, and declares his love, which is returned. At the height of his second-chance happiness, his wife shows up, very much alive. His new love goes into a convent, and Lavretsky stops "thinking about personal happiness," puts his duty as an enlightened landowner at the center of his life, and very quickly grows old. Hiding within this melancholy love story are scathing scenes of conversation among the nice, liberal gentry, who talk and talk about the problems of Russia, say all the right things, feel good about themselves, and then talk some more.

Somehow *The Nest of the Gentry* succeeded in pleasing practically everyone, and Turgenev was suddenly acclaimed Russia's foremost writer. Recognition in Europe, for the first time ever, came to a Russian. But this brief period of universal admiration was already ending. Two new young editors, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolubov, now dominated *The Contemporary*, the magazine that usually published his work. They believed art should be "socially useful" and that gradualism in political change was just a convenient pose for tired old aristocrats—like Turgenev. They provoked him often enough—orally and in print—that he decided to take his next novel to another magazine.

When Turgenev was starting *On the Eve*, Garibaldi and his "thousand" had landed in Sicily, and the world cheered as the unification of Italy at last became a reality. But in Russia, perpetually on the eve of revolution, there was no Garibaldi, no leadership to mobilize the energy and longing for change. "We have no one yet, no men, look where you will," complains the young artist Shubin. "Everywhere—either small fry, nibblers, Hamlets on a small scale, self-absorbed, or darkness and subterranean chaos, or idle babblers and wooden sticks. . . .No, if we only had some sensible men among us, that girl, that delicate soul, would not have run away from us . . . ."

That girl is the passionate and intelligent Elena, who is only lukewarm toward her two Russian suitors, Shubin the artist and big, awkward Bersényev the philosopher. Looking for a man with purpose, she falls in love and runs off with the rather improbably perfect Insarov, a Bulgarian dedicated to the freedom struggle in his own country. When he dies en route to Bulgaria, she continues on to join his revolution as a nurse to the sick and wounded. "How could I return to Russia; What have I to do in Russia?" In the description of the warm, still summer nights in the country and in the youthful uncertainties and yearnings of the central characters, Turgenev creates a mood of expectancy and yearning that seems to permeate the air, as Russia, like Sleeping Beauty, waits and waits in suspended animation for the prince of revolution.

Conservatives weren't happy with this book, but young people loved it. Except Chernyshevsky, who wrote an anonymous review complaining that Insarov should have

been a Russian. (And demonstrating how demanding that art be "useful" can make an otherwise intelligent reader miss the point of a book.)

Then came more of the unpleasantness that often goes with fame. Gonchorov accused Turgenev of plagiarizing his novel on a similar subject. In fact, he was full of paranoid delusions that Turgenev was stealing all his ideas, then giving the ones he couldn't use to his writer friends in Europe. Turgenev actually had to defend himself before an arbitration board which gave a wishy-washy finding somewhat in his favor. Gonchorov's paranoid fantasy only added a surrealist twist to an attack already leveled at Turgenev by other envious writers—he was guilty of the sin of spending too much time outside his own country. With Gonchorov (as with Dostoevsky) there was also a class issue. They were poor men who had nearly starved trying to make time to write. They resented Turgenev's moneyed leisure. Tensions between Turgenev and other novelists were added to the tensions with the young men who had taken over *The Contemporary*. Things were no better between him and the older radical exiles. Bakunin and Herzen, Turgenev felt, were prematurely urging revolution (as the exiled Mazzini, twenty-five years earlier, had almost cost young Garibaldi his life by sending him to join a revolt that never happened). All these soured relationships—along with the chaos that followed the emancipation of the serfs in 1861—helped lay the groundwork for the storm that broke in 1862 over his next and greatest novel. It could be said that the new man awaited in *On the Eve* finally appears in *Fathers and Sons*—not looking quite as expected.

The structure of *Fathers and Sons* can hardly be called a plot. Two friends, just out of university, spend a summer visiting their respective parents and the house of Anna Odintsova, a woman both men fall in love with. They travel back and forth and talk to each other and to others. After a few weeks the two young men separate to follow very different paths. Arcady Kirsanov marries the younger sister of Anna Odintsova and begins a conventional life like his father's. His friend Evgeny Bazarov (a doctor) dies suddenly as a result of an infected cut he suffers while performing an autopsy.

Their movements and conversations give us a view of the family and friends of these two young men. There is Arcady's father, Nikolai, the land-owning liberal who loves art and nature and who is completely ineffective in his well-intentioned efforts to manage his estate and improve the lot of the newly emancipated serfs. His brother, Pavel, Arcady's uncle, is his opposite, an old-style aristocrat who disdains all modern, democratic ideas and people. The lives of Bazarov's poorer, ex-military parents revolve around him, and their worshipful devotion drives him wild. Another of Arcady's uncles is a smug bureaucrat who has made a comfortable nest for himself by playing it safe. It is he who invites the two young men to a ball, causing the collision of passion between Bazarov and Anna Odintsova, both of whom fear the entrapment of love. Acquaintances of Arcady and Bazarov include a Slavophil who considers it a brave political act to wear "ethnic" clothes, and his friend, a "liberated" woman, avidly chasing the latest trends. Minor characters like these serve to show Turgenev's disdain for fashionable "progressive" pretensions of the upper classes. The most sympathetic women are both young—the sister of Odintsova, whom Arcady eventually marries, and the lower class mistress of his widowed father, whom the father will finally marry in a double wedding with his son.

In the center, of course, is Bazarov, whom Arcady proudly describes to his father, Nikolai, and his uncle, Pavel, as "a nihilist."

"How?" inquired Nikolai Petrovich, while Pavel Petrovich lifted a knife in the air with a small piece of butter on its tip, and remained motionless.

"He's a nihilist," repeated Arcady.

"A nihilist," said Nikolai Petrovich. "That's from the Latin, *nihil*, nothing, as far as I can judge; the word must mean a man who accepts nothing."

"Say, 'who respects nothing,'" put in Pavel Petrovich, and he set to work on the butter again.

"Who regards everything from the critical point of view," observed Arcady.

"Isn't that just the same thing?" inquired Pavel Petrovich.

"No, it's not the same thing. A nihilist is a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle may be enshrined in."

Bazarov believes only in what his five senses tell him. He describes himself—and all others—as even less autonomous than that. He insists that what human beings believe or disbelieve, like or dislike, is a matter of individual taste, by implication determined by biology. He distrusts fine words like honor, love, faith, charity, decency, goodness—words which often mask betrayal and cruelty. He dismisses not only fine words, but all the fine arts. The bristling aristocrat Pavel Petrovich demands of Bazarov,

"By what virtue do you act then?"

"We act by virtue of what we recognize as useful," observed Bazarov. "At the present time, negation is the most useful of all—and we deny—"

"Everything?"

"Everything!"

"What, not only art and poetry, but even . . . horrible to say . . ."

"Everything," repeated Bazarov, with indescribable composure.

Pavel Petrovich stared at him. He had not expected this; while Arcady fairly blushed with delight.

"Allow me, though," began Nikolai Petrovich. "You deny everything; or, speaking more precisely, you destroy everything. But one must construct too, you know."

"That's not our business now. The ground has to be cleared first."

Bazarov is careless in his dress, frank in his talk to the point of rudeness, and simmering with anger just beneath the surface, ready to boil over. He has a "cold smile" and seems, at heart, contemptuous of everyone from the "rotten little aristocrat" to the miserable peasant "who will cheat God himself." He has seen through the fine words of men like Rudin and looks unblinkingly at the reality around him. But, unlike the

Bulgarian Insarov in *On the Eve*, he has no revolution to which he can give his life. Bazarov is filled to bursting with a genius and an energy that have no channel to work through, no revolutionary barricades to die upon, no belief that such a death would really change anything and—worst of all—no conviction that a change would matter. In this he is very much like Turgenev—in fact, Turgenev later said he agreed with Bazarov in everything except for Bazarov's contempt for the arts.

Bazarov puzzles people (his parents), saddens them (Arcady's father), offends them (Arcady's uncle), or frightens them (Odintsova). Even Arcady, his friend and disciple, has already begun drifting away from Bazarov, Arcady having had his little radical fling before settling down. But the person mainly confounded by Bazarov is himself. His resistance to all the temptations of a comfortable or a self-deluding life is a constant, exhausting, losing battle, and his decisive defeat comes when he falls in love with Odintsova. He is faced with unacceptable alternatives: to surrender to his passion for a cold, controlling woman or to try to kill that passion. To make either "choice" would be to destroy his soul in order to save it. He confronts the hardest reality of all: there is no escape from the human condition. It is especially humiliating for Bazarov to confront the power of inner irrational forces on the ordinary, trite ground of romantic love, whose very reality he has denied.

Yet Bazarov is the only character in the novel we can respect. He is a competent doctor devoted to helping anyone who needs him. He is incorruptibly honest. He talks to peasants on an equal footing, and gains their trust. His attitude toward women is more realistic and charitable than that of the other men. (The one exception is his making a pass at the innocent young mistress of Arcady's father. But that seems to be an act of despair, guaranteed, he knows, to get him thrown out by his only friend.) Denied a chance to give his life to the change that will not come, he meets his death from a meaningless accident with all the heroism that his life gave him no opportunity to show.

Turgenev finished the novel during the summer of 1861. Immediately he began his usual vacillating. He sent the manuscript to friends, most of whom condemned it, nearly convincing him that he should destroy it. His new publisher Katkov, editor of *The Russian Herald*, accused him of trying to put Bazarov on a pedestal. Turgenev promised to rewrite and remove that false impression. Nevertheless, in writing to Katkov he defended Bazarov as "the real hero of our time. A fine hero and a fine time, you'll say. But that's how it is."

When some student riots occurred, Turgenev begged Katkov to delay publication. The book would be viewed suspiciously by the government, the censor wouldn't pass it, he needed more time to revise, and so on. Finally, at Katkov's threat to dump the book, Turgenev allowed him to publish it in February of 1862.

A few months later fires broke out in Petersburg. When Turgenev met an acquaintance on the street there, the man said, "See what *your* nihilists are doing! They're setting Petersburg on fire!" Not only had Turgenev "created" the nihilist, but the very word had been redefined to mean something like what we call "terrorist" today. In classic literary-lynching style, the word "nihilist," the character of Bazarov, and the author's intent had all been transformed, turned into the scapegoats for the fears of the literate minority—both left and right.

The accusation Turgenev met on the street in Petersburg grew into furious, thunderous reaction from all sides, for different reasons. To Turgenev's dismay, he

"received congratulations, almost kisses, from people belonging to a camp I loathed, from enemies," the conservatives, the gentry, the supporters of the status quo, who saw Bazarov as a negative portrait of a typical young trouble-maker. Other conservative readers noted Bazarov's winning qualities and accused Turgenev of encouraging the trouble-makers, worshipping this boor while creating wishy-washy or ridiculous gentry as his foils.

Of the people he respected, few understood what he was trying to do. One of these was, ironically, Dostoevsky, who suspended his seething resentment of Turgenev long enough to publish a laudatory review in the magazine he edited. He also wrote Turgenev a letter of praise. Turgenev answered gratefully that Dostoevsky had read as perceptively as if he had "entered my soul" when most other readers had so damned the book that he had begun to wonder if he hadn't "missed the mark" and wasted all his labor.

Liberals and radicals, those who wanted the same changes Turgenev wanted, those who had made his reputation in Russia, now turned on him in a kind of fury. They accused him, he said in a letter to a German critic, of making "an insulting caricature and a slanderous satire" in Bazarov. His letters to Russians insisting that Bazarov "is my favorite child" mollified no one.

Young Russian students studying in Europe wrote to him, calling him a traitor because he had not drawn Bazarov clearly as a hero and the conventional older generation clearly as villains. They accused him of betraying and defaming the young. Turgenev replied, "I did not want to sugar-coat him . . . though through that I would have had the young on my side immediately. I did not want to purchase popularity . . . yet if the reader does not come to love Bazarov with all his coarseness, heartlessness, pitiless dryness and sharpness . . . I am at fault and have not attained my aim."

Clearly, the subtlety, ambiguity, and realism that make up the strength of the book were wasted on most Russian readers. Readers? By this time people who'd never read the book had begun to join the uproar condemning the book they'd been TOLD Turgenev wrote. Lezhnyov's explanation of the appeal of Rudin's pointless rhetoric was, "Try to tell young people that you cannot give them the whole truth and they will not listen to you." He might have added that the opposite was also true. Turgenev had tried to portray wider, more complex, even contradictory truths of character, and his Russian readers, young and old, left and right, were even less willing to listen.

The literary left accused Turgenev of taking revenge on the young editors and critics now dominating *The Contemporary*. It is true that some of Bazarov's rudeness resembled the manner of Chernyshevsky and Dobrolubov toward Turgenev. But Turgenev hotly denied ever stooping to using his talent for petty, personal motives. He insisted that—except for Bazarov's dismissal of art—he (Turgenev) shared Bazarov's ideas. (If anyone is caricatured, it is Turgenev himself, in Arcady's father, with his love of music, his ideals, and his well-intentioned mismanagement of his estate.)

Only one of these young, radical critics, Pisarov, did write a long, thoughtful appreciation of the novel, accepting Bazarov as modeled on young radicals like himself while disagreeing with Turgenev on many points. But this even-handed reading from a young critic only seemed to stir up more anger.

Turgenev's exiled radical friends like Herzen accused him of "getting angry" with Bazarov and therefore finishing him off with typhus. Ironically, at this point, the czarist government summoned Turgenev back to Petersburg to answer suspicions that he was



conspiring with Herzen and Bakunin in London. When he successfully defended himself, his old radical friends said he must have betrayed or defamed them in some way in order to save his own skin. Nearly all liberals and radicals agreed that his novel had given conservatives a weapon against progressive movements, and—most distressing to Turgenev—the chortling conservatives thought so too. To top it off, the envious Dostoevsky found another pretext to attack Turgenev, and the imperious Tolstoy started another, quite unrelated, quarrel with him. It was as if Turgenev's mild, placating manner made both of these passionate, positive men determined to provoke him. No doubt pure competition played a big role, both of these two slightly younger writers avid to replace Turgenev as Russia's Foremost Author.

Besieged at home, he extended his frequent stays in France and Germany, returning to Russia only for short visits. The chaotic political climate in Russia was becoming more dangerous for him. If he answered the continuing attacks from the left or right, he would sooner or later say something that would give the ever watchful czarist police reason to arrest him. He could then be prosecuted more effectively than the last time, since he now had virtually no supporters. The most famous writer in Russia had become the most hated there. Old friends no longer spoke to him, young people attacked and insulted him, and the smug friendliness of the right-wing gentry sickened him. Another reason for his taking up residence in Europe inspired sarcastic attacks from his enemies and amused pity among his few friends—his attachment to Pauline Viardot. This relationship now offered him a much needed shelter.

Pauline had just retired from the stage and settled with her family in Baden. Instead of living as a lone exile in a foreign country, Turgenev was taken into the artistic Viardot family. With Pauline and Louis, their four children, and his own daughter, he could enjoy the beloved music missing at Spasskoye, artistic discussion rising above the gossip in Russia, and the harmonious family life he had never known. And he had a new friend, Gustave Flaubert, "the man I loved most in the world." The two writers agreed in most of their attitudes toward life and art. The big exception was women. To the misogynist Flaubert, love meant sex. Turgenev's view of women as objects of almost sacred, ennobling devotion only amused Flaubert.

Turgenev worried about settling outside of Russia. "I understand very well that my remaining abroad hurts my literary work, hurts it so much that it may put an end to it; but this cannot be changed. Every day I see more clearly that torn away from one's native soil one cannot keep on writing. It is time for me to retire."

Yet, as always when he announced he was through, he went on writing. His next novel shows that he could write about a setting outside Russia. But it also shows the suffering and anger that festered in him as a result of the attacks on him. Some writers are empowered by a sense of wounded rage; Turgenev was not one of them. Knocked off course by the attacks, he detoured away from his gentle, ambivalent strength. *Smoke* (1867) splits into two parts, each of them an exposure of and response to a deep wound. The first part is a heavy-handed satire on Russian tourists (many of them, at the time, recognizable as real people) in Baden—their pretentious dress and behavior, their ridiculous and vulgar manners. Thirty-year-old Litvinov observes them, while his older countryman Potugin comments, at length, issuing tirades against Russians at home and abroad, condemning everything from their intelligence to their honor to—worst of all—their hopeless, slavish craving for a "master . . . why we become slaves is a mystery, but

such, it seems, is our nature." Most of Potugin's long speeches come directly from letters Turgenev had written to Herzen. The writing is not bad, of course—it is, after all, Turgenev—but he draws his stupid Russian tourists with overly broad strokes and then makes derogatory speeches about them.

Suddenly, among these despicable examples of the Russian gentry, Litvinov sees Irena, a woman he had once loved desperately, and who had jilted him for a rich man. The book suddenly changes and becomes an account of Litvinov's relapse into hopeless love. He jilts his admirable fiancée, but the temptress Irena refuses to leave her opulent life, urging him, "Soon we shall be returning to Petersburg; come there, live there, we shall find you an occupation . . . only live near me, only love me as I am . . ." Litvinov tells himself, "Evidently you don't fall in love twice. Another life has entered into yours, you have let it in—and never shall you rid yourself of that poison until the end." Then the author comments, "Positive minds like Litvinov's should not be carried away by passion; it violates the very meaning of their life. But nature does not concern herself with logic, with our human logic; she has her own, which we do not understand and do not recognize until it passes over us, like a wheel."

Litvinov, like Bazarov, is unwillingly overwhelmed by the "poison" of love. Like Bazarov, he resists, flees, but eventually comes to a happier end. After hard work and penitence, he returns gratefully to his fiancée. The ending is conventionally "happy," but not nearly so interesting as the way Turgenev resolved his hopeless, lifelong passion for Pauline. Of course, Pauline Viardot was no empty-minded siren like Irena (said to be an obvious portrait of a well-known Russian woman). Pauline was a famous artist, like Turgenev, and she filled her family home not with smug, overdressed, overfed gentry, but with exciting artists and thinkers. But in this part of the book Turgenev shows a bit of resentment he might occasionally have felt in his position with the Viardots—not a home wrecker, but a hanger-on, living "on the edge of another man's nest."

*Smoke* only doubled the hostility against Turgenev in Russia. It was condemned as both immoral and unpatriotic. Dostoevsky, his spite mixed with his complicated efforts to use Turgenev to advance his own interests, declared war on him. He published a letter in which he "quoted" Turgenev abjectly praising Germans while saying hateful things about Russians. Turgenev, who made no public answer, wrote to a friend that he had decided to treat Dostoevsky as an unbalanced mind and to cut off further contact with him. "My novel has roused religious people, Slavophiles and patriots in Russian against me . . . Everybody is cursing me."

His only public defense was an essay first printed in the 1869 edition of Turgenev's *Literary Reminiscences*. "Apropos of *Fathers and Sons*," reviewed the gestation, writing, and reaction to the novel. "I was sea-bathing at Ventnor, a small town on the Isle of Wight—it was in August, 1860—when the first idea occurred to me of *Fathers and Sons*, the novel which deprived me, forever I believe, of the good opinion of the Russian younger generation."

He goes on to describe how a young doctor he met became the model for Bazarov. He speculates that, "The cause of all the misunderstandings, the whole, so to speak 'trouble,' arose from the fact that the Bazarov type created by me has not yet had time to go through the gradual phases through which literary types usually go . . . he had not been through a period of idealization and sympathetic starry-eyed adoration. At the very moment the new man—Bazarov—appeared, the author took up a critical, objective

attitude towards him. That confused many people . . . " He quotes foreign critics, who found it "utterly incomprehensible" that Bazarov should have been viewed as offensive to young Russians. He points out the contradictory nature of the attacks on him, the confusion over the word "nihilist" which "was taken advantage of by a great many people who were only waiting for an excuse, a pretext, to put a stop to the movement which had taken possession of Russian society . . . it was transformed into a means of denunciation, unhesitating condemnation and almost a brand of infamy. A shadow fell over my name. I do not deceive myself; I know that shadow will not disappear."

His explanation and defense mollified no one. He probably didn't help matters by adding a gentle reproach of the careless or lazy reader. "The reader always feels ill at ease . . . if an author treats his imaginary character like a living person, that is to say, if he sees and displays his good as well as his bad sides, and, above all, if he does not show unmistakable signs of sympathy or antipathy for his own child. The reader feels like getting angry; he is asked not to follow a well beaten path, but to tread his own path. 'Why should I take the trouble? Books exist for entertainment and not for racking one's brains.'"

He concluded the article, of course, by writing that he was "laying down his pen." He blamed his distance from Russia. "The talent Nature gave me is not lessened, but I have nothing to apply it to." Yet he kept in touch by his visits to Russia and by encouraging newly exiled Russians—with all their needs—to visit him.

In 1870, the Franco-Prussian war drove the Viardot family out of Baden. They eventually settled in Paris, Turgenev with them. During this period he wrote the novella *Torrents of Spring*, (1872) a nonpolitical love story, with his usual melancholy ending, and some lightly satirical portraits of his once-admired Germans—whose darker side he had seen revealed in the war. *Torrents of Spring* may have read like a romantic crowd pleaser in 1872, but today it reads a bit like a comic take-off on the agonized obsessive-versus-pure love stories in *A Nest of the Gentry*, *Smoke*, and *Fathers and Sons*. Perhaps this subtly ironic tone—for Turgenev, almost hilarious—is what made Flaubert like this novella so much. As for Turgenev, as soon as he finished it, he hated it, as usual. He may have seen it as a potboiler written to placate Russians, who, for a change, liked it.

Turgenev went on writing short stories, making short visits to Russia every year or so. Then in 1874 he wrote to Flaubert from Russia, saying he now had the material he needed for his big novel.

In *Virgin Soil* (1877) a group of young, privileged idealists conspires to go out to the peasants, intending to propagandize them and incite them to revolution. They are acting in accordance with what was now being urged by exiled writers like Bakunin, from whom Turgenev had withdrawn completely. He knew that it was not himself but Bakunin who was out of touch with Russian reality, urging high-risk, almost comically futile actions like dressing as peasants and going out "to the people." Turgenev lovingly creates very attractive young idealists. Then he shows how totally ignorant they are about the lives, hopes, even thoughts of peasants, how hopeless the methods of the young idealists to effect change, how premature their expectations. The most idealistic young man among them is driven to suicide.

The one realistic ally of these young rebels, Solomin, is a practical, competent factory manager who is trying to implement slow changes in the lives of workers. He and one brave young woman escape the police sweep that captures the others, and go off to

start a cooperative industry in a far province. The epigraph Turgenev provided for the opening of the book was, "Virgin Soil should be turned up not by a harrow skimming over the surface, but by a plough biting deep into the earth,'—From the Note-book of a farmer."

*Virgin Soil* is Turgenev's longest novel and most craftily plotted. Its only real flaw is the character of Solomin. He is a bit too idealized as the practical man in for the long haul—what Turgenev wanted his countrymen to be—and Turgenev was never good at creating a believable male of consistent virtue. Yet this complex book proves that there had been no falling off of the author's powers. Its plot is strong, and its many diverse characters are masterfully drawn. If it lacks the power of *Fathers and Sons*, that is probably because it lacks the author ambivalence of Turgenev's masterpiece. *Virgin Soil* is based on an idea about what constitutes effective change. *Fathers and Sons* grew out of a vague perception, an observation of people, a reality glimpsed yet not nailed down by the part of the mind that conceives intellectual ideas. Hence, it is more open, more fluid. What we call Turgenev's ambivalence is for him his greatest strength, the strength of open-minded attention, not judgment.

The first part of *Virgin Soil* went smoothly to publication in a Russian magazine, *The Herald of Europe*; but the second half barely made it past the censor. Conservatives were furious at the young characters, at the open distaste shown for the gentry by their own offspring. And, of course, liberal and left-wing critics pounced on it too, accusing Turgenev yet again of maligning radical youth and of being totally out of touch with Russia. His intent had been to make himself clear, to show that he believed the young radicals were fine people—the only thing wrong with them was the impractical tactics they were being urged to pursue. But this clarification was no more welcome than his complex portrait of Bazarov had been.

Then, barely a month after publication, czarist police made a mass arrest of fifty young conspirators—many of them women, just as Turgenev had shown in his novel. It would seem that Turgenev had the last word—he had proven that he was not out of touch, had used his powers of observation and intuition well during his short visits home. But no. Now the conservatives accused Turgenev of being, not out of touch, but in league with the conspirators, hence knowing their plans. The Left simply went on denouncing him.

Turgenev was thoroughly disheartened and, as he often did, began to agree with the reviewers. The book was a fiasco. "There has been something tragic about the fate of every Russian writer who has been at all prominent; with me it is absenteeism . . . the influence of which is incontestably manifest in my last—I mean last—work."

When the news of the arrests of the young rebels hit the papers, it spread all over the western world. Turgenev was hailed as a prophet in Europe and in the United States. Everyone bought the book, not only for the story, but to learn what was behind recent events in Russia. Nevertheless Turgenev remained depressed by the attitude of Russians toward him. In 1878, a year after publication of *Virgin Soil*, his brother died. Turgenev went back to Russia to settle his brother's affairs—and he went apprehensively.

He was in for a pleasant surprise. The young leftists who began the attacks on him fifteen years before were no longer The Young. A new generation of Russian students cheered him and his books. Others, despite their feelings about one book or another, recognized him as the grand old man of Russian letters. Tolstoy contacted him to patch

up their old quarrel. He was invited to speak at the Pushkin Festival, and when a wreath was laid on the tombstone of Pushkin, a poet picked it up and held it over Turgenev's head—to deafening cheers.

What did this gesture mean? Was it no more than respect for an old man who had put Russian literature on the map? Or did the members of this new generation believe that unlike Bazarov, they would not be rebels without a cause, that finally there would be something worth fighting for? that they truly were on the brink of change? If so, their hope was as vain as that of the previous generation. They themselves would be old men before the revolution of 1917 came.

For the next three years, Turgenev enjoyed their adulation, often in tears at public events. Then he fell ill with the cancer that slowly and painfully killed him in 1883. He died at the Viardot home in Paris, writing almost to the end, dictating to Pauline when he could no longer hold a pen.

All the honors, even death itself, could not erase the charge of fomenting violence that haunted his reputation. A decade after his death Oscar Wilde—as usual more interested in wit than in facts—declared Turgenev's work proof that "life imitates art," because Turgenev had "invented the nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in."

Wilde probably never bothered to read *Fathers and Sons* but many others did and do, throughout the world, because as the years go by, this prophetic book becomes more and more relevant. During the years of the Soviet Union, Russian critics continued to argue about the meaning of Turgenev's perceptions: Was he or was he not blinded by his own class interests? Did he or did he not defame young revolutionaries? Is Bazarov the first Bolshevik? Throughout Europe and the United States, the questions have changed with the times: is Bazarov the "angry young man" of post-war England? the "rebel without a cause" or "beatnik" of the 1950s? the American Black Power rebel of the 1960s ridiculing the non-violent protest of his elders? the 1960s New Left youth determined not to trust "anyone over thirty"? the young feminist of the 1970s, rejecting her devoted mother as a model for her own life? Yes, there is a bit of Bazarov in all these "in your face" challengers of accepted ideas.

But not in those few who joined groups like the Weather Underground or the Symbionese Liberation Army (USA), or the Red Brigades (Italy) or the Tupamaros (Uruguay) or Al Qaeda. The fiercely autonomous Bazarov would not challenge all orthodoxies simply to swallow a new one. Bazarov embodied unrelenting consciousness of deceit, self-deceit, and cruelty, in all forms, from all sources. We can bear only brief flashes of this unflinching consciousness. Yet it is what distinguishes us from the other animals. Like him or not, we must love Bazarov; he is our humanity.

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