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Image of nihilist in Fathers and Sons

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Abstract: Concept of Nihilism is not new to human society. More than two thousand years ago, philosophers identified these ideas within religious philosophy. Modern understanding of nihilism became popular mainly after Turgenev's novel 'Father and Sons'. The period in which this novel was written is particularly important in Russian history. This period of revolutionary change brought many political and social reforms in Russia, which are very well represented in the novels of that time. Rise of Raznochintsy (the new middle class of 19th c.) was a major event of that time. The 'new men' of the 1860s or the 'Nihilists' were representatives of this Raznochintsy class. This period also saw a major conflict between the old and new generations of society. Turgenev himself faced a similar type of conflict in his professional life as he depicted in his novel 'Fathers and Sons'.

Keywords: Nihilism, Raznochintsy, Turgenev, Bazarov, Nihilist, Fathers and Sons

Introduction

The concept of 'Nihilism' should not be considered a thing of the past. It isn't only the idea of a character in Turgenev's well-known book "Fathers and Sons"; in fact, it still holds true today. In contemporary culture, nihilism has become a popular ideology especially among youth. This is largely due to complex living conditions, like social tension, economic troubles, moral and psychological instability of a young person in society. However, one should not forget the historical reasons in Russia during the second half of the XIX century: centuries-old serfdom, autocracy, government control etc., which constantly reproduced and multiplied the idea of nihilism.

Nihilistic attitudes (not necessarily in the political sense that many people interpret it) initially appeared as a fundamental component of Buddhist

and Hindu philosophy, which acknowledged the "meaninglessness" of existence, millennia ago. Human existence, according to this philosophical point of view, is a series of sufferings, and human salvation is the escape from life and suffering. The term appeared in many different contexts. This term was used by various philosophers, and each interpreted it differently. The main purpose of this article is to examine nihilism as a phenomenon that occurred in 19th-century Russia and its effects on the Russian intelligentsia's consciousness.

First popular Nihilist in Russian Literature

If we mention nihilists in Russian literature, it is impossible to not to talk about Yevgeny Bazarov, the main character of the Turgenev's novel 'Fathers and Sons'. In this article, we have made an attempt to analyze the image of Yevgeny Bazarov from various aspects. Turgenev worked on the book 'Fathers and Sons' between the months of August 1860 and August 1861. During this time, the question of "fathers" and "sons" was important, not just from a political standpoint but also in a far larger sense.

Various characters appear before the reader in the novel: the Kirsanov brothers (Nikolai Petrovich and Pavel Petrovich), belonging to the camp of 'fathers', the son of Nikolai Kirsanov - Arkady (who, however, ultimately ends up in 'fathers' camp, despite the initial imitation of Bazarov and admiration for his ideas), the widow Anna Odintsova, who in general can hardly be attributed to one camp or another, her sister Katya, with whom Arkady gradually became close. Turgenev wrote the following for Bazarov: "at the basis of the chief character, Bazarov, there lay the personality of a young provincial doctor who had much impressed me. (He died shortly before 1860.) In this remarkable man were embodied - in my eye- *that scarcely conceived, still fermenting principle which later received the name of nihilism.* (Freeborn, 1973)

Bazarov in relations with the society

Bazarov has the nature of an activist and a fighter, which distinguishes him from the noble heroes. He acquired knowledge in the field of natural sciences. He developed confidence in himself, relying only on his own mind and energy. Bazarov puts himself in opposition to other people. He has no affection for anyone, including his parents, and finds neither pity nor sentiments for them. This is where Bazarov's sharpness and unceremonious tone come from. The relationship between a man and a woman, according to Bazarov, is reduced exclusively to physiology.

Visiting the Kirsanov's family, Bazarov tries to pay little attention to Pavel Petrovich and Nikolai Petrovich and spends most of his time in his scientific work. Treatment of Nikolai Petrovich towards Bazarov is like a good-natured old man, an old romantic. Nikolai Petrovich and Bazarov have little in common: they are representatives of different generations, and their views do not have anything in common, the heroes do not enter into either friendly or hostile relations. The main reason for this is Nikolai Petrovich's peacefulness and non-conflicting nature. Bazarov's main opponent in disputes is Pavel Kirsanov, a bitter and passionate man. Pavel Kirsanov has little resemblance to his brother and nephew: he does not succumb to other people's influence and hates those whose opinions differ from own. Pavel Petrovich, an aristocrat, dandy, hated Bazarov from the very first meeting. Bazarov is also unfriendly to him: he is critical of Pavel Petrovich for his lordship and aristocracy. The passionate nature of Bazarov is visible to everyone, and Pavel Petrovich (perhaps only he) is able to call Eugene into a long meaningful conversation. Bazarov once kissed Fenichka, and Pavel Petrovich, who, as it turned out, was not indifferent to Fenechka, became a witness of this incidence. This was the last straw for Pavel Petrovich, after which he challenged Bazarov to a duel. It should be noted that Bazarov, having agreed to a duel, gave up his principles. The duel comes out ridiculous: Bazarov, wounded Pavel Petrovich, but assists his opponent.

Bazarov looks at Arkady as if he was a child. Arkady is an enthusiastic young man, who has subtle feelings for the beauty of nature, art, gets easily influenced by people and just as easily carried away by them. It would be wrong to say that Arkady has a strong character, but he is certainly a harmonious person. In contrast to Bazarov, there is no aggression or harshness in him, although he displays very good qualities of the mind. Nevertheless, Arkady is a meek person, and there is no originality in him. Arkady is a devoted (up to a certain point in the novel) student of Bazarov, constantly trying to match his teacher. He is presented in the novel as a dependent character. During the course of the novel, Arkady's fondness towards art, which his friend denies, is evident. Y. V. Lebedev, popular Russian literary critic and writer, noted: Arkady, in the eyes of the democrat Bazarov, is soft and liberal. The definition is very precise: there is lordship in the character of Arkady. But Bazarov does not want to accept and recognize what is hidden, in addition to the lordship, in the depths of his soul. Indeed, both Arkady's kindness and Nikolai Petrovich's dovish meekness are also a consequence of the artistic talent of their natures, i.e. poetically

melodious, and sensitivity to music and poetry. Turgenev considers these qualities not specifically lordly, but deeply Russian. At a certain point, the relationship between Bazarov and Kirsanov acquires certain troubles; they have disagreements. And this shouldn't surprise the reader, as already at those moments when we are just beginning to recognize the nature of Arkady, it becomes clear that they are people of different nature and, therefore, the conflict is quite natural and inevitable. One of the key characters in the novel is Anna Sergeevna Odintsova, a woman who managed to melt Bazarov's heart. She does not look like traditional Turgenev heroines, because such a type could not fascinate Bazarov. It surprisingly combines aristocratic origin and worldly experience. Bazarov was conquered by Madame Odintsova's sharp, lively mind, combined with her refined femininity. If it were not for this meeting, the reader would probably not have had the opportunity to fully see and unravel the image of Yevgeny Bazarov. Bazarov is quite clearly aware that there is almost no hope for reciprocity of feelings. According to Bazarov's logic and worldview, he should have pulled himself together and left, forever forgetting about this woman. But Bazarov, with his logical, rational attitudes, unexpectedly discovers something truly human in himself: the desire for happiness burns too strongly in him. The novel contains a scene in which Anna Sergeevna tries to start a conversation with Yevgeny about happiness, as if pulling a confession out of him, and when he confesses his feelings to her and hugs her, she jumps back in fright. Presumably, this event broke Bazarov: after leaving Madame Odintsova, he became irritated. He is somehow angry from this failure, he is annoyed to think that happiness has beckoned him and passed by, and it is annoying to feel that this event makes an unpleasant impression on him. We remember that nihilism is an ideology that implies a complete rejection of many human weaknesses and a firm adherence to principles. In this sense, Bazarov can hardly be called unambiguously a nihilist; often he violates his own principles. Being much closer to the common people than the noble heroes, Bazarov still remains a gentleman for the peasant.

The novel was created at a time when nihilistic ideas were not fully developed. In the novel, there is not a single character with whom Bazarov could get along and feel comfortable. Perhaps nihilism is a kind of mask; this is how Bazarov calls his views, his aspirations, and his dissimilarity to other people.

Nihilist hero of Turgenev: Bazarov

In the 1850s, government reforms along with abolition of serfdom divided Russian educated society into three camps: conservative nobles who opposed any changes; 2) noble liberals (Western liberals) who supported the policy of then Tsar Alexander II; 3) young radicals, who demanded the end of autocracy. Most of these young radicals were from Raznochintsy (the new middle class of 19th c.) class, who didn't believe in Tsar's reforms and were against conservatives and liberals.

Turgenev himself was inspired by western ideas and after completing university left for Germany in 1838. While in Berlin he attended lectures on Hegelianism and became interested in German idealism. Turgenev was very much impressed by Western European values. The young student came to the conclusion that only the blend of universal culture can bring Russia out of the darkness in which it is immersed. In this sense, he became a convinced Westerner. As for his attitude towards young radicals, it was quite complicated. In the 1850s, he became quite familiar with the young people who later became ideological leaders of young radicals-raznochintsy; N. G. Chernyshevsky and N. A. Dobrolyubov. All three collaborated in Nekrasov's journal 'Sovremennik'.

Turgenev believed that Russia could progress only by the integration of best of Russian people be it liberal or radical. He wanted cooperation between noble liberals, with their intelligence, education and the high ideal of European culture, and young raznochintsy, with their energy and desire to change the socio-political climate of Russia. Contrary to him, radicals like Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky believed in the struggle against nobles and aristocratic culture. Such a radical position of young raznochintsy did not suit Turgenev, as it seemed to him going against the cultural norms of European civilization.

While working on the novel 'Fathers and Sons', Turgenev experienced repeated conflict with people who were important to him (the editorial Board of Sovremennik). Turgenev believed in uniting all progressive-minded people regardless of their social status and ideologies. Turgenev tried to organize the people against serfdom. He sent a letter to the authorities about the publication of the journal "Khozyaystvennyy ukazatel" (economic indicator), trying to convince the government that the Nobility was not ready for the emancipation reforms, as they do not have all the skills for independent farming. But unfortunately, no one agreed with him, and the idea of publication of this journal was not implemented. Creation of a society for the promotion of primary

education was another project of the writer which also did not receive support and was not implemented. Turgenev also realized a huge gap among the people: he started a farm, freed his serfs, and started cultivating land through freelance labor, but was never satisfied with what he had done because the reaction and behavior of the people were not cooperative. The peasants sometimes blocked the master's path, sometimes led a herd of horses into the master's garden and threatened anyone who dared to drive them out. Contempt and anger were often felt between serfs and their masters.

Pisarev saw the great merit of Turgenev in that. Despite his views, the Turgenev was able to reflect the historical truth, saw in the 'Bazarov' the leading force of Russia. It is also interesting that the writer, creating the image of a Democrat-Raznochinets Bazarov, by his own, felt sympathy for the hero. Turgenev wrote: "If the reader does not love Bazarov with all his rudeness, heartlessness, ruthless dryness and sharpness - if he does not love him, I repeat - I am to blame, and I have not achieved my goal". It should be noted that the very Russian reality of that era required the prominence of the figure of raznochinets, and a true image of life was the main artistic principle of Turgenev, who in the article about 'Fathers and Sons' wrote the following: "to accurately and strongly reproduce the truth, the reality of life, is the highest happiness for a writer, even if this truth does not coincide with his own sympathies". Dmitriy Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy in book 'Sketch of the work of Turgenev' divided artistic creativity into subjective and objective, saying that it is the author's desire to reproduce such types and characters that are alien to the artist or completely opposite to him. The literary critic spoke about the author of 'Fathers and Sons' as he is the greatest representative of subjective creativity is Turgenev.

In the novel, there is no such character that would have the right to trial Bazarov. Pavel Petrovich, although in opposition to Eugene, is not his judge. In this regard, we dare to assume that a kind of trial of Bazarov was performed by Turgenev himself. By 'killing' his hero, he showed that the time for the implementation of Bazarov's ideas has not yet come. Turgenev's certain sympathy for his hero-raznochinets and the desire to justify him does not mean that the writer believed in Bazarov's 'victory'. Turgenev casts a tragic shadow on his character and considers the hero doomed to death. Bazarov's death, according to the plot, is accidental and at the same time heroic (opening the corpse of the deceased from typhus, he becomes infected himself). The writer did not reveal the

prospects of Bazarov's tomorrow and left him on the threshold of the future because the main thing before us is not the hero of the future, but the figure of the present.

Here we consider it proper to mention the assessment of M. A. Antonovich, who saw in the novel 'Fathers and Sons' exclusively liberal views of the author and his polemic with revolutionary democracy. The critic assessed the work as a gross reactionary lampoon directed against the young democratic generation. Antonovich writes in his article 'The Asmodeus of our time' (1862), that he saw in the novel a reconciliation of Turgenev's personal accounts with representatives of the younger generation. He writes that Turgenev despises and hates his main character from the bottom of his heart, still he considered Bazarov a bold and self-confident man.

Turgenev was upset that Bazarov's character was called a caricature, although it is rather tragic. The writer's annoyance at this is quite fair: there is absolutely no caricature in Bazarov. Everything that happens to the hero can cause the reader to sympathize with him. Bazarov's death is a final chord in the creation of a tragic image. As some might have assumed; Pavel Petrovich, it would seem, a character closer to Turgenev, also dies, but not physically, but spiritually. Probably, Turgenev wanted to show that both sides - the radical (Bazarov) and the liberal (Pavel Petrovich) - did not unite (which the writer himself wanted in life) and, subsequently, turned out to be unviable.

Having conducted a fairly detailed analysis of the image of Bazarov and the circumstances under which the novel 'Fathers and Sons' was written, it can be noted that Bazarov's detachment from other characters, his loneliness, first of all, shows a certain intermediate social status of *raznochintsy*, and there is no unity with either the class of nobles or the common people. To some extent, this also refers to the fact that Turgenev himself, during the years of preparation for the peasant reform, failed to enlist the support of either the intelligentsia or the people.

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