

# Fathers and Sons Study Guide

## Fathers and Sons by Ivan Turgenev

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# Contents

<a href="#">Fathers and Sons Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Introduction.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Author Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1, 2 and 3.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 8 and 9.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 20 and 21.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 22, 23 and 24.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 25 and 26.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 27 and 28.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Historical Context.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">Critical Overview.....</a>	<a href="#">43</a>
<a href="#">Criticism.....</a>	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">Critical Essay #1.....</a>	<a href="#">46</a>
<a href="#">Critical Essay #2.....</a>	<a href="#">49</a>
<a href="#">Critical Essay #3.....</a>	<a href="#">60</a>
<a href="#">Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">66</a>



[Topics for Further Study..... 67](#)

[Compare and Contrast..... 68](#)

[What Do I Read Next?..... 69](#)

[Further Study..... 70](#)

[Bibliography..... 72](#)

[Copyright Information..... 74](#)



# Introduction

Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* was originally published in 1862 in the Russian magazine, *Russkii vestnik* (*The Russian Herald*), under the title, *Ottsy i deti*, and is also known as *Fathers and Children* in some translations. Even before its publication, the novel ignited controversy. The generation gap between the fathers and sons in the story neatly symbolized the current political debates between the older reactionaries and the younger radicals. The character of Bazarov, a young radical who declares himself a "nihilist," somebody who accepts nothingness, particularly inflamed both sides. Although Turgenev claimed at one point that he meant the book to be a favorable depiction of the young radicals, this group viewed Bazarov as a spiteful caricature of them. Many of the older liberals did not understand the book and were also very upset at the influence that it had on the young radicals, who claimed the term "nihilist" for themselves, and used it in their violent protests.

Despite the initially scathing reviews, the book has stood the test of time, and many regard it as Turgenev's best. The book also represents the times, depicting the social unrest that was present in Russia just prior to the historic 1861 emancipation of the serfs—Russian slaves that were owned by the landed nobility—by Alexander II, as well as the various reforms that were in place at the time.



## Author Biography

Turgenev was born on October 28, 1818, in Orel, a provincial town in Russia. His mother, Varvara Petrovna, had inherited a large amount of land, and the estate of Spasskoe-Lutovinovo was the largest and most impressive of her holdings. It was here that Turgenev's family stayed for the first few years of the author's life. Although they left the estate in 1822 to travel through Western Europe for a year, and then moved to Moscow in 1824, Turgenev would always be attached to Spasskoe. Turgenev received his education through a series of formal schools and private tutors and was educated in many languages. In 1833, Turgenev's father petitioned Moscow University to waive the age requirement and let Turgenev take his entrance exams early, which he eventually did.

Turgenev was well-read as a child, and became interested in literature very early. His first publication was a poem, "Vecher," which he published in the 1838 issue of *Sovremennik (The Contemporary)*. In the same year, Turgenev left for Germany, where he stayed until 1841. During this time, he made friends with several other Russians and he continued to send his poetry back to Russia for publication. In 1843, when Turgenev was back in Russia, Turgenev's narrative poem, "Parasha," was published, and the author began to be noticed—so much so, in fact, that he never finished his dissertation for his degree, which would have allowed him to teach. The same year, Turgenev was appointed to a post in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which he left two years later to pursue his writing.

In 1845, Turgenev stepped up his literary efforts, taking part, along with other writers, in the publication of *Sovremennik*, which was under new management. In 1847, he returned to Berlin, although he continued to work on his writing and send selections back to *Sovremennik*. Turgenev returned to Russia in 1850, and the following year, he was imprisoned in St. Petersburg for trying to publish in Moscow an obituary of a fellow writer, Gogol, which had been banned by the St. Petersburg censors. Turgenev's jail time was not long, but he was sent into exile for what turned out to be a two-year term at his Spasskoe estate.

In 1856, Turgenev's first novel, *Rudin*, was published in *Sovremennik*, in two issues. In 1858, he published his short story, "Asia," in *Sovremennik*. The story was one of the first that marked Turgenev as a liberal from the 1840s, and it was this, along with other works, most notably *Fathers and Sons* in 1862, led to a break with *Sovremennik* and with the young radicals.

The novel depicts the problems inherent with the emancipation reforms that freed the Russian serfs. The backlash from the novel's reception discouraged Turgenev from pursuing any major works until 1865, when he began writing his fifth novel, *Dym*, which was published in 1867. Although he would eventually be overshadowed by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Turgenev was still the first Russian writer who was known worldwide. Turgenev died on August 22, 1883, in his chalet at Bougival.



# Plot Summary

## Chapters I-III

*Fathers and Sons* starts with Nikolai Kirsanov eagerly waiting at a posting station—a depot for horse carriages—for his son Arkady, who has just graduated from school. When Arkady arrives, however, his father is surprised to see that he has brought a friend, Bazarov, to stay with him at their farm. Bazarov is an older medical student who serves as Arkady's mentor. He is calm, cool, and dispassionate.

## Chapters IV-XI

They reach the farm where Arkady's uncle, Pavel Kirsanov, is happy to see him. Pavel does not care for Bazarov, however, and makes no effort to hide his distaste. Nikolai tries to bring up the subject of his mistress, Fenitchka, delicately, but Arkady charges off to see her, finding out in the process that he has a new baby brother. It does not take long before the two generations start clashing, mainly due to Bazarov's nihilistic ideas, a type of scientific materialism that advocates believing in nothing. These ideas, which Arkady mimics in their conversations, distress the older Kirsanovs, who realize that there is a large generation gap between them and the young men. Nikolai is sad, feeling his son slipping away from him, while Pavel is angry and gets into heated debates with Bazarov. After Nikolai and Pavel decline an invitation to go see their cousin in another provincial town, Bazarov and Arkady accept in their place.

## Chapters XII-XV

In the town they meet Matvy Ilyich Kolyazin, Nikolai's cousin, who is an important official. Like Pavel, Kolyazin does not like Bazarov, although he invites both young men to the Governor's Ball. On the road they run into Victor Sitnikov, another one of Bazarov's disciples, who convinces them to pay a visit to Evdoksya Kukshin. Bazarov finds her boring, but still drinks her champagne. Kukshin tells them they should meet Anna Odintsov, a rich young widow, at the Governor's Ball. At the ball Arkady meets Anna and instantly falls in love with her, but she treats him like a friend and asks about Bazarov. After the dance, Arkady lets Bazarov know that Anna is interested in meeting with him and they visit at her hotel. Bazarov is uncharacteristically nervous in her presence. Anna suggests they come see her at Nikolskoe, her country estate, which they do a few days later.

## Chapters XVI-XVIII

At Nikolskoe, Anna introduces the two young men to her sister Katya. Bazarov and Arkady stay at the estate for a fortnight, during which time Arkady slowly builds up a friendship with Katya, which starts to blossom into love and override his nihilism. In the



meantime Bazarov is in the throes of a passionate love for Anna, which he finally confesses to her at the end of his stay. However, even though she has been flirting with him, he is dismayed when she spurns his advance. Relations are awkward with all of them until Bazarov and Arkady leave shortly thereafter for Bazarov's parents' house.

## **Chapters XIX-XXII**

Bazarov's parents have not seen him for three years and are expecting a long stay. However, they smother him with affection, which makes him uncomfortable, and he and Arkady stay only three days, much to their dismay. They get on the road to go back to Maryino and pick up Bazarov's scientific instruments but on a whim, Arkady decides to have them go back to Nikolskoe. Anna is not expecting them, and does not seem pleased to see them. They quickly make an excuse, saying that they were not intending on staying and that they have just stopped in on their way to Maryino. Bazarov and Arkady surprise everyone at Maryino, who also were not expecting them back so soon. However, they are glad to see the two young men. Arkady is not long at home, however, before he finds out from his father that he has letters from Katya's mother, who used to write to Arkady's mother. He decides to use the letters as an excuse to visit Nikolskoe again, but this time, he is received warmly by Katya.

## **Chapter XXIII-XXIV**

While Arkady is at Nikolskoe, Bazarov busies himself with his scientific experiments at Maryino. He also starts to spend more time with Fenitchka, Nikolai's mistress, under the pretense of offering doctor's remedies to their child. One day, when he is alone with Fenitchka in the garden, he kisses her, and Pavel sees. Shortly thereafter, Pavel challenges him to a secret duel and Bazarov accepts. Bazarov is unharmed, but shoots Pavel in the leg, then bandages the wound for him and stays with him until another doctor comes to relieve him. Bazarov leaves.

## **Chapters XXV-XXVI**

Meanwhile Arkady is starting to express his feelings for Katya, but cannot quite tell her he loves her. Bazarov arrives and stays for a few days. Arkady again tries to express his love for Katya in the garden but is interrupted when they hear Bazarov and Anna walking by, talking about their own failed relationship. They leave and Arkady finally tells Katya he loves her. She returns the sentiment and shortly thereafter, Arkady asks Anna for her sister's hand in marriage. Bazarov leaves.

## **Chapter XXVII**

Bazarov's parents are overjoyed to see him, especially when he tells them that he will be there for six weeks. He is noticeably changed from his experiences. Although he tries to busy himself with his experiments, he finds himself getting more social, talking to



peasants, and begins to help his father, another doctor, with his patients. After a patient dies of typhus, Bazarov performs an autopsy, cutting himself in the process. The typhus infection quickly overcomes him, and he dies shortly thereafter. On his deathbed, he sends for Anna, who is with him when he collapses into his final unconscious state before death.

## Chapter XXVIII

Six months pass, and in January, both Arkady and his father marry their respective loves. Pavel leaves on the day of the wedding to seek his fortunes abroad. Turgenev addresses the reader, saying that he will give a short synopsis of how everybody is doing in the present. Anna gets married, but not out of love; instead, it is out of the same practical good sense that she has always followed. Arkady, his father, and their respective families live at Maryino, where Arkady is running the now-prosperous farm, while Nikolai helps to institute the upcoming emancipation reforms that will revolutionize Russian society. Pavel spends his time first in Moscow before settling in Dresden, Germany. Finally, Bazarov's parents weep at his grave often, mourning their lost son. Turgenev offers one final thought, saying that love is not hopeless, and that in the end, even Bazarov will have eternal reconciliation and life without end.





# Chapters 1, 2 and 3

## Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

*Fathers and Sons* is the age-old story of generations torn between the new people who want to eradicate the past in order to build anew and the older generation who wish only to preserve the past memories. The protagonist is a young doctor named Bazarov who is firmly entrenched in Russia's emerging nihilism movement in the mid 1850's.

As the novel begins Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov awaits the arrival of his son, Arkady, at the local posting station in May 1859. Arkady is returning home to his small Russian village having just graduated from the university. Nikolai is a man about forty years of age who owns property twelve miles south of the posting station where people meet travelers arriving and departing by horse and carriage.

Nikolai comes from a privileged background, his father having served as an army general in the war of 1812. His mother is quite the opposite, a refined woman who reveled in the finer things of life and maintains a respectable distance from her children, Nikolai and Pavel.

Nikolai had been home schooled until the age of fourteen when he was sent away to school and graduated from the same university from which his son Arkady has just graduated. Nikolai also returned home to the family farm and married a girl named Prepolovensky soon after the death of both his parents. Nikolai and Prepolovensky became the proud parents of Arkady, living happily on the farm until Prepolovensky's untimely death ten years into the marriage.

Nikolai's grief is immense, his hair is turning completely gray at once and he leads a solitary life, emerging only to take Arkady to the university in Petersburg. Now this man of forty years, who looks much older, stands and waits to welcome his returning son. Nikolai's servant, Piotr, keeps watch for the approaching carriage. Nikolai's thoughts are consumed with his precious wife and son until his reverie is interrupted by Piotr's call that the carriage is near.

Nikolai rushes to embrace Arkady who is overwhelmed by his father's response. Arkady has brought a friend, also a university graduate, named Bazarov who has come for a visit at Nikolai's farm. Bazarov's cool demeanor puts Nikolai slightly ill at ease, but the old man welcomes his son's friend warmly.

Soon Nikolai's carriage is loaded with the bags and passengers as it begins the twelve-mile journey to the farm. Father and son are seated together and have the opportunity to speak privately for a little while. Times have been hard in Russia, and Nikolai has not prospered as he used to, having divided his farm among the peasants who now refuse to pay their rent. The farm which is named Maryino has been nicknamed Poverty Farm by the peasants who find it extremely difficult to make a living here.



Nikolai has one more news item to share: the young girl named Fenitchka is living with Nikolai. Nikolai makes no excuses for the improper arrangement telling Arkady that severe moralists would frown on the arrangement but it can't be concealed. Nikolai is not too concerned with Arkady's reaction because the father has always had unusual ideas about the relationship between fathers and sons.

Nikolai offers to install Fenitchka in another bedroom for the sake of appearances given Bazarov's presence, but Arkady assures Nikolai that the move is not necessary. Arkady changes the subject and comments on the beautiful meadows and fresh air that remind him of his youth.

## Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

It is important to note the time period in which the author sets the story. In the mid 1850's Russia was undergoing much social reform related to the rule of Alexander II who came to power during the Crimean War. It came to Alexander's attention that Russia was considered to be extremely backward in social issues in relation to the rest of the world. Alexander was sympathetic to these causes and fought landowners to free their serfs and divide their properties. Even though the rule to free serfs is still a couple years away, Nikolai has already done so and his farm has been divided causing hard times for both Nikolai and the serfs who now own parcels of the land they once worked in servitude.

Nikolai has anticipated Arkady's return with relish but finds that his son, who cannot relate to what the social changes have done to his home and lifestyle, does not match his own enthusiasm. The initially strained relationship between father and son is made even more awkward with the introduction of Arkady's friend, Bazarov, who makes no attempts to ingratiate himself to Nikolai. Nikolai's revelation that Fenitchka now lives with Nikolai at the farm is one more element capable of dividing the formerly close relationship between Nikolai and Arkady.



# Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7

## Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 Summary

Only a young girl and a man of about sixty years meet the arrival of the carriage at the farm. Nikolai announces that supper will be served immediately and asks if Arkady and Bazarov would like to wash after the journey. Pavel Petrovitch Kirsanov, Nikolai's brother who has been living on the farm for five years, greets the young men. Pavel is dressed impeccably and conducts himself with a noble bearing due to his days of living in the city.

Dinner conversation is stilted due to Pavel's abrupt manners and disdain for any of the arts or culture of the old Russian society. When the two young men retire to their rooms, Bazarov makes fun of Pavel's dress and manicured hands. Arkady defends his uncle and asks Bazarov to show some respect for his uncle and promises to tell Bazarov all about Pavel very soon.

The next morning Bazarov is the first to awake and sets out on foot to explore the farm. Coming upon two boys, Bazarov asks them to find some frogs so that Bazarov can practice his medical skills. Bazarov continues to explore the property, finding it small and rundown.

In the house, Nikolai and Arkady spend a few moments alone together to get reacquainted. Arkady leaves the room to greet Fenitchka, and Nikolai collapses in a chair uncertain of his new relationship with his son. Arkady returns to Nikolai in a happy mood that he has met Fenitchka and also her baby. Arkady wishes that his father had told him the night before about his baby brother and embraces Nikolai.

Pavel enters the room questioning Arkady about Bazarov and his odd behaviors. Arkady reveals that Bazarov is a nihilist and cares little for anything but medicine and science. Soon after Bazarov returns from his morning expedition as the others are having their tea. Bazarov continues to nullify Pavel's views and comments, and soon Pavel leaves the room declaring that his own distance from city living must make him appear completely out of touch with new thinking.

Arkady reprimands Bazarov for being so rude to Pavel and begins to tell Pavel's story. Pavel had been raised in the same circumstances as Nikolai, but two brothers could not have been any more different from the other. While Nikolai was a quiet boy who shunned social activities, Pavel was a handsome young man with a love of parties who prided himself on the fact that he never spent a night at home.

Pavel's sophistication and dashing good looks made him a favorite with the young ladies, and his conquests were numerous. Then one evening Pavel met a Russian princess who changed the course of his life. The princess was married to a boring man



who did not enjoy his wife's love of parties and social outings. This left the princess unescorted to many functions and available for Pavel's attentions.

Before long, Pavel and the princess began an intimate affair, but the princess ultimately grew weary of Pavel's obsession with her and left Russia for a reprieve. Pavel followed the princess wherever she went, but the young woman did not return his affections. Eventually Pavel returned to Russia to live life as a victim of unrequited love.

A few years later, Pavel learned of the princess' death and moved to the country to be with Nikolai who had also recently lost his beloved wife. The two brothers are still very different in their nature, though they are alike in their grief for the women they have loved and lost.

## Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 Analysis

The author introduces some foreshadowing in this section as Nikolai waits for Arkady's discovery of the baby who is Arkady's half-brother. As the older man's thoughts stray, it occurs to Nikolai that in this moment he realizes the inevitable chasm of the future relations with his Arkady. Nikolai questions his own thinking and actions related to Arkady's homecoming, realizing that the groundwork has been laid for future discord.

The theme of nihilism is also introduced in this section with the identification of Bazarov as a nihilist, a person who rejects romantic and artistic pursuits in favor of scientific endeavors. Bazarov symbolizes the movement of young people and fresh socialist thinking emerging in Russia in opposition to the old regime of rigid class structures where the privileged classes had the luxury of idle pursuits while the lower classes starved.

Pavel represents the dying breed of Russian aristocracy and holds on to his previous lifestyle with his dress and impeccable manners and social skills. The conflict emerging between Pavel and Bazarov mirrors the changes taking place between the classes in Russia at this time.

The author introduces the element of irony by contrasting Nikolai and Pavel in their physical characteristics and pursuits. Nikolai is more of a student with an average look and demeanor while Pavel is a social creature that thrives on personal interactions and conquests. Both men suffer loss and grief at the same time and come together in their sadness that is the bond that unifies them as brothers in the end.

It is important for Arkady to explain Pavel's history to Bazarov so that Bazarov may find some sympathy in his heart for Pavel's sad life. Being a single man in his forties, Bazarov mourns the loss of his one great love and the fact that he has no children to carry on his name. Arkady asks for some compassion but Bazarov feels that Pavel has squandered his life in a social swirl and has no one but himself to blame for his plight. Again the author shows the contrast in the ways of thinking of the old Russia vs. the thinking of the nihilist movement represented by the character of Bazarov.



# Chapters 8 and 9

## Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Pavel has accompanied Nikolai to the bailiff's office this morning only to find the same story; there is not enough money to properly run the farm. Normally Pavel contributes money to Nikolai on such occasions but has none to give today and prefers to leave. Pavel wonders to himself why it is that Nikolai is unable to manage the farm operations properly but has no viable suggestions, as Pavel himself is not trained in these matters.

Upon returning to the farm, Pavel knocks on Fenitchka's door to request some green tea when the shopping is conducted in town. Fenitchka is awkward in Pavel's presence because of his haughty nature and the fact that he has rarely spoken to Fenitchka. Now to have Pavel in her own room is embarrassing. Pavel asks to see Fenitchka's baby and waits as the girl retreats to the other room to dress the child.

Pavel delights in seeing the baby, Mitya, and plays with the child to Fenitchka's discomfort. Soon Nikolai comes to the room and Pavel leaves. Nikolai wonders what has brought Pavel to Fenitchka's room so unexpectedly and remembers the details of Fenitchka's coming to live at the farm. Nikolai had stayed at a rooming house, which was kept in such meticulous fashion that Nikolai had hired the domestic woman for service at his own home.

The woman brought her then 17-year-old daughter, Fenitchka, who appealed to Nikolai. After the woman's death a short time later, Nikolai retained Fenitchka and the romantic affair began between the two of them. Nikolai is roused from his reverie and asks Fenitchka once more the circumstances that brought Pavel to her room.

Later that day, Bazarov also meets Fenitchka as he and Arkady walk the grounds and come upon Fenitchka and Mitya in an arbor. Bazarov is taken with Fenitchka and speaks to her kindly and inspects Mitya with his doctor's precision. Bazarov inquires about Fenitchka's own health and the young woman replies that she is well.

When they are alone again, Bazarov reveals his attraction to Fenitchka and Arkady reminds his friend of the young woman's relationship to Nikolai. Arkady would prefer that Nikolai marry the Fenitchka if they are to live together and Bazarov chides Arkady for being too prudish.

The two friends continue their walk and Bazarov comments on the state of disrepair into which the farm has fallen. It is clear that Nikolai is not a farmer at heart and the farm is failing despite the man's continuing efforts. At that time, the sounds of a violin waft over the fields and Bazarov is surprised to hear that the melodies are coming from the hands of Nikolai himself.



## Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

There is more foreshadowing in this section with both Pavel and Bazarov meeting and being smitten with Fenitchka. Nikolai senses that something is amiss with Pavel's going to Fenitchka's room, an action that is quite out of character for his brother. Nikolai's questioning of Fenitchka about Pavel's appearance belies his uncertainty of his own relationship with Fenitchka as well as Pavel's past behavior of conquests of pretty young women.

Arkady begins to tire of Bazarov's continual negative comments about Arkady's family and family farm. Somehow Arkady does not so easily adapt the nihilistic trends that are so popular in the university setting in reference to his own family. Arkady is pleased to see the scenery, which has meant so much to him in his boyhood, and revels in its early summer beauty. Bazarov feels that nature is "not a temple, but a workshop," a metaphor which begins the rift between the two friends.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Bazarov's presence at the farm is becoming less awkward among the servants who find a friend in the young doctor but the relations between Bazarov and the older men continue to cool. Nikolai overhears Bazarov lecturing Arkady on Nikolai's old ways of thinking and lack of progress on the farm. The comments spur Nikolai on his way home and do not ingratiate Bazarov to the old man.

Pavel, in particular, finds Bazarov to be a grating presence in the house and the rift in the relationship comes to near explosive levels one evening at dinner when Pavel challenges Bazarov's beliefs on the rotten nature of aristocrats. To Pavel, aristocracy represents a way of life that is noble and cultured, while Bazarov finds the aristocracy to represent a people who have long outlived their necessity to Russia.

Pavel counters that if people were to discard all the things that Bazarov derides - aristocracy, progress, principles and liberalism - they would be living outside the very definition of humanity. Arkady tries to come to Pavel's aid in the discussion to say that people have no right to yield to personal egoism, a statement that infuriates Bazarov for its philosophical nature.

Bazarov calls for the destruction of all policies and principles in order to build a new Russia that is more democratic. Pavel can endure this ridicule to his own beliefs no longer and ends the discussion. Arkady and Bazarov leave the dining room to dissect frogs, leaving Nikolai and Pavel to lament the audacity of the young men.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

The theme of a generation gap is more evident in this section as Nikolai shares his feelings of discomfort about Arkady who thinks his father to be behind the times, even removing Nikolai's book from his hands to replace it with another with more current thinking. Nikolai and Pavel come to verbal blows also in the continuing futility of trying to get the other person to understand his own point of view. Pavel yearns for his own past and stands resolutely on the side of maintaining the aristocracy while Bazarov feels that each element of Russian life needs to be destroyed so that it may be rebuilt properly. When Nikolai suggests that not everything should be destroyed, that one must construct too, Bazarov replies with the metaphor that building is not the business at the moment, that "the ground wants clearing first," likening the soil to the country itself.





# Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15

## Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 Summary

After dinner Nikolai walks around his farm reveling in the natural beauty of a summer night in the country and wonders how Arkady and Bazarov can reject these simple splendors. Nikolai encounters Pavel who is also out for an evening stroll and the two brothers commiserate on the ever-growing distance between themselves and the younger generation.

Inside the house Bazarov suggests that he and Arkady accept the invitation that has arrived from Arkady's cousin who is an official in a neighboring town. From there, Bazarov will proceed to his own home to visit his family whom he has not seen for three years. Arkady is saddened at the prospect of Bazarov not returning to the farm but agrees to make the trip to visit his cousin.

Arkady and Bazarov arrive at the office of Arkady's cousin, Matvy Ilyich Kolyazin, who greets the young men with enthusiasm. Kolyazin is pleased to show off the trappings of his government position to his guests and invites Arkady and Bazarov to the Governor's Ball, which is to be held in Kolyazin's honor. The young men agree to attend the affair and leave the office where they encounter Victor Sitnikov, one of Bazarov's friends, who invites them to go to the home of a friend, an intelligent woman named Evdoksya Kukshin.

Kukshin is a widow who remains in the country entertaining the locals and drinking champagne with abandon, and while Kukshin is very entertaining, Bazarov finds the woman boring and the young men leave the house later in the afternoon having had their fill of the woman's champagne.

The next evening, Arkady and Bazarov attend the Governor's Ball where they both meet Anna Odintsov, another rich widow whom Madame Kushkin had mentioned. Arkady is immediately smitten by Anna, who is several years older than he, and Bazarov acts accordingly. Bazarov is not put off by Anna's sophistication, however, and the two engage in a spirited discussion that leads to an invitation for Arkady and Bazarov to visit Anna at her hotel the next day.

The next morning Arkady and Bazarov visit with Anna and Arkady is pleased to see that the normally cool and aloof Bazarov is visibly unnerved in Anna's presence. Arkady is still smitten with Anna but it is clear that she prefers Bazarov. Nevertheless both young men accept Anna's invitation to visit her at her country home, Nikolskoe.

## Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 Analysis

Nikolai and Arkady's relationship will never be as it was before Arkady went to St. Petersburg to the university and the older man walks in melancholy mourning the loss of





the bond he had shared with his son. This is a climactic moment as Arkady is about to leave the farm for more adventures and even more education, events which will further separate father and son.

This generation gap symbolizes the furthering divide between the Russian aristocracy, the *fathers*, and the reformists, the *sons*, signified in the novel's title.

The author shows some flaws in Bazarov's stalwart nihilism as the young doctor is more than happy to partake of the hospitality offered to him yet can deride those at whose table he sits, as in the example at Nikolai's farm. Bazarov is also quick to make derogatory comments about Madame Kushkin all the while he is drinking her champagne and enjoying her hospitality.

For the first time in his life, Bazarov begins to feel the pangs of romantic love, which are normally out of line with nihilistic thinking. At first, Bazarov remarks that Anna has a fine form which he would like to see on an examining table which indicates his very clinical approach to life but soon even Bazarov cannot justify the inexplicable feelings that rise up in himself.



# Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19

## Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19 Summary

A few days later Arkady and Bazarov arrive at Nikolskoe prepared to spend a few days at Anna's gracious invitation. Anna introduces the young men to her younger sister, Katya; her aunt, a Russian Princess; and a neighbor, Porfiry Platonitch, who amuses the ladies with card games.

Bazarov is impressed that Anna's household runs with precision and admires how she redirects conversations that tend toward the romantic or unimportant. Arkady is still smitten with Anna but her doting on Bazarov reveals that Arkady has no chance at winning Anna's affections. Anna even sends Arkady to another room so that Katya may play the piano for his entertainment, a sign that even Arkady cannot dismiss as his being eliminated from contention for her heart.

At first Arkady is annoyed with the younger Katya who seems dark and petulant in comparison to the vibrant Anna but soon Arkady changes his mind and begins to develop a sincere affection for Katya. Soon Arkady was paired off with Katya while Bazarov spent time alone with Anna.

Anna has secretly fallen in love with Bazarov and is devastated to hear his plans to leave soon to visit his own family whom he has not seen in such a long time. Anna discreetly entertains Bazarov in her room and flirtations are exchanged but Bazarov deflects any attempts at commitment or attachment much to Anna's dismay. Bazarov leaves Anna's room and she sits in silence long after the maid has brought the evening tea. Bazarov walks the grounds for several hours before returning to his own room and Arkady is near tears thinking that Bazarov has spent all these evening hours with Anna with whom he cannot help but still be smitten.

The next day the tension during morning tea is heavy and finally Anna asks Bazarov to accompany her to her room for some promised education on a chemistry topic. Anna's intentions do not include the study of chemistry and she probes Bazarov for his feelings until he admits that he is madly in love with her. When Anna does not reciprocate, Bazarov leaves the room and sends a note to Anna asking whether he must leave immediately or if he may spend one more night and leave tomorrow. Anna responds that she does not know why Bazarov must leave so suddenly.

Later that evening at dinner, tension fills the dining room and Bazarov is reluctant to look at Anna although she blatantly looks at Bazarov several times. After dinner, Bazarov tells Anna that he will be leaving tomorrow morning because Anna does not love him and he feels to foolish to prolong his stay in her home. Anna declares that they will see each other again and Bazarov and Arkady leave for the home of Bazarov's parents the next morning.



## Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19 Analysis

The author devotes this section to building up to the irony of Bazarov in love. From the beginning of the story, Bazarov has proclaimed the futility of romantic notions so it is ironic when the young doctor falls in love with Anna. It is particularly ironic that Anna is also a woman who lives off the wealth of a dead husband whom she married for opportunity, not love. Normally Bazarov would deject this opportunistic behavior in another person but he is blinded by love and not able to see Anna for whom she really is.

It is not clear what purpose Anna has in her flirtatious behavior with Bazarov and then withdrawing her affections when he declares her intentions toward her. The author is making the point that Anna is of aristocratic background and, although she is attracted to Bazarov, there is no hope of a relationship with a poor country doctor that is probably Bazarov's destiny. Much to Bazarov's chagrin, he has been used and it is hard to tell if Bazarov feels more pain from the unrequited love or the fact that the divide between the aristocrats and the common people is still so great. This is the first time that Bazarov has felt the pain of rejection as it is normally he who passes judgment and ridicule.



# Chapters 20 and 21

## Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Bazarov and Arkady arrive at the home of Bazarov's father, Vassily, and mother, Arina. Vassily embraces his son warmly but it is Arina who is overwhelmed with emotion and cries openly and at length at the return of her son. It has been three years since the elder Bazarovs have seen their son and even though he has been expected, Bazarov had never committed to returning on any certain day.

Vassily welcomes Arkady and cautions him that the Bazarov household is not so grand as Arkady's home but Arkady is touched at the family's graciousness and feels quite at home with his accommodations in the modest house. Arina prepares a feast for the two young men who eat lustily at the woman's kitchen table.

Vassily is a retired army doctor and still serves the local village in a medical capacity although his remedies are most often in the form of potions made from herbs and other natural elements. Vassily tries to discuss some recent cases from the village with Bazarov but the young man is not interested.

Later on as the evening draws to a close, Vassily is anxious to discuss things with Bazarov but the young man is too tired to talk when Vassily visits his room that night. There is a feeling of uneasiness that comes over Vassily but he cannot explain what it is.

The next morning, Bazarov rises early to walk the woods, which is his customary routine. Arkady has a chance to talk with Vassily who is clearly in awe of Bazarov and feels sure that his son is destined for greatness. Arkady admits that Bazarov will most certainly be famous one day but cannot make the claim that the fame will be related to the medical profession. All the same, Vassily's pride in Bazarov is barely contained as he speaks of his only son.

Later that afternoon, Bazarov and Arkady have a heated discussion about the nature of human beings; Bazarov still claims only a clinical interest, possibly due to his recent encounter with Anna; while Arkady is warming up to the possibility that there is some value in nature and romance. Vassily, who announces dinner with a local priest as their guest, interrupts this heated discussion. Bazarov is not interested in any blessings from a religious man but secretly Vassily is glad that the priest has come.

Later that night Bazarov tells Vassily that he and Arkady will be leaving tomorrow. Vassily does not tell Arina so as to spare her a broken heart for one more night. The next morning the two young men leave the house with Bazarov promising to return soon.



## Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

An important literary technique is point of view, which means the perspective from which the story is told. This story is presented in the third person omniscient point of view where the narrator can understand the thoughts and actions of all the characters equally. The author also uses the technique of addressing the reader directly as he does in this section where he describes Arina's characteristics and says "Such women are not common nowadays. God knows whether we ought to rejoice!" This technique is used throughout the book and provides a bit of humor and lets the story unfold as if the reader is sitting in the author's company listening to the author relate it verbally with these little anecdotes.

The author introduces the priest to the story in an attempt to show the division of Russian people on the dependence on religion during this period of time. Vassily and Arina are very pleased that the priest has come to their home for dinner to meet Bazarov who can barely contain his disdain for the man or the institution.



# Chapters 22, 23 and 24

## Chapters 22, 23 and 24 Summary

Arkady and Bazarov leave Bazarov's parents' home under the pretense of returning to Arkady's home to retrieve Bazarov's medical instruments but when their carriage driver pauses at the dead end of the road, the two young men briefly discuss their options. Turning left would take the young men back to Anna and Katya and turning right would lead them to Nikolai's farm. Bazarov lets the decision to Arkady who instructs the driver to turn left.

Upon arriving at Nikolskoe, Arkady and Bazarov are coolly received by Anna and Katya feigns illness and does not come out of her room. Arkady and Bazarov stay only four hours and Anna seems pleased to see them leave. Arkady and Bazarov arrive at Nikolai's farm the next evening and their reception is warm and welcoming, quite the opposite of their arrival at Nikolskoe the day before.

Arkady soon finds out that Nikolai possesses some letters that Katya's mother had once written to Arkady's mother and leaves the farm under the pretense of studying the Sunday School in town but instead heads for Nikolskoe where he catches Katya off guard and pleases her immensely.

Bazarov has a good idea of Arkady's true destination and resigns himself to work on his experiments while his friend is away from the farm. There is still a communications gap between Bazarov and his hosts but the young man is still attracted to Fenitchka who seems shy but comfortable with the young doctor. Something about Bazarov puts Fenitchka at ease, perhaps it is because he is not an aristocrat unlike the backgrounds of Nikolai and Pavel.

Bazarov is increasingly attracted to Fenitchka and tends to her child as a ruse to be close to the young woman. During one of his early morning walks, Bazarov finds Fenitchka alone in the lilac arbor resting after having picked a huge bouquet of roses for the house. Bazarov charms the unsuspecting Fenitchka and leans in for a kiss, which is witnessed by Pavel who stands at the edge of the arbor. Fenitchka retreats to the house in horror, and all is quiet for the remainder of the day.

The next day Pavel approaches Bazarov during his experiments and challenges the young doctor to a duel for the simple reason that Pavel cannot bear Bazarov and does not want him in the house any longer. Being a gentleman of honor, Bazarov cannot refuse the request and plans are set for a duel at dawn the next morning. As the rest of the day proceeds, Bazarov reasons to himself that Pavel is in love with Fenitchka and wants Bazarov out of the house because Pavel witnessed the kiss in the lilac arbor.

Early the next morning Bazarov, accompanied by Piotr, arrives at the designated location for the duel and waits only a few minutes for Pavel to arrive. Dressed



splendidly, Pavel offers Bazarov his choice of weapon and the paces are counted off. Before he realizes what has happened, Bazarov feels a bullet whiz by his face and manages to shoot at Pavel hitting the older man in the leg.

Pavel insists on another shot per man but Bazarov, as a physician, cannot let this duel continue and tends to Pavel's wounded leg. Piotr rushes off and returns with Nikolai who is told that the duel was a result of a political disagreement. Pavel is returned to the house and the town doctor is called in to tend to Pavel who holds court in his bed greeting all his visitors with all the nobility one can muster from a sickbed.

The next day Bazarov packs his belongings early in the morning and bids farewell to the residents of the farmhouse and heads back to Nikolskoe.

## Chapters 22, 23 and 24 Analysis

For someone with nihilistic beliefs, Bazarov uncharacteristically gives in to Arkady's whim to take the road to Nikolskoe when given the choice of that direction or the road back to Nikolai's farm. Bazarov secretly wants to return to speak with Anna again and risks humiliation for his effort. The author seems to be pointing out that once touched by love, even the most clinical man can lose his scientific perspective on the world and fall into the hands of fate.

It is fate also which presents the letters which Nikolai has kept all these years and now Arkady has a significant reason to return to Nikolskoe and pursue his love for Katya.

Like a true scientist, Bazarov cannot abide a vacuum and finds companionship in the sweet Fenitchka. Pavel, who is in love with the young woman, thwarts Bazarov's attempts at seduction. The scenario of the duel harkens back to the days of the Russian aristocracy as the method in which honor was restored is quite ironic as Pavel is wounded and the object of his hate, Bazarov ultimately comes to his rescue by tending his gunshot wound.

Bazarov is a man of honor, in spite of what Pavel may think, and leaves the house the next morning. It seems as if Pavel may have anticipated this outcome and Bazarov's response so ultimately Pavel has achieved his goal of removing Bazarov from the house with relatively little anguish.



# Chapters 25 and 26

## Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

At Nikolskoe Arkady courts Katya in earnest but as yet had not declared his love for her. Arkady is pleased that Katya is a girl who likes to obey yet feels that she is on Arkady's level, which makes for a good love match. Arkady especially appreciates the fact that Katya is independent like her sister, Anna, but is more reserved with her emotions about it. Katya resists any comparisons to Anna because of Anna's great beauty and style but Arkady reassures Katya that she has more character than Anna does.

Arkady finally tells Katya that he puts her above anyone else in the world. This revelation embarrasses the shy Arkady who leaves immediately to go to his room. On the way, Arkady is met by a servant who announces that Bazarov has arrived and asked specifically for Arkady. Arkady's pulse races a bit in anticipation of possible bad news from home and Bazarov proceeds to tell Arkady about the current state of affairs at the farm and about the duel which ended in the wounding of Pavel.

Bazarov shares that he had set off for his father's house but stopped at Nikolskoe to tell Arkady the news before proceeding. Bazarov comments on Arkady's health and bright demeanor and attributes them to Arkady's affair with Anna but Arkady corrects Bazarov as to the source of his bright mood. It is not Anna who has smitten Arkady but Katya.

Bazarov is summoned by Anna, who receives him in the drawing room where Bazarov apologizes for his impetuous behavior and declarations of love in a previous visit. Anna admits to her own part in the incident as having flirted with Bazarov to an unfair position. Anna admits that her attentions have now turned to Arkady who, although seems very young, has many fine qualities. Anna notes that Bazarov has feelings toward Katya but they are of the brotherly variety, not romantic.

Bazarov leaves Anna and Anna sends for Arkady who is not easily found as he is hiding deep in the formal gardens lost in thought about how his affections have turned from Anna to Katya.

Later that afternoon Arkady and Katya are seated alone together in one of their favorite spots in the formal gardens where Arkady shares a change in his way of thinking. It used to be that Arkady searched for unrealistic ideals but now new ideas and emotions have opened up to him revealing an entirely new way of life, which is very pleasant. Arkady is too shy to tell Katya outright that she is the source of this newfound joy.

Just as Arkady finds the courage to share his emotions with Katya, the sound of Anna's and Bazarov's voices are heard in the garden discussing their failed attempt at romance. Anna, however, admits once more to being interested in Arkady. At this point Arkady turns directly to Katya and declares his love for her and Katya confirms that the feeling is mutual.





The next morning Anna summons Bazarov to her room where she tells him that she has received a letter this morning from Arkady requesting Katya's hand in marriage. Anna and Bazarov laugh at the twist in fate and Anna fully intends to reply positively to Arkady's request.

With no love interest from Anna and Arkady having the distraction of Katya, Bazarov makes plans to leave Nikolskoe and get on with his life as a doctor in the village where he was raised. The parting between Arkady and Bazarov is sentimental in spite of their nihilistic beliefs and the old friends part for the last time. Anna tells Bazarov that they will see each other again and Bazarov leaves Nikolskoe.

## Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

The author uses irony once more in the situation of Arkady's affections. Upon meeting Anna, Arkady is quite smitten and his feelings grow with each encounter but Anna is more interested in Bazarov and sends Arkady off with Katya whom Arkady thinks is dark and sullen. After more time elapses, it is Katya who wins Arkady's heart while Anna's attentions turn from Bazarov to Arkady who is no longer interested in pursuing anything with Anna.

There are other literary techniques used by the author in this section such as the metaphor when Bazarov feels the need to start his life anew and says that "it's a good thing for a man to take himself by the scruff of the neck and pull himself up like a radish out of its bed... but I wanted to have one more look at what I'm giving up, at the bed where I've been planted."

Bazarov also states his need to leave Anna and Nikolskoe and says "... I have already been moving too long in a sphere which is not my own. Flying fishes can hold out for a time in the air, but soon they must splash back into the water; allow me, too, to paddle in my own element."

These visual descriptions provide imagery that relates Bazarov's state of mind so well that there is no question as to Bazarov's thinking.

The author also speaks directly to the reader again in this section where he states that Anna and Bazarov speak their true feelings; both thought they were speaking the truth. "Was the truth, the whole truth, to be found in their words? They could not themselves have said, and much less could the author."



# Chapters 27 and 28

## Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

Bazarov returns home to the joy of his parents who had not expected to see their son again so soon. Bazarov deflects the attentions from his parents in favor of his scientific experiments but soon tires of the constant work and begins to help his father with patients. One day a man arrives at the house with his brother who is dying from typhus. Unfortunately the man's condition is in the last stages and there is nothing to be done.

After the man dies, Bazarov goes to town to perform an autopsy in the name of science and ends up cutting himself in the process. Bazarov asks his father for caustic to seal the cut but it is too late; the typhus infection has already entered Bazarov's body. Both Bazarov and his father know that this means certain death for the young doctor and the elder Bazarov is completely wracked with sorrow.

Bazarov tries to view his imminent death with clinical eyes and comments that he thought he was going to live a long time and do good for Russia and it is disappointing that that will not happen now. Bazarov asks his father to send a letter to Anna telling her that Bazarov is dying and Anna arrives soon after accompanied by a German physician. Unfortunately there is nothing that can be done to alter Bazarov's fate. A few days later Bazarov loses consciousness and dies soon after.

Back at Nikolai's farm, two weddings have taken place; Nikolai has married Fenitchka and Arkady has married Katya. Pavel has relocated to Dresden where he lives a life closer in style to the one he enjoyed during the glory days of Russia. Anna has remarried, this time to another man of influence and wealth who can provide a fine life but no real love. Arkady helps Nikolai run the farm and their financial picture begins to brighten.

Months later Bazarov's parents are still overwrought with grief at the death of their only child and can be seen praying and tending Bazarov's grave which sits between two elm trees.

The author makes an objective statement at the end of the story by saying "However passionate, sinning, and rebellious the heart hidden in the tomb, the flowers growing over it peep serenely at us with their innocent eyes; they tell us not of eternal peace alone, of that great peace of 'indifferent' nature; they tell us, too, of eternal reconciliation and of life without end."

## Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Amid all the human drama and tragedies, the author uses humor throughout the novel as he does when he describes Bazarov's mother hurrying to fix a meal for her recently returned son looking as if she were a "hen partridge; the short tail of her abbreviated



jacket did, in fact, give her something of a birdlike appearance." The reader can easily envision what the author intended in describing the character in this way which provides visual imagery as well as lifts the tone of the story for a short time by providing some comic relief.

In this story of many ironies, the last and most devastating one is the death of Bazarov who is brought down by the science which he purported would sustain him during a life where sentimentality and soft thinking had no place.

The author speaks directly to the reader at the end and provides an update on the fates of all the characters as if writing a final postcard to old friends who have been on the journey of the story with him. At the end, the author does not chastise Bazarov and the nihilists, but rather provides hope by pointing out the flowers that grow at the head of Bazarov's grave as small testaments to the power of everlasting life that ultimately triumphs over any of man's thoughts and choices.



# Characters

## Father Alexey

Father Alexey is a nice priest who comes to visit Bazarov's parents; he wins money from Bazarov at whist, a card game.

## Arisha

See Arina Vlashevna Bazarov

## Arkasha

See Arkady Nikolaitch Kirsanov

## Arina Vlashevna Bazarov

Arina Vlashevna, Bazarov's mother, adores her son and is crushed at his tragic death. When she was younger, Arina was part of the Russian minor nobility, but since she has married, she has turned over all of her affairs to her husband, Vassily. She is still horrified at the upcoming reforms, however, which will divide up the land of the nobility. When Bazarov comes home to visit for the first time in three years, she smothers him with attention, and, as a result, he leaves after three days. When Bazarov comes back for a longer stay, she is more discreet and does not bother him as much. Vassily does not tell Arina about Bazarov's typhus until he is sure his son is infected. After Bazarov's death, his parents visit his grave often, weeping for their son.

## Vassily Ivanovitch Bazarov

Vassily Ivanovitch is Bazarov's father and like his wife, Arina, he adores his son. Vassily worked as an army surgeon under Arkady's grandfather, who was a general at the time. In his retirement, Vassily and his wife live in a small country homestead, where Vassily still administers treatment to the peasants for free. When Bazarov comes home, it is the first time he has seen his son in three years, and Bazarov only stays three days, a fact that makes Vassily very sad. When Bazarov comes back, Vassily is overjoyed to hear that Bazarov will be staying for six weeks. Bazarov starts helping his father with his patients, and in the process takes the opportunity to dissect a man who has just died from typhus. When Vassily sees the cut on Bazarov's finger that he gets during the autopsy, he is frightened that his son has caught the disease. A few days later, Bazarov dies, and Vassily's fears come true.



## Yevgeny Vassilyev Bazarov

Bazarov, as he is known throughout most of the work, is the friend of Arkady, and he dies at the end of the novel from a typhus infection. Even from the beginning of the novel, Bazarov, a young medical student, is expected by almost everybody to do great things. His unflinching manner and severe conviction to the strict tenets of nihilism—a type of scientific rationalism—have given him many disciples, of which Arkady is one. At the beginning of the book, Bazarov comes to stay with Arkady and his father at Maryino. The visit is full of conflict, as Bazarov's harshly radical ideas clash with Nikolai's brother, Pavel. Bazarov is completely unapologetic, even when Arkady tries to appeal to him. In fact, even though he wounds his friend with his sarcasm, Bazarov does not make amends. He states to all that he does not believe in his own emotions and should not therefore spare others. Bazarov and Arkady leave for a provincial town to meet Arkady's second cousin, who invites them to the Governor's Ball, where Arkady meets Anna Odintsov. The lady has more interest in Bazarov, however, and soon Arkady and Bazarov are staying with her at her country estate.

Although he tries to deny his feelings for Anna, they overcome Bazarov, who professes his love to her on the eve of his departure. She shuns him, however, and he goes instead to stay with his parents. They smother him with their emotion, and he leaves after three days, eventually going back to Maryino. Although he is content at first to busy himself with his scientific experiments, his eyes begin to stray, and at one point, he kisses Fenitchka, Nikolai's mistress. She is not interested in his affections, however, even though she was friendly with him. Pavel sees the kiss and challenges Bazarov to a secret duel. Bazarov accepts and walks away unharmed, although he shoots Pavel in the leg. Bazarov immediately takes care of the wound. He leaves Maryino shortly thereafter, and, after one more brief visit to Nikolskoe to see Anna, he bids his farewell to Arkady and goes to his parents' home. He tries to busy himself with his experiments, but finds himself being more social instead. He also starts to help his father, a retired army surgeon, with the peasant patients who come to him. In the course of performing an autopsy on a typhus victim, he cuts himself and gets typhus himself, which kills him a few days later. On his deathbed, he sends for Anna, who sees him before he dies.

## Enyusha

See Yevgeny Vassilyev Bazarov

## Fenitchka

See Fedyosa Savishna



## The Governor

The Governor throws the ball where Arkady meets Anna Odintsov. He is also the employer of Arkady's second cousin, Matvy Ilyich Kolyazin.

## Princess Avdotya Stepanovna H——

Princess H—— is the rich and grumpy aunt of Anna and Katya, who comes to live with them after their father dies. Nobody likes her, and nobody remembers her when she is dead.

## Katya

See Katerina Sergyevna

## Arkady Nikolaitch Kirsanov

Arkady Kirsanov is Bazarov's friend, Nikolai's son, Pavel's nephew and eventually, Katya's husband. When the book begins, Arkady, who is quite impressionable, is under the influence of Bazarov, and is trying desperately to adopt his friend's nihilistic ways. However, it is apparent from very early on that, although Arkady thinks he wants to be a radical, he still enjoys music, nature, and other "irrational" pursuits that distance him from Bazarov and nihilism. In fact, he and Bazarov get in many arguments throughout the novel about their conflicting beliefs. Still, in most cases, Arkady is willing to follow his mentor and does so to many destinations. At the Governor's Ball, it is Arkady who first meets and makes the acquaintance of Anna Odintsov. However, even though he is smitten with her, she only has sisterly love for him, and wants to meet Bazarov. As the two young men stay at Nikolskoe, Anna's country estate, the divide between them grows deeper, as Bazarov spends more time with Anna, and Arkady finds himself increasingly more attracted to Katya.

When Bazarov gets ready to leave Nikolskoe, Arkady is torn. He wants to follow his friend, but he also wants to stay with Katya. He follows his friend, first to Bazarov's parents' house, and then back to Maryino. However, Arkady cannot sit still for long. Finding an excuse to visit Nikolskoe again, he does so, where he finds Katya overjoyed to see him. After staying there for a little longer, Arkady finally gets up his nerve to propose to Katya, which he does after a few attempts. She happily accepts. When Bazarov shows up at Nikolskoe and says his farewell to Arkady, he tells him that he never would have made a good nihilist, and that he should pursue family life. Arkady and Katya are married in a ceremony with his father and Fenitchka. After this, they move into Maryino with the other couple, and Arkady takes over the management of the farm, whipping it into a profitable enterprise once more. At the end of the story, Arkady and Katya also have a son, Nikolai.



## Marya Kirsanov

Marya Kirsanov is Nikolai's deceased wife and Arkady's deceased mother. Nikolai names his estate, "Maryino," after her.

## Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov

Nikolai Kirsanov is Arkady's father and Pavel's brother. Nikolai and Pavel's father was a general, so they were both expected to go into military service, which Pavel does. Nikolai, however, breaks his leg on the day he is supposed to leave for service, and is unable to serve. Instead, Nikolai gets his university degree and then works in the civil service position that his father finds for him. However, directly after the mourning period for his parents' deaths, Nikolai quits the civil service position, marries Masha, the daughter of his landlord—something his parents did not approve of—and moves to his country estate to live. When their son Arkady is born, they are joyous but ten years later, Masha dies. Nikolai spends more time with his son, even going to stay three years in town to be by his son while he is attending college, getting to know his son's friends.

For his son's last year, however, he does not stay, so he is surprised by the arrival of Bazarov at Maryino when Arkady graduates and comes home. Nikolai is gracious to Bazarov, but is also distressed at the young man's nihilistic views. Nikolai feels the generation gap widening between him and his son. Meanwhile, he has had a child with Fenitchka, the young daughter of his old housekeeper. Although he has held off from marrying her out of respect for his brother, Pavel, whom he does not think believes in marriage. Pavel eventually encourages him to marry. Nikolai gets married to Fenitchka in the same ceremony where Arkady marries Katya. This double wedding, and Arkady's choice to start running his father's farm, helps to close the generation gap.

## Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov

Pavel Kirsanov is Nikolai's brother, Arkady's uncle, and Bazarov's opponent; when he challenges husband. At the end of the novel, she goes to Heidelberg, Germany to study architecture. Bazarov to a duel, the younger man wounds him, then tends to the wound. When he was younger, Pavel had a promising military career, which he ruined when he resigned his commission to chase after a married woman, Princess R—. Although the two do have an affair, it is torturous for both and she eventually ends it, after he has chased her through many countries, and they have one final meeting. Pavel tries to resume his normal life but he is a broken man. The only remnant of his disciplined officer days are the smart clothes and nail polish that he wears, even when lounging casually around Maryino, Nikolai's home, where he lives. Pavel occasionally bails Nikolai out when he has money problems.

When Pavel first sees Bazarov, he does not like him, an animosity that grows as Bazarov gives his nihilistic beliefs. They get in many arguments and on Bazarov's second visit, they appear to be at peace. When Pavel catches Bazarov kissing his



brother's mistress, however, he challenges Bazarov to a secret duel with pistols. Bazarov accepts and walks away unhurt. Pavel, however, gets shot in the leg. Through the experience of getting shot, getting tended by Bazarov, and recuperating in Maryino, Pavel is able to finally put his past behind and get on with his life. After the dual wedding of his brother and nephew, Pavel goes to Moscow, then finally settles in Germany, where he renews his old social habits for which he was famous as an officer.

## **Ilya Kolyazin**

See Matvy Ilyich Kolyazin

## **Matvy Ilyich Kolyazin**

Matvy Ilyich Kolyazin is Arkady's second cousin, a high-ranking official and the one who invites Arkady and Bazarov to the Governor's Ball where Arkady meets Anna Odintsov. Kolyazin is the cousin of Nikolai and Pavel, and originally extends the visitation invitation to them, but they turn it down. Arkady and Bazarov go in their place.

## **Madame Evdoksya Kukshin**

Madame Kukshin is a friend of Victor Sitnikov, who tells Arkady and Bazarov they should seek out Anna Odintsov. Arkady and Bazarov only agree to meet Kukshin with the promise by Sitnikov of free alcohol. Kukshin tries to impress Arkady and Bazarov with her advanced ways of thinking. She is an independent woman who runs her own affairs now that she is separated from her husband. At the end of the novel, she goes to Heidelberg, Germany to study architecture.

## **Sergay Nikolaevitch Loktev**

Sergay Loktev is Anna Odintsov's father, who loses much of the family fortune playing cards, prompting Anna to marry for money after his death.

## **Masha**

See Marya Kirsanov

## **Mitya**

Mitya is the child of Nikolai and Fenitchka. The child is born out of wedlock, but the couple marries by the end of the story.





## Nellie

See Princess R——

## Avdotya Nikitishna

See Madame Evdoksya Kukshin

## Fedyosa Nikolaevna

See Fedyosa Savishna

## Madame Anna Sergyevna Odintsov

Madame Anna Odintsov is the love interest of both Arkady and Bazarov, and ends up shunning both. Anna acts like a mother to her sister Katya, ever since their father's death. After his death, Anna marries a wealthy man to better her financial position and she and Katya retire to Nikolskoe where they live in isolation. Anna's neighbors do not like her because of the rumors that surround her and her father's scandalous gambling debts. Shortly after they move into Nikolskoe, their aunt Princess H——, a surly woman whom nobody likes, moves into Nikolskoe. Anna takes it all in stride and sticks to her principles of keeping everything orderly, including people.

Anna first meets Arkady at the Governor's Ball, where he talks to her at length, but she shows only sisterly interest in him. She does, however, ask to meet Bazarov, and does shortly thereafter when Arkady and Bazarov come to her hotel room. While she is calm, Bazarov is struck by love and behaves irrationally for perhaps the first time in his life. She invites them to come see her at Nikolskoe, her country estate, and they do so a few days later. Although Anna, Katya, Arkady, and Bazarov start out in each other's company, over the next fortnight they split into two couples—Anna and Bazarov; Katya and Arkady. When she is alone with Bazarov, Anna flirts with him, but then rejects his advances when he professes his love for her. She is scared of his passion and wishes to live her orderly life. After she approves of Katya's marriage to Arkady, Anna eventually remarries also, this time to a politically powerful lawyer—as before, it is out of opportunity, not love. She responds to Bazarov's deathbed summons, seeing him one last time before he dies.

## Piotr

Piotr is one of the few freed serfs that Nikolai keeps employed at Maryino. Piotr also serves as the witness at the duel between Bazarov and Pavel.



## Porfiry Platonitch

Porfiry Platonitch is the card-playing neighbor of Anna Odintsov's, and one of few regular visitors to Nikolskoe.

## Princess R——

Princess R—— is the woman with whom Pavel Kirsanov falls in love. Both are tormented by the relationship, which she finally ends by running away from Pavel. On her deathbed, she sends Pavel back his ring.

## Fedosya Savishna

Fedosya Savishna, also known as Fenitchka, is Nikolai's mistress. Fenitchka is the daughter of Nikolai's housekeeper, who comes to live with Nikolai while Arkady is at school. Although she is shy around Nikolai at first, at one point, he helps to heal her eye from a spark that has flown into it. After this, she starts to warm up to him. When her mother dies from cholera, Nikolai begins to have his affair with her, which results in the birth of Mitya. When Arkady comes home from school, he has heard about Fenitchka, but has not met her. Although Fenitchka is shy around him, and indeed around everyone, she gradually starts to open up. Bazarov introduces himself as a doctor, after which she comes to see him for various questions about Mitya. At one point, in the garden, Bazarov oversteps his bounds and kisses her. Although they had been having playful conversation, she did not want this, and lets him know. Pavel witnesses the incident, and later confronts her on it, but it is only to make sure that she is truly in love with Nikolai. Pavel encourages Nikolai and Fenitchka to get married, which they do with Arkady and Katya. At the end of the book, Fenitchka loves nothing more than conversing with her daughter-in-law, Katya.

## Katerina Sergyevna

Katerina Sergyevna, also known as Katya, is the sister of Anna Odintsov, and marries Arkady Kirsanov. When Anna first introduces Katya to Arkady and Bazarov, neither one is interested in her. They are both in love with Anna. Bazarov views her as a pupil, who could be molded into whatever they want. However, after a while, Arkady's love for Anna fades, and, through a slow but steady friendship at Nikolskoe, Arkady falls in love with Katya, denouncing many of his nihilistic beliefs in the process. When he proposes to her, it takes him a few tries to get the words out, but she gives him an immediate "yes." Katya and Arkady are married in the same ceremony as Fenitchka and Nikolai.



## Victor Sitnikov

Victor Sitnikov is the overeager disciple of Bazarov, who introduces Arkady and Bazarov to Evdoksya Kukshin. Sitnikov wants to be a true nihilist, but shows too much emotion for Bazarov's taste. For their part, both Arkady and Bazarov treat Sitnikov badly, ignoring him, making sarcastic remarks, and deliberately taking a carriage other than his.

## Vasya

See Vassily Ivanovitch Bazarov



# Themes

## The Generation Gap

The very title of the novel indicates one of the major themes. The gap between the older and younger generation is very pronounced, especially between fathers and their sons. Nikolai Kirsanov notes to his brother, Pavel, how they are "behind the times" and that the younger generation has surpassed them. He is wistful, however, at the implications of this gap: "I did so hope, precisely now, to get on to such close, intimate terms with Arkady, and it turns out I'm left behind, and he has gone forward, and we can't understand one another."

Bazarov's father makes a similar observation, when he gets into a discussion about new versus old ideas: "Of course, gentlemen, you know best; how could we keep pace with you? You are here to take our places." This gap seems to grow between them as they talk, and the old man tries to fit in by telling a funny story: "The old man was alone in his laughter; Arkady forced a smile on his face. Bazarov simply stretched. The conversation went on in this way for about an hour." When Bazarov's father complains about this fact to his wife, she tells him that there is "no help for it, Vasya! A son is a separate piece cut off."

Although Bazarov's early death prevents him and his father from closing their generation gap, the case is different for Arkady and Nikolai: "A week before in the small parish church two weddings had taken place quietly. . . . Arkady and Katya's, and Nikolai Petrovitch and Fenitchka's." The double wedding leads to Arkady and Katya staying at Maryino, where Arkady eventually pitches in and runs his father's estate for him. As Turgenev's narrator says, "their fortunes are beginning to mend."

## Poverty

Poverty is a very real issue in the story, even for formerly wealthy landowners like Nikolai. In the beginning, when Nikolai's farm, Maryino, is described, the peasant's portion is depicted as follows: "the peasants they met were all in tatters and on the sorriest little nags; the willows, with their trunks stripped of bark, and broken branches, stood like ragged beggars along the roadside." The peasants are not the only ones who feel the pinch. Nikolai often "sighed, and was gloomy; he felt that the thing could not go on without money, and his money was almost spent." For these reasons, Nikolai's farm is infamous; "the peasants had nicknamed it, Poverty Farm."

Bazarov's parents are even poorer. When Arkady first arrives at the residence, the reader sees that "his whole house consisted of six tiny rooms." And, as Vassily Ivanovitch notes: "I warned you, my dear Arkady Nikolaitch. . . . that we live, so to say, bivouacking." This military term, from Vassily's time in the military service, denotes a rougher lifestyle akin to camping in the rough.



## Nihilism

In the story, Turgenev sets up a conflict between the older generation of fathers who believe in art and other irrational activities, and the nihilists—scientific materialists like Bazarov who accept nothing. Bazarov is very critical of anything that does not serve a purpose, especially art. "A good chemist is twenty times as useful as any poet," Bazarov tells them.

For their part, the older generation of Kirsanov men does not agree. Says Pavel to Bazarov, "If we listen to you, we shall find ourselves outside humanity, outside its laws." Furthermore, Nikolai tells Bazarov that he does more than "deny everything . . . you destroy everything.... But one must construct too, you know." For Bazarov and other nihilists, leveling society and starting with a clean slate is the only way to get rid of "our leading men, so-called advanced people and reformers," who "are no good." Being a liberal himself, Nikolai understands his son's desire for reform, but cannot understand the total exclusion of the arts: "But to renounce poetry? . . . to have no feeling for art, for nature?"

As for Arkady, Bazarov's disciple, he finds it tough to maintain his nihilistic attitude as the novel goes on: "In his heart he was highly delighted with his friend's suggestion, but he thought it a duty to conceal his feeling. He was not a nihilist for nothing!" By the end of the novel, Arkady has totally forsaken his nihilistic beliefs for marriage, music, and nature, three ideas that nihilism does not allow. Bazarov also experiences a change by the end of the novel. After he is slighted by Anna following his unprecedented profession of love, he tells her, "Before you is a poor mortal, who has come to his senses long ago, and hopes other people, too, have forgotten his follies."

Bazarov has started to realize the error of his ways. While he is staying with his parents, they notice it too. "A strange weariness began to show itself in all his movements; even his walk, firm, bold and strenuous, was changed. He gave up walking in solitude, and began to seek society." And when he is dying from typhus, he encourages his parents "to make the most of your religious belief; now's the time to put it to the test." Although, it is telling that when Bazarov has the chance to try to save his soul with his parents' religion, he declines. Even though he has changed, allowed himself to love, and admitted the folly of some of his ways, he is not ready to embrace religion even on his deathbed.

## Love

The idea of romantic love permeates the novel and is most apparent with Arkady and Bazarov, who experience two different types of love. Arkady experiences a love that is based on friendship. Before he even meets his true love, Katya, he is smitten by Madame Anna Odintsov. Unfortunately, the older woman looks at him "as married sisters look at very young brothers." With Katya, however, the situation is different, even from the start. He "encouraged her to express the impressions made on her by music, reading novels, verses, and other such trifles, without noticing or realizing that these



trifles were what interested him too." From this tentative friendship, their love starts to blossom, and Arkady's love for Katya starts to replace his love for Madame Odintsov: "He began to imagine Anna Sergyevna to himself, then other features gradually eclipsed the lovely young image of the young widow."

The night before Arkady plans on leaving Nikolskoe with Bazarov, he is distraught: "I'm sorry to lose Katya too!" Arkady whispered to his pillow, on which a tear had already fallen." Eventually Arkady becomes so attached to Katya that he is ecstatic when he arrives unannounced and sees her first: "His meeting with her struck him as a particularly happy omen; he was delighted to see her, as though she were of his own kindred." Finally, Arkady owns up to his feelings, and eventually lets her know that "My eyes have been opened lately, thanks to one feeling." The feeling is love, but in Arkady's case, it is a love that builds slowly from friendship.

For Bazarov, on the other hand, the love is more passionate, forceful. Bazarov shows the signs of an irrational love at his first meeting with Anna. While she is sitting calmly, "leaning back in her easy-chair," and "He, contrary to his habit, was talking a good deal, and obviously trying to interest her—again a surprise for Arkady." As Bazarov stays at Nikolskoe, he begins to exhibit "signs of an unrest, unprecedented in him.... and could not sit still in one place, just as though he were possessed by some secret longing."

For her part, Anna gives Bazarov her terms for love: "My idea is everything or nothing. A life for a life. Take mine, give up thine, and that without regret or turning back. Or else better have nothing." Bazarov takes these conversations as a sign that Anna loves him and on the eve of his departure, lets her know that "I love you like a fool, like a madman . . . There, you've forced it out of me." However, Anna's intentions are not amorous, so her words are crushing to the passionate lover who has let his emotions overtake him for the first time: "You have misunderstood me."



# Style

## Setting

The setting in *Fathers and Sons* is crucial to the effect of the novel. The various provincial settings—Maryino, Nikolskoe, Vassily Ivanovitch's unnamed homestead—are seen as backward and uneducated when compared with the cities, which are vibrant with new ideas and scholarship. As Bazarov notes to Arkady at one point, if they were to look at their fathers' country existence from a certain perspective, it could be seen as enjoyable, having a routine to keep busy: "When one gets a side view from a distance of the dead-alive life our 'fathers' lead here, one thinks, What could be better?" However, for Bazarov, this life could only ever be "dead-alive," unlike Arkady. On a different occasion, Arkady, who likes the nature one finds in the country, challenges Bazarov: "And is nature foolery?" Arkady hopes to stump Bazarov, but the nihilist is not disturbed and as always, has an answer: "Nature, too, is foolery in the sense you understand it. Nature's not a temple, but a workshop, and man's the workman in it." For Bazarov, nature is something to be dissected as he does with the frogs, or otherwise observed from a scientific viewpoint. Arkady cannot do this, however, and he eventually comes to prefer the country, moving into Maryino with his new wife and his father's family, where Arkady becomes "zealous in the management of the estate" and turns it into a prosperous affair.

## Irony

A situation is ironic when its outcome is contrary to what the character and reader expects. In Turgenev's novel this happens many times. For example, Vassily Ivanovitch describes the bitter irony of the generation gap when talking to his son and Arkady about a philosopher of whom they are enamored: "you bow down to him, but in another twenty years it will be his turn to be laughed at." Bazarov and Arkady feel strong and invincible in their youth, as if their ideas are the only ones and they will never be refuted. However, when Arkady's son grows up, Arkady will no doubt realize, as Nikolai does, that aging and the decline of one's ideas is "a bitter pill" and that every new generation is ready to tell the old to "swallow your pill."

Other ironic situations are introduced in the character of Bazarov, whom the reader is led to believe from the beginning cannot be swayed to love. Bazarov is against love because there is no control over it, and it overpowers the senses that he holds dear and by which he rules his life. It is ironic, therefore, that Bazarov is stricken blind with love for Anna, and admits to her, "I love you like a fool, like a madman." It is also ironic that Bazarov, the character who is depicted in an almost god-like, invincible light, is refuted in his advance, from Anna, who seems on the verge of giving her heart to Bazarov.

The cruelest irony of the novel, however, is the death of Bazarov. The young nihilist who appreciates the hard sciences more than anything else goes to the village, "where they



brought that peasant with typhus fever." Although there is a doctor there who is going to dissect the body, Bazarov, always eager for scientific knowledge, offers to do it. Unfortunately, in the process, he makes a careless mistake and cuts himself, contracting the infection that soon kills him. It is tragically ironic that Bazarov's quest for knowledge is the thing that kills him in the end.

## Point of View

The novel is told by a third person omniscient, or all-knowing, narrator who has the power to go within any character's mind and display their thoughts. For example, when Bazarov and Pavel get in their first argument over their beliefs, Nikolai thinks to himself, "You are certainly a nihilist, I see that," although what he says aloud is "Still, you will allow me to apply to you on occasion." This is the style for most of the novel. However, there is a notable exception in the narration: at times, the narrator speaks directly to the reader, as when the narrator introduces Nikolai: "We will introduce him to the reader while he sits, his feet tucked under him, gazing thoughtfully round." This style is also used at the end of the novel: "But perhaps some one of our readers would care to know what each of the characters we have introduced is doing in the present." By book-ending the story with these two references that draw attention to the narrator, readers are reminded that they are reading a work of art and are encouraged to focus on the realities of the social situation the book describes—instead of just getting caught up in the story.





## Historical Context

*Fathers and Sons* is tied to Russia's history, particularly to the period of social unrest and reform that began to come to a head with the rule of Alexander II. Following the Crimean War, during which Alexander came to power in 1855, Russian society—and Alexander himself—was made painfully aware of Russia's backward place in the world. These were old concerns that were reawakened with the loss of about 250,000 men and some of Russia's land.

This war was not received well in society and as a result, Alexander, who had been taught by an artistic, romantic tutor, and who was sympathetic to liberal concerns, sought reform. Pitting himself against the landowners who owned serfs, Alexander began to talk about abolishing serfdom. Says Victor Ripp, in his *Turgenev's Russia: From "Notes of a Hunter" to "Fathers and Sons"*: "The Emancipation Act was signed by Alexander II on February 19, 1861, a little less than five years after he had openly declared his support for the abolition of serfdom." In the time between Alexander's announcement of the abolishment and the actual abolishment, Russia underwent some drastic changes as the nation prepared itself for reform.

In this time of uneasiness, Turgenev chose to set his book. As Ripp notes, "it is the spring of 1859, and the emancipation of the serfs, with all its uncertain consequences, is only two years ahead." Even two years before this historic event the effects could be seen in many locations. Nikolai Petrovitch, a more liberal landowner, has already freed his serfs before he is required to, although he is wary about giving his former slaves any control in any major business affairs. Says Nikolai: "I decided not to keep about me any freed serfs, who have been house servants, or, at least, not to intrust them with duties of any responsibility."

Not everybody was as enlightened as Nikolai, however. Some, especially the older Russian nobility with much land to lose, decried the reforms, like Bazarov's mother. She used to be a member of the landed gentry, but turned her land over to the care of her husband, a poor, retired army surgeon. She "used to groan, wave her handkerchief, and raise her eyebrows higher and higher with horror when her old husband began to discuss the impending government reforms."

However, those who observed the decline of Russia, as Arkady does in the novel, realized that reform was sorely needed: "this is not a rich country; it does not impress one by plenty or industry; it can't, it can't go on like this, reforms are absolutely necessary." Of course, as Arkady notes shortly thereafter, "how is one to carry them out, how is one to begin?" There seemed to be no clear answer to that, since Russia was mired in corruption, which, even though it started at higher levels, worked its way down. As the narrator notes of the young governor's official sent to a provincial town, he "was a young man, and at once a progressive and a despot, as often happens with Russians." This young man is both a sympathetic liberal and a tyrant when he is given the power to abuse. The same was true about the behavior of the lower classes. When given any power at all, they abused it, as Nikolai's farm manager does: "The overseer



suddenly turned lazy, and began to grow fat, as every Russian grows fat when he gets a snug berth." Likewise, once Nikolai puts the peasants on a rent system and does not enforce it, he has problems. "The peasants who had been put on the rent system did not bring their money at the time due, and stole the forest-timber."

Even when the serfs were about to be emancipated in 1861, the actual Emancipation Act caused much confusion. As Ripp notes, "In its efforts to please all factions, the Editing Committee produced an immensely complicated document." This general feeling of failure on the part of the Emancipation Act is expressed in the novel through the character of Nikolai, who is entrusted to carry out the upcoming reforms at the end of the novel. He drives around his district, giving long speeches that say the same thing over and over again, but as Turgenev's narrator notes, "to tell the truth, he does not give complete satisfaction either to the refined gentry.... nor to the uncultivated gentry.... He is too soft-hearted for both sets." Neither the landed class nor the lower classes wanted a hesitant legislation, but unfortunately, in its attempts to please everyone, the Emancipation Act pleased almost no one and eventually led to more unrest. As Ripp notes, Turgenev is aware of all of this as he writes the book in 1862, a year after the act has been implemented: "Turgenev wrote *Fathers and Sons*, his greatest novel, while directly under the influence of the crisis caused by the Emancipation Act."



## Critical Overview

In 1862, when Turgenev first gave the manuscript for *Fathers and Sons* to his editor Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov, the *Russkii vestnik* (Russian Herald) editor was concerned about the potential backlash over the novel.

Katkov had reason to be concerned. As Edward Garnett notes in his *Turgenev*, "the stormy controversy that the novel immediately provoked was so bitter, deep, and lasting that the episode forms one of the most interesting chapters in literary history." The controversy originated in the interpretation of the novel by the two main political forces in Russia at the time—the older liberals, or reactionaries, from the 1840s who were of Turgenev's generation, and the younger radicals—whom Turgenev called "nihilists" in the novel—of the current, 1860s generation. It was with this second group that Turgenev had found favor with through the publication of some of his earlier works in *Sovremennik* (*Contemporary*). However, the same critics who had praised Turgenev's earlier works now offered harsh criticism for *Fathers and Sons* as they had for Turgenev's previous novel, *Nakanune*. One of the most vocal critics from *The Contemporary* was M. A. Antonovich, who remarked that Bazarov "is not a man, but some horrible being, simply a devil or, to express oneself more poetically, a foul fiend."

Another radical critic, A. I. Gertsen, notes that in the book, "gloomy, concentrated energy has spoken in this unfriendly attitude of the young generation to its mentors." The overwhelming majority of criticisms, both good and bad, concerned the character Bazarov. D. I. Pisarev, another of the younger radicals, was the only critic from his political party who did not describe Bazarov as a "vicious caricature" of the radicals, as Leonard Schapiro notes in *Turgenev: His Life and Times*. Instead, Pisarev writes to both radicals and liberals: "You may be indignant about people like Bazarov to your heart's content, but it is most essential to acknowledge their sincerity."

The book was also disliked by the liberals, many of whom blamed Turgenev's book for the violence exhibited by young radicals. Turgenev himself recounts what is now a famous anecdote from his life, when he returned to Petersburg in 1862 on the same day that young radicals—calling themselves "nihilists"—were setting fire to buildings: "the first exclamation to fall from the lips of the first acquaintance I encountered . . . was: 'Look what *your* nihilists are doing! Burning Petersburg!'"

The major problem in the book's reception was the fact that both radicals and liberals thought that the book was aimed against them, especially in the portrayal of Bazarov. This problem was underscored by Turgenev's own conflicting views on the character. Although he stated in a March 30 letter to Fyodor Dostoyevsky that "during all the time of writing I have felt an involuntary attraction for him," he stated in a different letter on April 18 to A. A. Fet: "Did I wish to curse Bazarov, or extol him? *I don't know that myself*, for I don't know if I love or hate him!"

In 1881, William Ralston Shedden-Ralston, one of Turgenev's English friends, publicized the author's upcoming visit by noting that Turgenev was "the wielder of a



style unrivalled for delicacy and seldom equalled in force," and that "it will be easy to see that in his own field he stands alone." George Moore notes of Bazarov that "he is a real creation, not a modernisation of some Shakespearean or classical conception, but an absolutely new and absolutely distinct addition made to our knowledge of life." The famous American-born, English writer and critic, Henry James, notes the novel's "poignant interest," that is created by the "young world" smiting "the old world which has brought it forth with a mother's tears and a mother's hopes."

During the twentieth century, reviews were largely positive, as reviewers focused on Turgenev's artistic techniques and prophetic powers. Peter Henry notes that "it is a brilliant stroke of irony on Turgenev's part that Bazarov and Pavel Petrovich, so sharply contrasted in every way, are endowed with an essential identity as unsuccessful lovers." In his *Turgenev: The Man, His Art and His Age*, Avrahm Yarmolinsky says that "throughout, his craftsmanship is at its best. Even the minor characters are deftly sketched in." And Isaiah Berlin notes that today, "the Bazarovs have won," since the world is ruled by technology and empirical science.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



# Critical Essay #1

*Poquette holds a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses the many views of women in Turgenev's novel.*

In Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, women play very important and influential roles in the plot. Anna Odintsov attracts Arkady and Bazarov, who are both trying to remain true to their nihilistic beliefs, which attempt to deny love—an irrational force. This surrender to love shakes the very core of Bazarov's foundation. Eventually, he tries again at love, stealing a kiss from Fenitchka, which leads to the duel with Pavel. In the meantime, Katya wins over Arkady. Women are at the center of just about every major plot point in the book. But what does Turgenev think about women in general? The author makes several contradictory statements—through his characters—about how women are viewed, but in the end, he indicates that women are a necessary force, and a saving and nurturing influence on men.

At the beginning of *Fathers and Sons* Turgenev introduces four men, all of whom are strong Russian males. Arkady comes home from school a graduate, and brings his friend Bazarov, a nihilist with very powerful views. Almost at once, this younger generation of men conflicts with the older generation—Arkady's father; Nikolai, a liberal landowner; and Arkady's uncle Pavel, a retired military officer. Pavel does not like Bazarov from the start, calling him an "unkempt creature" after his first meeting with the younger man. This tension escalates when the younger men start expressing their radical views. Arkady informs his father and uncle that nihilists regard "everything from the critical point of view," and in the conversations between the two generations over the next fortnight, the young men criticize many of the institutions that the older generation holds dear. Bazarov—backed by Arkady—denounces all irrational pursuits including art, claiming, "a good chemist is twenty times as useful as any poet." For their part, the older generation says that "If we listen to you, we shall find ourselves outside humanity, outside its laws." This struggle between the two generations, the main theme in the book, is depicted throughout in passionate and violent terms.

However, just as this struggle culminates in the silly and ineffectual duel between Bazarov and Pavel, the men's manly debates are also ultimately ineffectual. While these strong men argue about philosophy and art, they are being quietly conquered by women who, like Fenitchka, only seem meek and mild, as when Fenitchka brings in Pavel's cup of cocoa and "dropped her eyes" in the presence of the men. "It seemed as though she were ashamed of having come in, and at the same time felt that she had a right to come." Of course, the men do not always realize the power that the women contain. In fact, through his male characters especially, Turgenev expresses many of the views of women that were prevalent at the time. One of the dominant views was that women were not very smart and could not hold their own against literate men. As Bazarov notes to Arkady about his own mother, "If a woman can keep up half-an-hour's conversation, it's always a hopeful sign." Bazarov is similarly condescending to Madame Kukshin, an independent woman who has separated from her husband. When Kukshin learns that



Bazarov is interested in chemistry, she thinks they have something in common: "You are studying chemistry? That is my passion. I've even invented a new sort of composition myself." However, Bazarov is skeptical in his reply: "A composition? You?"

Bazarov does not always think that an inferior, uneducated woman is a bad thing, as he notes to Arkady when discussing Anna Odintsov's sister, Katya: "She now is fresh and untouched, and shy and silent, and anything you like. She's worth educating and developing. You might make something fine out of her." However, while Bazarov thinks that Katya can be manipulated, he holds no such illusion over Anna, whom he refers to as "a stale loaf." This negative depiction of Anna is due to the fact that she has already started to affect him in ways that he does not like, such as the effect Anna has on Bazarov at their first meeting: "Bazarov himself was conscious of being embarrassed, and was irritated by it." Bazarov cannot handle feeling out of control, and so when he and Arkady discuss Anna and Katya, he is critical. Arkady remarks "what an exquisite woman" Anna is, while Bazarov says, somewhat condescendingly, "Yes . . . a female with brains. Yes, and she's seen life too." Although Bazarov tries to explain that he means this in "a good sense," he nevertheless describes Anna with the "stale loaf" reference.

Bazarov is afraid of Anna, both for the power she is beginning to hold over his heart and because he has very little power over her; he cannot manipulate her as he initially believes Katya can be manipulated. Hypocritically, Bazarov, who warms to the idea of manipulating women like Katya into an image that is pleasing to him, complains of the manipulative quality of women. When Arkady previously asked his mentor, "Why are you unwilling to allow freethinking in women?," Bazarov replies: "Because, my boy, as far as my observations go, the only freethinkers among women are frights."

Bazarov's view of freethinking women is even worse after Anna has "forced" him to confess to her that "I love you like a fool, like a madman." Anna slights his charms, letting him know that she is not interested in him in this way, and Bazarov tells Arkady that, "to my mind, it's better to break stones on the highroad than to let a woman have the mastery of even the end of one's little finger." Bazarov feels he has let his guard down and been manipulated by Anna and becomes bitter at the thought that he has been played in this way.

Besides being looked at as inferior or manipulative, Turgenev's characters also view some women as independent. In fact, before he is rebuffed by Anna, Bazarov agreed to some extent with a woman's right to advance her circumstances. As Bazarov notes to Arkady just prior to meeting Anna (and prior to being rattled by her): "to my mind, to marry a rich old man is by no means a strange thing to do, but, on the contrary, very sensible." If Bazarov had not been affected by his love for Anna, he might have still held this view, instead of denouncing women as manipulative. In fact, as Barbara Alpern Engel notes in her book, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-century Russia*, the nihilists in general were very supportive of women's rights, and "devoted considerable attention to women's problems." Engel notes that during the 1860s especially, these nihilists "tried to help women by encouraging them to become autonomous and by providing alternatives to the traditional family."





This is certainly addressed through the character of Madame Kukshin, who Sitnikov, a professed nihilist, adores for her independence: "She's a remarkable nature, *émancipée* in the true sense of the word, an advanced woman." Kukshin is proud of the fact that she has separated from her husband, and loves the power and responsibility she holds: "I manage my property myself." Kukshin states to her gathered men—Sitnikov, Bazarov, and Arkady—that Russia needs to change its education system, since "our women are very badly educated." In fact, Kukshin cannot stand the writings of women like George Sand, who Kukshin says "hasn't an idea on education, nor physiology, nor anything. She's never, I'm persuaded, heard of embryology, and in these days—what can be done without that?" Kukshin, like her young male counterparts, rests her hopes on objective fields like science in an attempt to be "advanced." In fact, Sitnikov also criticizes other women who are not at the same level of advancement as Kukshin, as when he describes Anna Odintsov: "Clever, rich, a widow. It's a pity she's not yet advanced enough."

The idea of a woman being "advanced" is not new at this point and is not attributed only to the nihilists. In fact, Nikolai, Arkady's father, fell in love with a smart woman: "She was pretty, and, as it is called, an 'advanced' girl; she used to read the serious articles in the 'Science' column of the journals." However, whereas the nihilist view called for new, autonomous relationships for advanced women that were outside of the family, in the end Turgenev seems to imply the opposite. The two symbolic weddings at the end of the novel do more than heal the rift between Arkady and Nikolai; they also indicate Turgenev's true view about the appropriate role for women—powerful matriarchs. At the end of the novel, Fenitchka, who was meek and mild in the beginning, is "different." As Turgenev's narrator notes, she is "respectful towards herself and everything surrounding her, and smiled as though to say, 'I beg your pardon; I'm not to blame.'" And Anna Odintsov, who is portrayed throughout as the ultimate independent woman, remarries. As the narrator notes, "They live in the greatest harmony together, and will live perhaps to attain complete happiness . . . perhaps love."

Even Bazarov, who had previously denounced women as inferior and manipulative, has had a change of heart, as he indicates to Anna in his final visit to Nikolskoe: "Before you is a poor mortal, who has come to his senses long ago, and hopes other people, too, have forgotten his follies." This is a far cry from the person who was never concerned with the way that people viewed him. In addition, Bazarov is also respectful toward the institution of marriage, something which he has never appreciated before. In his final conversation with Arkady, he is complementary about Katya's power: "Many a young lady's called clever simply because she can sigh cleverly; but yours can hold her own." Whereas before, Bazarov viewed Katya as weak and impressionable, now he acknowledges her strength. In the past, Bazarov would have viewed this power as dangerous, fearing that Katya might manipulate men in a bad way. However in the end, Bazarov, and indeed Turgenev, conclude that this manipulation is a good thing: "she'll have you under thumb—to be sure, though, that's quite as it ought to be."

**Source:** Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *Fathers and Sons*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.





## Critical Essay #2

*In the following excerpt, Lowe traces elements of both comedy and tragedy in Turgenev's novel.*

Sometime during the first months of 1862 Afanasy Fet sent Turgenev his reactions to *Father and Sons*. Fet's letter is not extant, but we do have Turgenev's reply, and it reinforces the often expressed conviction that one ought not to pay too much attention to what writers have to say about their own works. In the letter of April 6/18, 1862, Turgenev writes: "You also mention parallelism; but where is it, allow me to ask, and where are these pairs, believing and unbelieving?" . . . [In] spite of Turgenev's protests parallelism is one of the two basic principles at work in the novel. The other is contrast. No doubt there are few works in world literature that do not depend to some extent on parallels and contrasts for the building blocks that hold them together and give them coherence. In *Father and Sons*, however, their significance is all-inclusive and extends to matters of composition, characterization, and thematics. In *Father and Sons*, a novel whose very title both links and contrasts the generations, form and content are one. That pronouncement is not the pious repetition of a Formalist cliché. As the examination proceeds it should become increasingly apparent that in *Father and Sons* thematics determine form. As the first step in proving the validity of that contention, let us turn our attention to matters of composition and their relation to the novel's thematic concerns.

One way to look at the novel's structure is as a series of trips: Arkady and Bazarov are thus examined and illuminated in a variety of environments. At Marino Arkady is at home and Bazarov is the stranger. In town and at Nikolskoe, both Arkady and Bazarov are thrown into an unfamiliar environment, while at Bazarov's parents' estate Arkady is the stranger (though, paradoxically, he is less an outsider there than is Bazarov). Parallelism and contrast are immediately evident in such a scheme: Bazarov is the newcomer in one milieu, Arkady in another. But even within the series of trips we can establish cycles. Brazhe writes of two cycles of trips from Marino to Bazarov's home. Such a calculation takes into account only Bazarov's point of view. It would be more accurate to identify three cycles of trips. The interesting structural note here is that Arkady's and Bazarov's travels consistently dovetail with each other, even when the two protagonists are not together. In the first cycle, Arkady and Bazarov go from Marino to town to Nikolskoe to Bazarov's home and back through Nikolskoe to Marino. In the second cycle, Arkady goes to Nikolskoe on his own. In a later and parallel development, Bazarov arrives at Nikolskoe on his own. Finally, in the last cycle, Bazarov goes home alone, as does Arkady. Implicit in this view of the novel's structure is one of the novel's major themes: children cannot turn their backs on the world of their fathers. Imperfect as it may be, it represents the mainstream of humanity. Children ultimately do go "home" again, and willingly or grudgingly, they are reconciled to the family hearth. At that point, as Joel Blair notes, "the lives of the fathers become patterns for understanding the lives of the children."

A second way of viewing the structure is as a series of confrontations. Such an interpretation is particularly widespread, since it provides abundant opportunities to



discuss the ideological battles of the 1860s. Thus, we can map out the structure of *Fathers and Sons* as a series of ideological duels between Bazarov and Pavel, the ideological duels then capped by a real duel in which politics and social issues are as much at stake as personalities. Doubling the ideological skirmishes is Bazarov's series of erotic clashes with Odintsova. All discussions of the structure of *Fathers and Sons* in terms of confrontations are ultimately spinoffs from Gippius' Formalist analysis of composition in Turgenev's novels. (Rarely are they acknowledged as such.) Gippius' analysis is quite sophisticated, and there will be a need to return to it in some detail. It is nonetheless limited because, like most analyses of *Fathers and Sons*, it proceeds from the assumption that the novel is a tragedy and that Bazarov is the novel's only significant protagonist. These assumptions lead critics to attempt to identify a single, all-embracing structural pattern in the novel, whether it be trips, confrontations, love stories, or whatever. But the assumption needs to be reexamined. *Fathers and Sons* is a novel wholly dependent upon parallels and contrasts for its composition, and its structure is dualistic: it involves two parallel but contrasting patterns. The first is that of tragedy, while the second is comedy.

Since many will probably find controversial the notion that *Fathers and Sons* is in any way comedic, let us begin with this, the less obvious structural pattern in the novel. In using the word comedy, what it intended is not comedy in the popular sense (a funny play with a happy ending), but in the Aristotelian sense, specifically in its modern formulation by Northrop Frye. Frye uses comedy as a term denoting a literary mode, as he calls it, not a genre. Thus, as defined by Frye, the term is equally applicable to drama and narrative prose.

Basing his treatise on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Frye suggests that comedies deal with the integration of society. The standard comedic formula involves a young couple—the technical hero and heroine—whose marriage is blocked by other members of the cast (society). In realistic fiction employing the comedic mode, the hero and heroine tend to be dull but decent people, while the blocking characters are the truly interesting ones. The blocking characters are normally, but not necessarily, parental figures. They are consumed by a single passion (usually absurdly so), and they are in control of the society into which the hero and heroine seek entrance. The blocking characters are likely to be impostors, as Frye calls them, people who lack self-knowledge. At the conclusion of comedy the blocking characters are either incorporated into or expelled from the society, as a result of which the hero and heroine are free to wed. Thus, comedies often conclude with a wedding and the birth of babies, and have a rural setting (an escape to a simpler, less corrupt society). At the conclusion of comedy the audience feels that justice has triumphed, that the people who should have been united have been, and that everyone will live happily ever after in a freer, more flexible society.

This is a rather bald reduction of Frye's Aristotelian description of comedy, but it should be sufficient to demonstrate that in, *Fathers and Sons* we are dealing in part with the comedic mode. However, Turgenev spins some fascinating variations around the age-old comedic pattern.



Arkady is the technical hero about whom the comedic plot revolves. This is not to say that he is the novel's central hero. He is the *technical* hero of the comedic plot. Significantly, Gary Jahn notes that "Arkady and Bazarov are the organizational focus of the novel [*Italics mine-DL*]." And true to comedic type, Arkady is a rather bland but not unattractive personality. As in Roman comedy, we have not a single hero, but a pair of heroes. Instead of the typical pair of young heroes, however, Turgenev gives us a father and son, both of whose marriages are blocked, as is a genuine reconciliation between father and son. The blocking characters are Pavel and Bazarov, and consistent with the traditions of fictional comedy, both of them are considerably more interesting than the technical heroes and heroines, and both of them are removed from the stage at the culmination of the comedic plot line.

Bazarov's negative influence on Arkady forestalls an accommodation between him and his father, and it temporarily blocks Arkady and Katya's marriage, largely because Bazarov's attitudes, which Arkady attempts in vain to adopt, prevent the latter from coming to terms with himself and his true nature. In this connection, James Justus points out that "the battle is not just fathers against sons, but sons against themselves." Bazarov's obstructing influence is apparent as early as the third chapter. Arkady, riding along in a carriage with his father, waxes lyrical, thus betraying his "un nihilistic" enthusiasm for the beauties of nature. He abruptly breaks off in mid-sentence. "Arkady suddenly paused, glanced back obliquely and lapsed into silence." Bazarov's presence prevents Arkady from being himself, and as a result the relations between father and son are strained. Bazarov is a blocker, and his status as an obstacle to reconciliation between father and son is emphasized in several of the novel's passages. Just after the scene in which Bazarov suggests that Arkady wean his father away from Pushkin by giving him more adult food for thought, i.e., Büchner's *Stoff und Kraft* (sic), we discover Pavel and Nikolay in conversation:

"Well, you and I," Nikolay Petrovich, sitting in his brother's room the same day after dinner, said to Pavel, "have fallen into the ranks of the retired, our song is sung. What's to be done? Perhaps Bazarov is right; but I confess that one thing pains me: I was hoping just now to become close friends with Arkady; but it turns out that I have lagged behind, he has gone forward, and we cannot understand each other."

By the end of the novel there is no doubt that it is precisely Bazarov's sway over Arkady that temporarily thwarts mutual understanding between father and son. Furthermore, Arkady's distorted image of himself as a fire-breathing, militant disciple of Bazarov's impedes his progress toward the realization that his love is not for Odintsova, as he imagines, but for her sister Katya. It is Katya who articulates what the reader has sensed all along—Arkady has been under Bazarov's thumb. "My sister was under his [Bazarov's] influence then, just



as you were," Katya tells Arkady. She goes on to inform Arkady that he has nothing in common with Bazarov. When Arkady protests, saying that he wants to be strong and energetic like his friend, Katya lectures him: "You can't just wish that.... Your friend does not wish for it, it's just there in him." Here Katya sounds another of the novel's major themes: one cannot be what one is not. That Arkady's attempt to play the nihilist causes him to be untrue to himself is made explicit when Bazarov suggests that they go to town:

". . . Well, what do you think? Shall we go?"

"I guess so," Arkady answered lazily.

In his soul he rejoiced at his friend's suggestion, but felt obliged to hide his feeling. Not for nothing was he a nihilist!

Arkady's transition from his false role as Bazarov's protégé and a rival for Odintsova to his true status as his father's son and claimant for Katya's hand is signalled in a scene at Nikolskoe:

They did not find him [Arkady] soon: he had taken himself off to the most remote part of the garden where, resting his chin on his folded hands, he sat, sunk in thought. [Cf. Nikolay's penchant for garden meditation.] They were profound and important, these thoughts, but not sad. He knew that Anna Sergeievna was sitting alone with Bazarov, and he did not feel jealousy, as had happened in the past; on the contrary, his face shone quietly; it seemed that he was surprised at something and gladdened, and that he was deciding on something.

It is appropriate that Arkady should come to such self-knowledge in the garden. Alexander Fischler has noted that the architecture of *Fathers and Sons* is linked to a garden motif, and that "the garden is a microcosm of nature, foreshortening its laws to uphold *what ought to be*." Arkady's post-garden proposal to Katya is a symbolic declaration of what he must be—-independent from Bazarov: Arkady is now free to be himself, to express his true feelings. Bazarov's dramatic farewell and rejection of Arkady are really no more than a recognition on the former's part that he no longer has any influence over Arkady. Bazarov then retires to his father's house, removing himself from the comedic plot line and freeing Arkady to marry Katya and to be reconciled with his father.

Pavel is a blocking character vis-à-vis Nikolay [Nikolai] and Fenchka [Fenitchka]. His presumed hostility to the idea of their marriage dissuades Nikolay from regularizing his liaison with Fenechka. Note Nikolay's reaction when Pavel asks him to marry Fenechka:



Nikolay Petrovich took a step back and threw up his hands. "Is that you saying this, Pavel? You, whom I have always considered an implacable foe of such marriages? . . . But don't you know that it was only out of respect for you that I haven't fulfilled what you so rightly call my duty!"

So Pavel encourages Nikolay to marry Fenechka—an act that will assuage Nikolay's guilty conscience and allow him to feel more at ease with his son.

Then, at the culmination of the comedic plot line the blocking characters have been expelled (or have expelled themselves): Pavel prepares to spend the rest of his days in Europe, where he will continue his superfluous existence, while Bazarov retires to his father's home, and the pairs who belonged together all along are at last united.

Some critics have noted the importance of couplings, uncouplings, and recouplings in the novel.

[F.R. Reeve] writes:

Characters in pairs . . . relate each to the other through a succession of still other people, each relationship forming a temporary triangle, each triangle imperfect. . . . The third person's action always in some sense splits the original pair.

Or, as Blair formulates it:

The principle of composition operating in the novel is the grouping and regrouping of characters; our understanding of the novel develops as we observe the initial groups of characters dissolve and perceive the formation of new pairs. Eventually, those characters who seemed most unlike are aligned; their similarities become more important than their differences.

This general movement toward the final, "inevitable" pairings is the stuff of comedy. The double wedding noted in the epilogue underscores the emergence of a new, pragmatically freer society, a salient feature of comedy. The crystallization of this less rigid society is underlined by Pavel when he urges Nikolay to marry Fenechka: "No, dear brother, enough of high-mindedness and thinking about society: we're already old and peaceful people; it's time we put aside empty pretense." The new society, though not earthshakingly different from the old, is a little less rigid, a little more spontaneous: Nikolay, a member of the gentry, has become free to take Fenechka, a peasant, as his lawfully wedded wife. In this respect [Viktor Shklovsky,] overstates the case in arguing



that "What is new in Turgenev's novel was that he understood the love story as the confrontation of new people with a world built on old principles." It is really Nikolay and Fenechka who confront old social values with new ones, Arkady and Katya's thoroughly conventional marriage with their own socially "progressive" one. Shklovsky's assessment nonetheless shows that he perceives a comedic base in the novel. Fischler, who emphasizes the classical bases of *Fathers and Sons*, also sees comedy at work here. He writes of the epilogue as "*prostodushnaia komediia*, 'artless comedy'—life itself or a play in which the author's strings no longer matter. In such comedy, the naive pursuit of happiness by the characters remaining on the stage blends with the timeless designs, overwhelming what momentarily stood out and was disturbing because of its alien, fortuitous or fateful appearance."

What are the implications of the novel's comedic structure? One, obviously, is that the comedic mode is extraordinarily hardy and adaptive. But, more importantly, an analysis of *Fathers and Sons* in terms of comedy explains in generic terms why many critics read the novel as an affirmative one—one that celebrates life and nature (or, more accurately, Life and Nature). Strakhov, for instance, argues: "Although Bazarov stands above everyone in the novel, life stands above him."

But what kind of life stands above Bazarov? Some critics dismiss the life led by Katya, Arkady, Nikolay, and Fenechka as banal, mediocre, *poshly*. Pisarev, for one, suggests: "The life of a limited person always flows more evenly and pleasantly than the life of a genius or even just an intelligent person." [G. A. Byaly] asserts that Pavel and Nikolay are "finished" (*konchenye liudi*), that "life is passing them by." . . . Thus, for Byaly, Nikolay is not even involved in life.

Do Nikolay and Arkady and their wives represent mediocrity? Yes, but not in a negative sense. Their mediocrity is that of the middle way, the golden mean. Arkady and Nikolay may be ordinary, but, as Paul Bourget suggested, nearly a century ago, there is something fresh and appealing about Turgenev's average man. Turgenev himself spoke of Goethe's Faust as the defender of "the individual, passionate, limited man" who still has the right and the opportunity to be happy and not be ashamed of his happiness." Boyd writes: "The love of Arkady and Katya gives a healthy, optimistic balance to the novel. [A. Batyutor] calls the novel's love scenes life affirming. And Vinogradov writes:

The novel in essence is a battle of "cerebral" negative theories with the mighty power of love, with the inexpressible beauty of nature, with all the intermix of human feelings which, though "old," are alive and warm—a battle that ends with the triumph of "humanness," "nature," "beauty," over "nihilism."

The comedic couples may be limited, but they are hardly vegetables, nor is their existence gray. Arkady is a competent estate manager, and all the Kirsanovs' lives, ordinary as they may be, are enriched by an instinctual and profound attraction to nature, art, and their fellow man. They represent an ideal that Turgenev himself was





unable to attain. While working on *Fathers and Sons*, he wrote a letter to K. N. Leontiev in which he confessed:

And that I, as you write, have lately become gloomy, there's nothing surprising in that: I will soon be 42 years old, but I haven't made a nest for myself, haven't secured any spot for myself on earth: there is little cause for joy in that.

It must be admitted, however, that Turgenev claimed (*post-facto*) that in *Fathers and Sons* he had taken a contemptuous, despairing attitude toward bourgeois domesticity. In a letter of April 14/26, 1862, to Sluchevsky, Turgenev responds to what seems to have been Sluchevsky's summary of the reactions of Russian students in Heidelberg to *Fathers and Sons* (no letters from Sluchevsky are extant). The students' reactions are indicative, as is Turgenev's reply:

What was said about Arkady, about the rehabilitation of the fathers, etc., only shows—forgive me!—that I haven't been understood. *All my povest* [short novel] *is directed against the gentry as a progressive class*. Examine closely Nikolay Petrovich, Pavel Petrovich, Arkady. Weakness, flabbiness (*vialost*), or limitedness (*organichennost*).

Later in the same letter Turgenev expresses bewilderment at the Heidelberg students' having found Arkady "a more successful type." Thus we have Turgenev's own testimony that he did not intend to portray Arkady or Nikolay in a positive light. But an author's intentions are one thing, the reader's perceptions quite another. In spite of scornful depictions of "blissful" marriages in other Turgenev works, such as "*Andrey Kolosov*," "*Two Friends*," and "*The Country Doctor*," and Turgenev's protestations to the contrary, Nikolay, Arkady, and their wives add a healthy, optimistic note to *Fathers and Sons*. In this connection Gippius, discussing groups of *poshly* characters in *Smoke and Nest of Gentlefolk*, points out that these characters are "portrayed with exaggerated distortion, not at all as in *Fathers and Sons*, where the corresponding characters are presented in a significantly muted (*smiagchenny*) form, almost idealized, no matter how much Turgenev himself denied it."

"Arkady and Nikolay are not men of great stature, they are not great thinkers, but Turgenev's having infused them with love of Schubert, Pushkin, evening sunsets, their families, and their fellow man makes it difficult to conceive of them and the life they lead as *poshly*. Turgenev portrays the Kirsanovs in a positive, if subdued light. And he does so within the context of a comedic structure, one that invariably leads the audience at the conclusion to recognize that "this is how things ought to be." Bazarov's death is quite another matter, of course. That is the culmination of the novel's tragic structure. But in the first part of the novel's epilogue, where life and love are celebrated at Pavel's



farewell dinner, with its exaltation of marriage and family [as Strakhov writes] "Turgenev stands for the eternal foundations of human life, for those basic elements which may perpetually change their forms, but in essence always remain unchanged."

But of course not all critics find such positive notes in *Fathers and Sons*. Most would probably argue that the novel is a tragedy. Such an analysis should surprise no one—it is a bromide of Turgenev criticism. But how and why *Fathers and Sons* is a tragedy—these are questions that until recently have remained largely unexplored. Once again Northrop Frye provides useful tools for analysis. The basic movement of tragedy, according to Frye, is toward the exclusion of a hero from a given society, with an emphasis on the hero's tragic isolation. It is in this connection that Gippius' analysis of the structure of *Fathers and Sons* is particularly apt. He perceives the novel's "dynamic highway" in this way: "Having cast himself off from the elements of his milieu, the obviously hostile ones as well as the pseudo-friendly ones, the hero remains tragically alone." Yury Mann sees a similar pattern, which he calls "one against all."

According to Frye, the tragic hero must be of heroic proportions: "The tragic hero is very great as compared with us, but there is something else, something on the side of him opposite the audience, compared to which he is small." Surely this is the case with Bazarov, whose greatness (implied, rather than shown) is, as Strakhov argues, less than the sum of life forces represented by the Kirsanovs and their spouses.

In addition, Frye conceives of the tragic hero as an impostor, someone who is deceived about himself, who plays a role that is not his to play. Significantly, Charles Bachman writes of "tragedy and self-deception" in *Fathers and Sons*, pointing out that "false self-images are crucial to the tragic view which the action of the novel seems to demand. . . ." Most of the characters in the novel suffer from identity crises: this is true not just in the case of the strong characters, as Bachman suggests, but also of such a person as Arkady. But Bazarov's self-deception is the most extreme and his journey toward self-discovery the most painful and tragic. He dismisses the laws governing human life; his fatal infection, leading him to summon Odintsova for a last meeting in which he confesses that he is not the giant he had imagined himself to be, demonstrates that finally he understands the extent of his self-delusion.

The movement toward tragedy is generally toward a revelation of natural law, "that which is and must be," so that the audience's reaction to the hero's fall is paradoxical: we feel a sense of rightness (the tragic hero represents an imbalance in nature and thus must fall) and horrible wrongness (how sad that this man must fall). Such indeed is our reaction to Bazarov's death. Poignant as it may be, we nevertheless perceive, as Richard Freeborn formulates it, that Bazarov is a

usurper of divine right, whose arrogant self-will proclaims for itself a self-sufficiency in life which contravenes the limits of human experience and gives rise to a dilemma which is only to be resolved in death.





Fischler's approach to the question of Bazarov throws additional light on Turgenev's reliance on classical tragic models:

One must first note that Bazarov belongs to a special category of protagonists, the tragic protagonist or even the nature hero. He fits there less because of his famous assertion that nature is his "workshop," than because of his repeatedly underlined mysterious bonds with his natural surroundings. He is associated with nature not only by brute strength and passion, but by vaguer, though not necessarily less awesome bonds of sympathy: the world responds to him, follows him, at least so long as he chooses to practice and accept association, that is, throughout the first part of the novel. He is born with a gift for harmony with the creation, yet, as he himself points out to Arkady, it is a gift of limited usefulness: one may derive strength from nature so long as one yields to it through naive faith, so long as one is willing to believe in the talismanic virtue of an aspen tree by a clay pit; but, when the magic is lost, one must drift to the inevitable end. Nonetheless, even when Bazarov's bond to nature ceases being a means for coping with the world, his fate remains associated with it by the structure of the novel. He is a nature hero, and, by ironic extension, he is even a nature "god"; he appears on the stage in spring (May 1859) to offer the traditional challenge to an existing order already undermined by inner and outer turmoil; he is defeated (expect perhaps in the duel with Pavel Kirsanov, the living-dead representative of the older order who, in many respects, is a projection of himself); then, largely through his own acquiescence and even complicity, he dies in August, at the height of summer, a traditional time for the death of gods....

Comedy and tragedy coexist in *Fathers and Sons*. It is of course the novel's tragic side that impresses us most deeply. Such is human nature. Moreover, Turgenev takes pains to reinforce the novel's tragic overtones by placing the description of Bazarov's aged parents weeping inconsolably at their son's grave as the last element in the novel, the final chord of a tragic symphony, as it were. And yet, if we look closely at the very last lines of *Fathers and Sons*, we see that the narrator holds out a certain note of optimism, ambivalent as it may be:



Can it really be that their prayers and their tears are fruitless? Can it really be that love, sacred, devoted love is not all-powerful? Oh no! No matter what a passionate, sinful, rebellious heart may be hidden in the grave, the flowers that grow on it look at us serenely with their innocent eyes; they speak to us not only of eternal peace, of that great peace of "indifferent" nature; they speak as well of eternal reconciliation and of life eternal....

But what does Turgenev mean by "life everlasting"? The life of nature, which renews itself annually? The life of humanity, which is everlasting inasmuch as a new generation always takes the place of the dying one? Does the narrator really have in mind the Christian notion of the immortality of the soul? He is purposely vague in this quasi-pantheistic, quasi-Orthodox formulation. What is clear is that life goes on. Bazarov is dead, but Nikolay and Fenechka, along with Arkady and Katya, are multiplying and bringing forth much fruit.

The novel's tragic side predominates, but it does not overwhelm. Significantly, critics who write of *Fathers and Sons* as a tragedy often stop short of calling it a tragedy, pure and simple. Charles Bachman calls it "a basically tragic novel." Helen Muchnic describes the novel as "tragic in its implications, but not in its tone." Such hesitation can be accounted for on the formal level by the recognition of coexisting comedic and tragic modes within the novel. Observing this relationship helps us to understand—in formal terms—the initial and continuing furor created by *Fathers and Sons*. In "*Apropos of Fathers and Sons*" Turgenev writes that he has an interesting collection of documents and letters from readers who accuse him of doing totally contradictory things in his novel. This is hardly surprising, since Turgenev *is* doing what seem to be contradictory things within the work. By combining the tragic and comedic modes he seems to stand behind two diametrically opposed views of life at one and the same time. If we take the novel's comedic structure out of context, we conclude that life is triumphant, rewarding, and meaningful. Such is the conclusion that any comedy forces upon us. And in *Fathers and Sons* the portraits of the Kirsanovs, their babies, their joyful participation in the natural cycle, all lead the audience to infer that all's right with the world. On the other hand, if we take the novel's tragic side out of context, we are led to the view that life, which is ruled by fate and the irrational, is essentially meaningless: death is triumphant. Where does Turgenev stand? "Where is the truth, on which side?" We may ask, as does Arkady. And Bazarov's answer is most appropriate: "Where? I'll answer you like an echo: where?" An analysis of the novel's dualistic structure shows that the truth is on both sides. Or, as Fischler argues, the problems raised in *Fathers and Sons* are insoluble and the rifts revealed can be mended only by time. This conclusion is supported by one of Turgenev's letters to Annenkov, in which he writes: "I know that in nature and in life everything is reconciled one way or another.... If life cannot [do the reconciling], death will reconcile." Thus Turgenev's own view of life is dualistic, but not contradictory, and this dualism lies at the heart of *Fathers and Sons*: as we have seen in this [essay], it accounts for the novel's structure.

**Source:** David Lowe, excerpt, from his *Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons,"* Ardis, 1983, pp. 15-27.



## Critical Essay #3

Though Ivan Turgenev dealt with self-deception in a number of his works, nowhere is the theme more pervasive, or more subtly or convincingly handled, than in *Fathers and Sons*. Here false self-images are crucial to the tragic view which the action of the novel seems to demand, a view which in turn helps make it probably Turgenev's greatest work. This self-deception is most obvious in the case of certain minor characters. Peter (Piotr), Nikolai Kirsanov's "progressive" servant, is "a man whose whole merit consisted in the fact that he looked civil," and he obviously believes himself so, even though his civility is little more than an appearance. The progressive dandy, Sitnikov, is a sycophant who believes himself brave and definite when he feels the support of his idol, Bazarov, Madame Kukshin compensates for feminine plainness and frustration with the self-image of a woman of "advanced" views, and Matvey Ilyich Kolyazin, Arkady's relative who is sent to the town of X—to investigate the governor, is a "progressive" who "had the highest opinion of himself," whose slogan was "*l'énergie est la première qualité d'un homme d'état*," and for all that, he was usually taken in, and any moderately experienced official could turn him round his finger."

These characters help exemplify Turgenev's satire on a society which wished to believe itself progressive; but they also reflect, in miniature as it were, the basic problem of self-identity of the three strong characters of the novel: Evgeny Vassilyich Bazarov, Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov and Anna Sergeyevna Odintsov. Turgenev distinguishes them as strong by giving them poise and self-confidence. They seem to feel superior to those around them, and have enough pride to trust their own personalities and judgements in social intercourse. By contrast Arkady, his father Nikolai, Bazarov's parents and Sitnikov are more typical of Turgenev's male figures: pliant and anxious to please. Arkady, for example, like Sitnikov, appears strong mainly when he senses Bazarov's support, and Turgenev implies that he will always be a follower.

In the novel strength of personality causes both attraction and repulsion, so that the points of greatest tension occur when the strong characters interact: the debate over nihilism, Bazarov's infatuation for Anna and the duel. These provide the major occasions through which Bazarov, Pavel and Anna each discover that the self-identity which formed the basis for their inner poise had been an illusion.

The chief encounter is that of Bazarov and Pavel, who at first appear to be opposite in several significant ways. The former is young, plain-featured, gruff and rude in manner, disrespectful of tradition and the humanities, and unconcerned with form, social and otherwise. Pavel is past middle-age, strikingly handsome, sensitive and careful in manner, strongly in favor of tradition and the humanities and over-concerned with form in dress, speech and behavior. While Arkady echoes Bazarov and Nikolai tries to be polite, the two main antagonists clash over the arts, tradition and nihilism. Their seemingly opposite attitudes and temperaments, however, and their contemptuous references to each other as "An antique survival" and "That unkept creature" can become the occasion for open conflict only because they are depicted as so similar in their egoism and their strength of personality. Both are accustomed to being deferred to,



and cannot tolerate a lack of respect for themselves. Pavel is especially defensive. He ". . . had grown to detest Bazarov with all the strength of his soul; he regarded him as stuck-up, impudent, cynical and plebian; he suspected that Bazarov had no respect for him, that he had all but contempt for—him. Pavel Kirsanov!"

The most basic reason for Pavel's antagonism, however, lies deeper, and concerns his self-image. The great love affair of his life had been with the Princess R—, the glance of whose eyes was "swift and deep." Her reply to Pavel's statement that she was a sphinx indicated her intelligence: " 'I?' she queried, and slowly raising her enigmatical glance upon him. 'Do you know that's awfully flattering?' she added with a meaningless smile, while her eyes still kept the same strange look."

In becoming infatuated with the Princess, Pavel had fallen in love with stupidity unconsciously masking itself as depth, and his tragedy in this affair had a conscious and an unconscious aspect. His whole personality was so bound up with her love that when she lost interest he became disillusioned with life. But a major reason for his being attracted to her in the first place would seem to have been that, like the Princess, Pavel himself had grown accustomed to depending for his sense of identity upon the esteem and expectations of others—an esteem based upon his impressive mask of manners and physical appearance. His response to the Princess had a quality of desperation. Thrust by handsome looks and a dashing manner into the role of a romantic, Pavel came to believe the role himself. His pride grasped at it as a self-identity which seemed as impressive as was his appearance. "Much admired in society," he "had read in all five or six French books." ". . . a brilliant career awaited him. Suddenly everything changed." The most ironic aspect of this change was that in becoming ensnared in the deep but "meaningless" gaze of the Princess' eyes, Pavel had, not unnaturally, fallen victim to the same kind of deception as had the society which admired him. While he had perhaps read "five or six" more French books than the Princess, his statement that she was a sphinx was almost as unperceptive as her inane but pretentious reply.

After being deserted, and unaware of the irony implicit in his love, Pavel settled at Marion, where "he arranged his whole life in the English style." Of course Turgenev is satirizing in this "man with the fragrant mustache" the snobbishness and artificiality of the Russian gentry. But the satire is mixed with sympathy, since Pavel's artificiality and need for a style of life are largely unconscious attempts to retain in a new setting the romantic self-image with which he has so long identified himself. While Pavel and his brother are standing outside at night, however, and Nikolai "had not the force to tear himself away from the darkness, the garden, the sense of the fresh air in his face, from that melancholy, that restless craving," Pavel's feelings are similar to what would have been expected from Bazarov: ". . . he too raised his eyes towards the heavens. But nothing was reflected in his beautiful dark eyes except the light of the stars. He was not born a romantic, and his fastidiously dry and sensuous soul, with its French tinge of misanthropy was not capable of dreaming ...."

Pavel's view of himself as a romantic, then, is quite obviously a self-deceptive illusion. In view of this, the underlying motive for his resentment of Bazarov would seem to be that he sensed in the younger man a rather complete image of his own genuine



temperament: not only his egoism and pride, but his misanthropy and lack of romanticism as well. During the first argument (Chs. V and VI), his defense of nature, art and poetry against Bazarov, who refuses to acknowledge their value and is even "indifferent to the beauties of nature," actually conceal an insensitiveness to the things Pavel is defending. His staunch support of "the traditions accepted in human conduct," and of "personal dignity" and firmness of character as the "foundation for . . . the social fabric" are an overcompensation for the fear that in his encounter with Bazarov he is losing the basis for his own firmness of character—the image of self which he had so carefully though unconsciously created.

The duel not only forces the two antagonists into a grudging respect for each other's courage, but also reveals that they seem to hold similar attitudes toward Nikolai and the peasants. Pavel believes that Bazarov "behaved honorably," and they have a similar estimate of Nikolai's character:

"There's no deceiving my brother; we shall have to tell him we quarreled over politics."

"Very good," assented Bazarov. "You can say I insulted all Anglomaniacs."

"That will do splendidly."

Pavel is surprised at Bazarov's statement that the Russian peasant does not understand himself, because he obviously shares this belief: "Ah! so that's your idea! . . . Look what your fool of a Peter has done!"

These similarities, however, only further convince Pavel of the extent to which his self-image has been an illusion, and his joking with Bazarov is probably a cloak for this realization. What is even more significant is the major cause of the duel itself: Pavel's feelings for Fenichka. Before the duel, Fenichka had become "more afraid of Pavel Petrovich than ever; for some time he had begun to watch her and would suddenly make his appearance as though he sprang out of the earth behind her back, in his English suit, with his immovable vigilant face. . . ." After the duel, while mildly delirious, Pavel states that he sees a physical resemblance between the Princess R— and Fenichka, thus acknowledging that the latter has replaced the former as the symbol of his romantic illusion. The exclamation, "Ah, how I love that light-headed creature!" seems to refer to the Princess, but the object of Pavel's subsequent threat is omitted by Turgenev: "I can't bear any insolent upstart to dare to touch . . ." Both the Princess and Fenichka are meant, just as whatever rival had robbed Pavel of the Princess seems to be identified with Bazarov. By threatening the object toward which Pavel felt himself romantically inclined, both rivals have also threatened his careful illusion that he has a romantic temperament. His reaction in both cases is similarly desperate: in the first, disillusionment and exile from the Princess' scene of activity; in the second, the challenge to a duel and subsequent disillusionment and exile from Fenichka's scene of activity. After Bazarov's departure, Pavel tries to convince Nikolai that he should marry Fenichka: "I begin to think Bazarov was right in accusing me of being an aristocrat. No, dear brother, don't let us worry ourselves about appearances and the world's opinion





any more; we are old folks and resigned; it's time we laid aside vanity of all kind." In laying aside "appearances and the world's opinion," Pavel is acknowledging the falseness of the only self-identity he has consciously known, and the tear that rolls down his cheek as he exhorts Fenichka to love Nikolai is partly one of regret that the waste caused by this false self-identity is irrevocable. His suggestion that Nikolai marry Fenichka is really an act of despair. It is after the marriage that Pavel goes abroad, spiritually "a dead man."

The most ironic aspect of Bazarov's effect on Pavel is that the former's anti-romanticism and cynicism, which have made Pavel aware of these qualities at the heart of his own personality, are also an appearance concealing a different kind of person than Pavel ever realizes. Bazarov's profession of physician and his intense faith in the validity of experimental research are in direct contradiction to his statements that as a nihilist he believes "in nothing." But his infatuation with Anna is the chief event which reveals the romantic and at times lyrical sensibility beneath the gruff exterior. This is an ironic reversal for one who has characterized love as "romanticism, nonsense, rot, artiness." His overt scorn of poetry rings false when he quotes a line of "Der Wanderer" to Anna, and in his lyrical recollection of childhood in his later conversation with Arkady:

"That aspen," began Bazarov, "reminds me of my childhood; it grows at the edge of the claypits where the brick-shed used to be, and in those days I believed firmly that that clay-pit possessed a peculiar talismanic power . . ."

When alone, Bazarov "recognized the romantic in himself." One probable reason for his resentment of Pavel, then, is also an insecurity with his own self-image—a fear that his real temperament contains some of the romantic idealism which Pavel avows.

A further irony is that Bazarov has criticized Pavel for allowing his whole life to become dependent upon his passion for the Princess: "Still, I must say that a man who stakes his whole life on one card—a woman's love—and when that card fails, turns sour, and lets himself go till he's fit for nothing, is not a man, but a male." Yet after being rejected by Anna Sergeevna, Bazarov himself loses most of his own drive and sense of direction. He visits his parents, but feels dissatisfied and bored. After three days he impulsively visits Anna again and returns to Marino, where he conceals his romanticism from all but Arkady and Fenichka.

The source of Bazarov's disillusionment, however, is not only his discovery that his own self-image was an illusion. Anna's poise and serenity, which had attracted him and seemed to suggest genuine emotional depth, were actually manifestations of an emotional lethargy, an inability to feel deep passion. After Bazarov departs she begins to realize that there is something false about her conception of herself: "Under the influence of various vague emotions, the sense of life passing by, the desire of novelty, she had forced herself to go up to a certain point, forced herself to glance behind it, and had seen behind it not even an abyss, but a void . . . or something hideous."



Bazarov realizes that, like Pavel, he has become infatuated with a deceptive appearance. He turns to Fenichka partly because he senses that in her there is no illusion of self, and therefore no false mask. His declaration to her that "I live alone, a poor wretch," indicates the extent of both his trust in her and his disillusionment. The duel severs both him and Pavel from Fenichka, and Bazarov also becomes virtually a dead man, telling Arkady that "there seems to be an empty space in the box, and I am putting hay in; that's how it is in the box of our life; we would stuff it up with anything rather than have a void." He pays Anna one last visit, and the attempted casualness of their conversations cannot conceal the fact that they both feel ill at ease and empty. Feeling again "dreary boredom or vague restlessness," Bazarov finally returns home, and his death by typhus, like the demise of several of Thomas Hardy's heroes, is no artistic flaw in the novel, but an anticipated symbol of the death of his spirit which has already taken place.

Bazarov's tragic dilemma approaches the perspective which Turgenev invites the reader to share. The social class in the novel which suffers least from self-deception is the one to which Bazarov, in a last fruitless attempt to reestablish an identity, instinctively returns: that of the peasants and small rural landowners. The aristocracy, on the other hand, which wishes to believe itself progressive, is the class which as a whole suffers most from self-deception. In spite of disclaimers of didacticism Turgenev stated in a letter [dated 14 April 1862] to the poet K. K. Sluचेvsky that "My entire tale is directed against the nobility as a leading class." Bazarov, however, like the reader, has seen that not only "aristocrats" such as Pavel and Anna, but also all pseudo and genuine intellectual sophisticates, including himself, have been deceived as to their identity. Even Arkady, before his relationship with Katya, has had such illusions. As in Thomas Hardy, the gain of awareness has brought an inevitable loss of a sense of integrity—a dilemma which foreshadows the questioning of the very possibility of self-identity so prevalent in post-Freudian literature and society. But *Fathers and Sons*, though lacking the detailed psychological penetration present in the greater works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, nonetheless moves beyond the depiction of a pathetic paradox toward genuine tragedy; and perhaps the most fruitful method of discussing the tragic quality of this novel is by comparison with tragic drama.

As in Sophoclean tragedy, pride in Turgenev's novel is both a source of greatness and a tragic flaw. Because their pride is their own responsibility it becomes the main source of our admiration for Anna, Pavel and Bazarov, helping to give them magnitude and significance. Yet in contributing most to their perseverance in believing in and sustaining illusions of the self, their pride is also the major reason for their fall. Their own proud reserve and the modern universe in which they live prevent them from railing at the gods as did Lear, or examining the fatefulness of life as did Oedipus, Hamlet or Phèdre. But the questioning of the justice of fate, and the violent fall or destruction usually demanded by Sophoclean, Shakespearean and Racinian tragedy has become in *Fathers and Sons* the loss of self-identity: a paradox and a catastrophe which may well be as potentially tragic for modern man. This loss of self-identity, however, can be tragic rather than pathetic only if it involves a genuine, forceful and courageous internal and external struggle to maintain a sense of self. Necessary are both awareness and sheer stubbornness—which is presented rather than analyzed away. Through it would be





foolish to argue equivalencies, this dilemma, which characterizes Bazarov and Pavel, and to a lesser degree Anna, is also that of Oedipus. The pride with which Bazarov and Pavel assert themselves so forcefully as compensation for an unconscious insecurity is unexplained; the forcefulness does not depend on the insecurity. Sitnikov is also insecure, but weak. This unexplained but human dignity of pride which "goeth before a fall," combined with the seeming injustice—but not absurdity—of the fall, make it valid to classify *Fathers and Sons* as a basically tragic novel. The view of society and fate invited by the novel depends not upon Turgenev's final phrases concerning "eternal reconciliation," but upon the fact that for the strongest characters there has been no earthly reconciliation. In typical Turgenev fashion, the most assertive figure is killed off. The probability that the novelist's compulsion to destroy such heroes was motivated by his own pliant personality is only relevant to Turgenev's psychology, however. It does not affect the essential tragedy of *Fathers and Sons*, which lies in the fact that not only Bazarov, but all three strong characters in the novel have had self-images so dangerously false that, when uncovered, their personalities have been left shattered, dead of vitality or genuine hope.

**Source:** Charles R. Bachman, "Tragedy and Self-Deception in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*," in *Revue des langues vivantes*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, 1968, pp. 269-76.

# Adaptations

*Fathers and Sons* was adapted as an audio book by The Audio Partners Publishing Corporation in 1998 and read by David Horovitch.

*Ottsy i deti* is the Russian version of *Fathers and Sons*. It was adapted as a film in 1959. It was produced by Lenfilm Studio and distributed by Artkino Pictures.

## Topics for Further Study

Research the specific beliefs of both the young radicals from the 1860s and the older liberals from the 1840s in Russia. Create a picture, story, or some other sort of artistic effort in which half of the item represents the ideas of the radicals and half represents the liberals. Somewhere on this item, indicate the qualities you are trying to demonstrate for each half.

Read Albert Camus's *The Stranger* and compare Camus's existentialist narrator to Bazarov. What are the similarities and differences between nihilism and existentialism?

Research the current state of affairs in Russia, noting any particular reform efforts that are going on. How do these differ from reforms that were happening in the mid-1800s?

Research Russian art from the mid-1800s until the end of the nineteenth century and discuss whether it did or did not take a revolutionary approach, like much literature did. In either case, find one painting that you like and write a report giving your interpretation of what the painting means, as well as any historical significance it may have.

Research the complex history surrounding the emancipation of the serfs in Russia in the 1860s and their gradual establishment as landowners. Write a journal entry from the perspective of either a recently freed serf or a former member of the landed aristocracy, describing your views on the emancipation reforms. Incorporate your research into your entry where necessary.

Suppose Bazarov had not died from typhus at the end of the book and an extra chapter had been added on to talk about what happened to him in the end. Based on the transformation he undergoes in the novel, how do you predict he would have spent the rest of his life? Write a short plot summary detailing what would take place in this extra chapter.



# Compare and Contrast

**1860s:** Under the leadership of Alexander II Russia embarks on a number of social reforms, including abolishing serfdom and improving communications, such as establishing more railroad lines.

**Today:** Russia remains a poor and unstable country after the fall of the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century. In the wake of the brutal dictatorial regime that ruled "communist" Russia and other Soviet countries for much of the twentieth century, the plight of many Russians has worsened.

**1860s:** Like those in other countries, many of Russia's youth adhere to a scientific materialism philosophy, questioning everything with a strict rationalism and not letting any "irrational" behavior overcome them.

**Today:** In many civilized countries there is a resurgence in art, nature, and other humanistic pursuits, due in large part to humanity's increasing dependence upon technology.

**1860s:** Although modern medicine is improving with the such developments as vaccines, the "germ theory" of disease, and improved sanitation in hospitals, doctors are largely powerless. When cholera sweeps across Europe and Russia, many are killed.

**Today:** In most modernized countries, cholera and typhus, which are usually prevalent in poor, unsanitary areas, have been wiped out. Epidemic typhus persists in countries that experience famine, crowded living conditions, and other areas where sanitation is an issue. Cholera, on the other hand, has been largely dormant, and has not seen a major outbreak for more than a decade.



## What Do I Read Next?

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, originally written in 1868, is about the struggle that eccentrics face in an elite society that is both emulating contemporary Europe and drowning in Western materialism.

*Up from Serfdom: My Childhood and Youth in Russia, 1804-1824*, by Aleksandr Kikitenko, written in 1851—but not published until 1975—is a famous personal account from a young serf who describes what it was like as a member of the slave class, working at the mercy of Russia's wealthiest landowner. Although Kikitenko educates himself and becomes a teacher, he still faces the yoke of serfdom.

*Anna Karenina*, originally published serially from 1875 to 1877 by Leo Tolstoy, is a story of a married woman who has an affair with a count. The story revolves around the relationship she has with the two men and the social standards that they break in the process.

*Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, by Ivan Turgenev, is about the author's travels through Russia and his personal accounts with peasants who suffer because of their repression. When the sketches first appeared in book form in 1852, the author was put under house arrest for their political tone. Eventually, the sketches helped bring attention to the issue of emancipating the serfs.

*Vicissitude of Genre in the Russian Novel: Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons," Chernyshevsky's "What Is to Be Done?," Dostoevsky's "Demons," Gorky's "Mother"* (2001), by Russell Scott Valentino, talks about these authors' works and how this genre of "tendentious novels" became the most influential genre in Russian literature in the 1860s.

First published in 1842, *Dead Souls*, by Nikolai Vasilevich Gogol, is a story of a man who moves to an unknown town, wins the people's approval, and then plays out a scheme that involves buying the souls of all the recently deceased peasants.



## Further Study

Costlow, Jane Tussey, *Worlds within Worlds: The Novels of Ivan Turgenev*, Princeton University Press, 1990.

Turgenev's books are well known for the accurate portrayal of life within his time. The author discusses this aspect of his writing combined with his exquisite style for words.

Freeborn, Richard, *The Russian Revolutionary Novel: Turgenev to Pasternak*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Turgenev and Pasternak are just two of the Russian writers who faced persecution for their revolutionary works. One of the richest periods in Russian literature spans from the novels of Turgenev's time in the middle of the nineteenth century to those of Pasternak in the middle of the twentieth century.

Hayek, F. A., *The Road to Serfdom*, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Ahead of its time when first published in 1947, this book discusses the dangers to a society when the government gains increasing economic control. Hayek focuses mainly on the tyrannies of his time in Germany, Italy, and Soviet Russia, which were based on National Socialism. In this classic text, Hayek foresaw the failure of socialism.

Kolchin, Peter, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*, Belknap Press, 1990.

Kolchin's acclaimed comparative history study examines the institutions of slavery and serfdom in America and Russia respectively, including the emancipation efforts.

Lowe, David A., *Critical Essays on Ivan Turgenev*, Macmillan Library Reference, 1988.

This book contains reprinted criticism—reviews and essays—that was originally published in the early to late twentieth century. The criticism was originally published in English, German, and Russian.

Roosevelt, Priscilla, *Life on the Russian Country Estate: A Social and Cultural History*, Yale University Press, 1997.

The author gives a historical account of the rural, Russian aristocratic landowner class, which survived the emancipation of the serfs and was visible even at the end of the century. The book features many images and illustrations of a cultural world that has since vanished.

Waddington, Patrick, *Ivan Turgenev and Britain*, Berg Publishers Incorporated, 1995.

This book discusses the influence that Britain had on Ivan Turgenev. The author visited England often and associated with many of the English literary class, including

Tennyson and George Eliot. The book also reprints some previously unpublished articles and features an extensive bibliography.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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