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THE REFLECTION OF THE CONCEPT OF NIHILISM IN IVAN TURGENEV'S NOVEL "FATHERS AND SONS"

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Abstract
This article examines the concept of nihilism in the novel "Fathers and Sons" by the classic Russian author Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, exploring its socio-philosophical, historical, and literary-critical roots. Through the character of the protagonist, Yevgeny Bazarov, the study provides a theoretical analysis of the worldview held by the younger generation in the 1860s – specifically their rejection of traditional values – and demonstrates how this ideology ultimately faces a crisis when confronted with the realities of life. Furthermore, the article discusses Turgenev's perspective on nihilism and the enduring existential significance of the work today.

Keywords: nihilism, Ivan Turgenev, Yevgeny Bazarov, Fathers and Sons, philosophy of rejection, social conflict.

Introduction

The second half of the 19th century was a period of profound transformation in Russia's socio-political life. In particular, the intellectual climate surrounding the abolition of serfdom in 1861 laid the groundwork for the emergence of a new ideological current: nihilism. Nihilism is a philosophical worldview that rejects all generally accepted societal values, moral norms, traditions, state structures,

religion, and even art. It was not merely a departure from religion; rather, it was a rebellion by young intellectuals who had grown weary of the lofty ideals and empty, flowery rhetoric of the Western-leaning liberal gentry. Although the term had previously appeared in Western philosophy, it was Ivan Turgenev who – through his novel "Fathers and Sons", published in 1862 – introduced it into broad social and literary discourse.

Analysis and results

Yevgeny Bazarov is not merely a character in a literary work; he is a portrait of Russian nihilists. Turgenev depicts his character as highly resolute and cool-headed, yet exceptionally intelligent. In his appearance and attire, he stands in stark contrast to the refined atmosphere of the aristocratic Kirsanov household. In essence, Bazarov was a physician who knew no rest – constantly conducting biological experiments by dissecting frogs and studying the laws of nature. His worldview was built upon the principle of negation: "We reject everything, precisely because, in this day and age, rejection is the most useful thing." [1; 48]. He regards anything that yields no practical benefit – including love, which he terms a "biological need"; art, which he calls "nonsense"; and poetry, which he dismisses as a "childish pastime" – with disdain. Turgenev constructs the entire narrative arc of the work around the emergence, zenith, and eventual collapse of the philosophy of nihilism. This is most clearly manifested in the irreconcilable disputes between two generations. Rejecting culture and the aristocratic way of life, Bazarov mocks Pavel Petrovich's English-inspired habits and style of dress. Ultimately, this conflict leads them to a duel – a symbolic scene that illustrates both the impotence of the old world in defending its own principles and the utter disregard nihilism holds for all established traditions. While Pavel Petrovich champions aristocratic values, honor, and culture, Bazarov dismisses them as

"meaningless words" that hold Russia back and leave the peasantry to starve. Through these debates, Turgenev highlights the sharpness and logical rigor of Bazarov's arguments, underscoring the formidable influence that nihilism exerted during that era.

In Turgenev's work, the female figure consistently serves as the primary benchmark against which a protagonist's inner world and spiritual strength are tested. Anna Odintsova, for instance, is an intelligent, beautiful, and independent aristocrat – a woman of extreme composure. She is young, wealthy, and values the tranquility of her own life above all else. Before meeting her, Bazarov viewed women merely as biological entities – as raw material; upon first seeing her, he remarks, "What a magnificent anatomical specimen this fine lady is!" [1; 86]. Yet, a profound, genuine, and undeniable love for Odintsova shatters Bazarov's entire philosophy. He finds himself condemned to the very anguish of the soul – the torment of love – that he had previously dismissed as mere "sophistry".

"He would grow furious at the discovery of romanticism within himself, labeling this emotion coursing through his veins as a form of madness. Yet, in the darkness - alone in his room – he was forced to honestly acknowledge his own defeat". [1; 102].

Odintsova, for her part, does not wish to jeopardize her own peace. Frightened by Bazarov's passionate love, she rejects his advances, declaring: "No, God forbid - there is nothing in this world more precious than peace." This rejection transforms Bazarov's ideological tragedy into a psychological one; the very phenomena he sought to negate – love and human emotion – ultimately prevail over him. Bazarov's contraction of typhus while performing a routine autopsy, leading to his final days on his deathbed, serves as the novel's philosophical resolution. In the face of death, all ideologies and all forms of arrogance lose their power.

Bazarov comes to realize his own frailty. Looking at Odintsova as she visits him on his deathbed, he articulates his defeat in elegant, poetic language:

"Was I truly needed by Russia? Apparently not... Now... blow out this dying candle - let it go out..." [1; 194].

Turgenev concludes the work with a scene in which Bazarov's elderly parents sit weeping by his grave. This scene elevates the pathos of the narrative to a philosophical level:

"The flowers growing upon a grave do not speak only of stillness; they tell us of eternal creation, infinite life, and the profound peace of nature. No matter how rebellious a heart may be within the grave, nature inevitably enfolds it and brings it peace." [1; 201].

Ivan Turgenev's novel "Fathers and Sons" is not merely a social portrait of a specific era; it serves as an artistic testament to the eternal struggle between human nature and ideologies.

Conclusion

Through the character of Bazarov, Turgenev reveals the psychological and philosophical roots of nihilism while simultaneously demonstrating its limitations: a worldview rooted in negation proves powerless when confronted with the fundamental aspects of human existence – such as love, death, and affection. The author's empathy for his protagonist and his critical stance toward nihilism do not negate one another; rather, they form a dialectical unity that underpins the artistic truth of the work. Bazarov's tragedy is not merely a personal defeat, but an artistic expression of the contradictions inherent in the historical experience of an entire generation. In the figure of Bazarov, nihilism served as a storm – a force that arrived to sweep away the decaying feudal order and the hollow principles of society. Yet, a storm creates only a vacuum; "negation"

alone is insufficient to build a new life – a constructive vision is also required. As Dmitry Pisarev noted, the tragedy of Bazarov is the tragedy of a great and powerful individual who could not find a place within his own era. He perished, but the generations that followed him continued the work of transforming the world.

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