Introduction

Two Turgenevs?

More than a century and a half has passed since Turgenev entered the literary scene. Since then he has become a renowned author, whose work is appreciated both in Russia and in the rest of the world. Yet, when one examines the reception history of Turgenev’s work, a curious phenomenon repeatedly seems to present itself. I have in mind the more or less strict separation of Turgenev’s novels from the rest of his oeuvre. The novels are regarded as Turgenev’s contributions to Russian Realism. Indeed the novels fit the credo of Realism: a depiction of the life of the Russian intelligentsia, aimed at the analysis of possible new promising types among them. The discussion of social questions, and the description of the ideas of those parties that claimed to offer answers to the main political and social problems of the time, play an important role in the novels. This element of social discussion is not found in Turgenev’s short prose. Instead the focus there is on more universal, existential problems such as the psychological effects of passion, the confrontation with (the fear of) death, and, especially in the later stories, the supernatural.

The reception history of the novels has predominantly considered them in the light of the social debate that was going on at the time of their appearance. This is particularly true of their reception by Turgenev’s contemporaries, but this general approach has continued until now. Studies of the novels invariably contain a certain amount of information regarding the social and political environment in which the novels were written and received. This context serves as a reference point for evaluations of the characters and events. Examples of this approach are found not only in many Soviet studies but also in Western criticism (for instance Victor Ripp 1980 and Seeley 1991).

In periods of heightened aesthetic interest in literature, such as the post-realist period, critics’ attention shifted to the short prose. Literary criticism at the beginning of the twentieth century was inclined to treat the short stories as the better part of Turgenev’s work, displaying his gift for drawing detailed psychological portraits more successfully. For example, in a contribution to the five volume History of Russian Literature of the Nineteenth Century that appeared in 1910-11, A. E. Gruzinskij states that Turgenev was more an artist than a chronicler of his time and that he was more interested in psychological portraits than in contemporary social questions. He concludes: “Тургенев не был ‘писателем-гражданином’ […] больше всего он был художником-поэтом” (“Turgenev не был ‘писателем-гражданином’ […] больше всего он был художником-поэтом” – Gruzinskij/Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij 1911/1969: 279).

In a similar fashion, Vladimir Fišer argues that, although Turgenev wrote the novels to meet the demands of Realism, he was not really interested in the social engagement of his heroes (Fišer 1920). This, he says, is evident from the novels’ structure, in which the love between hero and heroine is central while the heroes’ social activities are only noted in passing:

While depicting the personal side of his heroes’ lives in his novels, Turgenev feels at home, but he seems to avoid portraying them on a wide arena of activity, although that apparently was in fact supposed to provide the basis of the novel’s design. […] Obviously, Turgenev the artist needs his heroes’ social activity only as an outside force that defines a human in a certain way. His attention is concentrated on individuals; everything else is kept at a distance. What is interesting is how an individual lives, loves and dies; for the sake of fullness and expressiveness of image conditions of time and place that are in and of themselves perhaps not very important are taken into account (Fišer 1920: 31).
Regarded in this way, the novels appear as a somewhat artificial combination of the content of a short story with a loose socio-historical framework.

Another example of contrasting the novels and the short prose is Marina Ledkovsky’s *The Other Turgenev* (1973). Her study is one of those that appeared in the West in the seventies and early eighties as part of a (re)discovery of Turgenev’s short prose. The “other Turgenev” whom the title of Ledkovsky’s study refers to is Turgenev the short prose writer as opposed to Turgenev the novelist. As was the case with Fišer’s approach, the result of the comparison between the short prose and the novels results in a negative view of the novels. Ledkovsky holds that the concrete and explicit historical setting of the novels limits their interest for the modern reader, while the more universal themes of the short prose have a more lasting appeal:

> It is rather significant that Turgenev’s “realistic” works, in which he exposed the latest political and social trends of the contemporary Russian scene, have tended to become outdated at different periods since their publication. [...] This aspect of Turgenev’s work nevertheless belongs to valuable historical material which acquires meaningful novelty in times of similar socio-political crises. The true measure of Turgenev’s achievement, though, rests in his concern with the eternal themes of individual existence in an impersonal universe, on which he concentrates exclusively in his novellas and “mysterious tales”, but which are found in all his work and lend it freshness for all times. (Ledkovsky 1973: 137-8)

This conclusion suggests that Turgenev’s short prose offers the best of his skills as a writer. Of course there are many studies of Turgenev’s work that do not compare the novels and stories in this manner. Nevertheless, it has become standard for discussions of the novels to concentrate on the relationship between these works and the reality of the Russian life they refer to. As a consequence, the novels have received a *status aparte* that is determined by their ‘realism’.

> It is to this division that I refer in the subtitle of this Introduction, and this division is what, in my opinion, should be seriously questioned. Should we, as the reception history suggests, discriminate between Turgenev the novelist, or Realist, and Turgenev the ‘poet’? A closer examination of the relationship between the short prose and the novels shows that such a division is unjust, not only because Turgenev usually worked simultaneously on a novel and one or more short stories, but also because the novels and stories are connected, both thematically and by character-type. M. Kleman (1936: 96-7) and Eva Kagan-Kans (1975: 9) have stated that each novel is thematically connected with a group of stories written in the same period, such that it is possible to see the stories as studies for the novel. Although I agree with A. Batjuto that this is not true of all the novels, but only of the first three of them (Batjuto 1972: 241-2), this does not invalidate the point. Where the characters are concerned, certain types of character recur in several novels and stories. This applies not only to minor, usually somewhat exaggerated characters such as the foreign doctor and the unsympathetic priest, but also to the major characters. For instance, Rudin resembles Jakov Pasynkov (“Jakov Pasynkov”), and both the personality and the fate of Bazarov are similar to those of Jakov in “The story of father Aleksej” (Koschmal 1984: 141-45).

> Furthermore, some of Turgenev’s basic philosophical ideas concerning the polar forces of egoism and altruism as displayed in nature and in man (voiced in his famous essay on “Hamlet and Don Quixote” - see 1.2) are also found, in a more condensed form, in the novels. The best known example is the likeness of the heroes in the novels to one or other of these two literary figures (see for instance Kagan-Kans 1975 and Mann 1986), but another, less well-known example is the insect imagery that Turgenev uses both in the essay and in a
number of his literary works, including *On the Eve* (see my analysis of this novel in chapter Four).

A final example of the interconnectedness of Turgenev’s novels and short prose is the occurrence of a stable set of images throughout Turgenev’s work. Walter Koschmal (1984) and Vladimir Toporov (2000) have identified a large number of images with a consistent symbolic significance that are found throughout Turgenev’s work. An example of such imagery is the significance that certain physical traits acquire. For example, a hooked nose consistently signals a person’s association with the supernatural (see Koschmal 1984: 49-58).

These examples of consistency in theme, character and imagery in stories and novels bear witness to the basic unity of Turgenev’s work. I think that the roots of this unity lie in Turgenev’s philosophical ideas, specifically in the less-abstract aspects of his world view. The basic premise of my investigation is that this world view determines the character of Turgenev’s work as a whole and should therefore form the basis of research into his work. It is from this point of view that I will approach Turgenev’s novels. The presentation of the methodology (in Chapter One) takes as its starting point an outline of those among Turgenev’s philosophical ideas that I consider most fundamental. Central to these ideas is the concept of nature as a dual force balanced between the wish for self-preservation that characterizes the individual creature, and the need for sacrificing the individual to the benefit of sustaining the whole. This concept of nature, which derives from the German romantic tradition, develops in Turgenev’s work into a tragic conflict between man’s expectations of life, and nature’s laws. Whereas man strives to achieve his individual goals (to lead a life that is successful from his point of view), nature’s laws make the destruction of individuality (ultimately in death) inescapable.

This conflict between the individual and cosmic forces is a basic theme throughout Turgenev’s work. As indicated above, this fact has been acknowledged for the short prose, but it has yet to receive its due place in the reception of the novels.

In recent years there has been a trend towards ‘poetic’ analysis of the novels. Important studies are those of Irene Masing-Delic (1985, 1987), Jane Costlow (1990) and James Woodward (1990). The analysis of the novels’ imagery in these studies reveals that they, like the stories, are concerned with what Ledkovsky described as “the eternal themes of individual existence in an impersonal universe” (Ledkovsky 1973: 137). However, these approaches remain unsatisfactory in one important respect: they fail to formulate the relationship between these ‘eternal’ themes and the historically time-bound aspect of the novels. This results in an understanding of the novels that is not dissimilar to that of Fišer, who saw the novels as short prose (that is, sharing the concerns of the short prose) contained within a socio-political shell. The historical substance of the novels consequently lacks a clearly defined place in the process of interpretation. It is therefore desirable to show how the whole of the novels’ material functions to communicate Turgenev’s views. I believe that the structure of the novels as a whole is geared towards the presentation of Turgenev’s ideas concerning the tragic conflict between the individual and the laws of nature. The depiction of the historical and cultural environment serves as the framework within which the individual’s life and goals are outlined. It is here, in this contemporary setting, that our attention is focused on the unique fate of (extraordinary) individuals. It is against this background that the poetic

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1 In the division of Turgenev’s work into ‘universal’ short prose and ‘contemporary’ novels, the place of Turgenev’s drama remains in the background. This is partly due to its having been written relatively early in Turgenev’s literary career (between 1843 and 1852). The short prose and the novels are more directly interrelated. I am not including the drama in my study, therefore, but I would simply note that the drama does resemble the short prose in its focus on the depiction of character, often drawing upon association as an indirect means of characterization. This is a feature of Turgenev’s means of rendering character throughout his work.
structure builds a pattern of ‘typification’ of the characters. From here they can be associated with more general types that do not need to be tied to any particular historical period. Examples are figures from classical and world literature, such as Oedipus, Faust and characters from Russian folklore, by association with whom the characters in the novels seem to reenact the lives of the archetypes. As a consequence, any notion of uniqueness of character within the contemporary context of the novel becomes irrelevant.

In Chapter One, I shall present a model for the textual analysis of the novels which will enable us to trace the textual means through which the contemporary and universal images of the characters are communicated. The ensuing chapters contain the analyses of the novels. I have decided to deal with all six novels in spite of a tendency among critics to maintain that, after Fathers and Sons, Turgenev changed his novelistic manner. This is because Turgenev himself suggested the contrary in his introduction to the 1880 edition of his six novels. Reacting to his contemporaries’ suggestions that he had altered his earlier method,² he wrote: “On the contrary, I think I could more accurately be accused of excessive constancy and a sort of straightforwardness of method. The author of Rudin, written in 1855, and of Virgin Soil, written in 1876, is one and the same person.” (Мне, напротив, кажется, что меня скорее можно упрекнуть в излишнем постоянстве и как бы прямолинейности направления. Автор “Рудина”, написанного в 1855-м году, и автор “Нови”, написанной в 1876-м, является одним и тем же человеком - XII, 303).³ An investigation of all six novels on the basis of the model for textual analysis that I will discuss in the next chapter will allow us to establish the relationship between the earlier and later novels as far as the expression of Turgenev’s dual world view is concerned.

² These contemporaries mainly aimed at the supposed decrease in Turgenev’s interest in the current socio-political situation in Russia, which they saw reflected in the supernatural themes of Smoke, and of the short stories of the sixties and seventies.

³ This reference has been taken from Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v dvadcati vos’mi tomach, Mosvka, 1960-1968. The Roman numeral indicates the volume, and the Arabic numeral the page number.