Chapter Three
A Nest of Gentry

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that Rudin is a novel in which Turgenev’s dual world view comes to the fore only in a very limited form. Both narrative and verbal art are geared toward the specific aims of that novel – the presentation of an assessment of the superfluous hero, and the creation of an image of him as a complex person who has both weak and strong features, and is not to be condemned. For this reason, Rudin is untypical when analyzed on the basis of the model I have presented for reading the novels. In A Nest of Gentry (Дворянское гнездо - 1859), as I hope to show, the narrative is constructed so as to present a dual (contemporary and cosmic) view of the hero’s life and fate. At the same time, however, the question of the significance of the superfluous man of the eighteen forties within Russian history is addressed once again, as it was in Rudin, and in this respect the first two novels form a unity since both have heroes who belong to that generation, a category of the past.33 In each of the later novels, the hero is a representative of the successors to that generation, the expected ‘new man’. We find him in non-reflective types such as Insarov and Litvinov, as well as in representatives of the ideological groups of the sixties and seventies, including Bazarov and Nezdanov.

In Turgenev criticism, the contemporary aspect of A Nest of Gentry has received a great deal of stress. It is usually treated as a novel that focuses on the tragic position of the men of the forties – a lost generation, too much marked by the past to be able to participate in Russia’s future. A significantly different approach is offered by Costlow (1990). She draws attention to those elements in the novel that convey a notion of timelessness. She formulates these elements in terms of idyll, which, according to her, is the state the hero longs to reach in an attempt to escape the history-bound course of his past. What the novel communicates, according to her, is that the hero is denied the idyll and that history therefore remains a ruling force. I will present different conclusions. On the basis of my analytical approach, I shall demonstrate that the novel does not feature a conflict between history and idyll, or between harsh reality and a desired state of bliss, but rather presents two views of the course of the hero’s life, one determined by his contemporary situation and the other determined by fate. As in Rudin, the contemporary portrait of the hero in A Nest of Gentry renders his superfluity explainable in historical terms. However, whereas in Rudin there is no more than a hint at a more universal background for Rudin’s fate, in A Nest of Gentry the verbal art network links the hero’s life and fate to those of more universal types, suggesting that the hero may be superfluous through the operation of cosmic laws.

A characteristic of A Nest of Gentry that is especially worth noting in this respect is the importance of the element of history. The historical framework in which the characters are placed is, by comparison to that of the other novels, remarkably extensive. I shall argue that this is part of the novel’s general focus on the element of time. I intend to show that the novel

33 Apart from this there are many differences between the two novels and their respective heroes. Rudin’s romanticism is one of his prime features, while in Lavrekkij’s portrait it is hardly of importance. Rudin is characterized by an atmosphere of irony because the tragedy of Rudin’s life has comical overtones. His portrait has elements of caricature, although his good intentions are ultimately placed beyond doubt. In A Nest of Gentry there is no trace of such a comical element; Lavrekkij’s fate is harsh and bitter. It may be that this greater sense of deep tragedy is linked to the idea of inherent tragedy; that is, cosmic tragedy, a concept that is certainly suggested in the second novel but is mostly absent in Rudin.
explores the impact of history and historical circumstances on man’s life, and suggests that this influence is countered by an ahistorical influence, namely that of predetermined fate.

The two textual and interpretative levels, the contemporary and the cosmic, each present a different view of the importance of history and historical factors. On the contemporary level, established by the narrative art structure, history comes to the fore as the main determinative force in life. History, in this context, should not be read as referring primarily to the influence of important historical developments on the lives of several generations, as in Tolstoj’s War and Peace. Instead, I refer principally to the idea behind the notion of history; that is, an understanding of events as being linked in a logical-causal manner, as a “historical” narrative. In A Nest of Gentry, we find an elaborate description of the hero’s ancestry. Similarly, in the portraits of the other characters, a great deal of attention is paid to the biographies of their parents and the stories of their own lives so far. In none of the other Turgenevan novels do we find anything of the kind. The characters are thereby placed in a historical framework that stresses the idea of the determinative influence of history on man. Again, what I am referring to here is not world history, but rather what we might call ‘personal’ history; that is, all the influences that are determined by the circumstances of the subject’s parents, his upbringing, his education and the other important events that will have had a significant impact on his life.

This idea of the determinative influence of history is countered by the verbal art level’s suggestion that man’s life is governed by a predetermined, cosmic fate. The verbal art associations in the novel link the fate of a concrete character to those of recurrent types. The notion of fate thus has an orientation that is the opposite of that of history as described above. It is not based on a logical-causal linkage of events or circumstances to the development of a life, but presents the course of that life as the repetition of a fixed pattern. In its broadest sense, this pattern is that of the annihilation of man’s life and achievements by the inevitability of death, but it also encompasses the development of a person’s life in accordance with that of an archetype. On the contemporary level, Lavreckij’s superfluity can be determined in terms of the generation of which he is a representative, but on the cosmic level it is linked to a more fundamental phenomenon: the superfluity – that is, the insignificance – of any man’s life in the face of predetermined fate.

A Nest of Gentry presents the reader with these two inherently different views regarding the influences determining man’s life. I shall argue that, although the extensive outline of Lavreckij’s ancestry at the beginning of the novel creates a strong focus on the historical embedding of the hero, the unfolding of events still presents a personal tragedy rather than the tragedy of a generation as represented by the hero. Lavreckij’s position in the social environment of the city of O. is determined by the embarrassing end of his marriage. Further developments show him in a struggle for personal happiness and in the final loss of any chance of achieving it. In this, there is a major difference between this novel and Rudin. The developments in Rudin’s life exemplify those of the contemporary type he represents. His lack of success can be regarded as flowing from the psychological deficiencies of the Romantic idealist, and the debacle of his relationship with Natal’ja stems from his lack of will. Such a line of argument fails in the case of Lavreckij. The end of his relationship with Liza is triggered by the return of his wife. It has the form of a personal tragedy rather than a representative portrait of the superfluous man of the eighteen forties. The course of Lavreckij’s life at this point lacks motivation through his contemporary portrait, but I shall argue that the unexpected return of Lavreckij’s wife hints at the influence of other than logical-causal factors in determining such events.

In the next paragraph, I shall first deal with the image of the hero on the contemporary level of the text. As I have argued, this stresses the impact of past events and the individual’s
concrete circumstances on his life – a logical-causal orientation. In the paragraphs that follow that, I shall discuss the verbal art structure of the novel. As I have already explained, this suggests that man’s life is determined by the influence of fate. The idea of such an influence is introduced by means of intertextual references to the Fates of classical mythology. The verbal art associations suggest that Varvara Pavlovna is an instrument of fate in Lavreckij’s life. Furthermore, the paradigmatic orientation of the verbal art structure offers a grouping of characters such that those who live superficially and happily form one group, and those who are confronted with tragedy form the other. The second group is physically accommodated in a place that is higher than the first group, suggesting their morally higher position. Lavreckij becomes associated with an archetype of suffering, a martyr, which suggests that it is his fate to suffer. In Turgenev’s world, however, he is denied the consolation that a martyr can find in the higher value of his suffering. This will be discussed further in the course of the analysis. However, I shall first turn to a description of the contemporary portrait of the hero.

3.2 The laws of history

The temporal make-up of A Nest of Gentry places strong emphasis on the embedding of the characters’ lives within the context of the past and future of Russian history. If one compares the novel’s narrative scope to that of the other novels, it becomes clear that it covers a much longer time span. Turgenev’s novels as a rule focus on a relatively short period of time, during which the lives of the protagonists either take a decisive turn or, in some sense, fail to do so. This period is usually only a matter of weeks. Earlier events may be related in the form either of flashbacks (including conversation, as is the case of the adolescent love between Litvinov and Irina in Smoke) or, more often, of a recapitulating presentation by the narrator (such as the youth of Elena in On the Eve). Furthermore, each novel has an epilogue (which may or may not explicitly be denoted as such) that is situated considerably later in time than the main action of the novel. The epilogue answers the question, “What happened next?”.

Most of these elements are also found in A Nest of Gentry, but a much longer time period is involved. The main action of the novel, from the arrival of Lavreckij in O. to his leaving after the return of Varvara Pavlovna, occurs in only a few weeks, but the total scope of the story is much greater than that. The narration of the novel’s present only begins one third of the way into the novel. Before this point, the narration is focused on the past. By comparison with the use of flashbacks in the other novels, this part of the narrative in A Nest of Gentry is not only more elaborate, but also more ‘in-depth’ in the sense that it provides fairly detailed information about several generations, going back as far as Lavreckij’s great-grandfather. As a consequence, Lavreckij is embedded in his own history to a greater extent than are the heroes of any of the other novels.

The scope of the novel encompasses not only the past, but also the future. A Nest of Gentry is the only novel in which an explicit vision on the future is formulated. In the epilogue, the life of the younger generation inhabiting the Kalitin house is sketched. Looking at these young people, Lavreckij predicts better prospects for them than those of his own generation since they will not be confronted by the same, hampering circumstances. This vision clearly fosters an idea of history in which circumstances inevitably change and always in such a way as to enable people to live a better life. Among Turgenev’s novels, A Nest of Gentry is the only one to provide such a perspective. In the others, expectations of the future are either not formulated at all or referred to in very vague terms (as in the last lines of On the Eve, where the mysterious Uvar Ivanović, refusing to repeat his earlier assertions about a new generation of positive heroes, only stares into the distance (VIII, 167)). The fact that a concrete
perspective on the future does occur in *A Nest of Gentry* re-emphasises its concern with the development of history.

Richard Peace has argued that the novel’s historical perspective suggests the idea of a family novel in the tradition of Tolstoj, but one that, as such, is not successful: “neither the past (the digressions [on the characters’ prehistory – MO]) nor the future (the epilogue) are convincingly integrated into the structure” (Peace 2001: II). Peace in fact maintains that the main interest of the novel lies in the story of Lavreckij’s return to the city of O., the development of the relationship between him and Liza and the end of that relationship after the return of Varvara Pavlovna. He considers the narration of Lavreckij’s past and the scene involving the younger generation in the epilogue as having little connection to the main action, and his choice of the word “digressions” for those parts of the narrative that concern Lavreckij’s past is telling in this respect. His interpretation of the novel reminds us of Vladimír Fišer’s reading of the novels as love stories in a loose historical casing (see my remarks on this subject in the Introduction). I think that Peace misinterprets the novel’s concerns. Its overall design is geared toward the presentation of the present within a historical perspective, attaching it both to the past and to the future. I shall now explain this idea in detail.

The first sixteen chapters of the novel focus on the past. These chapters almost entirely comprise the introductions of the characters, who enter the scene one by one. Compared to those found in the other novels, these introductions are much more elaborate and characteristically pay far more attention to the prehistory of the character under discussion. They provide information on the lives of the character’s parents, and the people and events that influenced the character during childhood. By far the most elaborate of them all is the narration of Lavreckij’s past. It takes up a full eight chapters and provides a detailed account of his ancestry all the way back to his great-grandfather.

This historical account can be interpreted as a way of placing Lavreckij’s life in the larger, historical context of the Russian gentry, not only in the previous century but even back to its very roots. The reader is informed about the arrival of his earliest known ancestors from Prussia, and about the fearsome reputation of his great-grandfather. All this information is very concise, but Lavreckij’s grandfather and father are discussed in detail. They represent the generations that came immediately before the ‘men of the forties’: the simple Russian landlord, uneducated but ‘naturally’ attached to his Russian background, and the westernized intellectual, educated but lacking a natural bond with Russia. Pjotr, the grandfather, is described as a “simple landlord of the steppes” (“простой степной барин” – VII, 149)34 who loves life in the country. His son Ivan, by contrast, is raised in Petersburg, not in the country. As a consequence, Ivan has a totally different attitude: his education is based on Rousseau, Voltaire and other great thinkers of the eighteenth century. Used to life in the Petersburg salons, he hates life in the country. The opposition between these two generations is beautifully illustrated in the scene where Pjotr, in traditional clothes, chases off his son, who sports a blue English suit and tasseled boots (153). Ivan’s son Fjodor Lavreckij, the hero of the novel, is raised under both Russian and Western influences. The first years of his life are spent with his grandfather, his father’s sister and his mother, who is a simple country lass, but when he is twelve years old his father decides to take control over the education of the boy using all his Western ideas. As a consequence, Lavreckij appears to be the product of an uncoordinated variety of influences.

Through this narration of his background, Lavreckij is presented as an example of the contemporary state of the Russian gentry; that is, Russian in origins but westernized in

34 Unless indicated otherwise, the references to Turgenev’s work in this chapter are to part VII of the *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v dvadcati vos’mi tomach.*
attitudes. This idea is supported by the words of Lavreckij’s longtime friend Michalevič, who visits Lavreckij in O. This former classmate of Lavreckij, who is himself a belated romantic, passes a judgment on the position of the Russian gentry. He paints Lavreckij as representative both of the Russian gentry as a whole and of its current position: “All of your kind are literate lazybones.” (“вся ваша братия – начитанные байбаки” - 204).

From chapter seventeen onwards the focus of the novel shifts to the present. This part relates the novel’s main developments. It starts with Lavreckij’s trip to the smaller of his two estates, Vasil’evskoe. This place has a special quality of timelessness (to the implications of which I shall return in 3.5). Within this atmosphere, Lavreckij comes to terms with his past and makes plans for future activities on his estate. At first, events seem to develop to the advantage of Lavreckij. News of the death of his wife Varvara Pavlovna, and the growing love between him and Liza, seem to open up a future that is free of the past. However, the return of Varvara definitively rules out this possibility. The present moves on from a period of hope for future change to one in which Lavreckij’s condemnation to the past is confirmed.

The novel’s final part, the epilogue, is focused on the future. The central picture is that of a new generation, the young Kalitins, who now inhabit the house in O. The major characters of the earlier parts of the novel have disappeared from the scene: Mar'ja Dimitrievna and Lemm have died; Liza has withdrawn to a convent, and Panšin and Varvara Pavlovna have moved to Petersburg. Only Lavreckij remains but, as will soon be seen, he is no part of the future. He is a bystander, one who observes a world to which he is a stranger. Watching the lively games of the younger generation, he declares that he has devoted himself to memories (“We old men busy ourselves with matters you as yet do not know and that no amusement can replace: memories” - “у нашего брата, старика, есть занятие, которого вы еще не ведаете и которого никакое развлечение заменить не может: воспоминания.” — 292). While these young people are part of the future, Lavreckij has become part of the past.

At this point Lavreckij himself makes the link between his personal circumstances (the hardship he has encountered in life) and the historical position of Russia’s gentry as a whole. Addressing the younger generation in the epilogue, he says:

Play, make fun and grow, young forces, (...) you have life ahead of you and it will be easier for you. You will not have to make your own path, fight, fall and get up again in the dark, as we did” (“Играйте, веселитесь, растите, молодые силы (...) жизнь у вас впереди, и вам легче будет жить: вам не придется, как нам, отыскивать свою дорогу, боротся, падать и вставать среди мрака - 293).

The temporal structure that I have just described places the narration of Lavreckij’s life within the framework of historical developments in Russian society. The logical-causal orientation of the narrative level of the text in effect presents Lavreckij’s unfortunate life as part and parcel of his position as a member of the gentry at this particular moment in Russian history.

The importance of other, non-historical factors is hinted at through the unsatisfactory motivation of the events on the narrative art level. The problem is that Lavreckij does not in all respects accord with the image of the ‘superfluous hero’ as normally understood. His superfluity is more personal than social, as I shall now try to explain. The core of the tragedy in A Nest of Gentry is formed by the impossible love between Lavreckij and Liza. However, the cause of the unhappy ending to this affair cannot be identified as a specific flaw in Lavreckij’s psychology, as is the case with Rudin and Neždanov. They are psychologically hampered, a fact that affects both their social positions and their personal lives, but in the case of Lavreckij one can speak of a successful restoration of his bonds with Russia. After returning to Russia, he has committed himself to a goal (working on the future of Russia,
“plowing the land” (“пахать землю” - 233) in his own terms), and he sets out to realize this goal even after the end of his relationship with Liza. In other words, Lavreckij does not suffer from the psychological defects of the superfluous man. He might even be rated the most successful of the heroes in the novels on the grounds that he, at least, regains his sense of Russianness and finds a way (albeit on a very modest scale) of making himself useful.

The direct cause of his tragedy is the unexpected return of Varvara Pavlovna. It is important to note that the elaborate description of Lavreckij’s ancestry and upbringing does not have a logical-causal connection with the core of his tragedy as it develops in the novel’s present. This tragedy is a highly personal one, made up of equally personal circumstances. The seemingly strong logical-causal connection between past and present, suggested by the elaborate attention paid to Lavreckij’s prehistory at this point, lacks explanatory power. On the basis of these facts, Lavreckij’s tragedy remains unforeseen. This can be regarded as a motivational gap in the sense that Schmid has discussed (Schmid 1991: 39). However, the novel’s verbal art structure does offer a motivation at this point: it suggests that man’s life is determined by a different, non-contemporary factor; that is, fate. Within the verbal art framework, the role of Varvara Pavlovna is the embodiment of fate.

3.3 The laws of fate

In the middle of the historical review of Lavreckij’s life, we find a curious, symbolic scene. The reader is told that Lavreckij as a child used to spend Sunday afternoons sitting in a small, dark room where his aunt, his nanny and a young woman are knitting. The narrator compares the knitting ladies to the Fates, goddesses from Greek mythology who were thought to weave man’s life like a thread, which they cut off when they choose. This image, coming though it does in the middle of a historical narration of the past, evokes a totally different understanding of life: as a thing governed by fate.

While the ladies are performing their handiwork, young Lavreckij is given an emblem book to kill time. He is fascinated by the book even though (or perhaps because) he cannot understand the meaning it conveys. The pictures, with their mysterious explanations in five languages, symbolize the incomprehensibility of life for Lavreckij. Emblems communicate elementary truths, but for Lavreckij they fail to make sense. It is suggested that this has less to do with Lavreckij’s lack of knowledge than with the inherent incomprehensibility of the message, and this is certainly borne out by the examples of some of the images and their accompanying texts that the narrator describes. Their meanings may be ‘explained’ in five languages, but these emblems read as complete mysteries.

Another symbolic element of the scene is the darkness in the room, which is only lit, and scarcely so, by one candle. This can be read as symbol of the ‘darkness’ of fate itself, which remains unknown to man, but it also functions as a symbol of fate itself. The element of darkness recurs throughout the novel in connection with the lives both of Lavreckij’s ancestors and of himself. The first thing we are told about Lavreckij’s ancestors is that they were descended from a Prussian family that moved to Russia “during the reign of Vasilij the Dark/the Blind” (“в княжение Василия Тёмного” - 148-9). In the life of Lavreckij’s father, darkness literally returns in the form of sudden blindness. This blindness, being medically unexplainable, itself carries overtones of fate, but it is also an instrument of Lavreckij’s own fate as his father drags him from one end of Europe to the other in search of a cure, thereby preventing Lavreckij from developing a life of his own. It seems that Lavreckij will be able to escape this fate when his father’s influence comes to an end, and this idea is strengthened by the predominance of light rather than darkness in the scene where his father dies. It is a spring
morning, and when he realizes that his father has died Lavreckij leans on the balustrade of the terrace and fixes his eyes on the garden that is “shimmering in the rays of the golden spring sun” (“весь блестевший в лучах золотого весеннего солнца” – 165). We are told that, at this moment, “life opened up for him” (“Жизнь открывалась перед ним” - 165).

However, malignant fate soon catches up with him in the form of destructive love. In reaction to his father’s death, Lavreckij decides to go to Moscow. At first sight, it seems that this decision is based upon his wish to gain more knowledge: we are told that he recognized the flaws of his upbringing and therefore wanted to go to university. So far, the choice seems logical enough, but he has actually chosen Moscow on the basis of a “dark, but strong feeling” (“темное, но сильное чувство” -165), and it is in a Moscow theater that he meets and immediately falls in love with Varvara Pavlovna. She in her turn is also associated with darkness through the clothes that both she and her parents wear. When Lavreckij first sees Varvara in the theatre, her mother is wearing “а black toque (“в черном токе” - 166); her father, we are informed, habitually wears a tie “the color of a raven’s wing” (“цвета воронова крыла” - 168), and on the day when Varvara returns to Lavreckij, she is herself dressed in black (245), her clothing thus symbolizing the death of all Lavreckij’s hopes. Not long before this, on the night during which Lavreckij and Liza met in the garden, Lavreckij thought he would be able to shake off his fate: “disappear, past, you dark phantom’, he thought” (“Исчезни, прошедшее, темный призрак – думал он” - 237). Ironically, this phantom proves to be more real than ever on the following day, when Varvara returns. By the time Lavreckij discovers who Varvara Pavlovna really is, it is too late: she has figuratively blinded him by her love. It is only upon discovering Varvara’s infidelity that Lavreckij realizes that he has “trusted his wife blindly” (“Он так слепо доверял своей жене” - 175).

The motifs of darkness and blindness connect the development of Lavreckij’s fate to the role Varvara Pavlovna plays in his life. His fate is determined by his falling in love with her. The fact that love would play a crucial role in the determination of Lavreckij’s fate has already been hinted at in the scene with the ‘Fates’: in the emblem book that Lavreckij reads there, “Cupid with his naked, rounded body” (“Купидон с голым и пухлым телом” - 161) takes a prominent place. Once Lavreckij has left behind his life of isolation on his father’s estate, he almost immediately falls under the influence of destructive love.

Varvara Pavlovna’s portrait contains a number of traits that are characteristic of fatal women in Turgenev’s work. She shares with Irina (in Smoke) and Zinaida (in “First Love”, “Первая любовь,” - 1860), among others, an enchanting outward appearance in combination with a manipulative character. Turgenev’s descriptions of them lack information as to their characters and deepest motives: only their behavior is narrated. As far as Varvara Pavlovna is concerned, such limited explicit characterization is all the more conspicuous because of the detailed information that is provided about all of the other characters, even those who are comparatively minor. The associations of the verbal art level, however, suggest that she is a destructive figure. In addition to the above-mentioned associations with darkness and blindness, suggesting that she is an instrument of fate, a third important motif is also connected to her and hints at her destructive influence on Lavreckij’s life, and that is birds.

The very title of the novel is indicative of the importance of bird imagery. Interestingly, critics have recognised the symbolic use of the term ‘nest’, but so far none have connected this to the bird imagery of the novel. For these critics, the nest stands for the traditional position of the gentry; that, is shaken but not destroyed.35 The image of estates as nests (of gentry) was a commonplace of Russian literature and criticism in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Turgenev himself used it as early as 1847 in his short story “My

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35 For examples, see the commentary in PSS, VII: 476-7.
neighbor Radilov” ("Мой сосед Радилов"). Afterwards, it has come into general use for referring to the position of the gentry in this period. G. Florovskij, for instance, criticizes Berdjajev for comparing Slavophilism with “the psychology and philosophy of the estate, of warm and comfortable nests” (Florovskij 1988: 253).

In A Nest of Gentry, the image of the nest should be seen in relation to the whole system of associations with birds. Several of the Lavreckij ancestors are associated with birds of prey. His great-grandmother, for example, is described as a woman “with a hawk nose” ("с ястребиным носом" - 149), and her character is accordingly sharp: she is quick-tempered, revengeful and continuously quarrels with her husband. These hawk-like traits are also found in her son Pjotr, who, upon hearing that his son (Lavreckij’s father) wishes to marry a peasant girl, attacks him “like a hawk” ("ястребом пустился на сына" - 153). As a child, Lavreckij himself is poignantly referred to by his grandfather, upon seeing him for the first time, as a “nestling” ("птенчик" – 156), and when he grows up he is associated with a falcon ("соколик" - 253).

Varvara Pavlovna can be associated with a raven. Unlike her father, whose tie is as black as a raven’s wing, she is never directly linked to one, but her own love of black clothes may be regarded at least as a tendency in the same direction. In Russian folklore, ravens (like crows and rooks) are associated with evil in several ways. They are seen as belonging to the world of the dead, and death may come in the shape of a raven. It is also thought that the devil can appear in the form of a raven (Gura 1987: 435-6). The association of ravens with death points to the unfailingly negative consequences that will arise from the appearance of Varvara and her family in Lavreckij’s life. Ravens are also associated in folklore with approaching disaster: to see a raven or to hear one calling is to know that some sort of misfortune is bound to happen (idem: 436). The raven-like family of Varvara, however, are more than an omen of impending disaster; they are themselves the embodiment of Lavreckij’s misfortune.

In folklore, ravens are often equated with birds of prey, and this too is relevant to the paradigmatic characterization of Varvara. In particular, the raven is often equated with the hawk on the basis of its predatory nature (idem: 434). The emotional effect of Lavreckij’s discovery of Varvara’s infidelity is compared to the attack of a bird of prey on its victim: we read that, at the moment when Lavreckij finally recognized Varvara for who she was, “the sorrow cut into his heart ever deeper, like a hawk burrowing his claws into his catch” ("как ястреб когти пойманную птицу, глубже и глубже врезывалась тоска в его сердце" - 176). Varvara is no longer a raven, but a ‘real’ bird of prey, while Lavreckij, who comes from a family of hawks and has himself been associated with the falcon, is depicted as the helpless victim of her destructive influence.

It is not only through its associations in folklore that the raven is a fitting image for Varvara and her family; there are also interesting observations to be made in the light of the real habitual behavior of ravens toward birds of prey, in particular as regards their nests. They take advantage of the birds of prey whenever they get the chance, stealing their food and taking over their nests. The behavior of Varvara and her father towards Lavreckij mimics these habits. The parents make no secret of their wish to marry their daughter to the wealthy Lavreckij. Once Lavreckij and Varvara are married, she, together with her father, takes control of the household. Lavreckij and Varvara Pavlovna initially move to Lavriki, the largest of Lavreckij’s estates, which, until that moment, has been managed by Lavreckij’s aunt, Glafira. Although Varvara never has no plans to settle on the estate for long, she decides to force Glafira to leave by “carrying out an assault” ("повела атаку" - 171). This resembles the way in which ravens tend to pester birds of prey into deserting their own nests so that the ravens can take them over. Glafira’s words to Lavreckij as she leaves confirm the
image: “I know who chases me from my parental nest” (“Знаю, кто меня отсюда гонит, с родового моего гнезда” - 172), and she goes on to predict that Lavreckij “too will never be able to build a nest” for himself (“не свить же и тебе гнезда нигде” – ibid.).

This idea of the loss of a nest entails a number of other associations with loss of home and wandering that I shall also treat as part of the nest imagery. After Glafira’s prediction, Lavreckij’s life indeed becomes characterized by a restless travelling and moving from one place to another, all of which is directly connected to the influence of Varvara. From Lavriki, he follows her first to Petersburg. Later, for reasons of health, they travel to Germany, Switzerland and Paris, which is where Lavreckij finds out about Varvara’s lover. This discovery initiates its own pattern of restless roaming. Lavreckij first leaves the city and wanders around for the rest of the day and the entire night (175). Instead of returning to the house, he takes up residence in a hotel and moves on to Italy some days later. Upon his return to Russia, it seems that Lavreckij will be able to settle again, but the reappearance of Varvara Pavlovna initiates a second sequence of running away and roaming. Upon Varvara’s arrival there, Lavreckij flees from the rented house in O., just as he fled from their apartment after his original discovery of her infidelity, and, just as he did in Paris, he roams about aimlessly for hours (249). Whereas, earlier, it was Glafira who felt chased off by Varvara, this time it is Lavreckij himself. Having sought shelter at the home of Lemm, Lavreckij realized that “his wife had chased him from his house” (“жена выгнала его из дому” - 249), and from this point onwards he is once more a homeless wanderer. He stays with Lemm for a day, then moves to Vasil’evskoe. Although Vasil’evskoe had earlier been a place where Lavreckij could regain rest and peace (see 3.5), he is now unable to find any rest here either, and we are told that Lavreckij “was unable to stay in one place for long” (“Он не мог оставаться долго на одном месте” - 268). He remains at Vasil’evskoe for no more than a day and a half, and even during this time he “almost constantly roamed outside” (“почти все время пробродил по окрестностям” – ibid.). He now returns to O.; the next day he moves with Varvara to Lavriki in a senseless attempt to live together, and one week later he moves to Moscow.

All these associations introduce the idea of man’s life as governed by fate. Fate is characterized by its incomprehensible nature (as the images of darkness, blindness and the emblems show), and the cupids in the emblem book also suggest that love will play a determinative role in Lavreckij’s fate. Since Varvara is linked with the same features of darkness and blindness that are associated with fate, she (that is, her destructive love) can be conceived as the embodiment of fate in Lavreckij’s life.

Jane Costlow, however, has put forward the opposing view. For her, the return of Varvara Pavlovna signifies that “history, and historical time, triumph in Turgenev’s plot” (Costlow 1990: 71). She concludes this on the basis of her overall interpretation of the novel, which in her view concerns Lavreckij’s struggle to escape history by means of a process of rebirth, the climax of which is his stay at Vasil’evskoe in the midst of nature. However, this rebirth is stopped in its tracks: “A Nest of Gentry aborts idyllic calm and shelter, returning its hero to history, to the consequences of his and his country’s past” (idem, 58). In this light, Costlow sees the returning Varvara as the instrument of the “linearity of history” (idem, 71).

The idea that Varvara’s return can in any way be viewed as part of a progressive scheme of the development of history is highly questionable. If such a scheme were regarded as a traditional plot, it would develop according to the sequence initial situation - change (action) - different situation. However, in A Nest of Gentry, the scheme is initial situation - expectation of change (Varvara’s death, Liza’s love for Lavreckij) - annihilation of [the possibility of] change (the return of Varvara) - initial situation. Thus, the normal course of history is denied. This is not to say that Lavreckij’s return to his initial position should be
regarded as the result of a mythic (cyclic) orientation of the text; Lavreckij’s tragedy is too “modern” for that (having personal mischief as main subject). But it does point to the influence of fate, rather than history, as the determining factor.

An interpretation of Varvara’s return in terms of the influence of fate is more in tune with Turgenev’s world view, in which the individual’s freedom of action is limited by the fixed patterns of the universe and not, as Costlow supposes, by the course of history. History, with its schemes of change and development, is rather a part of the human concept of the world. From a cosmic perspective, real change is impossible or illusory. The negation of change in *A Nest of Gentry* is therefore a mark of the determinative influence of cosmic laws. This negation takes the form of the return of Varvara Pavlovna. Far from being logically connected to the historical framework of the novel, the role of Varvara is shown by the associations discussed to be that of the embodiment of the novel’s other system of determination, the non-historically defined system of fate.

3.4 Character grouping

In addition to associations with fate (as opposed to historical influences), the verbal art structure also provides its own patterns for the presentation of character and time. This section is concerned with the first of these.

As was argued above, characterization through the narrative art structure relies to an important extent on information regarding the character’s past. On this basis, characters are placed in a historical framework. The novel’s associative network, however, offers a different type of framing whereby a number of characters are connected to one another on the basis of similarities, and these are set in opposition to a second group that is similarly linked by what its members have in common.

In *A Nest of Gentry*, the first group comprises Lavreckij, Liza, Lemm and, less prominently, Marfa Timofeevna, while the second is made up of Mar’ja Dimitrievna, Panšin, Varvara Pavlovna and Gedeonovskij. The members of the first group are confronted by suffering, while those in the second are an undisturbed, happy company. The second group might be judged as socially more successful in the sense that they are better integrated in society, but they are also associated with unnaturalness and superficiality, unlike the first group who are judged as more respectable.

A very basic but telling difference between the two groups is established on the basis of location. Mar’ja Dimitrievna and her guests Panšin, Varvara and Gedeonovskij meet in the salon, downstairs. Marfa Timofeevna lives upstairs; Lavreckij and Liza visit her there, and that is also where Lemm gives his piano lessons. The characters who go upstairs do also appear in the salon from time to time, but the salon characters themselves never go upstairs. This difference can be interpreted as symbolising the moral superiority of Lemm, Lavreckij, Liza and Marfa Timofeevna.

Another distinction arises from the different attitudes of the respective group members towards music. Several researchers have previously observed that music plays an important role in *A Nest of Gentry*; among these, Katalin Špengler has noted the part it plays in bringing Lavreckij and Liza together, for example through the singing of the nightingale (Špengler

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36. A character’s attitude to music (like other preferences, habits and so on) is in principal a feature of characterization through narrative art. However, the grouping of characters and the moral division into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ that this entails, arises from the linkage on the basis of similarity and can therefore be considered as a principle of verbal art.
Lavreckij first addresses Mar'ja Dmitrievna:

crucial moment, she makes Varvara appear from behind a folding screen, and in reaction was there a scene just like this?" (246). Some time later, Mar'ja Dmitrievna, having made a plan to force Lavreckij to forgive his wife, hides Varvara and pleads on her behalf. At the moment of speaking through music rather than in words, but it is also true of Lavreckij and Liza. This is particularly true of Lemm, who has made a habit out of speaking through music rather than in words, but it is also true of Lavreckij and Liza.

And, of course, the fact that the first meeting of Lavreckij and Varvara was located in a theatre is in itself significant.

The group that is set in opposition to this ‘salon’ group tends to prefer serious music. It includes Lemm, Liza and Lavreckij. Marfa Timofeevna, even though she is part of this group, is not very interested in music, but for the others music expresses emotions that are too deep to be expressed in any other way. This is particularly true of Lemm, who has made a habit out of speaking through music rather than in words, but it is also true of Lavreckij and Liza.

In spite of this, the members of this group are not able to ‘use’ music as freely as Varvara and Panšin can. Though Lavreckij “passionately loved music” (“страстно любил музыку” - 193), he does not play any instrument since music did not play a significant part in his education. Liza plays the piano well, but it costs her a great deal of effort because she has little talent. Even Lemm is a poor performing musician, and he also experiences great difficulty in composing. The light music played by members of the ‘salon’ group is contemptible to these people. Lemm overhears Panšin singing his romance, and clearly gains no pleasure from it (136). When Panšin tells Lemm that he, too, appreciates serious music, although it is “sometimes boring” (“иногда скучна” - 137), Lemm feels justifiably insulted.
The incompatible attitudes towards music in the two groups are grounds for conflict. Panšin deliberately offends Lemm by letting him know that he has seen the cantata Lemm had composed exclusively for Liza, and his disparaging remark about serious music only aggravates the differences between the two, as does Mar’ja Dmitrievna’s similarly negative reaction to Lemm’s walking up and down the room and conducting as Liza plays Beethoven on the piano: she “at first looked at him and smiled, then she went to bed. She said Beethoven got on her nerves too much” (“сперва смеялась, глядя на него, потом ушла спать; по ее словам, Беттонен слишком волновал ее нервы” - 193). In this scene, even as a contrast is established between Lemm and Mar’ja Dmitrievna, who apparently finds his rapture quite ridiculous, a similarity is discovered between Lemm and Liza (and Lavreckij, who at this occasion sees Lemm for the first time and finds him very intriguing). In a similar instance in which members of the two groups are opposed on the basis of their attitudes to music, Mar’ja Dmitrievna dismisses Liza’s musical capacities as futile by comparison with those of Varvara (“она играет недурно и любит музыку, но что это значит перед вами?” – 259).

Music is a linking factor between Lemm, Liza and Lavreckij on other grounds as well. Important moments in the building of the relationship between Liza and Lavreckij are invariably linked to music in some way, such that a non-causally motivated connection between music and (growing) love is established. To begin with, it is while Liza is playing music that she and Lavreckij first become aware of their feelings for one another. Liza has been told by her mother to entertain Lavreckij, and so she decides to play the piano. Thus, music literally brings them closer, but it also seems to influence them greatly. Liza looks up at Lavreckij, and his look gives her such a fright that she stops playing and asks him what is wrong. He answers that he is simply glad to see her. The next chapter opens with Lavreckij’s inner realization of his love for Liza.

Katalin Špengler has pointed out that the emotional connection between Liza and Lavreckij is symbolically expressed in the singing of the nightingale (Špengler 1994: 230). First, the singing of the nightingale reminds Lavreckij of Liza (196). Then, when Lavreckij has defeated Panšin in their dispute over the future of Russia, the “mighty, almost brutally-strong song of the nightingale” (“могучая, до дерзости звонкая, песнь соловья” - 233) can be heard. Liza and Lavreckij both remark upon the singing and feel that “the nightingale sang especially for them” (“для них пел соловей” - 234). They walk up to the window (music again bringing them literally closer to each other, as was the case with the piano playing) and look into the nocturnal garden. The majestic singing seems to herald their happiness together. Later that night, they will meet one another in the same garden, and confess their love. Once Varvara Pavlovna has returned, there will be no further mention of the nightingale.

During the night in which Lavreckij and Liza confess their love, music also plays a remarkable role. Having left the Kalitin house, Lavreckij roams the nocturnal landscape for some time and then arrives, without having planned to do so, at the back of the Kalitin garden. He opens the gate which “seemingly waited for the touch of his hand” (“слово ждала прикосновения его руки” – 235) and sees Liza, who appears near the open terrace doors. In the garden they confess their love. When Lavreckij wants to leave by way of the same gate that he came in by, he finds it locked and has to jump over the fence. On his way to his house he is once more struck by a strange coincidence: Lemm has composed a piece of music that expresses exactly the happiness that Lavreckij is experiencing. This whole sequence of events has a rather mysterious nature. From Lavreckij’s unexpected finding of the gate into the Kalitin garden to the fact that the climax of Lavreckij and Liza’s happiness coincides with Lemm’s success in writing the piece he has been dreaming of for so long, the connections are not logical, but rather mystical, linking events that are based both on the interconnectedness of the three characters and on the connection between love and music.
This remarkable sequence, which does not find sufficient motivation on the basis of the logical-causal development of events, makes sense only against the background of the similarity pattern between these characters.

The characters of the morally higher group, Liza, Lavreckij, Lemm and Marfa Timofeevna, are, as I have said, socially less successful than the ‘salon’ group. They have more or less chosen to retreat from society into their own world. This is underlined by associations linking them to other figures who live secluded lives.

Marfa Timofeevna is “known to be reclusive” (“слыла чудачкой” - 126). She has almost literally made a small world of her own: she lives upstairs with a strange company of animals and humans, all of whom have in common the fact that they depend on her for their maintenance.

Lemm is similarly eccentric. He is not very talkative and hardly has any contacts apart from Liza, to whom he gives lessons. The only thing that interests him is music, and his reactions to other people are often abrupt and sometimes even rude.

Liza does not retreat from society in any literal sense. She obeys the rules of etiquette, and even allows herself to be confronted by Varvara Pavlovna because her mother expects her to out of courtesy to this ‘guest’. In her mind, however, she concentrates on higher values. She is very religious and deeply convinced of the necessity to submit herself to the will of God. In her youth she was much influenced by her religious nanny Agaf’ja, who used to take Liza to early mass and tell her about “the lives of hermits, saints and holy martyrs” (“житие отшельников, угожников божих, святых мучениц” - 242). Agaf’ja herself later entered a convent, and Liza’s life is associated with that of a nun even before she decides to enter the convent herself. Her small room is compared to a “little cell” (“келийку” - 284).

Lavreckij’s social position has been harmed by the behavior of his wife. Gedeonovskij makes this clear when he states that he cannot understand how Lavreckij has the nerve to show himself in O. after what has happened (129). Like Lemm, Lavreckij breaks the social codes. He abruptly and rather rudely cuts off a conversation with Mar’ja Dimitrievna, who consequently expresses sympathy with Varvara’s inability to live with such a husband (179). Moreover, in O., Lavreckij’s retreat to the small and run-down house in Vasil’evskoe is eccentric, and is associated with the behaviour of a hermit: “he began to live as half-landlord, half-hermit” (“не то помещиком, не то отшельником” - 191).

The Christian names of Lemm and Lavreckij create another, not unrelated, association – with the Saints. Lemm’s Christian names are Christofor (“carrier of Christ”, patron saint of travelers), Theodor (“God’s gift”) and Gottlieb (“he who loves God”). Lavreckij is named Fjodor (Theodor) after the saint on whose commemoration day he was born, the holy martyr Theodor Stratilatus (8th February). Marković has pointed out similarities between the lives of Lavreckij and St Theodor Stratilatus (Marković 1982: 165-166). However, as Marković himself admits, these similarities are based on very general links, and what seems more relevant is the fact that Lavreckij’s name carries with it an association with martyrdom per se (Costlow 1990: 62).

Marković and Costlow agree with one another that this is a firmly realist martyrdom, unlike the suffering of the traditional martyr that seems purposeful because it serves a higher cause. There is no higher cause in the case of Lavreckij; as a martyr, he is only the victim of a cruel fate. As Lotman has argued, such an idea of suffering is characteristic of Turgenev’s work (Lotman 1992: 104-105). The deaths of the heroes in his novels never provide their lives with meaning, as would be the case with the martyr whose death was the crowning glory of his life. For Turgenev’s heroes, death only signifies the destruction of life and, with
it, the destruction of its meaning. Suffering and death do not make sense to these heroes because they contradict man’s intrinsic desires, which are to live and be happy.  

This also applies to the lives of Lemm and Liza. It is their fate to suffer, but this suffering does not have the implications that it has for the figures with whom they are associated. Whereas, for saints and hermits, suffering plays a meaningful role in their lives, for Lavreckij, Liza and Lemm, it deprives their lives of meaning. Their suffering arises from their failure to achieve their goals, these being the happiness they have envisaged for themselves. This suffering makes them into tragic characters in the Turgenevan sense of tragedy as being determined by the inevitable denial of man’s individual goals and wishes.

The confrontation with suffering silences the characters. Liza enters a world of silence in the convent; Lemm refuses to speak about the tragic turn that things have taken, and from the epilogue we learn that Lavreckij has also decided to bear his fate without further protest. Lavreckij’s behavior in this final scene is best read in the light of his earlier experience of silence at Vasil’evskoe.

3.5 Vasil’evskoe as anti-temporal locus

Vasil’evskoe is a spatial zone in which the influence of time seems strongly reduced. Lavreckij’s departure for the estate occurs immediately after the sixteen ‘introductory’ chapters. This creates a strong contrast between the historical development and causality of these chapters, on the one hand, and the a-temporal atmosphere of the first days Lavreckij spends at Vasil’evskoe on the other.

Lavreckij’s arrival at Vasil’evskoe signifies his entrance into a world in which time stands still. This is stressed by the situation in which Lavreckij finds the house. Since the death of the last inhabitant, Lavreckij’s great-aunt Glafira, two years earlier, the house has been locked up. Only when Lavreckij arrives are the shutters and windows opened to let light and fresh air into the dusty rooms that are full of old-fashioned furniture and memories of Lavreckij’s past. The servants, the dog, and even the chicken that Lavreckij is served for lunch, are characterized primarily by old age, associated here not so much with the passing of time as with the suggestion of constancy and permanence. The old servant, Anton, has worked for the Lavreckij family all of his life and even knew Lavreckij’s great-grandfather. All the changes in Lavreckij’s prehistory that were the subject of the previous chapters are thrown into relief by the unchanged life of Anton, who serves Lavreckij just as he did his great-grandfather. His position as steady element, untouched by change, is underlined by his being likened to a cypress, a tree that is generally associated with eternity because it is evergreen and reaches a great age.

When serving Lavreckij a meal after his arrival at Vasil’evskoe, Anton is described as giving off “an ancient, strong smell, like that of a cypress” (“крепкий, древний запах, подобный запаху кипарисового дерева” - 188).

Lavreckij immerses himself in this timeless scene. The effect it has on him is that of an enchanted circle. He slips into a state of “peaceful tranquility” (“мирное оцепенение” - 189), in which he does nothing but observe his environment. He sits near the window in the

37 In the light of this shift between sense and senselessness of life as seen from the contemporary (individual) and the cosmic perspective, see my remarks in 1.4. Suffering and death make sense only from the cosmic perspective, but not from the viewpoint of the individual.

38 It is also associated with death, its wood having been used for making coffins in Ancient Egypt and Greece.

39 Interestingly, the smell of cypress is also associated with death because the wood and branches of the cypress were thought to take away the smell of a dead body. The association of Anton with a cypress may therefore also be said to hint at Lavreckij’s spiritual deathliness. His situation here seems like a rebirth, as Costlow has argued, but any possibility he may have of beginning a new life will eventually be cancelled.
morning and remains there all day. He “did not move and listened, so it seemed, to the flow of quiet life around him” (“не шевелился и словно прислушивался к теченью тихой жизни” - 189). This flow signifies a movement that is cyclic rather than linear, linear movement (as from A to B) having a temporal character. Lavreckij himself concludes: “Always, and at any time, life here is quiet and calm. He who enters its circle must submit to it.” (“всегда, во всякое время тиха и неспешна здесь жизнь, кто заходит в ее круг - покоряйся” - 190).

The prime feature of nature in this scene is its quietness, which implies both silence and stasis. At first, Lavreckij listens to sounds – a cock crowing – fragments of conversation. Soon, the scene becomes entirely quiet: “suddenly there was nothing but a dead silence” (“н вдруг находит тишина мертвая” – ibid.). This silence is a feature of every element of the scene: “the sun rolls quietly in the quiet blue sky and the clouds float by quietly” (“сонце катится тихо по спокойному синему небу, и облака тихо плывут по нем” – ibid.). The same element is felt in the description of the plants growing near the house. What is emphasized is not the action of growing, or the movement of the clouds and the sun as progressive activities, but rather the fixed pattern that all of this traces. The focus is not on change and development (as is the case in the historical account that forms the first part of the novel), but on continuity and stillness. It is even positively associated with lack of action: “what strength everywhere around, what health, in this inactive silence” (“какая сила кругом, какое здоровье в этой бездейственной тишине” – ibid.). The secret of nature is thus described in terms of its imperturbability, and it is exactly this feature that characterizes the unchangeable staff of Vasil’evo – Anton and the old housekeeper. The housekeeper’s name is very telling in this respect. She is called Aprakseja, a Greek philosophical term that literally means “inactiveness” and denotes a state of imperturbability reached through a process of resignation from life. It encompasses a loss of desires and of emotions, and indeed the narrator notes that old Aprakseja had not so much “lost her mind as every emotion” (“выжившая не столько из ума, сколько изо всякого чувства” - 269).

At the end of the novel, when Lavreckij visits the Kalitin house several years after the return of Varvara Pavlovna, he has himself reached a state of mind not unlike that of Aprakseja. After looking around the house for a moment, he leaves, unnoticed by the young people who are absorbed in their games. He gets up “quietly” and leaves “quietly” (“тихо встал и тихо удалился” - 293). The quietness of nature has become part of him. At the same time, he is no longer a part of life itself. He is separated from the lively young people by “а thick, green wall of tall lime trees” (“зеленой сплошной стеной высоких листв” - 293-4). Although still among the living, Lavreckij has been shut off from life by nature itself.

Since life no longer has anything to offer, Lavreckij is left with no choice but resignation. Jane Costlow has suggested that, at Vasil’evo, Lavreckij goes through a process of rebirth (Costlow 1990: 69-70). Her argument is based upon Lavreckij’s feeling of being “at the bottom of the river” (“вот когда я попал на самое дно реки” – 189, 190). However, I do not think that this idea of rebirth is sustainable owing to the general atmosphere of stasis in this scene, the features of which I have discussed above. Its characteristics of silence and immobility are even directly associated with death by the mentioning of the sudden “dead silence” (190).

The idea of a rebirth suggests a complete remaking of one’s life, a sense of liberation and the accompanying freedom to go on living an active life. What Lavreckij goes through in this scene, however, is of different nature altogether. He gains an insight into the essence of nature, its basic principle of quiet, almost unnoticeable yet unremitting activity. This insight bears a close resemblance to that of the first-person narrator in the short story “Journey into Poles’e” (“Поездка в полесье”), published two years before A Nest of Gentry. This story
relates the two-day trip of a hunter into the forest. On the second day he is captivated by the sight of a dragonfly. Looking at this creature, he claims suddenly to understand the essence of nature, which he sees as lying in its equilibrium of forces. Lavreckij, likewise immersed in nature, goes through a similar experience. As in “Journey into Poles’e”, it is the act of observing that imparts the insight. The stress in this case is not on the *equilibrium* of nature, but on the quiet self-assuredness and strength of every part of it.

In both the story and the novel, man’s confrontation with the principle of nature is connected with suffering: in the face of nature, all that man can do is suffer in silence. In “Journey into Poles’e”, it is the peasant Egor who embodies this principle. He has endured a lot of hardship, but bears it in silence. Silence is an intrinsic part of Egor; he is very taciturn and moves about without producing any noise. The narrator states that, when a man meets adversity in his life, he should, at least, keep his silence (IV, 147).40 *A Nest of Gentry* also focuses on the equilibrium of nature, which lies behind the silence and inactivity that are stressed in this scene. An insight into the nature of nature does not mean liberation; it is only the recognition of one’s own fixed position in relation to nature as a whole. Lavreckij seems not to realize this himself since, at the first opportunity, he again tries to construct a happy life for himself (with Liza). Only after the return of Varvara Pavlovna does he fully recognize that the only possible life is one of subjection to fate. This is the effect, not of a rebirth, but of the principle of *aprakseja*, the loss of every emotion, that characterizes Lavreckij at the end of the novel. In the epilogue we see him as a man who has fully resigned from life.

3.6 Conclusions

In comparison with *Rudin*, there is a more explicit difference in the views of the hero conveyed by the narrative and verbal art structures of *A Nest of Gentry*. The historical perspective of the narrative characterizes Lavreckij as a product of his age and thus as a representative of his generation: the superfluous generation of the forties. The associations of the verbal art structure identify his tragedy as universally human: the tragedy of man confronted with a tragic fate entailing the frustration of his struggle for personal happiness.

As I have argued in my analysis of the novel, I find that the presentation of Lavreckij’s ‘failure’ hints at the importance of fate, as opposed to history, as the driving force behind the course of the hero’s life. His failure is not depicted in social terms, as was largely the case in *Rudin*. On the contrary, in this respect Lavreckij appears to be as successful as he can be under the given circumstances: he does not suffer from psychological instability; he just has a simple but progressive plan of action – “plowing the land” (“пахать землю” –233) – and in the epilogue, we are told that Lavreckij has indeed done a great deal to improve the position of his farmers. Moreover, the frustration of the novel’s love affair cannot be explained in the same terms as that of the superfluous heroes in Turgenev’s earlier short stories, or in *Rudin*. Lavreckij does not lack vigor or psychological wholeness. His happiness is prevented by the unexpected return of Varvara Pavlovna, who, on the basis of the verbal art associations, can be seen as the embodiment of fate. It is, in my opinion, this element – the clash of man’s desires with the ultimately determinative pattern of fate – that determines the novel’s deepest tragedy.

Both the unexpectedness and the devastating effects of Varvara’s return are characteristic of Turgenev’s interpretation of fate. In his third novel, *On the Eve*, the implications of the

40 For a consideration of the motif of silence in “Journey into Poles’e”, see Brouwer, 1996: 146-150.
influence of fate are depicted in yet stronger images, thus rendering it Turgenev’s most explicitly despondent novel.