7.1 Introduction

In Turgenev criticism, *Virgin Soil* (Новь - 1877) has met a similar fate to that of *Smoke*. It is generally regarded as an unsuccessful work that is not truly representative of Turgenev’s abilities as an author. As soon as it appeared, the work was adversely criticized both for its socio-political message and for its supposed lack of artistic value. In general, the critics maintained that Turgenev had long since lost touch with Russian reality, and was repeating himself without adding any insights that were relevant to the time at which he was writing (*PSS* XII, 526-7). Furthermore, they considered the general atmosphere and characterization to be pale and uninspired (idem 529). This verdict has, by and large, continued over time. That Turgenev’s powers had expired by the time he came to write *Virgin Soil* has become a commonplace. His protracted stay outside Russia, during which he supposedly lost contact with the details of Russian reality, is often given as a reason for the novel’s failure, but there is also the idea that Turgenev was unable to keep up with developments in the Russian novel itself – that the historical, epic style of Tolstoj, and Dostoevskij’s interest in psychological analysis, drew the readers away from the more conservative schemes that Turgenev continued to use.101

Recent researchers have issued similarly negative judgements. Freeborn, for example, holds that Turgenev lacked knowledge of the milieu he was describing, not only because he lived outside Russia but also because he was depicting an environment that was different from the circles of gentry to which he belonged. He states that the description of Solomin’s factory in chapter XVI shows that Turgenev is describing a scene that is alien to him (Freeborn 1970: 172-174). He maintains that the same is more-or-less true of the whole revolutionary scene, and that this determines, for the larger part, the novel’s lack of success (idem 174).

Needless to say, I do not find Freeborn’s argument convincing, if only because it is possible to read the description of the factory as deliberately alienating. The almost naïve observations can be ascribed to Neždanov and Markelov since they follow immediately after the sentence: “Neždanov and Markelov had time to go up to the window and look around” (“Нежданов и Маркелов успели подойти к окну и осмотреться” – XII, 109).102 The description of what they see shows how much this (Solomin’s) world differs from what Markelov and especially Neždanov are used to, and this idea is enhanced by the continuation of the text after the description: “Neždanov looked at Markelov; ‘I have heard so much about the extraordinary skills of Solomin […] this complete chaos surprises me’” (“Нежданов глянул на Маркелова. ‘Мне столько натолковали об отменных способностях Соломина […] меня весь этот беспорядок удивляет’” – 110).

Freeborn also makes statements about a lack of detail in Solomin’s characterization, which he likewise ascribes to a lack of affinity between Turgenev and this industrial, practical figure

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101 In some respects, *Virgin Soil* does differ from the earlier novels: although it still does not come close to the length of Tolstoj’s and Dostoevskij’s novels, it has twice the length of the earlier novels and involves a considerably larger number of characters, thereby allowing for a broader picture of the period in which it is set. Furthermore, Bjalyj has detected the influence of Dostoevskij in the sudden changes of emotions that occur in *Virgin Soil*, for example in the quarrel between Neždanov and Markelov in chapter XXI (Bjalyj 1962: 233-4).

102 Unless indicated otherwise, all references to Turgenev’s work in this chapter are to part XII of *Polnoe sobranie sočinenija v dvadcati voz’mi tomach*. 

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(Freeborn 1970: 174). However, this mode of characterization rests on a device, as does the description of the factory. Solomin is a representative of a group of practical characters, of whom Turgenev’s own Ležnev and Gončarov’s Stolz are examples. The characterizations of these figures have in common the fact that the information we are given as to their thoughts and motivations is very concise. The emphasis is on their practical, down-to-earth attitudes that contrast with those of the reflective Neždanov. As his diametrical opposite, Solomin occupies the same position towards Neždanov that Ležnev does to Rudin and Stolz to Oblomov. (See also my analysis of Smoke in paragraph 6.3.)

Freeborn furthermore discerns a lack of unity in the hero’s characterization. He maintains that Neždanov’s character is inconsistent because of its contradictory traits: on the one hand, he is presented as having an inherently tragic nature, but on the other he is seen as a representative of the collective tragedy that befell the populists in their failure (idem 171). This opinion arises from a misreading of the novel. As I will argue below, Neždanov is not in any sense a representative of the populists: his aspiration to become one of them highlights the insoluble conflict between who he is and whom he longs to be. This conflict forms the very theme of the novel. In my analysis of Virgin Soil, I shall argue that Neždanov’s personality should be read, not in terms of a contemporary type, but as a philosophical character, by which I mean that he is characterized by his constant contemplation of his own position in the world.

As has already been noted in connection with Smoke, it has become the rule to exclude the last two from poetic studies of Turgenev’s novels. Only sporadically has any attention been paid to intra- and intertextual allusions. I have included both Smoke and Virgin Soil in this study in order to track both the development of the narrative and verbal art structure in the novels, and its function in the expression of Turgenev’s world view.

I argued in the preceding chapter that Smoke presents us with the result of Turgenev’s decision to write a new type of novel, a poeticized novel in which the influence of fate is explicitly presented in the narrative structure. I have stated that the writing of such a novel is in accordance with the general development of Turgenev’s work after the appearance of Fathers and Sons, which is itself characterized by a more explicit expression of the idea that man’s life is determined by a blind and devastating fate. The stories that were written from the beginning of the eighteen sixties onwards often feature the effects of irrational and destructive events on the lives of human beings, and these mostly have an overtly supernatural component. Smoke itself, as I have argued in the previous chapter, touches upon the same theme, the irrational influence there taking the form of destructive love that is associated with an irrational and enchanting power. As I have shown, this change in the presentation of the cosmic element is also made prominent through a breach with the narrative schemes of the previous novels.

Within this development of Turgenev’s work after Fathers and Sons, the last of Turgenev’s novels is conspicuous for its return to the ‘traditional’ narrative structure. Unlike those of Smoke, the plot scheme and character-set of Virgin Soil are reoriented towards those of the first four novels. For example, the plot scheme of Virgin Soil is based upon the insertion of the hero into an establishment of gentry, in which he meets the heroine. She is part of that milieu, but feels attracted to the hero’s ideology and commits herself to him and his ideas. Within this establishment, the hero also meets several other characters; one of these is a clear ideological opposite, with whom the hero clashes. In this connection, we might compare the ideological discussions that take place between Rudin and Pigasov, Lavreckij and Panšin, and Bazarov and Pavel Kirsanov, with the one between Neždanov and Kallomejcev that occurs in chapter XIV. What is more, the heroine is a typical Turgenev girl,
totally unlike the ‘predatory’ Irina. Like the heroines of the earlier novels, Marianna is mentally superior to the hero and lives by a natural devotion to her convictions, which is a quality that the hero lacks.

As was the case in the first four novels, the contemporary setting is concrete and detailed: it focuses on a well-determined social and ideological group, the populists, a collection of revolutionary youths who spread across the Russian countryside in the late sixties and early seventies, trying to identify with the people and to inspire them to rise in revolt against the government – a procedure known as ‘going to the people’ – ‘хождение в народ’). The hero himself participates in this movement. He does not have the role of a detached observer as did Litvinov, surrounded as he was by a number of ideological groups without ever being part of one himself. Compared to the ideological make-up of Smoke, in which several contemporary socio-political groups are described without bearing any real relation to the plot, Virgin Soil has a more consistent ideological theme, as did the first four novels.

Virgin Soil thus seems to represent a backward step within the general tendency of Turgenev’s work towards a more overt display of the influence of cosmic forces. To some critics, the socio-political content of Virgin Soil even seems so pervasive that they consider it the work’s sole interest. Freeborn uncompromisingly states: “it is […] a novel comprehensible only in political terms” (Freeborn 1970: 169). He further presses the point by adding that “Virgin Soil is a work curiously lacking in ‘philosophical’ content; everything is subordinated to the socio-political function of the novel” (idem, 176). He even maintains that the novel breathes the atmosphere of “a work of Socialist Realism” (idem 169), completely overlooking the pessimism expressed by Neždanov’s unsuccessful struggle to become a revolutionary, and his subsequent suicide.

Such evaluations are based on a misreading of the novel. I would argue that the novel’s ‘philosophical content’ takes a prominent place because the hero constantly raises the question of why he is who he is and why he cannot change himself. In this sense, I have already referred to the hero as a ‘philosophical character’. Owing to his central position in the novel, his philosophical problem gains the status of a central theme.

Bjalyj does note that the novel addresses more than the social-political reality of the time: “The sober socio-political discussion of the failure of ‘going to the people’ is considerably complicated by fatalistic ideas” (“трезвое социально-политическое объяснение неудач ‘хождения в народ’ заметно осложнено в романе Тургенева фаталистическими идейами” – Bjalyj 1962: 224). He adds that Neždanov’s failure as a revolutionary is determined by the “psycho-physiological specifics of Neždanov’s character” (“психофизиологические особенности натуры Нежданова” – ibid.). However, he only describes these features in terms of Neždanov’s aestheticism and reflective mind, qualities that he would have inherited from his aristocratic father. In other words, he describes Neždanov as superfluous on the basis of those aspects of the previous generation that supposedly also affected Neždanov’s mind and made him unsuitable as a revolutionary. Again, this does not sufficiently recognize the implications of Neždanov’s characterization.

Neždanov is the embodiment of a still more fundamental phenomenon: the all-determining force of the archetype. The novel is fully geared toward a discussion of the determinative power of type. It brings to the fore the idea that man cannot live as he chooses, but that his life is determined by the fate of the archetype of which he is a representative. Obviously, this idea is not new in Turgenev’s work: upon outlining the premises of my research I labelled it as a core feature of his world view. What seems unique within the framework of the contemporary scene appears from the cosmic perspective only as a manifestation of recurrent

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103 Nevertheless this does not make him a representative of the movement, as I will explain in 7.2.
patterns. In my analyses of the novels in the previous chapters, such patterns of typification repeatedly presented themselves in the form of associations of the characters with different kinds of archetype.

In these novels the patterns of typicality shimmering behind the unique could only be recognized through the verbal art level. In Virgin Soil, they take a more prominent place as a consequence of the extraordinary position of the hero. He contemplates his own personality and position in the world. He himself recognizes that he is the living embodiment of an archetype that determines who he is and hinders him from being the person he longs to be.104 This conflict is the novel’s central concern, and therefore the character of the novel as a whole can be identified as philosophical. Contrary to Freeborn’s assertion that it is to be understood fully in contemporary, socio-political terms, I consider Virgin Soil to carry an extraordinarily explicit philosophical interest.

Virgin Soil’s philosophical theme displays a new orientation in comparison with the earlier novels. In On the Eve and Fathers and Sons, the focus is on man’s insignificance in comparison with the whole of nature; in Smoke (as in the short stories of that period), it is on the irrational influence of fate that overpowers man, and in Virgin Soil it is on the determining power of archetype. All these themes represent different aspects of Turgenev’s world view. It is important to note that, in Virgin Soil, the forms in which cosmic influences are expressed in the earlier novels are conspicuous by their absence. There is no suggestion of supernatural or irrational influences in the lives of the characters. Perhaps even more striking is the absence of the paradigm of love associated with enchantment and destruction. This is remarkable since it not only forms the main theme of many of Turgenev’s later works but also appears, albeit in a less overt form through verbal art associations, in earlier short stories such as “Faust”, and in A Nest of Gentry, On the Eve and Fathers and Sons. In fact it is one of the most fundamental themes of Turgenev’s work. However, in Virgin Soil there is only the short-lived influence of Sipjagin’s wife on Neždanov: she impresses him with her coquettish behaviour, and he notes that she has remarkable eyes (“What eyes she has” – “Какие у неё глаза” – 85). Extraordinary eyes in Turgenev’s work are a fixed feature of persons with supernatural powers (see 6.4). Thus, at this point, it seems that Virgin Soil will partly re-enact the plot of Smoke, but the whole idea of a connection between them quickly fizzles out: Marianna convinces Neždanov of Sipjagina’s cold and heartless character, and he increasingly becomes involved with Marianna herself. Their relationship is characterized by companionship rather than passion; there is no implication in the verbal art structure that love is a destructive element in Neždanov’s life, or that Marianna has an enchanting influence over him.

In Virgin Soil, the manifestation of cosmic laws is not by the occurrence of irrational events or the element of destructive love; the focus is completely on predestination. The characters’ lives are not presented as being influenced by outside forces; instead they are completely determined by predestined fates, inherent in the types of people they are. In other words, their fates are already determined at their birth. This is the motto of the novel. It is alluded to in a curious scene in which Neždanov and his fellow revolutionaries, Solomin and Markelov, visit Paklin’s extraordinary relatives. Paklin asks the lady of the house, Fimuška, to predict the “fate, character and future” (“Скажите нам нашу судьбу, характер наш, будущее” – 139) of her guests. She takes up the cards, but then suddenly flings them away and says: “I do not have to tell fortunes. I know the character of each of you anyway, and as

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104 The problem by which Neždanov feels confronted mirrors the element of metamorphosis that characterizes ‘going to the people’. Neždanov’s struggle to leave behind his Hamletic qualities, and the populists’ attempts at identification with the people, both involve the wish to become someone else. In the novel this idea of metamorphosis is associated with acting (see 7.4).
your character is, so is your fate ("И не нужно мне гадать! – воскликнула она – я и так
характер каждого из вас знаю. А каков у кого характер, такова и судьба” – ibid.).
Fimuška tells Solomin that he is “cold, steady” (“холодный, постоянный”), and Markelov
that he is “sanguine and destructive” (“горячий, погубительный” – ibid.). She labels
Neždanov “pathetic”(жалкий – ibid.). And she is right about all of them: Solomin is a
successful man in every respect; Markelov is heading for a certain downfall – eventually he is
betrayed by one of the men he trusts most, and is sent to Siberia. Neždanov is doomed (see
7.2); hence the association with pity, which recurs later in the novel: Marianna pities him
when he has been plied with liquor by some peasants (246), and Neždanov himself tells
Marianna that her relationship with him is based not on love, but on pity (“ты жалеешь
меня” – 281).

The fate of the characters is thus linked directly to their inherent features. This is
underlined by an interesting aspect of the narrative structure of the text. In my analysis of
Smoke, I discussed the role of coincidence as a device for the reduction of the influence of
causality in the narrative. The lack of causality in the development of the plot suggested the
determinative influence of irrational (supernatural) forces upon the course of Litvinov’s life
against his will. In Virgin Soil, a related phenomenon can be detected. Upon reading the
novel, one senses a lack of connection between the characters. Although they meet and speak
with one another, and even influence other characters’ lives to some extent, the general
course of each of their lives develops independently of the others. Let me give a few
examples. The minor characters Mašurina and Ostrodumov, enthusiastic revolutionaries,
appear in the novel every now and then without really having any clear connection with the
other characters. They seem to have no influence whatsoever on any events or any of the
other characters. They come and go, literally and figuratively, without leaving a trace.
Markelov’s unhappy life heads for certain tragedy which comes ever closer during the course
of the novel, but none of the characters, not even he, seems to make any attempt to prevent
this. The same is true of Neždanov. He goes through a psychological process of self-analysis
that develops independently of the lives of the others. Although Marianna has committed
herself to Neždanov, thereby connecting her life to his by her word, in practice she
progressively moves further away from him. Marianna and Solomin both notice that
Neždanov is concerned about something, but they never question him or discuss his problem.

This notion of independence from the influence of others – which amounts to complete
dependence on fate – is expressed through the narrator’s words in the last moments before
Neždanov shoots himself: “it was as though everything was deserted, everything had turned
away from him, had withdrawn, leaving him to the arbitrariness of fate” (“точно все
вымерло, все отвернулось от него, удалилось навсегда, оставило его на произвол
судьбы” – 285). The atmosphere that is generated is one of a group of individuals with
individual fates, following their courses independently of the influence of others. The
importance of the consequences of one’s deeds is overshadowed by a notion of the
inevitability of fate based on predestination.

This motto is sustained by the novel’s verbal art structure. It associates the hero with the
archetype of reflection, Hamlet (7.2.1). Neždanov’s love for poetry also links him to the
figure of the poet in Nekrasov’s poem “The Poet and the Citizen”, thus presenting the
opposition in Neždanov’s life as ‘be’ versus ‘want to be’ (7.2.2). Furthermore, I shall explore
the motif of acting and, in connection with that, discuss the changeability of character in
Turgenev’s work (7.3). Finally, I will pay attention to the symbolic appearance of fate in the
form of the wheel of fate (7.4).
7.2 The hero as archetype

I have already stated that the denial of a philosophical concern in *Virgin Soil* fails to take into account the position of the hero. He is the focal point of the discussion of the laws of predestination that is presented on both the narrative and the verbal art levels of the novel. It is his awareness and contemplation of his fate that makes the issue explicit on the narrative level. Curiously, it has not generally been taken into account that Neždanov’s position in the novel makes him an odd man out on the contemporary scene. He has been discussed as a representative of the populist movement, the ideological group that provides the content of the contemporary scene, but where Rudin, Lavreckij and Bazarov can be seen as examples of the romantic-idealist, the man of the forties and the nihilist respectively, Neždanov is by no means a typical populist or revolutionary. The typical representatives of the movement are the secondary characters Markelov, Ostrodumov and Mašurina. Neždanov, however, has a highly problematic relationship with the populists: he joins them, speaks as they do and acts as they do, but he feels that he does not fit in. Although others accept him as a revolutionary, he considers himself unfitting. This dilemma forms the main element of the presentation of the hero. It is highlighted within the context of the populist movement and his wanting to join it, but its roots lie deeper, in the idea of a discrepancy between who one wants to be and who one is. It is primarily a personal dilemma, and it is this that marks the position of the hero as philosophical and psychological rather than ideological. The underlying philosophical theme of predestination is made manifest in Neždanov’s struggle to become a revolutionary, and his absolute failure to do so.

The presentation of the hero marks the philosophical nature of his position in the novel. Throughout the novel his contemplation of his own character and position in life form the primary element of his characterization. The information provided by the narrator is similarly focused on a portrayal of Neždanov’s inner life, especially the conflicting elements of his psychology. However, such narrative commentary is limited. Information as to Neždanov’s background and character is provided at the point when he is introduced, in chapter IV, and even that focuses mainly on the contradictory aspects. Apart from that, the narrator refrains from direct qualifications of the hero’s character and psyche; instead, it is Neždanov himself who analyses his own position. Chapter XVIII begins with a narrative account of the hero’s mood, but after only a few lines his own inner monologue takes over.

In this respect, *Virgin Soil* does develop beyond *Smoke*. I have already noted that in that novel there an extraordinary concentration on the consciousness of the hero in relation to the earlier ones. It provides a greatly-increased insight into the hero’s psychological state and the developments that take place within his psyche. However, the perspective of the narrator is almost identifiable with that of the hero, Litvinov; it is through his eyes that the other characters are observed and, consequently, the observations are coloured by his perception. In *Virgin Soil* this is not the case; the general perspective is that of the omniscient narrator (as in the first four novels). However, the novel does display the same non-judgement of the hero on the part of the other characters that was noted in *Smoke*. In the first four novels, it is the rule that the characters discuss the hero and their expectations of him. This contributes enormously to the presentation of the hero as socio-political and ideological type: he is judged on his capacities as new hero, who might replace the superfluous man. Neždanov’s personality is not the subject of discussion among the other characters (apart from a few remarks the Sipjagins and Kallomejcev make about his being revolutionary minded), and so there is no judgement of the hero’s capacities as new active type. In place of judgements of the hero by others (as in the first four novels) and judgements of others by the hero (as in *Smoke*), *Virgin Soil* presents Neždanov’s judgement of himself.

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This focus on Neždanov’s inner life defines his position as a philosophical hero. It should be noted that, in the previous novels, the characters do not recognize their own positions as those of archetypes. In those novels, it was only from the position of narrator that the events and characters could be viewed from a perspective that was other than strictly contemporary. The interventions of the narrative voice mark such moments of changing perspective: the fisherman scene in On the Eve, in which the narrator sets the personal drama of Insarov and Elena in the light of the futility of man’s life in general, and the narrator’s remark in Smoke that identifies the events in Litvinov’s life as a manifestation of the logic of nature. Neždanov, however, is tormented by the knowledge that he lives in the name of an archetype. By means of these extraordinary features of the hero, the philosophical theme of the novel is externalized on to the narrative art level. Its explicit appearance in the portrait of the central character makes Virgin Soil, of all the novels, the most overtly outspoken expression of Turgenev’s world view.

7.2.1 Hamlet

The archetype in whose image Neždanov lives is the paragon of reflection: Hamlet. During the course of the novel, he is repeatedly associated with Hamlet. The first association arises as soon as he is introduced. When Neždanov appears in his apartment (where three of his friends are awaiting him) in chapter II, he is addressed by Paklin, one of the friends, as “Russian Hamlet” (“российский Гамлет” – 14). Apart from a short description of his outward appearance, this ‘name’ provides the first qualification of Neždanov’s personality. At a later stage, Neždanov identifies himself with Hamlet in an inner monologue in which he analyses his own character. The description he gives of his state of mind comprises characteristic features of Hamlet: he calls himself a “cursed aesthetic”, a “sceptic”, and a “reflective and melancholy mind” (“эстетик проклятый! Скептик!” “репфлектер и меланхолик” – 121). He reproaches himself for busying himself with poetry and with his “own insignificant thoughts and feelings” (“с собственными мыслишками и ощущеньцами”), and for “digging in all sorts of silly psychological contemplations” (“да копайся в разных психологических соображениях” – ibid.), instead of being a revolutionary. He concludes these thoughts as follows: “О Hamlet, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, how to step out of your shadow? How can I stop imitating you in everything, even in the shameful delight of self-castigation? (“О Гамлет, Гамлет, датский принц, как выйти из твоей тени? Как перестать подражать тебе во всем, даже в позорном наслаждении самобичевания?” – ibid.), at which point he is interrupted by the sudden arrival of Paklin, who voices Neždanov’s thoughts by calling out to him: “My friend, Russian Hamlet” (“Друг! российский Гамлет!” – 122).

Even if the name of Hamlet had not been mentioned explicitly in this scene, the characteristics that Neždanov mentions would clearly have identified him. These are the traits that Turgenev himself mentioned as core features of Hamlet in his essay “Hamlet and Don Quixote”, where he states that Hamlet is characterised by “analysis” and “egoism” (“анализ и эгоизм” – VIII, 174). By his use of the word “egoism”, he does not mean to suggest that Hamlet does not care for anyone; Turgenev states that Hamlet hates all evil, but does not take action to alter it since he does not believe in the existence of ‘good’ (183). Egoism, as a Hamletic trait, is primarily a focus on one’s own personality. He is “constantly busy, not with his duty, but with his position” (“он постоянно занят не своей обязанностью, а своим

105 This situation seems to contrast with the implications of Neždanov’s name: although he is ‘unexpected’, he is introduced in a scene in which all present are expecting him.
He knows on which points he falls short and reproaches himself for them, even enjoys doing so (ibid.).

Neždanov mentions exactly these traits. Furthermore, like Hamlet, he lacks belief in any cause. In one of his letters to his friend Vladimir Silin, he reproaches himself for not really believing in the revolution and the activities of the populists: “Where to get belief?” he asks in despair (“да где веры-то взять?” - 227). As well as these familiar character traits, aspects of Neždanov’s outward appearance are also reminiscent of Hamlet. We are told that he has aristocratic features: a pale skin, a handsome face and a well-proportioned body.

There is one major difference between Hamlet and Neždanov. As Turgenev states in the essay, Hamlet, no matter how much he hates his position and states that death would free him from his problems, is attached to life and does not wish to leave it (VIII, 176). Neždanov, by contrast, concludes that there is no place for him in life, and commits suicide in order to free himself of the burden of his existence.

Apart from this difference, Neždanov is the most overt and complete Hamlet of all the heroes in the novels. It is a commonplace of Turgenev criticism to suppose that each of the heroes in the novels resembles a Hamlet or a Don Quixote. However, an in-depth evaluation of the heroes shows that this is not easily sustained. Rudin has some Hamletic traits – he analyses his environment and ponders the need for action without acting himself – but these are not the basic traits of Hamlet as Turgenev describes him in the essay. Rudin lacks the deep melancholy of Hamlet, and he certainly does believe in the existence of good causes. Moreover, during the course of the novel, he becomes more and more Quixotic, as my analysis of Rudin shows. Lavreckij has also been associated with Hamlet, primarily on the basis that he was forced to keep a diary when he was a child, but he is much more down-to-earth and practical in character, and at no point features the paralysing effects of reflection or the love of analysis that characterize Hamlet. Insarov is, if anything, Quixotic; Bazarov and Litvinov are, in my opinion, not amenable to convincing association with either type. Only Neždanov is an overtly Hamletic character.

Another complicating factor in the characterisation of the hero as one of these two types is that Hamlet may be egoistic, but not every egoist has Hamletic traits. The reason is that in Turgenev’s work there are two types of ‘egoist’. The first is the ‘natural egoist’, the one who displays the natural attitude of the individual whom Turgenev has connected with the image of the mosquito. (See in my analysis of On the Eve in paragraph 4.6) Characters who are natural egoists live primarily for their own profit. Examples of such characters in the novels are Varvara Pavlovna, Šubin, and Sipjagin. It should be noted that these are secondary characters; the heroes of Turgenev’s novels can never be classified as natural egoists because they are always the victims of tragedy. For a natural egoist, that would almost be a contradiction in terms. Turgenev’s heroes can, however, be classified as the other type of egoist, the Hamlet. The egoism of Hamlet has nothing to do with the aggressive wish for self-assurance that drives the natural egoists. Hamletic egoism, as has been noted, comes down to a preoccupation with the self which paralyses the capacity for action. These two types of egoist are radically different. The natural egoists prosper; the Hamlets are doomed figures. It would thus be misleading to label characters Hamletic on the basis of their egoism. That would render Bazarov a truly Hamletic character, which he could not possibly be on the basis of Hamlet’s core features.

On the basis of the above considerations, Neždanov is the only purely Hamletic character in the novels. I therefore cannot agree with Woodward, who maintains that Neždanov has little in common with Hamlet. He argues that Neždanov’s problem lies in “his ‘natural’ self”.

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106 See, for instance, Levin 1965, Kagan-Kans 1975 and Woodward 1989a
rather than in “rational analysis”, and that it is characterized by his irrational delight “in beauty in all its manifestations” (Woodward 1989a: 65). Woodward argues along the lines that there are two groups of characters, the egoistic and the altruistic. His ‘egoism’ is understood as ‘natural egoism’. He sees love of beauty as an egoistic trait, and argues that egoism is in accordance with nature’s laws. Hence, he maintains that Neždanov’s ‘natural self’ is egoistic. When Neždanov decides to devote himself to altruistic goals (populism) and tries to banish his aestheticism, he consequently falls out of tune with nature. Woodward thus concludes that Neždanov’s death should be read as nature’s “customary punishment” for his changing himself from egoistic to altruistic (idem 66).

There is little in the text to support this view. Woodward seems anxious to discover in Virgin Soil the same scheme that he has developed in his analyses of On the Eve and Fathers and Sons, in which he also designates the hero’s death as punishment by nature (see Woodward 1990). I think that, in general, such an interpretation leads to the personification of nature’s influence to a degree that is out of step with Turgenev’s notion of nature as an indifferent force. Nevertheless, it can be usefully applied to those novels in which the central philosophical concern is the question of man’s position within the whole of nature (as is the case in On the Eve and Fathers and Sons). As I have argued, the philosophical concern of Virgin Soil focuses on the all-determining power of predestination through type. Neždanov’s problem is that he was born a Hamlet (an aesthetic mind) and wants to become an altruistic Don Quixote, but cannot. This is the opposite of Woodward’s position. He claims that Neždanov’s aesthetic traits are ‘natural’ (in accordance with nature’s laws). However, the aestheticism is exactly the trait that makes life impossible for Neždanov. It is connected to the features of reflection and analysis that render his archetype, Hamlet, a tragic and doomed figure.

Moreover, Woodward’s interpretation implies that Neždanov changes himself and perishes as a consequence of this change (because such change is not allowed by nature). However, the very theme of the novel, featured in the characterization of the hero, is the denial of the possibility of changing oneself. Neždanov is an archetypal Hamlet, and therefore cannot change into anything else. His death is a consequence of this very unchangeability.107

Furthermore, as I have shown, Neždanov has a clear and outspoken Hamletic profile. Why should the explicit presentation of the hero’s inner conflict, which shows that he struggles to change himself but cannot, be neglected and substituted by one that is not supported in the text but is simply based upon a notion of what nature’s role in the novels should be according to its function in the earlier novels? In Virgin Soil, nature has no role to play, either direct or implicit, in the lives of the characters. The interference of a force ‘from outside’, as the cosmic forces in On the Eve and Fathers and Sons are presented, would be out of tune with Virgin Soil’s focus on a hero who is burdened by the knowledge of inescapable fate.

Neždanov’s position is rendered more complicated by his wish to be Quixotic. To an extent, this makes him akin to Rudin, who is characterized in the first half of the novel by his analytical state of mind, and in the second by activities that share with those of Don Quixote their rational indefensibility. Rudin and Virgin Soil resemble one another in several respects but primarily in aspects of the plot. In both novels, the heroes have psychological opposites: Ležnev and Solomin respectively. These characters are uncomplicated and practical. They are devoid of ideology, but do have their own strategies for effecting moderate change. They have similar traits: they are not very talkative and can even be downright rude (Ležnev is curt

107 In accordance with this, Neždanov’s death lacks the element of an unexpected and unintelligible force breaking off man’s life that is felt in On the Eve and Fathers and Sons. His suicide is the ultimate consequence of his awareness of his own typicality.
with the landlady Dar’ja Michajlovna; Solomin insults both Sipjagin and his wife by his overt unwillingness to observe the rules of courtesy and spend a minute more than necessary in their company. They also share a paleness of outward appearance and character. Both are blond. At first sight, Marianna finds Solomin “indefinable, without personality” (“неопределеным, безличным” – 181). Their rather dull personalities are associated with the colour grey: Ležnev wears a grey suit, and Solomin is labelled “grey” by Paklin: “They [people like Solomin – MO] are the strong, grey, monochromic men of the people” (“это – крепкие, серье, одноцветные, народные люди” – 298).

Ležnev and Solomin are two of a kind. Both are clearly more successful than their corresponding heroes. Rudin and Neždanov are unable to find acceptable positions in life, and cannot be worthy partners for the women who fall in love with them, whereas Ležnev and Solomin seem naturally successful, act without contemplating their deeds, and reach the goals they set themselves. In love, they are similarly more successful than the heroes: Ležnev marries the woman he loves whereas Rudin loses Natal’ja to Volyncev; Solomin even becomes the hero’s rival with respect to the heroine: even when Marianna is still intending to marry Neždanov, she feels attracted to Solomin, and it is he whom she eventually marries.

There is one important difference between the two novels, however, and it touches upon the core of the message of Turgenev’s last novel. Rudin is presented as a Hamletic character who changes into a Don Quixote. Although his achievements are limited and his goals even ridiculous, he is granted a degree of respect for what he aims at. In Virgin Soil, we are again presented with a Hamlet, and one who acknowledges the need to aim for concrete deeds, but the core of the message here is that the Hamlet cannot change into a Don Quixote. The characters and their fates are fixed, and they will each live in the image of their type no matter what they strive to achieve. As far as the characterization of Rudin is concerned, one might consider his Hamletism a trait that characterizes the superfluity of his generation: the idealists who have lost contact with reality. His idealism is explained in the words of Ležnev as a temporary trait that will not hinder later generations.

Neždanov’s Hamletic character, however, is depicted as the embodiment of a recurrent and unchangeable type. It cannot be regarded as a characteristic of his generation: among the revolutionaries in whose circles he is staying, he is the odd man out. If he were to characterize a generation, such Hamletism could only be a trait of the Romantics, in the vein of Onegin and Pečorin. But this is not the substance of the Neždanov’s Hamletism. It does not associate him with these figures. He is the paragon of a more fundamental phenomenon: a basic psychological make-up, a character to which a fixed fate is unchangeably connected – hence the far sharper, psychological characterization of Hamletism in Neždanov’s portrait in comparison to that of Rudin. Virgin Soil really is about Hamlet as a psychological type.

When Rudin and Virgin Soil are thus compared, one can discern an evolution in the interests of the novels. Rudin is a novel primarily concerned with the depiction and evaluation of a contemporarily-defined type, a romantic-idealistic character whose limited contributions to the benefit of Russia are discussed. Rudin is moderately positive in its admission that, at least over time, man may move to a less superfluous position. Moreover, as I have stated above, Rudin’s Hamletism does not have the same quality as that of Neždanov. Rudin is more of an idealist than a Hamlet, and therefore his development into a more Quixotic figure is not really surprising: at the core, it is the same enthusiasm, expressed first in words and later through deeds.

Virgin Soil’s interest clearly lies in the depiction of the hero, not as a contemporary type, and not as the belated reappearance of such a type from the past, but as a recurring archetype. For Neždanov’s characterization, it is crucial that he cannot change. His Hamletism determines his destiny. Thus, the messages of the two novels differ substantially. In Rudin, as
was established in the analysis of that novel in Chapter Two, the idea of cosmic typicality is of only very limited interest. In *Virgin Soil*, the situation is the opposite: the contemporary context is of only limited interest for the understanding of the hero, while the idea of predestination is crucial. In this respect, Turgenev’s last novel can be seen as a commentary on the first, denying the possibility of moderate change that characterizes *Rudin*. This re-evaluation is in accordance with the development of Turgenev’s philosophical outlook, which focuses increasingly on the inescapable and all-determining power of cosmic fate.

7.2.2 The Poet

The conflicting types of Hamlet and Don Quixote are doubled by a second pair: that of the Poet and the Citizen. The relevance of this pair has been suggested by the Russian critic Mostovskaja. She discusses it as part of an article on echoes of Nekrasov’s work in *Virgin Soil*. She is not so much interested in direct quotations, but rather in elements reminiscent of his poetic vocabulary and themes. Among them, she notes the activation in *Virgin Soil* of the Nekrasovian pair of the Poet and the Citizen, from the poem bearing the same title and dating from 1856 (Mostovskaja 1996: 119). This poem presents a dialogue between the Poet and the Citizen, who are logically opposed to one another in their view of the world. The Citizen tries to encourage the Poet to stop busying himself with his own personality and to devote his powers to the general benefit instead, but the Poet refuses; his disappointment in life and a lack of belief in his own powers hold him back from devoting himself to any cause.

Mostovskaja argues that one line from the poem is of particular interest: “Not to be a poet is allowable, But a citizen one must be” (“Познам можешь ты не быть, Но гражданином быть обязан” – Nekrasov 1995, XII, 32). She states that this line is echoed in several aspects of Neždanov’s characterization in chapter IV, in which we are told that in public he busies himself only with political and social questions, but is secretly devoted to art and poetry. He even writes poetry, but at the same time considers it a weakness and becomes annoyed if anyone mentions it (Mostovskaja 1996:118-9). According to Mostovskaja, Neždanov’s struggle with his own contradictory nature and aims re-enacts the discussion between the Poet and the Citizen (idem, 121). I find the link between this description and the line from Nekrasov’s poem somewhat overstated, but Neždanov’s inner conflict can indeed be phrased in terms of a conflict between the attitudes of the Poet and the Citizen.

Mostovskaja does not explore this idea any further, but I think it is worth considering this pair of opposite types in the light of Neždanov’s struggle against his own character. In Nekrasov’s poem, the Poet and the Citizen are representatives of two attitudes; the Poet is characterized by a concentration on the self, a constant evaluation of one’s own experiences and feelings; the Citizen is focused on the well-being of society as a whole. Theirs is a conflict that can never be resolved. In *Virgin Soil*, these opposite types are represented in the ‘be’ and ‘want to be’ of Neždanov’s life. Neždanov’s personality is identifiable with that of the Poet clearly enough. Not only do his love of beauty and his own poetry link him to the Poet; more importantly the poet shares his general attitude to life. The Poet, like Hamlet, is characterized by reflection and an ensuing lack of belief in the usefulness of his efforts. Unlike the Poet in Nekrasov’s poem, Neždanov strives to become a Citizen, to devote himself to the common cause and to forget about his poetic side.

However, Poet and Citizen are incompatible types. In Nekrasov’s poem this results in a conflict; in *Virgin Soil* it leads to tragedy: the conflict of the Poet and the Citizen now rages within Neždanov’s life and ruins it. Shortly before he shoots himself, tells Marianna: “There are two men in me, and one does not allow the other to live” (“во мне сидят два человека –
и один не даёт жить другому” – 279). Neždanov is a born Poet, literally and figuratively, and he cannot change. The association thus supports the core message of the novel: man cannot change himself or his fate.

In addition, the allusion to the poem provides another way of looking at the subject matter of Virgin Soil. The notion of the power of typicality determining one’s fate, a major theme of all Turgenev’s novels and throughout his work in general, is complicated in Virgin Soil by the hero’s wish to change himself. Neždanov’s portrait is not only that of a type, but of one who rebels against his typicality. His death becomes inescapable by the unresolvable conflict between the Poet and the Citizen that divides his life and makes it impossible. This may account for the important difference that I have noted above between Hamlet and Neždanov: Hamlet loves life and would never make and end to it himself; Neždanov kills himself. Hamlet continues his life because he, like the Poet, finds some satisfaction in his position. He loves and despises himself at one and the same time, and has become used to this bitter-sweet mixture of feelings. Neždanov, however, makes his life definitively impossible by urging on an inner conflict between two opposites.

The role of the archetype in Virgin Soil stresses the idea of the immutability of life. The characters are unable to change their lives. This is not only true of Turgenev’s last novel, but forms a constant pattern in all his novels. It presents one of the distinctive ways in which the plot schemes of Turgenev’s novels deviate from the general line of the European nineteenth century novel, as has been outlined by Lotman. This line provides a plot based on a significant change in the hero’s life. In the western European novel, this change is often formulated in social terms: during the course of the novel, the hero gains a more favourable social position and as a consequence finds the happiness that was formerly out of reach. The Russian novel is less inclined towards a change in the hero’s position than towards a moral change of the hero’s personality, for instance the transformation of Raskol’nikov and Gogol’s plans for a similar process in Čičikov’s life. As Lotman has argued, this plot derives from the mythic duality of the destroyer/saviour, which in Romantic literature most prominently takes the form of the hero who combines both features, and in Russian Realism takes the form of a hero who is at first evil and then goes through a process of change (Lotman 1992: 97-8). In Turgenev’s novels, the possibility of a transformation of the hero’s personality is denied. The end of the plot does not feature a changed hero, but is marked by the denial or elimination of the possibility of change, in most cases through the hero’s death (idem 104). This determines the de mythologizing role that Turgenev’s novels play in relation to the nineteenth century Russian novel in general (idem 106).

The impossibility of real change lies at the basis of the plots of all Turgenev’s novels. Rudin cannot become the active hero he longs to be; Lavreckij cannot leave behind his past, and neither can Litvinov, who finds that Irina still exerts the same power over him as before. Insarov and Bazarov are confronted less with the impossibility of changing themselves than with the impossibility of determining the courses of their own lives. In Virgin Soil, however, the question of whether the personality can change develops into the novel’s basic theme. Neždanov’s characterization is centred on his own acknowledgement that he resembles an archetype, and features his struggle to change his personality. The possibility of transformation is denied. Turgenev’s mythology presents an image of man confined by the unavoidable recurrence of his archetypal fate.

In this connection, Virgin Soil can be seen as a novel with an anti-plot. Generally, the plot of a (pre-modernist) novel presents an initial situation, a series of events and a final situation that has substantially changed in comparison to the initial situation. In Virgin Soil, however, the events do not lead to significant changes, at least in the case of the hero. He is introduced
as a man who struggles with his Hamletism. Although his environment and his activities do change, these changes do not lead to any change in position. He remains confined by his character traits, and even his death cannot free him. That simply serves as a confirmation of his unchangeable position.

7.3 The motif of acting

The novel’s theme of change of personality (desired and denied) is supported by the motif of role-playing. This involves a complex intertwining of one of the characteristic aspects of the populist movement – the populists’ dressing up in simple clothes – with the symbolic notion behind role-playing: pretending to be someone whom you are not. These associations contribute to the idea that Neždanov’s attempts to become a revolutionary place him in a false position.

This element comes into play as early as chapter III, where Neždanov visits the theatre. The idea of acting – of playing a role – is implicit in the environment itself, of course, but its implications are further narrowed to the element of being placed in a false position by the play, that is on stage: Ostrovskij’s “Don’t take another man’s sledges” (“Не в свои сани не садись” – 1853). Mostovskaja has noted that the title, a Russian saying which means “stick to your (social) position”, serves as a direct response to Neždanov’s situation at that moment (Mostovskaja 1996: 117): he has bought himself a ticket in the front row, which he did not intend to do until the person standing behind him in the queue at the box office insulted him by supposing that he wanted to buy a cheaper one. Now, wearing old clothes and unpolished boots, he has taken his place among the generals in the front row. In the theatre, Neždanov is literally out of place, but the title and message of the play can figuratively be applied to Neždanov’s life in general. As Mostovskaja notes, he is out of place in all the situations he functions in: as teacher, as populist and as one who is beloved (idem 118). This theme of role playing and false position is worth elaborating on.

The populist movement, and its policy of dressing in the clothes of the local peasantry, provide the environment in which the motif of deception is further developed. Dressing in simple clothes is associated with all kinds of play acting: when Neždanov and Marianna arrive at Solomin’s factory, change their clothes and prepare to mingle with the people, Solomin refers to the whole process as a “masquerade” (“маскарад” – 208), and Neždanov later calls it a “vaudeville with dressing-up” (“Водевиль с переодеванием” – 219); when trying out some plain language, Neždanov interrupts himself by exclaiming “What play-acting this is!” (“что за актерство” – 217), and Marianna adds that they seem to be “playing a comedy” (“Мы точно какую-то комедию играем” – 220). The very idea of dressing up, and trying to speak and act, as simple people do is obviously a form of acting, but it also symbolizes the intrinsic falseness of what Neždanov is trying to do: his whole attempt to become a revolutionary remains nothing more than an actor’s part. In a letter to his friend Silin, Neždanov expresses this idea himself. He complains that he cannot influence the

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108 It is worth noting that, in Ostrovskij’s work, play-acting is connected to deception, as is the environment of the theatre in general (Rahman 1999: 149). Theatre stands for “the creation of illusory or make-believe worlds” (idem, 148). Neždanov’s visit to the theatre conveys a similar symbolism; it initiates his movement into a world of deception, principally one of self-deception: in the theatre he meets Sipjagin, who takes him to his estate and (unintentionally) to the centre of populist activity. Within this environment, which is characterized by play-acting (see my further observations in this paragraph), Neždanov comes to the conclusion that he is deceiving himself.
people: “I feel, that I am no good at it, like a bad actor in someone else’s role” (Сам чувствую, что не гожусь. Точно скверный актер в чужой роли – 226).

The dressing up has a different meaning for Marianna than for Neždanov. For her, it is a step on the way to identification with the people; her changed clothes are an expression of her changed personality. For Neždanov, it only results in the discovery that his revolutionary activities are unnatural to him. This difference is symbolized by their respective costumes. Marianna’s peasant outfit suits her, but Neždanov has been given an odd costume, a sort of caftan that makes him look, not like a peasant, but like a “poor imitation of a town dweller” (“плохим городским мещанином” – 216). The outfit looks strange on Neždanov, and he feels uncomfortable in it. Thus, even his disguise is not convincing. It is the visible expression of the fact that Neždanov, as a revolutionary, is intrinsically a misfit.

The notion of deceiving others, which is inherent in the dressing up, is also, for Neždanov, an attempt to deceive himself. Neždanov’s dressing up becomes a symbol of his life: his attempts to become someone else only affect his outward appearance; they do not reflect a real change. Significantly, before shooting himself, Neždanov changes back into his own clothes: “he threw off his ‘masquerade costume’, kicked it into a corner and dressed himself in his previous clothes” (“сбросил с себя свой ‘маскарадный’ костюм, отпихнул его в угол, достал и надел свое прежнее платье” – 284). Marianna had changed her clothing as sign of her changed life, but for Neždanov it had never been anything more than a temporary guise, such as one might wear for a special occasion, always knowing that one’s eventual return to reality was inevitable.

7.4 Fate

In accordance with Virgin Soil’s theme of predestination, we find a symbolic image of fate that stresses its destructive force, constantly moving towards, and inevitably resulting in, death. In the earlier novels, the influence of fate was mainly hinted at in one or more of the following ways: through the occurrence of ‘irrational’ events (such as the return of Varvara Pavlovna, and the renewed relationship between Litvinov and Irina); in the form of death (which, as I have argued in Chapter One, is presented, not as part of life, but as the breaking in of an element that is alien to life itself), and in the form of associations with archetypes that speak of predestination (such as the association of Insarov with Tristan). In Smoke, the existence and influence of fate (‘nature’s logic’) is made explicit through remarks made by the narrator. In Virgin Soil, it takes a symbolic form: that of the Juggernaut, which expands into a more generalised imagery of the wheel.

The Juggernaut ritual is explained at an early stage in the novel. Discussing the tasks of the revolutionaries, Paklin warns them that they do not know what they are heading for or what they will meet, and he adds:

The Indians throw themselves under the wagon of Juggernaut; […] it crushes them and they die in bliss. We have our own Juggernaut; it likewise crushes us, but there is no bliss in it” (“Индийцы бросаются под колесницу Джагернаута, […] она их давит, и они умирают – в блаженстве. У нас есть свой Джагернаут… Давить-то он нас давит, но блаженства не доставляет” – 28-29).

In the context of the discussion, it is implied that the activity of the revolutionaries can be compared to the religious ritual of the Indians: it too is a sacrifice, made for a sacred cause, which would almost certainly appear senseless to an outsider. As such, it can be seen as a
critical commentary on the usefulness or otherwise of the revolutionaries: they are killed, but for what good? This implication returns later. When Solomin asks Neždanov whether he is prepared to go to the people together with Marianna, Neždanov remembes the image of the Juggernaut: “Juggernaut […] there it is, this giant wagon…and I hear the grating and rattling of its wheels” (“Джаггернаут […] Вот она катится, громадная колесница … и я слышу треск и грохот ее колес” – 188).

A similar image, carrying a similar meaning, occurs at the point where Marianna is taking care of Neždanov after he has been plied with liquor by peasants. In this instance, she is confronted by the harsh reality of the world in which she wants to get involved, and it frightens her. She asks herself the question: “To what Moloch was she planning to sacrifice herself?” (“Какому Молоху собиралась она принести себя в жертву?” – 246). The Moloch has the same implications as Juggernaut: both are symbols of cruel and senseless sacrifice.

However, the Juggernaut image has already appeared in Turgenev’s novels but carrying a different connotation: not senseless sacrifice, but cosmic fate. On those occasions, the link with the Juggernaut is less explicit; the image is of man being crushed by a wheel. It occurs in Fathers and Sons and Smoke.109 On both occasions, it represents fate as an unexpected and devastating force. In Fathers and Sons, the dying Bazarov describes his own situation as that of the victim of a wheel: “I have been run over” (“попал под колесо” – VIII, 395). In Smoke, fate (“nature’s logic”) is described by the narrator in terms of a wheel: “Nature does not mind logic, our human logic; she has a logic of her own, one that we do not understand or recognize until it runs over us like a wheel” (“природа не справляется с логикой, с нашей человеческой логикой; у ней есть своя, которую мы не понимаем и не признаем до тех пор, пока она нас, как колесом, не переедет” – IX, 287-288).

In this light, the occurrence of the wheel as an image gains a broader and more fundamental significance as a symbol of fate. Paklin’s remark and Neždanov’s later thoughts about it do more than simply link the revolutionary activities to sacrifice; they invoke the all-encompassing influence of fate, which brings a senseless and inevitable end to man’s life. The element of voluntary sacrifice is completely absent here. This idea is supported by the occurrence in Virgin Soil of a literal victim of a wheel, a daughter of the factory worker Pavel, whose wife reports that “she has been run over” (попала под колесо” – 213). The literal wheel and the figurative wheel of fate mirror one another.

Throughout the novel, wheels symbolize the drawing nearer of the wheel of fate. Having been introduced at its very beginning in the reference to Juggernaut, the sound and presence of wheels is an ominous symbol of its inevitable approach, especially in connection with Neždanov.

Neždanov’s arrival at the Sipjagin house is accompanied by two such wheel symbols. Neždanov climbs down from the carriage and stops “close to the front wheel” (“остановился близ переднего колеса” – 47). Having been taken to his room, he hears, through the open windows, the sound of a colony of rooks “resembling the grating of a great number of wagon wheels” (“подобный скрипну множества тележных колес” – 49). In the light of the Juggernaut image, these images imply the approach of annihilation. Indeed, Neždanov’s arrival at the house may be regarded as the initiation of his destruction as it is here that he will meet Marianna and execute the plan to go to the people. As we saw earlier, his and

109 In A Nest of Gentry the image of a wheel as symbol of fate also occurs, not as a crushing wheel but as the wheel of fortune. After the return of Varvara Pavlovna, Lavrekcij ponders the sudden change of his fate, and concludes: “it is like a lottery – had the wheel turned over just a bit further, a poor beggar would have turned into a rich man” (“да ведь и в лотерее – повернуло колесо еще немного, и бедняк, пожалуй, стал бы богачом” – VII, 269).
Marianna’s decision to leave the house and devote their lives to the people is associated with the Juggernaut. Furthermore, the description of the factory of Solomin, which is where the plan takes them, also mentions “buzzing wheels” (“колеса жужжали” – 109). That may be considered natural enough as part of the description of a factory, but when Neždanov is on the point of shooting himself, and he hesitates, hoping for some human being to appear and stop him, “there was only the factory’s muffled pounding and smelling” (“Одна фабрика глухо гудела и воняла” – 285). The reappearance of the working factory at this point does more than simply create an image of loneliness in which no human soul is interested in Neždanov’s fate; it also stresses the connection between his death and the fate that has been following him in the symbolic form of wheels throughout the novel. Each stage in the development of Neždanov’s life from the beginning of the novel – his arrival at the Sipjagin household, his involvement in the populist cause, his death – is accompanied by wheel imagery that associates it with an inevitable process leading to, and culminating in, his own destruction.

There is a second victim of the wheel of fate in the novel: Markelov. When he has been betrayed by his peasants and arrested, we are told that he “had been run over by a wheel” (“попал под колесо” – 271). In accordance with Fimuška’s prediction, he is predestined to lead an unsuccessful life, as is Neždanov. The life of the successful Solomin, by contrast, is also associated with a wheel – as an image of the smooth running of his life. Upon his returning to his factory after a visit to Sipjagin’s household, we are told that “his life began to run again, like a drive wheel” (“и завертелась опять его жизнь, как большое маховое колесо” – 166).

The notion of the drawing nearer of the wheel of fate in Neždanov’s life is supported by colour symbolism. The appearance of such symbolism has a form and function that was not encountered in Turgenev’s earlier works. Perhaps for this reason, it has so far escaped the attention of critics. In the earlier novels, colour symbolism was encountered only in the process of characterization. As we have seen, dress-colour could associate characters with good or evil, especially when the colours were black, or white. A similar symbolism attaches to eye-colour: black eyes and eyes of unusual colour suggest a character’s evil nature and/or association with the supernatural (see Koschmal 1984:51-53).

In Virgin Soil, however, there is a different type of colour symbolism, similar to that which is more readily associated with Dostoevskij. In Crime and Punishment, for example, the colour yellow (rooms with yellow wallpaper, yellow clothes and the like) is associated with inner feelings of bitterness (see Toporov 1995). In Virgin Soil, the occurrence of the colour green develops as a symbol of fate. A discussion of its appearance will illuminate its function.

The walls of Neždanov’s room in Petersburg are painted “pale green” (мутно-зеленой краской – 7). The room that is given to Neždanov at the Sipjagin estate is called “the green room” (“зеленую комнату” – 48). In a letter to his friend Silin, Neždanov explains his doubts about his capacities to identify himself with the people by observing that he hates their vodka, which he refers to as “green wine” (“зелёная вина” – 228). Later, when Neždanov is plied with liquor on one of his propaganda trips, he begins to see “green circles” (“зелёные круги” – 244). Finally, when Neždanov shoots himself, his consciousness is blurred by a “pale green whirlwind” (“мутно-зелёный вихрь” – 285).

This colour symbolism forms an image of inescapable fate. Of special interest is the presence of this element from the very beginning of the novel: the colour of his room in Petersburg is exactly the same as that of the whirlwind that accompanies his death. His inevitable death, unsuspected though it is, is already present in the colour of the room. The fact that he also sleeps in a green room at the Sipjagin estate again hints at the unchangeable
nature of his fate, regardless of his forthcoming attempt to alter the course of his life by becoming a populist.

Referring back to my remarks about Virgin Soil’s deviations from the normal plot development (in 7.2.2), it should be noted that the symbols of fate mentioned here create an alternative pattern. Instead of signifying progressive developments in the plot, they are used to stress the invariability of fate. The wheel and colour symbolism is found at crucial points in the plot: the opening (introduction of the hero); Neždanov’s transfer to the Sipjagin estate; his coming into contact with the people, and the scene of his suicide. The reader’s expectations (based on general notions of plot-development in the traditional novel) that a hero’s change of environment or activity will result in substantive changes to his life, are countered by the recurrent appearance of symbols of invariable, destructive fate on the level of verbal art. Neždanov’s suicide (motivated by his own conclusion that no real change can occur in his life) brings this notion of predetermined fate on to the level of the plot, which thereby functions as a kind of anti-plot in relation to the earlier novels.

7.5 Conclusions

Virgin Soil appeared ten years after Turgenev’s previous novel, Smoke. It seems logical that this should have led to differences in the novel’s structure and theme as compared to the earlier novels. I have argued that, on the basis of Peterson’s scheme, the novel’s basic plot scheme and set of characters seem oriented towards those of the first four novels. However, during the course of the novel it becomes clear that Virgin Soil has an orientation of its own: it focuses on predestination, a notion of man’s life and fate determined completely by the (arche)type that he represents. The role of the hero is fully adapted to this theme. He is characterized as a philosophical and psychological hero rather than as a contemporary ideological type. His participation in the populist movement contributes to the development of his inner conflict between the person he is (by nature) and the person whom he strives to be. He is by no means a typical representative of the populists. On the contrary, he comes to understand that he cannot be a populist because his reflective and melancholy character hinders him from believing in their cause.

Neždanov’s superfluity is not definable as a contemporary trait; it is inherent in his psychology. The central topic of Virgin Soil is not a depiction of populism but the exploration of inherent superfluity: that of the Hamletic character with which Neždanov was born and which he cannot change. Neždanov is given the position of someone who is aware of his own situation: he analyses his problem in inner monologues and in letters to his friend Silin. As a consequence the theme of inherent superfluity is externalized on to the level of narration. As a consequence, Virgin Soil is the most explicit of the novels in its presentation of Turgenev’s world view. This is further strengthened by the development of the plot into an anti-plot.

The motto of the novel is explicated in the words of the curious old lady, Fimuška, who claims that “as one’s character is, so is one’s fate” (139). Indeed the main characters in the novel are all predestined by their characters: Neždanov and Markelov are sad, doomed characters, destined to perish; Solomin and Marianna are solid and practical, and destined to be successful. Another successful type is that of the egoist Sipjagin.

With regard to the verbal art level, it is interesting to note that the key images of the earlier novels are conspicuously absent: the connection of love to destructive power and enchantment; the image of the destructive female; the bird imagery, and the division of characters into predators and prey on the basis of the animals they are associated with. As I have argued above, the absence of these familiar images fits in with the novel’s concentration
on predestination: the images of destructive love, enchantment and predators all imply that one character has a definitive influence on the life of another, whereas in Virgin Soil the theme is rather that man’s life develops according to the fate dictated by his type, without his or anyone else’s exerting any influence on it. Fate itself is represented through an adaptation of the Juggernaut ritual: it is symbolized as a wheel that inescapably approaches until it crushes man. The aspect of voluntary sacrifice that characterizes the Indian ritual is completely absent. It is an inescapable fate that will inevitably catch up with man sooner or later, however he might try to prevent it.

The plot development, up to a point, follows the familiar Turgenevan scheme in which a supposedly new type enters as a newcomer into a settlement of gentry and gains the love of the heroine. So far, the plot also develops according to the schemes of the traditional novel that include substantial change in the hero’s position. However, in Virgin Soil real change is denied because the hero’s personality cannot change, being governed by predestination. The traditional development of the plot ends in an anti-climax, with Neždanov’s suicide.