

Introduction

This investigation takes as its starting point the idea that in Turgenev's short stories the image of a character is not exhausted by the 'traditional' Realistic metonymic relations between outer circumstances and inner life. Though genealogical factors and the 'influence' of the milieu¹ do contribute in an important measure to the psychological make-up of Turgenev's characters, which is often rendered with the help of equally metonymical 'characteristic' details of outer appearance, there is no merely one-to-one, causally motivated relationship between the inner qualities of the characters on the one hand and their deeds (actions and utterances), their life's career, and their fate as a whole on the other. The metonymic qualities are supplemented by metaphoric ones, and it is my intention to describe this phenomenon in what follows. The model for my description is taken from two recent books by W.Schmid (Schmid 1991 and 1992), which can be regarded as the condensation of his own investigations over the last ten years (see 1991: 5 and 1992: 179), and in which he applies methods developed by A. Hansen-Löve and himself on the basis of Formalist and Jakobsonian ideas².

It may be said that the 'material' for literary character is not taken from situations, persons and their deeds in the 'raw', actual world, but from that world as it is modelled by the cultural context (that is, a world shaped by a unique historical past and reacting to unique contemporary questions). Of course, an author can 'draw from life', as, vice versa, actual persons may try to 'be like' (or not be like, for that matter) a literary character, or may understand the behaviour of other real people in terms of the behaviour of literary characters. A character may also be meant by the author as a portrait of a certain existing group, a representative of man in general, or a certain historical-cultural formation, or a social group; he may be an ideal portrait, or a figure of ridicule, etcetera. Any individual in a work of literature, however close to life that work may be, always functions in some degree as an 'example', modelling more than the concrete and the particular. At the basis of the artistic world of a work of art lies a conception of

¹ For Turgenev this is predominantly the intellectual, and, to a lesser degree, the social milieu.

² For background literature, see especially the notes to the Introduction and Chapters I and II of Schmid 1992).

life and of man's position in it and a 'personality model' that is somehow communicated to the reader.

But in its concrete form such a model is determined, not only by observation of concrete historical individuals, but also by other existing forms and concepts. The personality model of any author should be seen as interwoven with and influenced by other models from the cultural context the author lives in – it is shaped as a variant of these models, even if it were no more than a new combination of elements taken from them. Therefore, when collecting data on characterization, special attention should be paid to patterns that either resemble, or are variants of, or that perhaps are conspicuously contrasted with similar motifs and patterns from contemporary culture. This applies especially to Turgenev.

In this book, features that are characteristic of Turgenev's work as a whole are central; my purpose is to explore Turgenev's specific traits against the background of other Russian literature, that is, as far as the image of man and the mechanisms of its construction are concerned. One of the consequences is, inevitably, that the differences between his individual works (as well as the respective differences between other individual Russian authors) are not paid a great deal of attention.

Among other things, this leads to the relative neglect of the differences between the various periods of Turgenev's creative career – the Romantic, Realist, and possibly pre-Symbolist phase. It is the constant characteristics in his work that are placed more in the forefront. It is true that I have chosen five stories from different periods of Turgenev's life, but these show equally well what I want to concentrate on – the importance of paradigmatical mechanisms in the construction of the image of character in his short work. For the early, Romantic period, this does not seem to present too great a problem, since in this period Turgenev wrote mainly poems and plays, which fall outside the scope of this book. As regards the other end of his career, I have certain doubts as to the existence of a separate pre-Symbolist phase in Turgenev's late work: elements taken by some as characteristic for that phase (e.g., Koschmal 1984) can without great difficulty be demonstrated in his earlier work as well (cf. Brouwer 1993).

Turgenev's characters are in their own way illustrative of a general tendency in Realism to unmask the Romantic hero, who in Russian literature took the shape of the 'strong, unusual individual' mainly seen in the Romantic narrative poems. Each Realist has his own particular slant on the subject. Tolstoj's work shows an urge to expose individual idiosyncrasy as

a human category, proposing a 'natural existence' (стихийное существование), a harmony with Nature and its laws of procreation (here, the influence of Russian Rousseauism is felt). Dostoevskij points his ideological arrows more at the amorality of the Romantic strong individual (in the name of a Christian ethics). In the work of Gončarov, active energy without ideals is set in opposition to the impractical striving after ideal beauty and harmony; thus, Romanticism's ideal combination of action with deep understanding is negated (however much that ideal may already have been clouded in Romanticism by the social rejection of the hero, from Răuber to Corsair). This opposition comes very close to Turgenev's central thematics.

Fundamental to Turgenev's conception of man is a worldview, influenced by Schopenhauer and the later Goethe, in which all that lives is dominated by two blind forces that are in a kind of equilibrium: the one is that of the affirmation of the ego, of the individual, the other that of self-sacrifice in the service of the common good, the whole (see section 2.4, especially on the Hamlet and Don Quixote dichotomy). It falls outside the scope of this book to discuss the intellectual background to this worldview, or how it developed in Turgenev's life (see Kagan-Kans 1975, though on some points I do not agree with her; for details, cf. section 2.4.1). Here it is simply important to note that, especially as far as the concept of human existence is concerned, the form this worldview took is orientated towards the image of man as it developed in Romantic and post-Romantic Russian literature (Puškin, Lermontov, Gogol', Herzen) and at a later stage in the work of Turgenev's Realist fellow writers. Turgenev's characters are moulded as a variation on, and as an answer to, the roles such an 'unusual individual' fulfils in that prose: in his work we find the two basic Romantic and post-Romantic types of protagonist. Firstly, there is the one with an unusually sharp insight into the world 'as it really is' and his own place in it: the protagonist is endowed with an 'increased consciousness', he is elevated above the crowd at lonely heights. Secondly, there is the sensitive person, a typical representative of the idealist generation of the thirties and forties, who strives for a realization of his lofty ideals in a far from ideal world, and who thus likewise does not belong to the mass of the 'Philistines' (обыватели, or 'sky-sooters', небокоптители, in Gogol's terms). In Turgenev's work, such a character has typical *emploi*: he is the gentry squire estranged from his environment in his village or in a provincial town, the idealistic but impractical student or adolescent, etcetera. These characters are about to take a decisive step in their lives (in fact, more often, they recount such a phase in their lives from a position of disillusioned old age),

a step that is going to give their life meaning and to enable the character to realize his own special and unique potential. But they fail, for at the decisive moment they dare not act, and their lives end with meaningless death or are lived out in a state of senseless passivity. Deeds planned by characters who do seem capable of acting are almost unfailingly aborted by untimely death (Bazarov, Insarov), which puts the whole life they have led in a perspective of meaninglessness. These figures are presented as outsiders, too – no one understands them and they do not fit into their social environment.

This meaninglessness for the characters' own consciousness (on the level of the fictional world) is in the world-view of the author wholly in tune with the general law of nature, but that does not imbue it with any more sense: in his texts Turgenev gives us no solace in the form of philosophical commentary or through the juxtaposition of an example of meaningfulness on a deeper, perhaps even truer level, such as Tolstoj does, for example, in *Three Deaths*.

Turgenev's prose has widely been regarded as 'un-Russian' and as comparable with West European prose writers rather than with contemporary Russians like Dostoevskij and Tolstoj. The results of this study, however, support the thesis developed by the late Ju.Lotman (1986), that Turgenev's prose is orientated towards specifically Russian problems, but that it adopts a position in regard to these problems that is quite exceptional when set against the background of what is widely seen as 'Russian literature'. This will be shown in the texts themselves, especially in the way the characters in the short prose are constructed as a rejoinder of a kind to the image of man that emerges from important representatives of 'Russian literature'.

It should be clear from the outset that it is not my concern to investigate Turgenev's intellectual debate with his contemporaries in itself; there is a fairly extensive literature on Turgenev's discontent with the post-Romantic myth of Russia as a pariah among civilized, enlightened nations, but a pariah who is nonetheless about to speak his 'own word' and enlighten or even redeem the world: I am referring to the myth of the 'stone, rejected by the builders'³. Turgenev's discontent can be felt especially in his discussions with Herzen in the early sixties, when the latter's populism absorbed many elements from Slavophilism with its notion of the Russian people (notably the Russian peasant) as a chosen people –

³ In the elder Zosima's words: Dostoevskij XIV: 288.

in this case the carriers of some sort of natural, primaeval socialism. Turgenev had cherished some hopes about the Russian peasant himself in the fifties (the period of *A Nest of the Gentry*), but gradually abandoned his illusions and came to see the only way out of Russia's deplorable situation as being a slow and gradual process of 'civilization'. In 1852, we find his ideal of the Russian peasant still incorporated in the figure of Gerasim from *Mumu* (chapter 5), but in stories like *A Journey into Poles'e* and *The Dog* no trace of this nor any other illusion remains.

Significantly, Turgenev's central characters are modelled as persons capable of transgressing a boundary that other characters may not transgress: by stepping into the realm of taboo, they place themselves in the position of outcasts. Their image, however, differs significantly from similar types in Russian literature. The latter, mainly in the works of Gogol', Herzen, Dostoevskij and Tolstoj (and Puškin too, in a sense) have the expectation of undergoing a (moral) rebirth once they have plumbed the depths of sin, of going through a transformation of personality resulting from an experience of 'epiphany'. Thus purified, they are to return gloriously from their state of sinful exclusion from society and bring it redemption (or, for that matter, punish it for its sins). In Turgenev's works, such expectations are undermined. His characters, in the context of their own lives, their own world, experience a personal failure, but in terms of the text as an utterance in a cultural context, they can be said to live out the failure of a cultural myth.

We may here observe one of the peculiar phenomena in Russian literature of the so-called 'classical' period (from Puškin to Čechov), in which two main concepts concerning the dynamics of human life (and thus of literary plot) coexisted and fertilized each other. Firstly, there was the idea that life centered around a 'revulsion', that is, a movement between extremes that is sudden and essentially not brought about by man's own efforts; and secondly, that life was a gradual process consisting of continuous growth, brought about in no small part by conscious decisions. These concepts express two types of culture, coined 'binary', or 'dualist', and 'ternary' by Ju.M.Lotman (Lotman 1992, who develops ideas presented earlier in Lotman and Uspenskij 1977). In the first type, everything in the world, including values and semiotic objects, is divided up into two sharply opposed areas, which may appear as positive and negative, sacred and sinful, native and foreign, etcetera; in the second type a third, neutral area, in which most objects do not have an unequivocal (moral) value, is postulated between these poles. In such a culture, this third area tends to include

increasingly more types of objects and activities, while the extreme areas are gradually pushed back to the cultural periphery. Whereas up to the end of the eighteenth century the dualist type of culture remained dominant in Russia (cf. Lotman and Uspenskij 1977), nineteenth-century Russian literature can from a certain viewpoint be described as a mixture of both types (cf. Lotman 1994, esp. 382-387). Turgenev's prose obviously belongs more to the 'ternary' line in Russian classical literature, which is furthermore, according to Lotman⁴, represented by Puškin and by Čechov. Indeed, Lotman, in his article published in 1986 – which has been of crucial importance for the writing of this book⁵ – claims to show Turgenev's place in Russian classical literature seen from this point of view. Of course, these two possible lines of plot development do not exhaust the 'Russian plot range' and the character stereotypes in it, but they are very important ones. Their characteristic traits are described with a high degree of abstraction, so that many particular plots may be seen to form variants of them, and many character constellations to be variants of its typical constellations.

This brings us to the question of Turgenev's 'topicality'. On the last page of his book published in 1992, Lotman makes an interesting appeal to his readers. He writes: "The fundamental change in the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe that is taking place before our very eyes possibly gives us a chance to proceed to a common European ternary system and do away with the ideal of destroying 'the old world to its foundations', and after that 'building a new one on its ruins'. To miss this chance would mean an historical catastrophe". It is a commonplace that in times of crisis and transition, people tend to envisage the world in black-and-white terms, and to favour radical solutions (sharp turns from black to white). Russians are no exception to this. After the disillusionment over the impossibility of effecting a quick and radical transition to a market economy and some measure of prosperity for all, the call to at least restore order quickly and radically is now heard alarmingly often. 'Binary' thinking, with its sharp oppositions between good and bad, old and new, native and foreign, original and valuable as opposed to artificial and alien, which has always

⁴ Lotman 1994: 385. Lotman treats Tolstoj as the third great nineteenth-century representative of this line (idem: 385-389), but points to the important role dualist models play in his works (389). Indeed, the moment of revulsion is strong in the life of his main heroes.

⁵ I am very grateful to the late author for letting me read the typescript version long before it became available in print.

been a relatively prominent element in Russian culture, is once again prevailing. In such a situation, mitigating, sobering, 'demythologizing' voices from within can be very important. Such a voice is Turgenev's, speaking its sobering message in the nineteenth century (see section 2.7).

Whether it could do so under the present circumstances remains an open question. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Turgenev's work was already either seen as interesting only from a purely aesthetic point of view, with its lyrical depictions of nature and its tone of melancholy resignation, or it was regarded as an intellectual chronicle of its day – and thus increasingly doomed to be of only historical and sociological interest. The first approach was at first dominant in the West (Henry James, Flaubert, Maurice Baring), but towards the middle of our century, the sociological view prevailed (see Isaiah Berlin's famous essay *Fathers and Children* of 1970). In the last twenty years, roughly dating from Marina Ledovsky's *The Other Turgenev* in 1973, a shift in interest back to his 'poetical' (and philosophical, cf. Kagan-Kans 1975) side can be observed, though historical aspects are still studied. In Russia, both approaches have always existed, though the Symbolist critics (Annenskij, and in a sense Geršenzon) obviously regarded Turgenev as a pure aesthete. Although Soviet criticism has been heavily overlaid with ideological prejudice and nationalist sentiments, the same two lines of approach are, in general, recognizable. After the disappearance of ideological pressure, no re-evaluation of Turgenev and his place in Russian culture seems to have taken place: during the last five years he even seems to have vanished from the intellectual and critical horizon.

One of the aspects of Turgenev's work that has been relatively neglected until now, and to which I will pay special attention in this study, is the fact that he uses folkloric connotations pertaining to elements of the text in a very intriguing way in order to shape the equivalential relations between them, as a result of which additional paradigmatical elements are introduced into the image of character.

The occurrence of folkloric connotations may seem odd in the works of a highly aristocratic author like Turgenev. But this is the rule rather than the exception with nineteenth-century Russian writers: where in the period before Romanticism images and certain stereotypes of plot and character from folklore and popular mythology were found only in the 'lower genres' of literature, Romantic and post-Romantic authors often consciously studied folklore as a source of inspiration. Puškin's enthusiasm, for example, for the tales of his nanny Arina Rodionovna is well known; as a result, he star-

ted collecting folk-tales and songs himself. For his history of the Pugačev rebellion, he widely used oral material of folkloric nature. Gogol', as well, had his relatives send him as much material on Ukrainian folklore as they could find (village customs, ritual celebrations, puppet theatre and so forth). Other writers knew Russian popular mythology from their own experience: Dostoevskij had the opportunity of studying it at close quarters during his four years in a forced-labour camp (see his *Notes from the House of the Dead*); Leskov grew up in a milieu that was imbued with folklore and popular religion. In the case of Turgenev, we have his own evidence that he consciously studied Russian popular culture; in 1852 he wrote: "This winter I have extremely diligently studied Russian history and Russian antiquities: I have read Sacharov, Tereščenko, Snegirev e tutti quanti; I am particularly delighted by Kirša Danilov" (Pis'ma II, 138). Again, we may assume he learned something of Russian popular culture during his repeated and prolonged hunting tours in rural Russia.

In most of the stories that I shall analyse, one of the effects of the use of folkloric connotations is that particular characters and chains of events become recognizable as variants of archaic mythic and folkloric standard images and plots. But this is not all. Thanks to the fact that Turgenev's stories were written in a period in which literature and, indeed, culture in general, was being 're-mythologized', these characters and chains of events may also appear to function as an allusion to certain 'cultural myths' of the period. In the sixties, especially, the 'leftist Slavophiles' (левые славянофилы) and 'leftist populists' (левые народники) created their own variant of the myth of the outcast as a potential bringer of doom or of redemption, and as one capable of undergoing a spiritual transformation). The failure of Turgenev's outcasts thus acquires, as we shall see, a polemical ring.

Bringing to light equivalential relations and paradigmatical elements in literary texts, is, as far as the nineteenth century is concerned, especially relevant in the analysis of short prose works, which in a way tend to incorporate textual mechanisms traditionally regarded as typical for poetry. By this I mean that the fictional world of a short story has reference to the actual world more than in the case of the novel by means of tropes, while the novel offers more possibilities of absorbing the contiguous relations of that actual world into the structure of the text itself.

Turgenev's novels, however, are in fact clearly aimed at portraying cultural-historical types in which contemporary society projected its 'redeemer' images (Rudin, Insarov, Bazarov and Neždanov; Lavreckij

stands somewhat apart in this respect). The novel offers more opportunity to depict the concrete ideas and ways of life of these types, as well as their environment and their social position; judgments on them may be given by various secondary characters, each from their own position, and the protagonist may be contrasted with such secondary characters, and so forth. Turgenev's short prose tends to omit the concrete and historical aspects in the portrayal of the main character, and to present human life in a more condensed and, as it were, existentially typical mode. It also shows a tendency to put characters in a perspective of timelessness by comparing them with well-known literary images, especially from the work of Shakespeare, and with mythological archetypes.