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Chapter II C

Russia Abroad Champions Turgenev's Legacy¹

"Smoke gets in your eyes"²

—Kern and Harback

When, in the Spring of 2006, a committee of prominent American writers and critics were asked by the *New York Times* to determine "the single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years," the question appeared simple at first.³ It was decided that "the best works of fiction ... are those that assume the burden of cultural importance. America is not only their setting, but also their subject." The top choice was Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. This is admittedly an arbitrary exercise at best but, as we know, no one takes this sort of exercise more seriously than the Russians. The stakes have been high since the nineteenth century, when "the burden of cultural importance" was transformed into that of "national" significance as writers came to represent the nation. The "burden" also included a considerable social and civic component.

Contemporaries gave surprisingly disparate ratings to Ivan Turgenev, one of the most prominent nineteenth-century writers. The Russian subjectivity is revealing, especially if we consider his enthusiastic reception in Europe. While his place in the Russian classical canon remained unquestionable, it was often disputed, yielding primacy to Dostoevsky

¹ This chapter originally appeared under the title "Turgenev Finds a Home in Russia Abroad," in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology and Legacy*, ed. Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2010), 189-216. I would like to thank Tyrus Miller, a fellow modernist, for good conversation and input.

² This is a refrain from a popular song of love lost from the 1933 musical *Roberta*. Music by Jerome Kern, Lyrics by Otto Harback. I would like to thank Maya Slobin for her sharp eyes in reading this chapter.

³ *The New York Times*, 21 May 2006, 17-18.

and Tolstoy. In a recent essay, titled “How Tolstoevskii Rewrote a Russian Myth,” Jeffrey Brooks confirmed the dominance of the “two giants” as he reviewed the role writers held in Russia: “The power with which they present the issues [after emancipation] transcends their views and explains how during this period Russian literature became synonymous with Russian identity among the educated elites, and soon thereafter among many semi-educated citizens.”⁴

Conscious of its mission of “continuity” and “preservation” of the classical canon, the émigré literary community endeavored to place the legacy of Turgenev, the Russian European, in a new light. This chapter examines the reappraisal of Turgenev’s status by the postrevolutionary Russian diaspora, focusing on specific criteria that emerged in its polemics with the received critical tradition. We consider how this process reflected the diaspora’s quest for national identity as it sought to define its cultural position to counter the ideological Soviet stance. The reevaluation of Turgenev in the split Russian nation had important implications for the literary process and transmission in *Russia Abroad*, and for the tradition as a whole.

Turgenev’s experience as a Russian European affected the older émigré writers, Aleksei Remizov and Ivan Bunin, as well as the young Vladimir Nabokov/Sirin. Turgenev’s life and work provided an invaluable resource that sustained the émigrés, bereft of nation but committed to its language and cultural tradition. While living in Europe, Turgenev had remained deeply engaged with Russia and did not cease to write about Russia in Russian. His evocation of his native land did not suffer from the separation and he left a body of work which represented the highest achievement in the language, contributing greatly to the reputation of Russian literature in Europe. As Richard Freeborn noted in his study, *Turgenev: The Novelist’s Novelist*: “Europeans can understand Russia much better through a reading of Turgenev than through a reading of any other writer.”⁵ A cultural ambassador of his country, Turgenev was also a prominent participant in the French literary scene, which included Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, George Sand, and Victor Hugo.

⁴ *Slavic Review* 64: 3 (Fall 2005): 558.

⁵ R. Freeborn, *Turgenev: The Novelist’s Novelist: A Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 181.

Received Critical Tradition

In order to understand the criteria of the diaspora's reappraisal, we will recall how Turgenev's aestheticism and liberal views in a radically political age of imperial nationalism and revolutionary movements affected his status. Turgenev's reputation as the Russian European arose from a series of important public occasions in Russia. In 1864 Turgenev was invited to Petersburg to deliver a speech celebrating 300 years of Shakespeare's birth. For him, it was Shakespeare who heralded a new age of Renaissance Humanism in Europe and its new ideal of freedom.⁶ However, Tsar Alexander II forbade the celebration of a "foreigner" in the Imperial theater, and the invitation was withdrawn. The situation provides insight into Russian cultural politics at a time when the intervention of the highest imperial authority upheld the "Russian/foreign" dichotomy.

Next was a foundational moment in Russian history, the Pushkin Monument Celebration of 1880. Considered by contemporaries as the heir to Pushkin, Turgenev traveled to Russia for the occasion and was received with great pomp and formality. The celebration, backed by both the Westernizers and Slavophiles, was marked by the absence of Tolstoy and the much-awaited speeches of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. Speaking in measured tones, Turgenev questioned whether the title of a "world" poet could be conferred on Pushkin, as it had been on Shakespeare or Goethe, stressing Pushkin's great achievement in creating a national language and its literature. As Marcus Levitt writes, the speech exposed "the vulnerability of Turgenev's liberal, 'Enlightenment' position."⁷ Dostoevsky's impassioned visionary speech, and an unprecedented public response the day after, cast a clear vote for the speaker as the greatest living Russian writer.

The lasting perception of vulnerability and indecision that lowered Turgenev's status in the tradition led Robert Jackson to summarize it as a "treasury of clichés": "Turgenev's novels are period pieces; he is a conduit only for studying his class and culture; he was indecisive and weak in character; he is a writer with poetic sensibility and style, but nothing

⁶ I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 15 vols. Vol. 15 (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 48.

⁷ Marcus C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 90.

to say.”⁸ The clichés persisted even as the Symbolists set out to revise the nineteenth-century canon at the turn of the century, with emphasis on aesthetic criteria, free from civic and utilitarian concerns. Pushkin and Gogol were regarded as foundational figures, and debates concerning the legacy of the long nineteenth century centered around Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

In the *Symbolists' Reception of Turgenev* (1999), Lea Pild analyzes their “internal” discourse, which revealed a complex and contradictory situation. At the turn of the century the Symbolists recognized Turgenev’s cultural role as that of a “middleman” (*posrednik*) between Russian and European literatures.⁹ Although Valery Briusov and the younger Symbolists, Blok and Bely, admired Turgenev’s late mystical tales, they defined their public views in conscious opposition to the Positivist critics who stressed the “progressive” social aspects of Turgenev’s work. Thus, an implicit connection with the aesthetics of Turgenev’s later work to their writing was counterbalanced by their explicit critical rejection of his legacy in the quest for “new art.”¹⁰ In his seminal 1893 essay “On the Causes of Decline and on New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature,” Dmitrii Merezhkovsky highly valued Turgenev’s late fantastic, mystical tales as remarkably “original.”¹¹ In his speech on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Turgenev’s death in 1908, Merezhkovsky proclaimed him to be “the sole genius of measure” after Pushkin and predicted a return to him.¹² Subsequently, Merezhkovsky’s view became submerged in the championing of the “two giants” approach to the tradition. Writing about “new art” in the 1890s, Vasily Rozanov opined that “in our time it would be an anachronism to analyze characters drawn by Turgenev ... We love them as living images, but there is nothing for us to divine in them ... The opposite is true for Dostoevsky: anxiety and doubt in his works are our anxiety and doubt.”¹³

According to Pild, only in the late 1970s did Russian scholars begin to revise the significance of Turgenev’s late work for individual writers of the

⁸ R. L. Jackson, “The Turgenev Question,” *Sewanee Review* 18: 2 (Spring 1985): 306.

⁹ Lea Pild, *Turgenev v vospriiatii russkikh simvolistov. 1890-1900-e gody* (Tartu: Tartu State University, 1999), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ S. S. Grechishkin and A. V. Lavrov, *Simvolisty vblizi. Ocherki i publikatsii* (St. Petersburg: Skifia, 2004), 152.

¹² D. Merezhkovskii, “Turgenev,” *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 28 vols., vol. 18 (Moscow: Tip. I. D. Sytina, 1914), 58.

¹³ Quoted in Pild, *Turgenev v vospriiatii russkikh simvolistov*, 10.

Symbolist period.¹⁴ Pild briefly remarks on the “apologetic conception” of Turgenev created in emigration by Balmont and Remizov, who considered him as a forerunner of Russian Symbolism, an opinion neither of them had expressed earlier.¹⁵ However, we find that the diaspora’s critical reappraisal of Turgenev can hardly be seen as “apologetic.” As it was carried out in the historical context of exile, it revealed problems in the received tradition and offered a way out of the Symbolist contradiction.

In addition, we must note the work of two prominent Russian literary critics of the Symbolist period, Iu. Aikhnevald and M. O. Gershenzon, whose studies of Turgenev have direct bearing on the later émigré response. Aikhnevald’s controversial *Silhouettes of Russian Writers* was a popular book of impressionist criticism in the vein of “literary appreciation.” First published in 1906 and subsequently reprinted several times, it was intended to counteract the positivist critics who championed Turgenev. Disparaged by literary contemporaries as “not serious” and as “subjective” criticism intended for an “average” reader, the book was dismissive of Turgenev, whom Aikhnevald considered an indelible part of everyone’s youth and their past, or as a sign of their aging. However, we will see later how the 1929 Berlin edition of Aikhnevald’s book engaged in the émigré reappraisal of the writer.

A study titled *Turgenev’s Dream and Thought* by M. O. Gershenzon appeared in 1919, the same year as his seminal work, *Pushkin’s Wisdom*, suggesting that the two works were written in implicit association with each other. In his introduction to the American edition of the book, Thomas Winner comments on the fact that “the titanic figures of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky deflected scholarship from Turgenev, whose lyrical but philosophically less ambitious works seemed, to some, in contrast, pallid and even shallow.”¹⁶ Gershenzon countered this situation, explaining

¹⁴ Among the more recent studies of Turgenev’s reception, see: A. V. Lavrov and S. S. Grechishkin, “Briusov o Turgeneve” in *Simvolisty vblizi. Stat’i i publikatsii*, 148-154; M. V. Bezrodnyi, “Kommentarii k drame Bloka ‘Neznakomka’” in V.I. Bezzubov, ed., *Biografiia i tvorchestvo v russkoi kul’ture nachala XX veka. Blokovskii sbornik no. 9* (Tartu: Tartu State University, 1989), 66. See also: Marina Ledkovsky, *The Other Turgenev: From Romantic ‘Idea.’ Iz goroda Enn* (St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2005), 31-40.

¹⁵ Pild, *Turgenev v vospriiatii russkikh simvolistov*, 12.

¹⁶ M. O. Gershenzon, *Mechta i mysl’ Turgeneva* (Moscow: T-vo “Knigoizdat pisatelei,” 1919). Reprinted with an introduction by T. Winner (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1970), vii.

instead how Turgenev's characters behaved when caught in the ethical choice between responsibility (*dolgi*) and passion: "As in religion, so in service to the 'good,' justice, and freedom, as in love, Turgenev saw and championed one thing: not the result of sacrifice, but the sacrificial nature of the spirit itself—its selflessness."¹⁷ In arguing with the cliché of the writer's "passivity," Gershenzon emphasized the fact that "Turgenev's work was elevating despite its tragic sense of life, precisely because it was pervaded by ethical values: religion, the good, love and beauty—these four values."¹⁸ These indeed were the values that Russians abroad could embrace as they struggled to retain their identity in trying conditions.

Gershenzon's approach continued the dissenting opinion of the philosopher Lev Shestov, a contemporary of the Symbolists. Shestov intended to work on a book on Turgenev and Chekhov in 1903, but instead wrote his philosophical work, *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness*. In the original fragment that was left out, Shestov understood how Turgenev's anomalous status as a Russian European confounded his countrymen. Focusing on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who admired the art of their illustrious elder compatriot but distrusted him, Shestov offered an important insight: "There is really nothing surprising in the fact that Tolstoy and Dostoevskii considered Turgenev a complete European and were not able to hear the dearly familiar native sounds in his works" (*ne umeli uslyshat' ... blizkikh i rodnykh im zvukov*).¹⁹ The fact that the three great classics shared "the cultural burden" of the land rendered this lack of discernment all the more puzzling.

Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in the Diaspora

Taking Shestov's insight as a point of departure, I will argue that the key to this almost willful attitude of the "two giants" and their contemporaries lies in Turgenev's being "at home" in European lands and languages, which automatically put his Russianness in doubt. Indeed, Turgenev was a singular Russian cosmopolitan. The paradoxical term itself, from the Greek

¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹⁸ Ibid., 93.

¹⁹ L. Shestov, *Turgenev* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982), 124.

kosmos (world) and *polis* (city), was compounded by the Athenian Stoic, Zeno. He and Diogenes, who “used the idea of cosmopolitanism in the sense of someone who has no anchorage in any contemporary city-state ...,” produced “the first intimations of a universal humanism ...”²⁰ Are these qualities, i.e. cosmopolitanism, or love of the world, and nationalism, love of nation or *polis*, mutually exclusive? Or can they, somehow, be negotiated in the case of a humanist writer, such as Turgenev, whose works carried “the burden of cultural importance”?

Turgenev himself was aware of this problem and addressed it in his controversial novel *Smoke* (*Dym*, 1867), about a cross-section of Russians living in Europe. When a prominent character, Potugin, representing the Westernizer position, was asked this very question, he compared himself to the Roman poet, Catullus, in feeling love and hate, “*odi et amor*” for his homeland.²¹ This was an irreconcilable duality for his contemporaries. We will see how cosmopolitanism and nationalism become key words in the diaspora’s reappraisal of Turgenev. As Richard Freeborn reminds us, some of the fire in the *Smoke* had not been extinguished and lay smoldering to be reignited. Indeed, it was reignited in Russia Abroad some fifty years later.

When many Russians found themselves in exile after the October Revolution, they faced confusion and uncertainty. As a deterritorialized entity, the émigrés sought anchor in the national literary tradition and language while functioning in their host countries. Hence, the diaspora’s reappraisal of Turgenev can be seen as a symbolic gesture of national self-assertion. However, unlike their great Russian European countryman, the exiles experienced a loss of the homeland, as well as keen privation and insecurity as stateless refugees in interwar Europe, whose natives were indifferent to their plight. National identity is a critical issue in diaspora, whose conditions of displacement and transplantation are “inseparable from specific, often violent histories of economic, political, and cultural interaction—histories that generate what might be called ‘discrepant cosmopolitanisms.’”²² It is for this reason as well that Turgenev would

²⁰ R. Fine, and R. Cohen, “Four Cosmopolitan Moments,” in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138.

²¹ Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 15 vols, vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 174.

²² James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 36.

become a key figure for Russians in Europe. No doubt, they also felt great anxiety remembering Potugin's extreme and now seemingly prophetic statement in Turgenev's *Smoke*, announcing that if Russia were to disappear, no one would notice.

Thus, it is not surprising that the émigrés turned to Turgenev's writing and his biography to counteract this possibility. As a Russian writer abroad, Turgenev fulfilled the criterion of "linguistic nationalism" and that of the "national soul, a spiritual principle," posited as components of nationalism by Ernest Renan, who spoke at his funeral.²³ These ideas would be reiterated by Vladislav Khodasevich in the Paris emigration some fifty years later, in his key essay of 1933, "Literature in Exile." Written in the third stage of the history of the first-wave diaspora, the essay asserted that creativity in a national language was not bound by a specific dwelling place, nor by the everyday life (*byt*) of the land: "Literature's nationality is created by its language and the spirit it reflects."²⁴ Although Turgenev was not cited among the historic examples of exile writing, which included Dante, the Polish Romantics, and the poets of the Hebrew poetic renaissance in the Russian Empire, he became a native model by the time Khodasevich's essay was published.

Critical Reappraisal in the Diaspora

The diaspora's reconsideration of Turgenev's legacy continued the work begun by Shestov and Gershenzon. A need for a departure from the "two giants" complex, propagated by Merezhkovsky's books on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, translated into German in 1922, was recognized at the outset.²⁵ Furthermore, the publication of Berdyaev's *Dostoevsky's*

²³ For Renan's ideas on nationalism, see: "Que-est'ce qu'une nation?" a lecture delivered in the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882. For English translation, see: "What is a Nation?" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), 19. See also his "Adieu à Tourguènev." *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947), 869. Reprinted in Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 15 vols., vol. 9, 163.

²⁴ V. Khodasevich, *Literaturnye stat'i i vospominaniia*, 258.

²⁵ By this time, the "two giants" complex became a subject of parody as the "Tolstoevsky" complex, a phrase coined by Ilf and Petrov in the 1920s (see Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985], 588). It would be parodied by Vladimir Nabokov in *Prin*.

Worldview in 1922, reiterated the idea of Dostoevsky as a “prophet of the revolution” also put forth the notion of the Russian “dislike of form.” The diaspora’s counter-response to both of these ideas was instrumental in the effort to restore Turgenev to an appropriate place in the canon.

The reconsideration of Turgenev’s legacy began as early as 1921 and was the subject of one of Balmont’s three extensive essays, “Thoughts on Creativity” in *Contemporary Annals*. Balmont championed the old idea of Turgenev’s place in literary transmission as the heir of Pushkin, affirming that “Pushkin was the first poet of Russian verse and Turgenev, the first poet of Russian prose.”²⁶ Balmont reasserted the commonplaces attributed to both figures, who plumbed the depth of the national language and character, insisting that Turgenev was the most Russian of all the prose writers, the one who conveyed the flow of native tongue, the one who best understood the folk and capricious Russian history.²⁷ He portrayed Turgenev as someone who was “tossed out abroad” (*otbroshennyi na chuzhbinu*) by his country’s crudeness and misunderstanding of the writer “torn” by his exile. Turgenev’s bitter words about his native land in *Smoke*, which so upset Dostoevsky, are cited here as a fruit of painful meditation on his beloved Russia. Balmont also quoted a letter to Mme. Viardot, in which Turgenev grants a possibility of a social revolution. His words, as Balmont noted, should undo his reputation as a “gradualist” (*postepenovets*), even though they make for difficult reading in these “stormy days” of Russian history.²⁸

Balmont’s view of literary transmission was seconded by D. S. Mirsky in his *History of Russian Literature*, first published in English in 1925. In the chapter on “The Age of Realism,” Mirsky noted that Turgenev, more old-fashioned than Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov, was a “highly intelligent and creative pupil of Pushkin’s.” His explanation recalls Rozanov’s opinion, cited earlier: “Like Pushkin in *Evgeny Onegin*, Turgenev does not analyze and dissect his heroes, as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky would have done; he does not uncover their souls; he only conveys their atmosphere ... —a method that at once betrays its origin in a poetic

²⁶ *Sovremennye zapiski* 2:4 (1921): 285.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 286.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 293.

novel..."²⁹ This suggests a connection with the lyrical novel, an important genre in modernist prose.

Balmont's essay coincided with the publication of Iu. Nikolskii's *Turgenev and Dostoevskii*, subtitled *A History of an Enmity*. Nikolskii cast aside persistent doubts about Turgenev's *amor patriae*, citing Turgenev's Shakespeare speech of 1864, where he made a connection between King Lear and the English people (*narod*), who do not fear to know and reveal their deepest weaknesses: "Just as Shakespeare, he is not afraid to bring out the dark aspects ...". Nikolskii's main concern was to reconsider the writers' rivalry, largely misunderstood by scholars who approached the problem subjectively. The famous falling out between the two writers occurred after their 1867 meeting in Baden-Baden, when Dostoevsky accused Turgenev of "atheism, russophobia, and germanophilia."³⁰ Dostoevsky despised Turgenev's novel *Smoke*, with its idea that Russia should follow European civilization.³¹ Nikolskii argued that to understand Turgenev, one needed to recall his words to Tolstoy about the power of the subconscious in the art of this otherwise rational man. Dostoevsky did not understand this, missing his deeply prophetic wisdom.³²

The deep rift between the two writers was also documented in André Mazon's commentary on their correspondence, published in the first issue of the *Revue des Études Slaves* of 1921.³³ S. Kartsevskii mentioned this important publication in his review of Nikolskii's book in *Contemporary Annals*, stating that it wisely removed the problem from the usual petty rivalry situation, seeing it instead as that of an essential incompatibility of "two contradictory and psychologically distant natures."³⁴ Kartsevskii suggested that their lack of understanding was akin to a tragic situation where there is no guilty party.

²⁹ D. S. Mirsky, *History of Russian Literature from its Beginnings to 1900* (New York: Vintage, 1926), 192. The Russian Formalists, who, in their focus on "esthetics" and their preoccupation with the "new," were dismissive of Turgenev as an epigone of Russian Romanticism, who had nothing new to contribute to Russian letters. See Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), 282.

³⁰ Iu. Nikolskii, *Turgenev i Dostoevskii* (Sofia: Rossiisko-Bolgarskoe Knigoizdatel'stvo, 1920; Reprint, Letchworth: Prudeax Press, 1972), 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³² *Ibid.*, 35.

³³ "Quelques lettres de Dostoevskij à Turgenev," *Révue des Études Slaves* 1 (1921): 117-137.

³⁴ *Sovremennye zapiski* 2:5 (1921): 381.

The incompatibility of the two writers was explored at the end of the twentieth century in Robert Jackson's in-depth essay, "The Root and the Flower: Dostoevsky and Turgenev, a Comparative Aesthetic." Jackson concludes that "the Turgenev-Dostoevsky antinomy resolves itself finally into a cultural metaphor for the twentieth century ... With Turgenev, we are certainly in the presence of an archetypal vision of an epic unity ... one in which 'beauty' (in the classical sense of 'harmony', 'clarity', and 'serenity') is in the foreground; with Dostoevsky, a tragic vision of turbulence and fragmentation."³⁵ Turgenev's vision "of an epic unity" as well as his "poetics of reconciliation, limitation, and moderation" as posited by E. Cheresch Allen in her study of Turgenev,³⁶ had clearly appealed to the émigrés in the aftermath of the October Revolution. This was understood by E. Sémenoff in his 1933 book, *La vie douloureuse de Ivan Tourgenieff*.³⁷ Citing the contemporary writer, Boris Zaitsev, as well as the French scholars and critics, A. Mazon, A. Maurois, and M. Haumann, who understood that Turgenev was neither old, nor old-fashioned, Sémenoff emphasized the value of Turgenev's writing for his countrymen in exile as that of "a classic who could sustain the spirit and to whom one always returns, especially after tempests and tragedies, when one needs to breathe purified air ..."³⁸ Throughout the stormy history of his country, Turgenev remained a humanist and a liberal, who believed in the abolition of serfdom but, like his predecessor, Pushkin, he feared rebellion. Who could better appreciate his values than the homeless Russian intelligentsia, having witnessed a realization of his worst fears in 1917?

Proclaiming their mission abroad as that of continuity and preservation of national literary tradition, which they perceived threatened in the Bolshevik USSR, the émigrés placed books in the sphere of the sacred. This is a classic diaspora move, much like the one that sustained the Jews dispersed after the destruction of the temple for two thousand years. Pushkin became the great national symbol in the diaspora and in

³⁵ R. L. Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 164.

³⁶ Cheresch E. Allen, *Beyond Realism: Turgenev's Poetics of Secular Salvation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 40.

³⁷ E. Sémenoff, *La vie douloureuse de Ivan Tourgenieff. Avec des lettres inédites de Tourgenieff à sa fille*. Troisième édition (Paris: Mercure de France, 1933).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

1926 the poet's birthday was declared a national holiday of the Russian diaspora everywhere. Pushkin remained "the golden mean" and "our all" for the émigré writers.³⁹ And here, the competition between the diaspora and Soviet literary politics comes to the fore. The irony of the Pushkin standard-bearing is that this was played out in the USSR as well, where Gorky was the contender as the heir to Pushkin. In her study of the mythmaking process, Irene Masing-Delic demonstrates its strange logic, as Gorky translated Pushkin's foundational role into the Soviet literary context: "Gorky wanted to emulate Pushkin's courageous life," but more than that, he also wanted "to reincarnate" him.⁴⁰ This is quite different from the émigré reconsideration of literary genealogy, with Turgenev as the heir to Pushkin, or with homage to Pushkin in the work of Bunin and Nabokov that will be noted later.

Along with the affirmation of Pushkin's incomparable stature as the national poet in *Russia Abroad*, with Gogol as a close follow-up, the nineteenth-century classical tradition would be sustained in the diaspora. Indeed, history intervened in how the vote for the best Russian writer would now be cast. Tolstoy's stature was beyond doubt, but his rejection of aesthetics was problematic. Dostoevsky's legacy as a prophet of the revolution was a source of distress for the émigrés. As a rational humanist and a supreme craftsman of the Russian language, Turgenev held definite advantages over his great rival and contemporary, Dostoevsky, whose literary style many thought was careless.

Moreover, Turgenev became an important part of cultural capital for Russian exiles, bereft of their homeland and history. For them, classical literary works served as the *lieux de memoire*, replacing, in Pierre Nora's words, the *milieux de memoire*.⁴¹ Important in this context was Turgenev's care for Russians in Europe (travelers and political exiles) that led him to create an important *milieu de memoire*, the Russian Library in Paris,

³⁹ See Greta Slobin. "Appropriating the Irreverent Pushkin," in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, ed. Boris Gasparov et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 214-230. See also A. Smith, *Montaging Pushkin. Pushkin and Visions of Modernity Russian Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

⁴⁰ Irene Masing-Delic, "Full of Mirth on the Edge of an Abyss: Puškin in Gor'kij's Life Creation," *Die Welt der Slaven* 42 (1997): 113.

⁴¹ Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, part 1, ed. P. Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), xvii .

an island of cultural memory for estranged exiles. The Paris émigré community celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the library, established in 1875, in the amphitheater of the Sorbonne. The library was a place of great value for the exiles: “For Russians living abroad, the Russian book is a constant necessity. It provides a spiritual tie to the homeland.”⁴² The Library continues to be a place of work, of social and literary gatherings of the Paris émigré community to this day.

A reconsideration of the Turgenev legacy intensified in 1929-1930 as the fiftieth anniversary of the writer’s death in 1883 was approaching. This third stage in the history of the first-wave diaspora, ending at the outbreak of World War II, was marked by a stronger sense of national identity and self-realization. This was a period of extreme isolation from the Soviet Union. It was also a time of generational change, when younger writers not steeped in the Russian tradition were more open to European modernism and the atmosphere of interwar Europe, engendering debates about possible continuity of Russian literature abroad.

Immediately relevant to the ongoing discussion of Turgenev’s cosmopolitanism and nationalism was the posthumous 1929 Berlin edition of Aikhenvald’s book, *Silhouettes of Russian Writers*. In his introductory essay, the critic and philosopher Fedor Stepun singled out the binary opposition of “the problem of native and foreign land” (*problema rodiny i chuzhbiny*), citing Kantian terms of “longing for the homeland and longing for foreign lands” as key in Russian literature, noting its connection with the greater theme of “culture and nature.”⁴³ Stepun thought the opposition worked in the case of Pushkin, a world writer in whom “the synthesis of enlightened and wise spirit erases the boundary between native and foreign land.”⁴⁴ In his opinion, Turgenev “who contained much that was both Russian and European, did not achieve this.”⁴⁵ After some back and forth between these seemingly incompatible binaries, Stepun suggested that a lack of synthesis between the two resulted in Turgenev’s

⁴² Iu. Delevskii, “Turgenevskaiia Biblioteka v Parizhe,” *Vremennik Obshchestva Druzei Russkoi Knigi* (Paris: s.n., 1925), 78-80. Reprinted in *Russkaia Obshchestvennaia biblioteka imeni I. S. Turgeneva. Sotrudniki, druz’ia, pochitateli* (Paris: Institut d’Etudes Slaves, 1987), 33.

⁴³ Iu. Aikhenvald, *Silhouettes of Russian Writers*, reprinted with V. Kreyd, “About Iulii Aikhenvald,” with an Introduction by F. Stepun (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

“tragic flaw” (*nadlom*). For him, the “key to Turgenev” can be found in this irreconcilable split. Stepun concluded that “culture” remained “second nature” for Turgenev, arguing that “he is not a European, precisely because his europeanism is so obvious.”⁴⁶ This opinion may be seen as a projection of a self-conscious Russian émigré who does not feel at home in twentieth-century Europe. If it sounded more maudlin than convincing, it was because Stepun, like his fellow exiles, the “Russian Europeans” who knew and loved Europe in their youth, now experienced Europe as strangers, thus feeling doubly exiled.⁴⁷ This contributed to their sense of national identity and wariness of cosmopolitanism.

In contrast, Boris Zaitsev’s biographical work *The Life of Turgenev* (1929-31) provided a very affectionate account of the writer’s dual existence.⁴⁸ Zaitsev did not share Stepun’s point of view, but reiterated instead Turgenev’s deep immersion in the life and language of the Russian countryside and his love for everything Russian which broke through his “westernism” (*zapadnichestvo*). He acknowledged that Turgenev was a “westernizer,” who distanced himself from Russia and argued with the Slavophiles. He was a liberal by the virtue of his reason, but a Russian to the depth of his soul, which is what assured him his reputation.⁴⁹ In discussing the difference between Turgenev and Tolstoy, Zaitsev concluded that the former knew he was “neither a reformer, nor a prophet,” but what he valued most was “the air of freedom and undisturbed artistry.”⁵⁰ Séménoff’s French book of 1933, cited earlier, including published letters from Turgenev to his daughter, undertook to clear the writer’s reputation from the misunderstanding of compatriots who did not know about his devotion to and care for his daughter, and never forgave his love for Pauline Viardot as a love “not worthy of the great writer and responsible for his expatriation.”⁵¹ Séménoff acknowledged a debt to the Paris lecture of Professor Zavatsky in 1931, significantly titled “Défense de Tourguéneff,” as part of the trend to clarify the writer’s legacy.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of this phenomenon, see A. Dolinin, *Istinnnaia zhizn’ pisatel’ia Sirina*, 178-179.

⁴⁸ Boris Zaitsev, *Zhizn’ Turgeneva* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1932).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁵¹ E. Séménoff, *La vie douloureuse de Ivan Tourguéneff*, 43.

Diaspora writers Turn to Turgenev

Remizov

Among major writers who turned to Turgenev in the thirties, both in criticism and in fiction, were the senior émigrés, Remizov and Bunin, and the young Nabokov/Sirin. In a major collection of critical essays, many written in the thirties, *The Fire of Things* (*Ogon' veshchei*), Remizov included Turgenev in the pleiade of his chosen writers—Gogol, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Dostoevsky. In her introductory essay to a magnificent recent reprint of the book, the editor Elena Obatnina describes Remizov's idiosyncratic approach as a departure from critical commonplaces. As we will see, despite the ostensibly esoteric theme, Remizov's approach was quite methodical. There are three essays devoted to Turgenev in the collection. The essay originally written for the writer's jubilee, "Turgenev, the Dreamer" (*Turgenev-snovidets*), appeared in *Chisla* (n. 9) in 1933, written for the fiftieth anniversary of the writer's death. As Obatnina notes, the Czech translation of the essay, published the same year, bore the significant subtitle "About the Forgotten and Unread, but still living and contemporary TURGENEV."⁵²

Remizov set out to clear Turgenev's image from its critical clichés. Remizov heeds Shestov's insight that Turgenev's contemporaries, the "two giants," remained deaf to his true voice, describing it in words that echo his old friend, the philosopher, as "familiar native sounds" (*blizkikh i rodnykh im zvukov*): "No, Turgenev was not the snobby Moscow dandy with the Parisian 'tiens' and 'merci' as he may have seemed to Dostoevsky ... and Tolstoy."⁵³ In the effort "to hear the voice" in the "din" of the age, Remizov poses a relevant question in another essay, "Thirty Dreams": "Perhaps after such thunderous lightning conductors as Gogol, Tolstoy, Leskov, and Dostoevsky, a normal human voice appeared no louder than a mouse squeak?"⁵⁴ This ironic question asserted Turgenev's centrality in the tradition, applying Remizov's two most important criteria of verbal

⁵² *Ogon' veshchei; sny i predson'e: Gogol', Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoevskii* (Paris: Opleshnik, 1954). Reprinted with an introduction and commentary by E. Obatnina (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo Ivana Limbakha, 2005), 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

art: "Turgenev's eye and ear ... were assimilated by all of subsequent Russian literature, whenever nature descriptions were given ..."⁵⁵

Siding with both Gershenson and Balmont in his understanding of the essential values in Turgenev, Remizov also "rehabilitated" the writer from the "cliché" bias of class, upheld by the Symbolists. Following Gershenson, Remizov asserted the writer's "deeper" knowledge and insight into the mysteries of human existence. Furthermore, Remizov disputed Turgenev's reputation as a "calm" and "old-fashioned" writer, insisting that his stories about "human nature" in *Huntsman's Sketches* (*Zapiski okhotnika*) were not only passionate, but also "contemporary," as was their author.⁵⁶ Remizov disputed the narrow criterion of "contemporariness" as currently applied to writers and their politically correct apprehension of the present, especially in the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

A tribute to Turgenev's model for struggling émigré writers appeared in Remizov's literary memoir of pre-war Paris, *The Music Teacher* (*Uchitel' muzyki*). Written in the thirties and published in 1949, it addressed the difficulties facing writers as they sought to overcome their isolation and find a way into the French literary establishment through translation and participation in conversations with their French counterparts.⁵⁸ The narrator's recognition of nineteenth-century Russian antecedents of the contemporary diaspora provided a frame of reference for his capsule biographies of Gogol, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky, who all spent time in Europe. The connection with past masters is most striking in the narrator's realization that Turgenev would be surprised to see that the "Russian Paris in the 13th year after the revolution would recognize itself in 'The Quiet' (*Zatish'e*) of 1845" which appears prophetic in retrospect.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁷ On semantics of "contemporaneity" see G. N. Slobin, "Modernism/Modernity in the Postrevolutionary Diaspora," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 37:1-2 (Spring-Summer 2003): 57-70. (See chapter with the same name in this volume.)

⁵⁸ On the efforts of diaspora writers to participate in the French literary scene, see Greta N. Slobin, "Remizov's Exilic Journey in 'Uchitel' Muzyki,'" in *A Century's Perspective; Essays on Russian Literature in Honor of Olga Raevsky Hughes and Robert P. Hughes*, ed. Lazar Fleishman and Hugh McLean (Stanford, CA: Stanford Slavic Studies vol. 32, 2006), 399-415.

⁵⁹ A. Remizov, *Uchitel' muzyki* in *Sobranie sochinenii*, in 10 vols., vol. 9 (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 2002), 78.

Remizov considered Turgenev as the first Russian writer who was also an *homme de lettres* who learned verbal craft from the French masters in Paris.⁶⁰ This enabled him to draw current implications for young writers in the diaspora: "I consider the appearance of young writers with the western 'starter' the most significant phenomenon of the last five years of Russian literature."⁶¹ Unlike many of his contemporaries, who saw them as the tragic "lost generation," Remizov turned the exile condition to the writers' advantage and saw its potential for contributing to Russian literature: "Such a phenomenon cannot be transmitted second-hand, but directly through literary texts in the original." He was able to foresee that "this will have great importance for Russian literature, but only if the young writers will remain Russian, and will not start writing in French one fine day and disappear among the thousands in French literature."⁶² The possibilities of combining native and European elements for a Russian writer were controversial in the diaspora, where many thought them as incompatible, would have met with Turgenev's approval.

Nabokov/Sirin

Nabokov/Sirin was among the young writers whose fiction continued the classical Russian literary tradition in the context of contemporary European modernism. When he read his early novel *Mary* to a literary gathering in Berlin on 23 January 1926, Aikhenvald exclaimed that "a new Turgenev has appeared," insisting that Sirin send it to Bunin for publication in *Contemporary Notes* (*Sovremennye zapiski*).⁶³ The poignant evocations of Russian countryside and first love in *Mary* may account for Aikhenvald's reaction. Ironically, however, later émigré critical responses to Sirin were controversial, with accusations flying that his work was un-Russian and that he was perhaps the least Russian of all contemporary writers.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ "Tsarskoe imia. Razgovor po povodu vykhoda vo frantsuzskom perevode rasskazov Turgeneva," *Ogon' veshchei*, 262.

⁶¹ Quoted in Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii*, 235.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Bryan Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 257. Boyd comments on a self-conscious echo of Nekrasov's response to a reading of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* here as a way to signal an important moment in modern literary transmission and evolution.

⁶⁴ Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii*, 285.

Russian literature is the subject of Sirin's last and major Russian novel, *The Gift (Dar)*, written in 1935-1937, but published in book form only fifteen years later.⁶⁵ The novel masterfully bears the "cultural burden" and fulfills Remizov's prescription for the "younger writers" with a European "starter." Brian Boyd points out that in *The Gift*, which includes references to Russian as well as West European literature, Nabokov "looks directly to the work of Proust and Joyce, in the spirit of homage and challenge."⁶⁶ The novel also fulfills Tynianov's conception of literary evolution and innovation through parody and "overcoming" of the preceding tradition.⁶⁷

Appropriation and renewal of the tradition, both past and present, are key in the novel, whose heroine in the author's words in the preface to the English translation "is not Zina, but Russian literature."⁶⁸ This novel about a writer, Fedor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, is set in the Russian Berlin of 1926-1929. Its portrayal of the émigré literary community parodies recognizable personalities and recalls Turgenev's satire of the Russians in Baden-Baden in *Smoke*. References to Turgenev are both implicit and explicit in the novel, imbued with the spirit of the Russian literary tradition and its turbulent cultural history, past and present. *The Gift* includes a satire of émigré writers and critics, especially G. Adamovich, and of contemporary Soviet writers.⁶⁹ Central in the novel is Nabokov's literary parody of the "civic" and "utilitarian" strain in the tradition of the 1860s, which informs the narrative of the "writer's becoming" in this complex and brilliant work.

In an extraordinary meta-literary first chapter tinged with light affectionate irony, the young writer conducts "a fictitious dialogue with myself," regarding the tradition not for its own sake, but rather using it as "a self-teaching handbook of literary inspiration."⁷⁰ Pushkin, untouchable as the "gold reserve of Russian literature" (*zolotoi fond russkoi literatury*), was his late father's favorite poet and the author's primary aesthetic model. As for Gogol, he is accepted in his entirety. Dostoevsky is ridi-

⁶⁵ Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov*, 442-443.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 466.

⁶⁷ Iu. Tynianov, "Dostoevskii i Gogol' (k teorii parodii)," 300-371.

⁶⁸ V. Nabokov, Foreword to the English translation of *The Gift* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1970). Further citations from the novel refer to this edition.

⁶⁹ A. Dolinin, *Istinnaiia zhizn' pisatel'ia Sirina*, 130.

⁷⁰ *The Gift*, 88.

culed in one swift phrase “Bedlam turned into Bethlehem,” but a striking example of his artistry in *The Brothers Karamazov* is cited.⁷¹ Turgenev figures in the classical pantheon, but to the question “don’t tell me all is well with Turgenev?” (*Tak neuzheli zh u Turgeneva vse blagopoluchno?*),⁷² the response is sly. As in the case of Dostoevsky, Nabokov cites a memorable example of great craft and felicitous phrase, describing the folds of Odintsova’s “black silks” in *Fathers and Sons*. However, as a trained naturalist, Nabokov makes his alter-ego skeptical about Bazarov and his “highly unconvincing fussing with those frogs (*neubeditel’naia voznia s liagushkami*).⁷³ In an ironic aside, a further proclamation of the young writer’s independence, the narrator mentions that his father, a famous naturalist, found “all kinds of howlers” in the hunting scenes and nature descriptions of both Turgenev and Tolstoy. This manifests at once Sirin’s critical attention to the canon, a rejection of the “commonplaces” in the tradition and a moving on.

Turgenev references in *The Gift* suggest that Nabokov had *Smoke* in mind in his major Russian novel, where the young writer’s evolution champions love and the freedom of creative imagination. The two are inseparable and both reference Turgenev. In chapter three, devoted to Fedor’s creative life in Berlin when he would “begin a day with a poem,” there is an extended recollection of his first attempts at poetry writing at sixteen, which coincided with an affair with an older married woman. This is a poignant memory of his adolescent passion for the lover’s irresistible feminine charm, recalled in exile: “In her bedroom there was a little picture of the Tsar’s family and a Turgenevian odor of heliotrope.”⁷⁴ The nostalgic recollection presents a powerful association of historical and personal time, irrevocably lost but brought back by memory. The bouquet of heliotrope recurs in Turgenev’s *Smoke* like a musical motif—at the beginning in Russia, when Litvinov’s young love for Irina seemed possible and at the end of the novel, in Baden-Baden, where it signifies love lost, unrequited, and betrayed. The heliotrope becomes a double recollection in *The Gift*, where a personal sensory evocation is

⁷¹ Ibid., 84.

⁷² Ibid., 85.

⁷³ V. Nabokov (V. Sirin), *Dar*, in *Sobranie sochinenii russkogo perioda v piati tomakh*, vol. 4 (St. Petersburg: Simpozium, 2000).

⁷⁴ *The Gift*, 162.

heightened by a literary one. The feelings it evokes are emphatically self-conscious as Fedor intends them to be filed for future reference in his own fiction: "I used to see her home. These walks will come in handy sometime."⁷⁵

The same chapter contains a detailed description of a specific street corner of Russian Berlin where several literary personalities converge, with a parenthetical aside, "like the confluence of people in a dream or in the last chapter of Turgenev's *Smoke*."⁷⁶ A similar convergence of several characters takes place at the end of Turgenev's novel, which opens with the scene of the daily gathering of Russians, ironically described as the "*fine fleurs* of our society at *l'Arbre Russe*" in Baden-Baden. The novel unfolds in a splendid example of social satire of highly-placed aristocrats and 1860s radicals.⁷⁷ The Turgenev reference in *The Gift* registers both the connection with this self-enclosed world of Russian Berlin, as well as the marked change from this postrevolutionary community of stateless compatriots. The two worlds are brought into association by literary satire and parody in both novels.

The Gift provides a gloss on émigré cosmopolitanism, or the lack of it, through an ironic interplay of the native/foreign dichotomy in a remarkable scene in chapter two. With dramatic economy, the episode reveals the displacement and estrangement of a Russian exile's life. While riding a tram on his way to a lesson, Fedor observes a man in a seat in front of him. This personage becomes the focus of his accumulated rage, "pure fury" against his host country, typical of Russian exiles: "he instantly concentrated on him all his sinful hatred (for this pitiful expiring nation) ..."⁷⁸ What follows is a barrage of accusations and disgust with Germans and their habits of everyday life, their "visibility of cleanliness" and filthy toilets. After half-a page of this stream of consciousness attack of germanophobia reminiscent of Dostoevsky, something funny happens. When the narrator suddenly realizes that his "German" is reading a Russian paper, his emotions take a sharp turn as he regards the stranger with affection. A self-ironic comment dismisses the incident with a quick phrase of relief: "That's wonderful ... How clever, how gracefully sly and

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁷ Turgenev, *Smoke*, 144.

⁷⁸ *The Gift*, 93-94.

how essentially good life is!”⁷⁹ As a result of this quick turnaround, a self-conscious change of mood follows: “His thoughts were cheered by this unexpected respite and had already taken a different turn.”⁸⁰

With a sleight of hand, this passage comments on Fedor’s story as a typical émigré experience, while offering a way out of the existential predicament. Fedor’s handling of the process suggests Turgenev’s which, as Allen had noted, “expands the receptivity of his audiences” and “increases their willingness to learn new modes of response to the arduous demands of actuality.”⁸¹ But the episode accomplishes even more by implication, dismissing one of the stock tales of the Turgenev/Dostoevsky encounter in Baden-Baden, the latter’s angry response to his compatriot’s “germanophilia,” and his own disgust with that country. An extended account of this encounter was featured in Nikolskii’s book, where he cited Dostoevsky’s letters to Maikov describing the incident, in which he blamed Turgenev for his preference of superior western “civilization.”⁸² The young Sirin, whose “humanism” and cosmopolitanism are akin to Turgenev’s, signals that it is time to break with the old mythologies and stock ideas of the past. Sirin’s young writer appreciates Berlin as a modern European metropolis and closely observes its constantly changing urban landscape, to great aesthetic effect.

Nabokov’s understanding of history as “chance,” along with his belief in the independence of artistic vision, informs one of the novel’s two set pieces in chapter four, devoted to the radical writer and philosopher, Nikolai Chernyshevsky. Sirin continues Turgenev’s parody of the radical intelligentsia in *Smoke*, which had no doubt served as his inspiration. This metaliterary chapter has a historic cultural significance for the young émigré writer, who takes up an extended argument with Chernyshevsky’s materialist idea, delineated in his “disingenuous” dissertation on *The Aesthetic Relations of Art and Reality*. The parody of the radical, utilitarian critical tradition, now continued in the contemporary Soviet state, is central in this novel of the young writer’s “becoming.” Fedor’s aesthetic stance is opposed to Chernyshevsky’s, whose position was in turn antithetical to Turgenev’s. Nikolskii devotes considerable attention

⁷⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁸¹ Allen, *Beyond Realism*, 48.

⁸² Nikolskii, *Turgenev i Dostoevskii*, 41.

to this history in his book, which Nabokov probably read, stating that Turgenev's troubles with *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*) started with Chernyshevsky's letter of 1861, which highlighted their philosophical differences: "It seems to us that Mr. Turgenev's last works do not correspond to our views as closely as before, so when his direction was not so clear to us, nor are our views to him, we parted ways ..." ⁸³ This historic rift is taken up by Sirin and brought into his twentieth-century present.

Like Turgenev before him, Sirin finds Chernyshevsky's awkward diction and obsession with general ideas untenable: "Such methods of knowledge as dialectical materialism curiously resemble the unscrupulous advertisements for patent medicines, which cure all illnesses at once."⁸⁴ In book four, Sirin painstakingly interrogates the legacy of the radical critics who distorted the literary tradition with utilitarian aesthetics and managed to disparage Pushkin. He cites passages of ridiculous infelicities from Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?* (*Chto delat'?*), which, nevertheless, acquired immediate status as a classic upon its publication in 1863. His commentary on the adulation of the contemporaries is scathing: "Instead of the expected sneers, an atmosphere of general pious worship was created around *What To Do?* It was read the way liturgical books are read—not a single work by Turgenev or Tolstoy produced such a mighty impression." But more than that, "no one laughed, not even the Russian writers. Not even Herzen."⁸⁵ Turgenev did, and had he been able to read Sirin, he would have certainly felt avenged! Turgenev had a good laugh in his delicious satirical gloss on the novel in *Smoke*, where he created a memorable scene in which Mme. Sukhanchikova announces to the radical gathering that "she no longer reads novels." To the question "Why not?" she answers in utmost seriousness with a ridiculous reference from *What Is To Be Done?* that "she has one thing on her mind now, sewing machines ..." (*u menia teper' odno v golove: shveinye mashiny*).⁸⁶ Sirin's portrayal of Chernyshevsky is very much in tune with Turgenev's depiction of the radical Gubarev in Baden-Baden, treated by all around him

⁸³ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁴ *The Gift*, 261.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 289.

⁸⁶ I. S. Turgenev, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, vol. 8 (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozhennoi literatury, 1962), 159.

with astounding awe and adulation. Turgenev had to wait for over sixty years for someone to share this laugh.

In *The Gift*, as elsewhere in his Russian period, Nabokov argues with the past tradition as well as the present diasporic and Soviet cultural politics, asserting his own view, where aesthetics rather than politics plays the primary role. Nabokov's focus on the relationship of art and politics in the nineteenth century is written from the perspective of his present position, an émigré writer who pays close attention to the continuity of 1860s radicalism in the Soviet Union, hence his citation of a diary entry of the young Chernyshevsky asserting that "political literature is the highest literature."⁸⁷ In his aesthetics Sirin sides with the émigré poet Koncheev (Khodasevich) and parodies Mortus (Adamovich), who preferred the confessional "human document" whose authenticity he valued more than artistic craft.⁸⁸

Bunin

Conscious of the problems of literary transmission and genealogy, the literary diaspora acknowledged the leading senior émigré writer, Ivan Bunin, as the heir of Turgenev. Born in an ancient family of impoverished Russian gentry, Bunin grew up in the Russian countryside. His lyrical prose is steeped in poetic evocations of its nature and atmosphere. According to Mirsky, Bunin's prose had "that 'classical' appearance which distinguishes him from his contemporaries."⁸⁹ Bunin received the Academy Pushkin Prize in 1903 and continued writing in the classical Russian prose tradition, with a modern inflection. Bunin's work abroad was highly regarded by émigré critics. Although his style and the typology of his plots were reminiscent of Turgenev, Bunin accomplished something remarkable with his acknowledgment of the classics—he expanded literature's "cultural burden" at the same time as he freed it from social constraints. Philosophical contemplation of life and death were the primary preoccupations of his work. As T. Marchenko observes, "he was able to replace the 'accursed questions' ('what is to be done' and 'who is guilty?')

⁸⁷ *The Gift*, 265.

⁸⁸ For an extended discussion of Nabokov's position in the literary polemic between Khodasevich and Adamovich, see Dolinin, *Istinnaia zhizn' pisatel'ia Sirina*, 299-300.

⁸⁹ Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, 390.

with philosophical meditation on life, death, immortality, the spirit and existence”⁹⁰

The Life of Arseniev, written in 1927-1929, shares important features with Nabokov’s *The Gift*. It was also acknowledged as a masterpiece of Russian émigré literature. Difficult to define in terms of genre, it was a book of Proustian recollection, a literary autobiography of “a writer as a young man,” steeped in literary references. Exquisitely written, it is an evocation of life and nature, but above all it is a tribute to Russia and its past greatness, to its literature and writers. Its intricate dynamic of the “old” and the “new” and its detailed evocations of childhood as part of creative authorial consciousness led W. Weidle to compare it to Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.⁹¹ Gleb Struve remarked on its masterful treatment of “the theme of eros,” unique in Russian literature.⁹² The book is one of the most innovative work of émigré Russian fiction—an autobiography, but about a fictional hero, though with verifiable detail of Bunin’s own creative biography, here compressed and intensified. As Anna Saakiants notes, it is a poetics that “melds truth and poetry, recreation and transformation.”⁹³

Like Nabokov’s novel, Bunin’s book is a poem in prose commemorating Russian literature and its writers. Pushkin’s place is central in Bunin’s homage to the great poet, who forms an indelible presence in Arseniev’s life since early childhood. Bunin’s literary constellation leads from Pushkin and Lermontov to other writers and poets, extensively cited throughout the work. Turgenev dominates book five, written later and published in 1932-1933, in which the young Arseniev finds his writer’s calling in Orel and starts on a path of becoming a writer. The references to Turgenev become explicit here when Avilova, the head of the publishing house that employs him as an editor, asks him whether he loves Turgenev and proposes an outing to the estate described in *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (178). As the young Arseniev looks at the now uninhabited dilapidated house,

⁹⁰ Tatiana Marchenko, “Traditsii russkoi klassicheskoi literatury v proze I. A. Bunina” in *Bunin revisité. Cahiers de l’émigration Russe* 4, ed. Claire Hauchard (Paris: Institut d’Etudes Slaves, 2004), 23.

⁹¹ Quoted in Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii*, 249.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 251.

⁹³ Commentary to *Zhizn’ Arsen’eva*, I. A. Bunin, *Sochineniia v trekh tomakh*, 3 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1982), 496. Citations in the text refer to this volume.

he remembers the characters of the novel and experiences “a passionate desire for love” (179). Indeed, passion and discovery of his literary vocation form the center of this book, where Goethe and Tolstoy are also a part of the young writer’s literary constellation. In conversation with the local doctor, who questions his plans for the future, Arseniev remembers Goethe’s words that “politics can never be the business of poetry” and affirms that “civic duty is not a poet’s concern” (189). Bunin and Nabokov are in agreement on this issue, as was Turgenev.

It is notable that writing in the late twenties and thirties, both Bunin and Sirin chose budding writers as their heroes, one in prerevolutionary Russia, one in exile, both steeped in the literary tradition as its self-conscious heirs and innovators. Both connect the nascent power of artistic imagination in their young heroes with their sexual awakening and first love. The freedom of the imagination is shown to possess infinite capacity of recollection and transformation in the creation of an alternative reality, of the “*lieux de memoire*” in the absence of the “*milieux*.” Fedor understands this while he works on his novel: “Ought one not to reject any longing for one’s homeland, for any homeland besides that which is within me ...?” (187). These two acknowledged masterpieces of Russia Abroad draw on Turgenev as well as contemporary masters of European modernism, Proust and Joyce. They provide a brilliant confirmation of Khodasevich’s argument in the essay on “Literature in Exile,” cited above.

Conclusion

Serious critical reconsiderations of Turgenev’s legacy take place in the third stage of the diaspora’s history, when an affirmation of its identity and cultural life brings a new sense of achievement. There are two historical dates that contribute to this in the year 1933—the jubilee of Turgenev’s death and the Nobel Prize awarded to Bunin.

The Commemoration of the approaching fiftieth anniversary of Turgenev’s death began when *Vozrozhdenie* (13 January 1930) printed a brief article “At Turgenev’s Coffin,” citing the memoirs of D. Obolensky describing the memorial, attended by the cream of the French literary and cultural establishment (Renan was one of the speakers), before the return of his body to be buried in Russia. The political tensions of that last “journey” home are well known. It cites Vyrubov’s speech at the me-

morial, commenting on the difference between the deceased Herzen and Turgenev, who both contributed to Russian civilization: “Turgenev had something greater than an idea. He had form, the perfection of artistic form, whose mystery is known only by great writers.”⁹⁴

On the anniversary of the writer's death three years later, the Parisian paper, *Poslednie Novosti* of 3 September 1933, devoted two full pages to a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Turgenev's death. Pavel Miliukov opens his essay titled “A Russian European” with an ironic statement: “To call a Russian writer a European in these days of disillusionment and growing affirmations of the impending destruction of Europe—is hardly complementary.”⁹⁵ Miliukov explains the less than adulatory attitude toward the writer who, unlike Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, remained “on the margin of the historic flood” because “unlike the ‘two giants’ he was not a maximalist.” Neither a believer in the messianic role of his people, nor a denier of art and culture, Turgenev did not suit his country's temperament and was “out of step with his times.” Miliukov echoed Balmont's idea that, as a European, Turgenev was an heir to Pushkin, concluding that Turgenev's voice of reason is just what Russia needs to heed now.

The other article in this issue, written by Georgii Adamovich, was less adulatory and rather caustic. The begrudging tone of his opening remark that “if Turgenev were to rise from the dead, he would probably be pleased with his posthumous fate” points to the writer's present popularity among the “average” citizen (his use of the pejorative *obyvatel'* is more in line with Soviet rhetoric). Adamovich, who went against the grain of émigré cultural politics in his rejection of Pushkin as the greatest national poet, now reiterates the old “clichés” regarding Turgenev as “old-fashioned” and “out of step with the times,” stubbornly refusing to discard them.

By the end of the year, a radical change in mood occurred when Bunin was awarded the Nobel Prize in December, making 1933 a remarkable year in the history of Russia Abroad, signifying a moment of recognition of the Russian literary diaspora by the Europeans. A whole issue of *Contemporary Notes* (54, 1934) was devoted to the double celebration

⁹⁴ *Vozrozhdenie* 1686 (13 January 1930).

⁹⁵ *Poslednie Novosti* 4547 (3 September 1933): 2-3.

of Turgenev and Bunin. It opened with a statement from the editorial board, expressing surprise at the Swedish Academy's choice of Bunin as the consummate artist, worthy of representing Russian literature. A detailed essay on Bunin by F. Stepun was followed by Miliukov's extended essay on Turgenev, quite different from the earlier one cited above. Miliukov now considered Turgenev not only a great artist, but also an "original thinker," a champion of "the golden mean." Turgenev also deserved the Russian prize as "the teacher of life" for his generation. In conclusion, Miliukov asserted that Turgenev's example could serve as an antidote to Russian maximalism, suggesting that, more than any other Russian writer, he could now help the Russian intelligentsia "to renew contact with European culture, to render the torn ends and lead the Russian intelligentsia onward"⁹⁶

This message is strikingly different from Miliukov's depressing image of Europe just a few months earlier. Turgenev's national mission, revealed by association with Bunin's triumph as an émigré Russian writer, had finally received its due recognition. Miliukov expressed the hope that cosmopolitanism, combined with nationalism, in renewed contact with European culture would heal the Russian intelligentsia and point a path to the future. Miliukov offered a fitting tribute to Turgenev's views on the importance of European culture for Russia, resolving the age-old misapprehension of Turgenev by his compatriots. Moreover, the European connection now had the potential to be a distinguishing feature of Russia Abroad that would eventually contribute to the national culture.

⁹⁶ *Sovremennye zapiski* 54 (1934): 280.