



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi  
The Journal of International Social Research  
Volume: 3 Issue: 14 Fall 2010

**FATE, DEATH, FANTASY AND MYSTERY IN TURGENEV'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT**  
**TURGENEV'İN FELSEFESİNDE KADER, ÖLÜM, FANTAZİ VE GİZEM**

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**Abstract**

Turgenev is a master of novel and stories. His masterpieces tend to two types: a tale of romantic overtones that turns on the expression of a mood, and the more objective portrait of character and mores favored by the realist. In this article will be discovered that artful blend of realistic narration and lyrical coloring that is distinctively 'Turgenevian'. Much of Turgenev's works anticipating modernism veers away from psychological and social interests to a purer narrative and fantastical prose. Turgenev specialized in genre mutations: plays that were dreams, science fiction that was neither science nor fiction, adaptations that were actually original. So it is not surprise that his masterpieces are dense with mystery, fate, death, ambiguity and irony, a subversive work which fits no genre neatly. His novels are the only remarkable thing about him. The rare the justification for his existence. The supernatural stories seem to bring us to the very heart of the conflict in Turgenev's ideology. It is seemed that it would not be true to say that the mysterious and the improbable appeared only when Turgenev thought his life to be especially dismal. His whole concept of fate and chance was always enveloped in an aura of mystery in which the caprices of a powerful and secret underlying force might suddenly erupt.

**Key Words:** Fate, Death, Fantasy, Mystery, Mysticism, the Fantastic Stories.

**Özet**

Turgenev roman ve hikayenin ustasıdır. Eserleri iki tür eğilim gösterir: bir taraftan ruh hali ifade eden romantik öğeler gerçekçi bir tonla ifade edilirken, diğer taraftan da çizdiği karakterleri ve içinde buldukları töre ve gelenekler objektif bir tarzda dile getirilir. Burada ve eserlerinde vurgulanmaya çalışılan başlıca unsur kurnaz bir gerçekçi anlatım ve ayırt edici 'Turgenev tarzı' bir lirik resimleme karışımıdır. Aslında dile getirilen bir çok konuya gerçekçilikle karışık bir bilim kurgu demek daha doğru olur. Romanlarında ilk ve tek olarak belirtilmeye çalışılan başlıca unsur Turgenev tarzı bir saf anlatım ve türünde mutasyonlar geçirmiş olan uzmanlaşmış bir fantastik anlatım tarzıdır. Turgenev psikolojik ve hayat çıkarlarından uzak modernizm'e doğru yön değiştiren bir hayal dünyasında gibidir. Bundan dolayıda, bilinen ağır bir eleştiri ve yergi taşıyan yapıtlarında gizem, kader, ölüm, belirsizlik ve alaycılık zamanının hiçbir türüne uymayan düzgün yoğun bir çizgi halinde olması hiç de sürpriz olmamıştır. Romanlarında onunla ilgili bir tek dikkat çekici nokta da hiç kuşkusuz var oluşu dile getiren gerekçeler ve gerçeklerdir. Aynı zamanda, doğaüstü hikayeler Turgenev'in ideolojik çatışmanın bir göstergesidir. Onu imkansız, erişilmez ve gizemli kılan Turgenev tarzlı yapıtları kederli ve ölümlü bir hayatın düşüncelerini ortaya koyduğu söylemeni belirtmek hiç de kuşku uyandırmayan bir gerçektir. Hayatında kader ve şans belki de onun bütün kavramıdır, daima güçlü ve gizli bir temel kuvvet adeta kaprislerine karşılık verir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kader, Ölüm, Fantazi, Gizem, Mistikizm, hayali hikayeler.

**Fate in his Masterpieces**

Turgenev's acceptance of a fate that governs human existence found expression in the use of the supernatural in certain of his stories. *Every man has his own fate*, wrote Turgenev, which leads him along its own paths, and he felt, as he deduced the Marks of fate that this predetermined doom stamps some people from birth. Turgenev viewed fate not as a rational necessity but as a mysterious force vitiating human plans; he described it as "cold, impassive fate," capable of circumventing even the barriers that man set up to defend himself.

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Dostoyevsky saw chaos internalized in man. Turgenev externalized these dark powers and his heroes are pounced upon by indifferent forces of fate, which mold and direct their lives. Yet, as realist, Turgenev often suggested the possibility of chance or accident which strikes at random. The individual, cast into the maelstrom of life is powerless and meaningless chance seems to rule existence. The early story 'three meetings', for instance, in which the three crucial meetings are purely accidental is built on this play chance.

At times, though, Turgenev definitely stressed the theme of destiny; this awareness of the power of fate is unfolded with the utmost force in "Son": "Only now I understood that some unknown forces had been guiding me from early morning---that I was in their power---and for a few minutes there was nothing in my heart except the ceaseless splash of the ocean and the mute fear which overwhelmed me at the thought of fate which had taken possession of me".<sup>1</sup>

The goals of fate are varied and unfathomable, and the instruments which fate chooses are as unpredictable as its purposes. In his story "Faust" Turgenev's conviction of man's dependence on fate and the futility of personal wishes and his sense of the dark, powerful and destructive forces of the unknown were manifested and he saw the protagonists trying presumptuously to break through these forces. For Goethe there was free choice and he did see man as doomed to obey blindly the dictates of fate. Both Gretchen and Turgenev's Vera chose duty; but while Gretchen's choice was made voluntarily, Vera was forced into it by the power of supernatural forces (her mother's ghost), which were simply another manifestation of the unknown.

Indirectly, Turgenev touches upon the problem of free will: if the world is a casual complex of blind forces, then man is deprived of freedom. On the one hand, Turgenev's portrayal of man as a victim of dark forces removes all blame from the individual. And yet at times Turgenev accepted the burden of responsibility directly, as we see from his letter to Countess Lambert: "This seems to be my fate. However, one can say that people with weak characters like to invent a 'fate' for themselves. This releases them from the necessity of possessing their own will and from any obligation toward themselves."<sup>2</sup>

But when his reason would rebel against the senselessness of life, Turgenev would turn to Shakespeare and say with Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy," whence the conclusion that the unknown remained unknown and the inexplicable would never reveal its secrets to the human eye or the human understanding.

### **Death, Fantasy and Mysticism in His Philosophy**

The supernatural stories seem to bring us to the very heart of the conflict in Turgenev's ideology. Turgenev constantly questioned himself offering different solutions in an attempt to redeem an existence governed by harrowing experiences and the knowledge of eventual death. It is unfair to accuse him, as does Andreevsky, of fearing to face reality and lulling himself into tranquillity with graceful illusion. We see on the contrary even a morbid fascination and a yearning on his part to deal with this reality.

It was not the problem of good and evil, the focal idea of Dostoevsky that interested Turgenev. What he probed was the possibility of another existence, beyond the borders of our empirical reality which would deny the definitiveness of death. But the stern integrity of his reason never permitted him to give a final solution to this problem. "I have not fallen into mysticism, nor will ever," he vowed to Herzen<sup>3</sup>. Yet every prayer, Turgenev knew, is a prayer for a miracle that two and two should not make four ("Molitva"), that love, beauty, life should survive indefinitely.

It would not be true to say that the mysterious and the improbable appeared only when Turgenev thought his life to be especially dismal. His whole concept of fate and chance was always enveloped in an aura of mystery in which the caprices of a powerful and secret underlying force might suddenly erupt. In 1846 Aksakov described Turgenev as a superstitious nature, sensitive to the impressions of the dark, mysterious world of the human soul.

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<sup>1</sup> S.A. Andreevsky, "Turgenev," in *O Turgeneve, Russkaia i Inostrannaia kritika*, ed. P.P.Pertsov (Moscow, 1918), pp. 90-91.

<sup>2</sup> Turgenev to E. Lambert, June 10 1865, *Pis'ma*, 2: 364

<sup>3</sup> Turgenev to Herzen, April 16 1862, *Pisma*, 4: 383

The philosophical thought of the nineteenth century reveals two important trends: the rational one and that of transcendental, idealistic philosophy. The most distinctive tenet of the latter is that reality is not totally encompassed by reason and that the visible world, the spiritual world and the transcendental world beyond both of them extending into infinity all form an organic whole.

The German Romantics whose chief representatives were Tieck, Novalis, Wackenroder embodied the yearning of philosophical idealism for other worlds in their artistic works. Whether the cause for this was social or metaphysical, the Romantics reacted against the positive thinking of the Encyclopedists. Close to the center of German Romanticism lay an awareness that beneath the mass of sense perceptions that make up the world of everyday life, the physical things around us, there exists a deeper meaning, an inexplicable substance, a relationship which, if not supernatural, is at least supersensual. A philosophy that denies objective reality and allows the individual to create his own world is obviously a boon to dreamers.

In this sense, the convictions of the Romantics were antirationalist. However, they did not reject science or scientific investigation; they were merely dissatisfied with the deepest probing of which the human intellect is capable. Indeed, the earlier cult of mesmerism was accepted with great interest by the German romantics. In the magnetic sleep of somnambulists the romantic scientist and physicians believed they recognized a state which the soul possessed a higher activity and a clear consciousness than in the waking state and a heightened sensitivity to stimuli which would not otherwise be apprehended by the senses.

The circle of Stankevich, with which Turgenev was associated, seems to have shared with the German Romantics a belief in the significance of dreams and fantasy and the borderline world where dream seems to merge with reality. In Turgenev's group of fantastic stories, all the abnormal phenomena can be said to cluster around three points: the dark and unexpected aspects of the human psyche, the actions of one human being who directs these unexplored forces toward another person, and the inevitable presence of death. This association of the mysterious forces in the human soul with death is moreover revealed only after death, so that a link between the living and dead is forged.

The school of the *litterature frenetique* of Poe and Baudelaire, as well as the English pre-Raphaelites, was contemporary to Turgenev. Pumpiansky asserts the influence of their two schools on the creation of Ellis forgetting the other vampire and supernatural figures in Turgenev's works. However, the vampires in the *litterature frenetique* are always male figures, while, except for Mutsii, Turgenev's vampire figures are female.

As a rule, Turgenev's compliance with the traditional rules of Romantic literature is evident. The established witching hour of midnight is honored by him, and the supernatural events in "Klara Milich", "Faust", and "Prizraki" occur, if not at the stroke of twelve, at least in the dead of the night. The frequent image in Romantic literature of the guardian spirit is mirrored in the ghost of Vera's mother who like the mother of Coleridge's Christabel, comes to warn and save her daughter. Exoticism plays an important function in Romantic literature. The early German Romantics worshipped the Middle Ages as the Golden Age of religion and poetry, and the vividness of the colors and mystery of the past combined to give them the landscape in which they could express themselves more fully. Although most of Turgenev's stories take place in an everyday, prosaic Russian setting, "Son" stand out because of their exotic and romantic coloring. "Son" is the only story in which the place of action is not defined by Turgenev, and suggests a Baltic port rather than a Russian town. This story which Turgenev dedicated to Flaubert is set in the Middle Ages in Ferrara and is accompanied by almost every possible device to achieve the desired affect.

The pink light that suffuses the air during the scene of seduction, the mysterious, dumb Arab servant who seems to possess terrible and inexplicable powers, the mysterious incantations and rites, the magic powers of pearl necklace, the heavy fragrance of incense are only a few of the numerous details that abound in the story. The literary association with Flaubert's masterpieces is evident the image of the little snakes, which the Arab servant worships. Equally reminiscent of Flaubert (when he speaks of the Orient) is the description of the exotic countries and the enumeration of the strange and wonderful objects--Oriental rugs, the silks, the arms, the ornaments and spices--he has brought back. This is a device that Turgenev never used before or after; even those stories which deal with the supernatural are always placed in a concrete, mundane setting. Turgenev uses symbolism which likens the scene of the crime to a coffin where the victim lies in a state of torpor until the walls part miraculously to let in death in the shape of passion.

### **Dream and Reality**

The whole plot of Turgenev's story is based on a tormenting nightmare which begins as a dream and ends in reality so that there is no possibility of determining where the dream world ends and reality begins. One could even say that the story is like a dream within a dream: the son searches for his unknown father, finds him, and then loses him in another nightmare sequel, and the mother's confession is revealed during her delirium or trance: "All this was so strange, as if she were doing all this in her sleep, as if she herself were absent, and someone else were speaking with her mouth or forcing her to speak" ("Son", 12: 377). As in a dream, the three participants can never, even for one moment, find themselves together, and as any two of them grope through the fog of the nightmare to come together, the third disappears from the phantom world.<sup>4</sup>

Turgenev's dreams are purely prophetic and visionary and not psychoanalytic like those in Dostoyevsky's works which reveal potential or hidden desires and passions. And although he denied the element of mysticism, Turgenev acknowledged that he wished to show the imperceptibility of the transition from reality to the dream.

The 1860s and the 1870s witnessed a renewed interest in hypnosis, mesmerism, clairvoyance and mediums and Turgenev himself seems to have participated in a seance with the famous magician Hume. Although the episode of the seance with the crayfish in "Son" is cruelly satirized in his stories Turgenev uses hypnotism or mesmerism to portray the inexplicable power of one man over another or rather the irrational force of nature or fate which select one person to act as its medium in order to exercise its jurisdiction over the victim.

Turgenev's use of the supernatural and his belief in it were not part of a philosophic system. Partially based in the Romantic tradition, and surrounded by the idealist ambiance of the 1830s', both in Russian and German literature, Turgenev could turn more freely toward the irrational as the only possible solution to his despair. The world of sense perceptions then becomes quite negligible and people are no longer fettered by the limitations of time or distance or mechanical causality. Thus, retrospective and prophetic dreams, visions, and omens become common and indisputable. We see examples of this in "Faust", and "Klara Milich". In all these cases of mystical experiences, the human consciousness suddenly perceives that which is usually inaccessible to our direct perceptions. The use of omens and swift transformation of a hitherto peaceful scene into an ominous, oppressive one can be found as early as his novels. The purpose of Turgenev is not to delve into the irrational but simply to establish the intangible, indefinable barriers between the real and the imaginary, and Turgenev indicates the transition as the hero plunges into the world of fantasy by a sudden change in the surrounding scene. Everything is mysteriously connected and joined together by invisible hands, there is no fixed barrier between persons or between ancestors and their descendants who have to bear the sins of their fathers.

The love ecstasy was, for Turgenev, the highest goal; and love in his eyes transcended the boundaries of any rational understanding and penetrated into the realm of irrationality. The poeticization of nature, the lyricism of love, the worship of art (especially music) and of a spontaneous emotional expression, the presence of the infinite in the finite, all these elements enter into the philosophy of German Romanticism. Yet all these Romantic motifs merge in a focal point---the mystery of love. One can point to the host of women who inspired and illuminated the lives of the Romantic geniuses---Carolina Schlegel and Bettina Brentano. "Love is tantamount to religion and justifies everything, and the love story of Klara Milich."

### **Mystery and Mysterious Signs and Events in Turgenev's Fantastic Stories**

Turgenev's fantastic stories don't strike the reader with a sense of fear or terror as Hoffmann's do, nor are they enveloped with an atmosphere of horror as Poe's stories are. Turgenev's attitude toward occult phenomena is an unstable compound of skepticism and belief, an ambiguous blend of rationalism with a romantic tendency toward speculation. In most cases, the ghost or vision that appears to a Turgenev hero is recognized by that person alone; we may call such a perception 'subjective', since it can be

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<sup>4</sup> Turgenev to Annenkov, Mar 9 1857, *Pisma*, 8:156.

interpreted as a hallucination, or at best, a particularly sensitive bond between two persons which could fit into the framework of a rational, scientific explanation.

And finally, the highly fantastic story "Son" is opened to a rational explanation if one begin by viewing the narrator as a neurotic dreamer, an only child brought up by a sick mother: "My nerves were prematurely affected; in addition my health was not the best... I avoided the company of my peers; in general, I shunned people...Most of all I loved to read, to go for walks alone---and to dream, to dream" ("Son", 10:168). This dreamer who anticipated some unknown secrets lying behind half-closed doors and to whom these secrets were unexpectedly revealed is a suspect witness.

Turgenev even modifies the phenomenon of hypnosis. In "Son" the narrator drinks a bottle of wine before the seance at which he sees the ghost of his late tutor, a figure he has deliberately chosen and kept in his mind all that day according to the instructions of the medium: "Go over your deceased ones and whichever you select, keep him in your mind, keep him all the time" ("Son",12:173). On the other hand, though the scientific explanations of magnetism leave the narrator with some doubt, the power capable of producing such acts, nonetheless, "remained something wonderful and mysterious" in these fantastic stories.

The numerous mysterious signs and sounds have a reasonable explanation too, the hero of "Faust" could have heard the cry of an owl which, in his highly excited state, he took to be a cry for help from Vera. Aratov himself tries to explain the first ghostly appearance of Klara as "the beating of my heart, the rippling of my blood."

The special character of the artistic structure of such fantastic stories is the alternation between pictures of genuine realism and fantastic episodes which seem to erupt into the mundane world of everyday and which lead man into that secret sphere dominated by the joyless and majestically oppressive weight of eternity. The mysterious and strange events that fascinated Turgenev are another manifestation of the theme that constantly absorbed him---man's helplessness before the dreadful and inexplicable forces of nature which are hostile to him and threaten him with inevitable destruction. Is it chance or fate? This is the question that runs through all of Turgenev's works, including his novels. Bazarov and Insarov are either casualties of absurd chance or victims of those malevolent and implacable forces that control man.

Turgenev's reply seems to be: I do not know, and that is why I cannot affirm or reject. Unable to deny the materialistic conception of the world but at the same time attracted by the concept of fate, by those mysterious forces which can perhaps be identified with nature, Turgenev developed a fatalistic view of the individual and of human life as a whole.

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