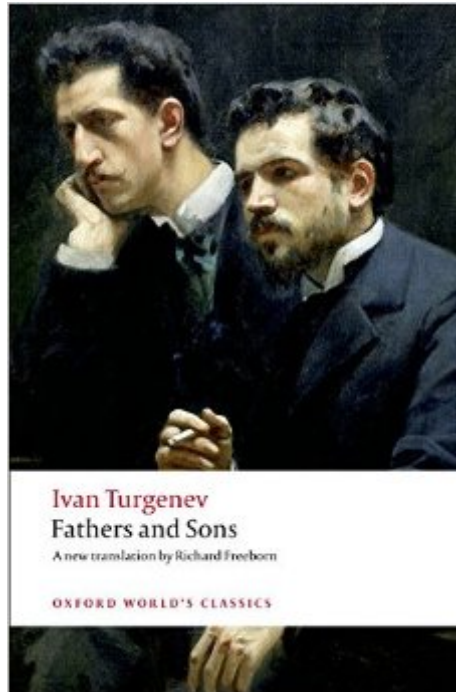


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Fathers And Sons (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

When a young graduate returns home he is accompanied, much to his father and uncle's discomfort, by a strange friend "who doesn't acknowledge any authorities, who doesn't accept a single principle on faith." Turgenev's masterpiece of generational conflict shocked Russian society when it was published in 1862 and continues today to seem as fresh and outspoken as it did to those who first encountered its nihilistic hero. This new translation, specially commissioned for the Oxford World's Classics, is the first to draw on Turgenev's working manuscript, which only came to light in 1988. About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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Customer Reviews

As Turgenev preceded Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, I always assumed that he belonged to a stuffier time; picking up "Fathers and Sons" in the bookstore, the first few pages seemed to confirm this assumption. Unlike Dostoevsky's prose, which I've always found compulsively readable, Turgenev's style seemed dense and somewhat stilted. Thankfully, the writing gets much more fluid and engaging as the story progresses. Turgenev is in fact a wonderful stylist: economical, precise, lyrical when it befits his characters, yet never wordy. Whereas Dostoevsky's characters sometimes seem

to be acting in a vacuum, and Tolstoy occasionally digresses into paeans on the wonders of nature, Turgenev straddles the happy medium. There are many brief but vivid descriptions of atmosphere, times of day--a horse's hooves flashing at dusk, Arcady and Eugene reclining on recently mown hay--yet they are always in service to the story and not overly symbolic. Turgenev's approach to his characters is similarly nimble and balanced; sometimes he adopts a more distant tone, sometimes he's in a particular character's head, sometimes he gives a brief description of a character's background, at others a character will relate another's history from his point of view. In fact everything in the novel testifies to Turgenev's faith in humanity, without ever seeming didactic or boring. All of the characters are sympathetic, and I could imagine actually traveling with them or engaging in conversation with them. Nobody beats Dostoevsky when it comes to penetrating psychological insight and dark humor, but his characters are always on some level types, intended to personify philosophical extremes. Tolstoy always seems to be hiding a profound but nonetheless conservative morality up his sleeve.

There are multiple *Fathers and Sons* translations, and Richard Freeborn's is particularly controversial. It is certainly readable and does a remarkable job of conveying Turgenev's poetic prose. However, Freeborn tries to convey the character Bazarov's slangy speech by using Southern American dialect - a risky tactic that many will appreciate but some will loathe. Anyone looking for a worthy translation who is not bothered by this would do well to pick up Freeborn's version, but others are warned. Now to the book itself. Though not Russian fiction's father in Nikolai Gogol's sense of adapting the language and producing its first notable fictional works, Ivan Turgenev is the direct antecedent of the psychological characterization and philosophical dramatization that is most closely associated with it and thus arguably its true father. *Fathers and Sons*, his most famous work and masterpiece, was the first Russian novel to attract Western praise, particularly winning over Henry James, who hailed it as a masterwork and championed Turgenev over the Russian writers who soon overshadowed him. One can debate Turgenev's merits relative to giants like Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, but he certainly provides an interesting contrast, and *Fathers and Sons* has long had an indisputable place alongside their great works in the world canon. The book is of course most famous for Evgeny Vasilevich Bazarov, its protagonist, who is both painstakingly realistic and thoroughly symbolic. He typifies the young, European-influenced, middle-class liberal that Turgenev rightly thought was a rising Russian power. A self-proclaimed nihilist, he rejects religion, conventional morality, and nearly every other traditional Russian virtue.

With *Fathers and Sons*, Turgenev shocked the Russian literati with his portrayal of Bazarov, the self-described 'nihilist'. Rejecting everything and recognising no single authority, Bazarov was a kick in the teeth of the aristocracy's grand old men, a rebellion of the son against the father. Evgeny Bazarov is a young man, with ideas that he believes are the only rational, reasonable way to live and behave. He is contemptuous of love, of sentimentality, of tradition and of the aristocracy. Yet he is intelligent and capable, and believes the way he does not through a sense of hostility and outrage, but because it seems right to him. His younger friend, Arkady, considers Bazarov his 'mentor', and though the two disagree with the depth of nihilism that is necessary for accurate living, they are for the most part in agreement. Bazarov's nihilism is argued amongst the characters at several different stages of the novel. Turgenev chose not to make the hero an unassailable target - both the negatives and the positives of such an outlook are admirably explained, discussed and dissected. The characters are intelligent in their own field or experiences, and all are willing to add to the argument. Obviously, the title should reveal to all that it is the father's of the two main characters, Arkady and Bazarov, who have problems with the younger generations ideas, though the 'fathers' of the story do try to understand Bazarov's thinking, rather than merely stamping him down with their experience and wisdom. The characters are very well realised. Pavel Petrovich is the typical Russian aristocrat, unable to fully understand the scope of change that the emancipation of the serfs will bring.

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