

Destroyers in the  
name of progress:  
bazarov in "fathers  
and sons" and mr.  
fortune...



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The destruction of tradition in the name of progress exists in Flannery O'Connor's "A View of the Woods" and Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* through the main protagonists in each work. Bazarov is the central character of *Fathers and Sons*: he is a young nihilist who challenges the traditional Russian aristocracy and the older generation of Russians. Mr. Fortune, the protagonist of O'Connor's "A View of the Woods," is uniquely different from the characters of *Fathers and Sons* in that he is both a part of the older generation and also makes a stand for progress in his small town. Bazarov and Mr. Fortune create conditions for progress by destroying not only the traditions of their cultures, but also by destroying nature itself. Through this theme of change and progress, tensions are created, both internal and external. As this conflict heightens, Bazarov and Mr. Fortune are revealed as iconoclasts in their respective society by virtue of their relationships with their settings and the thematic ideologies behind their actions. Bazarov and Mr. Fortune's relationships with their settings are important in understanding their actions and beliefs, because, for destruction to occur, an inherent tension must first exist in those relationships. In *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov is introduced as a nihilist: in Arkady's words, he is "a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle may be enshrined in" (17). Nihilism is in direct conflict with romanticism, a concept that is supported by Pavel Petrovitch, Arkady's uncle, and also by most of the traditional Russian society. Romanticism is expressed in *Fathers and Sons* through the imagery and figurative language used to describe the various settings, and, most importantly, Nikolai's estate: "Fields upon fields stretched all along to the very horizon, now sloping gently upwards, then dropping down again; [...]" <https://assignbuster.com/destroyers-in-the-name-of-progress-bazarov-in-fathers-and-sons-and-mr-fortune-in-a-view-of-the-woods/>

And the piteous state of the weak, starved beasts in the midst of the lovely spring day, called up, like a white phantom, the endless, comfortless winter, with its storms, and frosts, and snows" (8-9). Turgenev uses figurative language in this passage to present a traditional view of Russia, a view that is quickly destroyed by Bazarov when he sees Nikolai's estate only for its usefulness. Bazarov does not support science in an abstract sense, because he, as a nihilist, cannot support any such authority; however, he is still able to take romanticism out of Nikolai's estate by using nature only for utilitarian purposes: "' You study the anatomy of the eye; where does the enigmatical glance you talk about come in there? That's all romantic, nonsensical aesthetic rot. We had much better go and look at the beetle'" (26). The beetle represents, in this case, an example of Bazarov taking a creature out of the natural world and literally killing it; in his nihilism, he destroys every previously held romantic view of Russia, even destroying life itself. In Flannery O'Connor's " A View of the Woods," the tension between tradition and progress also exists between the protagonist, Mr. Fortune, and the setting. Although not a nihilist, Mr. Fortune destroys his surroundings, plots of land in rural Georgia, in the name of progress: " He would never have been able to sell off any lots if it had not been for progress, which had always been his ally" (337). The main conflict of the story arises in Mr. Fortune's plan to destroy a plot of land that his granddaughter holds dear. Like Bazarov, Mr. Fortune looks for the pragmatic uses of nature, and, in this plot of land, Mr. Fortune envisions a gas station being built. He is incapable of understanding the romantic view of nature held by his granddaughter, Mary Fortune, and the woods are, to him, " an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before" (348). Mr. Fortune believes that, because nature is <https://assignbuster.com/destroyers-in-the-name-of-progress-bazarov-in-fathers-and-sons-and-mr-fortune-in-a-view-of-the-woods/>

not useful, it can be destroyed to create a clearing for progress.

Furthermore, Mr. Fortune is a practical man in his relationship with his family; he does not “have any use for” his own daughter, who lives on his land and stands in the way of progress (336). He sees his daughter’s family, the Pittses, as “the kind that would let a cow pasture interfere with the future” (338), and so it is with his own family that the tension between tradition and progress reappears. The symbol of Mr. Fortune’s destruction is the bulldozer that digs clay out from the land. The bulldozer is described in terms of words concerning illness and monstrosity: “She [Mary Fortune] sat on the hood, looking down into the red pit, watching the big disembodied gullet gorge itself on the clay, then, with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turn and spit it up” (335). This motif is used by O’Connor to present an unnatural creature that directly conflicts with the natural environment, much like Mr. Fortune. When Mr. Fortune dies at the end of the story, he is left alone with his tool of destruction: “He looked around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay” (356). This final irony of Mr. Fortune’s death with the bulldozer reveals his alienation by his family, or traditionalists, and questions the cost of destruction in the name of progress. Bazarov and Mr. Fortune clearly differ in their views of destruction and progress. For Bazarov, progress is simply another abstract ideal for which he has no use: “‘Aristocracy, Liberalism, progress, principles,’ Bazarov was saying meanwhile; ‘if you think of it, what a lot of foreign... and useless words!’” (39). Although Bazarov does not believe in progress in the abstract, inherent in his ideas of nihilism is a type of implicit progress. Bazarov instead <https://assignbuster.com/destroyers-in-the-name-of-progress-bazarov-in-fathers-and-sons-and-mr-fortune-in-a-view-of-the-woods/>

chooses to focus more on the destruction than on the progress of his nihilistic views, as pointed out by Nikolai Petrovitch: ““ You deny everything; or, speaking more precisely, you destroy everything... But one must construct too, you know’” (39). Bazarov does not “ construct” anything, because, to construct, it would be necessary for Bazarov to have a vision for the future, like Arkady has a vision for Nikolai’s estate (9). Bazarov does not have a vision because he does not believe in anything, and so, as a nihilist, he can only destroy and never create. In direct contrast to Bazarov’s nihilism, Mr. Fortune focuses on the progress of his actions, and he sees destruction simply as a means to an end. Unlike Bazarov, Mr. Fortune is “ a man of advanced vision” who hopes that, in the future, the town in which he lives will be renamed Fortune, Georgia (338). He believes in progress as an ideal to which he can dedicate his life, and he is not “ one of these old people who fight improvement, who object to everything new and cringe at every change” (337). All of his actions align with his view of destruction as a method of progress; even his murder of his granddaughter, Mary Fortune, serves the purpose of proving to her that her romantic views are wrong (355). He is determined to impose progress on his traditional surroundings, no matter the cost. Both Ivan Turgenev and Flannery O’Connor make a comment on the success of their protagonist’s actions through the final death scene. *Fathers and Sons* ends at the gravesite of Bazarov, who has died after being infected with typhus. Turgenev’s final sentence reveals his view of the main tension of the novel: “ However passionate, sinning, and rebellious the heart hidden in the tomb, the flowers growing over it peep serenely at us with their innocent eyes; they tell us not of eternal peace alone, of that great peace of ‘ indifferent’ nature; they tell us, too, of eternal

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reconciliation and of life without end" (168). In the struggle between nihilism and romanticism, the flowers, representing nature, show that romanticism has finally conquered Bazarov, and that creation and life will always prevail over destruction and death. O'Connor's final passage describing Mr. Fortune's death and alienation with the monstrous bulldozer hold a similar, although more sobering, message: O'Connor reveals that Mr. Fortune's ways were not successful, and that destruction in the name of progress leads to isolation and death. In all, both *Fathers and Sons* and "A View of the Woods" present protagonists who find themselves directly at odds with tradition. Through their destruction of the natural world, these characters ultimately destroy themselves. Works Cited O'Connor, Flannery. *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971. Turgenev, Ivan. *Fathers and Sons*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998.