

A comparison of
arkady and bazarov,
from turgenevs
fathers and sons
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Turgenev opens the novel with the first comparison of many, setting the pace for the rest of the text, where Arkady and Bazarov are ceaselessly contrasted and compared. Turgenev initially portrays Arkady as a youth and Bazarov as a man. Arkady is described frequently as being boyish, whereas words such as 'virile' help the reader to understand Bazarov's manliness. His physical description is more thorough than that of Arkady's ('a face so bright and boyish') and we can infer from the bulging temples and broad forehead, phrenology being at its peak, that he is a deep thinker and an intelligent man.

Arkady is initially relatively unself-conscious within his joy at seeing his father and is described as having a 'genuine, almost childish delight', but quickly becomes less relaxed and more conscious of his movements as he attempts to be treated and viewed as a man in front of his more advanced friend. Bazarov's self-assurance and masculinity have impressed Arkady as, after these moments of ease, he reconsiders his actions and speech, as he takes care to call his father 'father' as opposed to 'papa'.

His behaviour is forced and stilted in attempt to impress Bazarov and he takes 'more wine than he actually wanted'. His home-coming is at once liberating, as he can revert to old habits and enjoys old pleasures such as 'falling asleep under the quilt worked by loving hands – those of his old nurse', but also frustrating: 'he had but lately been a child and returned to a place where everyone is accustomed to regard and treat him as a child.'

This first trip forms the primary cracks in Arkady and Bazarov's leader-follower relationship; Arkady is at once impressed and repulsed by the way

in which Bazarov treats his father and uncle. Bazarov is churlish and insolent with them, as with everyone. While this is acceptable in other contexts, and wins him admirers, for he had ' a special faculty for winning the confidence of the lower orders, though he never pandered to them, and indeed was very off-hand with them', Arkady's upbringing brings him to question whether these older gentlemen should be treated with more respect.

It is Bazarov who lights the nihilistic spark within Arkady, who initially is very impressed by its principles. Bazarov is a romantic figure himself; by being different and expressing his progressiveness throughout his dress and his long hair, he easily became Arkady's hero and it is only as Arkady matures that he is able to shake off his admiration for Bazarov and prevent it from clouding his principles. Bazarov, as a nihilist, ' repudiates' the useless, such as emotion, art, music and beauty, in a somewhat Philistine fashion.

He wants to destroy, not for destruction's sake but in order to start anew. From the opening, there are significant moments where we see that Arkady embraces nihilism because he believes this progressiveness to be the fashionably ' correct' thing to do. His willingness to be advanced is influenced dramatically by the high esteem that he holds Bazarov in. The shakiness of his nihilist ethics is evident as he semi-consciously reminds himself of them and thus feels superior for having bought into this progressive way of thought.

As he is unable to fully embrace them and indeed to entirely adhere to them, he realises, with Katya's input, that he is no revolutionary but rather ' a good little liberal gentleman'. Bazarov, on the other hand, sticks steadfastly to his

moral high-ground. It is Bazarov's self-assurance and subsequent insolence that helps to break down their leader-follower relationship, as Bazarov's attitude toward Nikolai and Pavel sows doubtful seeds in Arkady's mind and he first questions Bazarov's doctrine.

As Arkady matures throughout the text, he begins to find Bazarov's cynical and somewhat blinkered ways tiring: we see this first shortly before the two leave Arkady's father's house, when Arkady asks Bazarov, ' And is nature trivial? ' This is the turning point in their relationship as it is where the ' fledging' first thinks of flying solo. Arkady's personality is somewhat different to Bazarov's intensity. Arkady is in some ways more mature than Bazarov, specifically in the way that he is generally mellower and less angry at the world in general.

We see this contrast most specifically when both fall in love with Anna Odintsov. Arkady accepts his ardour, appreciates how little interest she has in him and settles into a contemplative melancholy. Bazarov, on the other hand, grows angry with his ' weakness' and is disgusted at the way in which he has been so easily taken over by ' mouldy aesthetics'. Arkady shies from conflict where possible and gives respect where he feels respect to be due. Bazarov respects no one and, regardless of others, always speaks his mind.

While Bazarov is the more 'emancipe' of the two, it is Arkady who has the advanced viewpoint in regard to women. He easily accepts them as people with their own opinions and believes that they need to be treated with as much respect as their masculine counterparts. As both are struck by Anna's beauty, a conversation takes place which perfectly sums up the difference in

their opinions in regard to women. Bazarov notes Anna's high-quality shoulders and, when Arkady asks, ' Why are you unwilling to allow that women are incapable of independence of thought? states that '[...] free-thinking women are monstrosities. ' This comment shows us the way in which he objectifies women, particularly noticeable when he attempts to reassure himself when nervous before speaking to Anna - ' What an idea, frightened of a petticoat. '

He believes that being affected by love's accompanying emotions is a major sign of weakness: Arkady takes pains to paint Pavel as a romantic hero and Bazarov repudiates his tale of heartbreak, and explains that he believes that ' a fellow who has staked his whole life on the one card of a woman's love [...] is not a man, is not a male creature'. As he wishes to believe that love is only ' tomfoolery', he is highly disrespectful toward the relationships of others. In kissing Fenichka, not only does he demonstrate his contempt for her relationship with Nikolai, he also reduces her to an attractive object as opposed to a woman in love with someone else. Very much in denial, only once does Bazarov acknowledge his love for Anna, though he later passes it off as nonsense.

Arkady's view of women changes throughout the text: while he continues to respect them and view them as equals, he matures in that he is no longer swept off his feet by a pair of fine shoulders. He loves Katya not only because she is attractive, but because he views her as a friend with worthy opinions and thoughts. We see Turgenev's opinions of the two characters by the conclusion of the plot. Bazarov, highly ironically, dies at the hands of his

highly revered science and realises as he dies that being a revolutionary betrayed all his principles.

All the time spent preaching could have been spent in being useful and he realises that the 'tinker' is in fact far more use than the radical. On his deathbed, he also discovers that the most important thing, his love for Anna, is one of the things that he previously keenly dismissed as 'mouldy aesthetics'. Turgenev shows us that the stereotypically angry young man is not so much bad as unknowingly narrow-minded.

Bazarov's story is a sad one; Turgenev evidently both pities and despairs of him as a character and it is only through death that he is finally able to mature emotionally and mentally and reevaluate his all-important priorities. At the beginning of the text, Turgenev views Arkady as a foolish young boy who holds Bazarov in unnecessarily high esteem. However, as Arkady learns to form his own opinions, Turgenev's tone in regard to him warms and, by Arkady's happy ending, we see the respect that Turgenev has for the character's balance. It is this equilibrium that saved him while Bazarov's extremes drove him to his demise.