Faust

Ivan Turgenev

Translated by Hugh Aplin
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Introduction

More than any other of the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century, Ivan Turgenev was, by instinct and experience, a European. He spent the major part of his adult life abroad, and a list of his literary friends reads like the roll-call for a masterclass in prose-writing of the age of Realism – Henry James, Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, to name but a few. As a member of the Russian nobility, he was reared on a rich European cultural diet; and he was, broadly speaking, sympathetic to the Westernizers in their great debate with the Slavophiles about Russia’s position vis-à-vis Western Europe, a debate that was central to much of Russia’s cultural history during his lifetime. It should therefore come as no surprise that Turgenev included many a reference to Western art, philosophy and literature in his writings. What may be surprising is that no major German names can be found to figure among the sample of friends listed above; this is, however, a matter of mere historical chance, for, as the title of this volume suggests, German literature was just as important for Turgenev as were, say, French and English. Indeed, if allusions, quotations and reminiscences are totted up, then it is Germany’s greatest poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who proves to figure in Turgenev’s wide range of reference more frequently than any other foreign writer. Not for nothing did the Russian label himself “an inveterate Goethe man”.

Turgenev’s enthusiasm for things German can be traced back to his youth, when he spent the years from 1838 to 1841 studying at Berlin University. The city at that time was something of a philosophical and cultural Mecca for young Russians, and it was there that the still rather immature future
writer made the acquaintance of many an older luminary. Among them were the Moscow University history professor Timofei Granovsky, Nikolai Stankevich, the immensely influential hub of a philosophical circle, who died of consumption in 1840 at the age of only twenty-seven, and the anarchist-to-be Mikhail Bakunin. While men such as these played important roles in Turgenev’s general development, his specific fascination with German culture and, first and foremost, with Goethe would have been fired by meetings with the great man’s one-time close friend, Bettina von Arnim, and his future English biographer, G.H. Lewes. Certainly, by the time he settled back in Russia Turgenev was said to know the first part of his favourite work, Goethe’s Faust, all but by heart, rather like the narrator of his own story of the same name.

His desire to propagate Goethe in Russia is attested to by his translations of various parts of the German’s literary output, including the final scene from Part One of Faust, which he published in 1844. That same year a translation by Mikhail Vronchenko of the whole of Part One of Faust appeared in St Petersburg, prompting Turgenev to write a lengthy review. Not only did it deal with the merits of Vronchenko’s labour, it also summarized Turgenev’s own opinions of Goethe and Faust as they stood at that time. These were not what they might have been but a year or two earlier, for under the influence of Vissarion Belinsky, the leading Russian critic of the day, Turgenev was now disapproving of the egotism, individualism and romanticism he perceived as central to Goethe’s tragedy. Nonetheless, he still regarded it as “the fullest expression of the age when battle was finally joined between the old days and the new, and men acknowledged that nothing was unshakeable except for human reason and Nature”. In particular, he valued highly the aspiration it embodied to be free of “the yoke of tradition, scholasticism and any sort of authority in general”; Goethe, he wrote,
“was the first to stand up for the rights of the individual, passionate, limited man”.

Such, then, was the background against which Turgenev’s story *Faust* was written just over a decade after the publication of this review. And although *Yakov Pasynkov*, the second story in this volume, may not have the same self-evident links with German culture as Turgenev’s *Faust*, still much of its substance can be seen to stem ultimately from similar sources.

Turgenev wrote *Faust* between June and August 1856, for the most part while living at Spasskoye, his late mother’s estate in Oryol Province. The descriptions of the estate in the story closely resemble the reality of Spasskoye, the narrator’s past is very similar to Turgenev’s own, and there may have been a further autobiographical strand in the plot of *Faust* too. For it was in 1854 that Turgenev first met his neighbour, Maria Tolstaya, the sister of Leo Tolstoy, at her nearby home, Pokrovskoye. She was already married, but such niceties never prevented Turgenev from forming attachments, as is amply demonstrated by his lifelong relationship with Pauline Viardot. The physical description of Vera, the heroine of *Faust*, is reminiscent of Maria, and the idea of Vera’s ignorance of creative literature may have been suggested by Maria’s indifference to poetry. It is certainly tempting to picture Turgenev charting his own feelings for his charming neighbour through the relations between his fictional characters, even though the denouements in life and fiction were to differ very markedly.

The key event in the plot of Turgenev’s *Faust* is the narrator’s reading of Goethe’s *Faust* to the heroine. Such literary communication was a regular motif in Turgenev’s works in the 1850s; the reading of one of Alexander Pushkin’s poems in *A Quiet Spot* (1854) leads to catastrophe; in *Rudin* (1856) the eponymous hero reads several works of German literature, including *Faust*, to the young Russian girl who loves him; and in *Asya* (1857) the narrator’s declaiming
of Goethe’s *Hermann and Dorothea* has a remarkable impact upon the enigmatic heroine. Less characteristic of Turgenev at this time, albeit not later on in his career, is the intrusion of a supernatural element in the development of the plot. This led to a degree of criticism from those of his contemporaries who insisted on the pre-eminence of realism in literature; but such disapproval might be countered with the argument that the supernatural should be interpreted here not literally, but psychologically, as the projection of the characters’ troubled feelings about their situation.

In any event, the nature of the relationship between hero and heroine, the sense of guilt and resignation that pervades the story’s conclusion, the self-centred, introspective character of the male protagonist – all these are elements immediately recognizable to those familiar with Turgenev’s oeuvre as a whole. And these features are discernible to one degree or another in *Yakov Pasynkov* too.

Turgenev wrote this story in an even shorter time than *Faust*, in less than two weeks in February 1855, although he did make some significant changes between its first publication in a journal later that year and its subsequent reissue in book form. The most obvious of these was the exclusion of the story’s epigraph, which had immediately forged a link with German culture, for it was a quotation from Friedrich von Schiller – “Dare to err and to dream”.

Work on *Yakov Pasynkov* was simultaneous with that on *Rudin*, and the interrelatedness of Turgenev’s writings in the mid-1850s is suggested by the removal of the original opening of the former story to the latter, and by the transfer of the name Pasynkov (derived from the Russian word for “stepson” or, figuratively, “outcast”) in the opposite direction. And just as Turgenev drew on his own life as a student in Germany for the background of the narrator of *Faust*, so he used aspects of his own pre-Berlin life for the early biography of his narrator in
Yakov Pasynkov. But a strong link with Germany is established in this story too through the figure of Yakov Pasynkov himself. Most obviously, he is a great admirer of German art, reading Schiller in the original and revering the music of Schubert. He is, indeed, in general a representative of the generation of young Russians who grew up under the influence of German idealism in the 1830s. Critics have identified the youthful Belinsky, before his move away from idealism, as the specific prototype for the character of Pasynkov; yet it might also be suggested that those Russians Turgenev knew in Berlin, such as Stankevich, already long dead, and Granovsky, who died in 1855, joined Belinsky (who had died in 1848) in Turgenev’s consciousness to form a composite portrait of a doomed but memorable romantic. Certainly the relationship between the story’s narrator and its hero, Pasynkov, could be seen to echo that between Turgenev and any one of these mentors.

But irrespective of its model, it is Pasynkov’s very nature, with its burning sincerity, its enthusiasm, kindness and generosity, and its thirst for truth and beauty, that is of supreme importance. It was the contrast between such a figure and the self-obsessed self-analysts whose introspection leads to spiritual paralysis, pessimistic scepticism, and misanthropy that Turgenev was to explore in his lecture ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’ (1860). The conclusion he reached was that the actual achievement of a man is arguably of less significance than the nature of his aspirations and the manner of his life. This was a lesson that Turgenev had been taught by Granovsky in Berlin in the 1830s, and it was a belief held by Goethe too.

Turgenev is perhaps best known for his depiction of “superfluous men”, Russian Hamlets incapable of fulfilling their potential, and although he proved his own worth as one of the finest of all Russian novelists, he was himself close to this type in temperament. Yet his writings also include numerous examples of the optimistic, active idealist, the quixotic character whose
origins, for him, are to be traced no less to Germany than to Spain. The two stories in this volume reflect admirably the debt that Turgenev owed to German culture, while at the same time underlining his right to a place of honour not only on a Russian Parnassus, but on a European one too.

– Hugh Aplin
Faust

A Story in Nine Letters

Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren.
FIRST LETTER

From Pavel Alexandrovich B——
to Semyon Nikolayevich V——

The village of M——oye, 6th June 1850

I arrived here three days ago, my dear friend, and, as promised, am taking up my pen and writing to you. There has been a sprinkling of light rain since morning: it’s not possible to go out and, what’s more, I feel like having a little chat with you. Here I am again in my old nest, where I haven’t been – it’s frightening to say it – for nine whole years. If you think about it, it really is as if I’ve become a different person. And I am, indeed, different: do you remember, in the drawing room, my great-grandmother’s dingy little mirror with those strange little scrolls in the corners? You were always wondering what it had seen a hundred years ago. As soon as I arrived I went up to it – and became embarrassed in spite of myself. I suddenly saw how I’ve aged and changed of late. But then I’m not the only one that’s aged. My little house, which has long been ramshackle, is now scarcely standing, it’s grown crooked and sunk into the ground. My kind Vasilyevna, the housekeeper (you’ve not forgotten her, I’m sure: she fed you such marvellous jam), has become quite shrivelled and bent; when she saw me, she was unable to cry out and didn’t burst into tears, but just started groaning, had a coughing fit, sat down on a chair in exhaustion, and waved her hand. The old man, Terenty, is still in good form, stands up as straight as ever and twists his legs about as he walks, wearing the same funny yellow nankeen
trousers and the same squeaky goatskin shoes with the high instep and bows that you many a time found touching... But my God! How those trousers flap about now on his skinny legs! How white his hair has become! And his face has quite shrivelled up to the size of a small fist; and when he started to talk to me, when he began to make arrangements and give out orders in the next room, I found it funny, and yet felt sorry for him too. He’s lost all his teeth, and he speaks in a mumble accompanied by a whistling and a hissing. The garden, on the other hand, has become amazingly pretty: the modest little lilac, acacia and honeysuckle bushes (you remember, it was you and I that planted them) have filled out into magnificent dense shrubs; the birches and maples – they’ve all shot up and spread wide; the lime-tree walks have become particularly attractive. I love those walks, I love the delicate grey-green colour and the subtle scent of the air beneath their vaults; I love the dappled network of bright little circles across the dark earth – as you know, I have no sand. My favourite oak sapling has already become a young oak tree. In the middle of the day yesterday I sat for more than an hour in its shade on a bench. I felt very happy. The grass was flourishing so cheerfully all around; a golden light, strong and soft, lay on everything; it even penetrated into the shade... and the birds that could be heard! I hope you haven’t forgotten that birds are my passion. Turtle doves cooed incessantly, every now and then an oriole would whistle, a chaffinch did its sweet little thing, the thrushes got angry and twittered away, a cuckoo responded in the distance; suddenly, like a maniac, a woodpecker would utter its piercing cry. I listened, listened to all this soft, commingled babbling, and did not want to stir, and it was hard to tell if it was idleness or emotion in my heart. And it’s not just the garden that has grown: my eye is constantly being caught by solid, hefty lads, in whom I simply cannot recognize the little boys I knew before. And your favourite, little Timosha, has now become such a grown-up Timofei, you just can’t imagine.
You were afraid for his health then and predicted he’d be consumptive; but if you looked now at his huge red hands, the way they poke out of the tight sleeves of his nankeen frock coat, and what rounded, thick muscles he has bulging out everywhere! The back of his neck is like a bull’s, and his head is covered in tight blond curls – a perfect Farnese Hercules!* But then his face has changed less than those of the others, it hasn’t even grown much in size, and his cheerful – yawning, as you used to say – smile has remained the same. I’ve taken him on as my valet; I got rid of the one from St Petersburg while in Moscow: he was so very fond of putting me to shame and making me feel his superiority as regards the ways of the capital. I didn’t find a single one of my dogs; they’ve all died off. Only Nefka lived longer than all the rest, but even she didn’t stay waiting long enough, the way Argos did for Ulysses; she was not fated to see her former master and hunting companion with her dimmed eyes. But Shavka is alive, and barks in the same hoarse way, and has one ear torn in the same way, and there are burrs in her tail, as there should be. I’ve moved into your former little room. The sun beats into it, it’s true, and there are lots of flies in it; on the other hand there is less of the smell of an old house than in all the other rooms. It’s a strange thing! That musty, slightly sour and faded smell has a powerful effect on my imagination: I can’t say that I find it unpleasant, on the contrary; but it makes me sad and, in the end, depressed. Just like you, I am very fond of old, bow-fronted chests with brass finger-plates, white armchairs with oval backs and crooked legs, fly-blown glass chandeliers with a large egg-shaped piece of lilac foil in the middle – in short, all sorts of furniture from our grandfathers’ time; but I can’t bear seeing it all continually: a sort of uneasy dreariness (that’s it precisely!) will take hold of me. The furniture in the room I’ve moved into is the most ordinary home-made stuff; however, I’ve left a long, narrow chest of drawers in the corner, on which various pieces of antiquated green and blue blown glassware can
scarcely be seen through the dust; and I’ve ordered to be hung on the wall, do you remember, that portrait of a woman that you called the portrait of Manon Lescaut.* It’s become a little darker over these nine years, but the eyes look out just as pensively, slyly and tenderly, the lips laugh just as frivolously and sadly, and the rose with half its petals pulled off droops just as gently from her slender fingers. I’m most amused by the curtains in my room. They were once green, but have turned yellow in the sun: painted across them in black dye are scenes from d’Arlincourt’s The Hermit.* On one curtain this hermit, with the most enormous beard and bulging eyes and wearing sandals, is enticing some dishevelled young lady away into the mountains; on the other there is a violent struggle taking place between four knights wearing berets and with padded shoulders; one is lying dead en raccourci;* in short, every horror is represented, while all around there is such untroubled calm, and the curtains themselves reflect the light onto the ceiling so meekly… A sort of spiritual hush has come upon me since I moved in here; I don’t want to do anything, I don’t want to see anyone, there’s nothing to dream about, I’m too idle to have any serious thoughts – but I’m not too idle to think: these are two different things, as you know very well yourself. Memories of childhood crowded in on me at first… wherever I went, whatever I looked at, they rose up from all sides, clear, clear to the tiniest details, and seemingly fixed in their sharp definition… Then these memories were replaced by others, then… then I gradually turned away from the past, and there remained only a sort of drowsy weight in my breast. Imagine! Sitting on a weir underneath a willow tree, all of a sudden I unexpectedly burst out crying, and would have cried for a long time, despite my already advanced years, had I not been put to shame by a passing peasant woman, who gave me a curious look and then, without turning her face towards me, bowed straight and low and went on by. I should very much like to remain in a mood like this (it goes without saying that I won’t be crying any
more) right up until the time I leave here, until September, that is, and I should be most upset if any of the neighbours took it into their heads to call on me. But there seems to be no reason to fear that; I don’t even have any near neighbours. I’m sure you’ll understand me; you know from your own experience how beneficial solitude can often be… I need it now, after my various wanderings.

But I shan’t be bored. I brought several books with me, and I have a respectable library here. Yesterday I opened up all the cabinets and spent a long time rummaging among the moulder ing books. I found many curious things that I had not noticed before: *Candide* in a manuscript translation from the 1770s; newspapers and journals from the same time; *The Triumphant Chameleon* (Mirabeau, that is); *Le Paysan perverti*, etc.* I came across children’s books, both my own and those of my father and grandmother, and even, imagine, my great-grandmother: one dreadfully tatty French grammar in a mottled binding has written on it in large letters: *Ce livre appartient à m-lle Eudoxie de Lavrine,* and the year is marked down as 1741. I saw the books that I once brought from abroad, among them Goethe’s *Faust*. Perhaps you’re not aware that there was a time when I knew *Faust* off by heart (the first part, it goes without saying), word for word; I couldn’t read it enough… But new days, new ways, and in the course of the last nine years I’ve scarcely had occasion to pick Goethe up. With what an inexpressible feeling did I catch sight of the little book I knew all too well (a poor edition from 1828)! I carried it off with me, lay down on the bed, and began to read. What an effect the entire magnificent first scene had on me! The appearance of the Earth Spirit, his words, you remember, “On the waves of life, in the whirlwind of creation”, aroused in me a tremor long untasted and a chill of rapture. I remembered everything: Berlin, my time as a student, Fräulein Clara Stich, and Seydelmann in the role of Mephistopheles, and Radziwill’s music, and absolutely everything…* I couldn’t get to sleep for a long time: my youth came
and stood before me like a ghost; like fire, like poison it ran through my veins, my heart swelled and didn’t want to contract, something tugged at its strings, and desires began to seethe…

Those are the dreams that your friend of almost forty fell into, sitting all alone in his lonely little house! What if someone had spied on me? Well, so what? I wouldn’t have been ashamed at all. Being ashamed is a sign of youth as well; and do you know why I’ve begun to notice that I’m getting old? Here’s why. I try now to exaggerate to myself my cheerful feelings and curb my sad ones, whereas in the days of my youth I did quite the reverse. You’d fuss over your sadness like a treasure, and be shamefaced about a burst of gaiety…

Yet it seems to me, nevertheless, that regardless of all my experience of life, there is still something on this earth, my friend Horatio,* that I haven’t tried, and that that “something” is all but the most important thing.

Oh dear, what have I ended up writing! Goodbye! Until the next time. What are you doing in St Petersburg? Incidentally, Savyely, my cook here in the country, asks to be remembered to you. He’s aged as well, but not too much, he’s grown rather fat and flabby. He’s just as good at making chicken soup with boiled onions, curd tarts with decorative edging, and sour cucumber skilly, that renowned dish of the steppes, skilly, that made your tongue turn white and go stiff for a whole day. But on the other hand, his roast meat turns out just as dry as ever, so dry you can knock it about on your plate, but it’s still just like cardboard. Anyway, goodbye!

Your P.B.
SECOND LETTER

From the same to the same

The village of M——oye, 12th June 1850

I have quite an important piece of news to tell you, dear friend. Listen! Yesterday, before lunch, I felt like taking a walk, only not in the garden; I set off along the road to town. Striding quickly down a long straight road without any objective is very pleasant. It’s as if you’re doing something, hurrying somewhere. I look, and there’s a carriage coming towards me. “It’s not going to my place, is it?” I thought with secret terror… But no: in the carriage sits a gentleman I don’t know with a moustache. I was reassured. But suddenly this gentleman, drawing level with me, orders the coachman to stop the horses, raises his cap courteously, and even more courteously asks me if I am not so-and-so, calling me by my name. I stop in my turn and, with the enthusiasm of a prisoner being taken for interrogation, I reply that “I am so-and-so”, while staring blankly at the gentleman with the moustache and thinking to myself: “But I’ve seen him somewhere, haven’t I!”

“Don’t you recognize me?” he says, climbing down in the meantime from the carriage.

“No, sir.”

“But I recognized you straight away.”

It turned out little by little that it was Priyimkov, you remember, our one-time companion at university. At this moment, dear Semyon Nikolayich, you’re thinking: “What kind of important piece of news is this then? Priyimkov, so far as I can
recall, was a rather shallow fellow, albeit not vicious and not stupid.” That’s all true, my good friend, but listen to how the conversation continued.

“I was very glad,” he says, “when I heard you were visiting your village, right next door to us. But I wasn’t the only one who was glad.”

“Might I learn,” I asked, “who else could have been so kind…”

“My wife.”

“Your wife?”

“Yes, my wife: she’s an old acquaintance of yours.”

“Well, might I learn your wife’s name?”

“Her name is Vera Nikolayevna; her maiden name was Yeltsova…”

“Vera Nikolayevna!” I involuntarily exclaim…

And it’s this that is that important piece of news I was telling you about at the beginning of the letter.

But perhaps you find nothing important in this either… I shall have to tell you something from my past… my distant past.

When you and I left university together in 183–, I was twenty-three years old. You entered the civil service; I, as you are aware, resolved to set off for Berlin. But there was nothing for me to do in Berlin any earlier than October. I took a fancy to spending the summer in Russia, in the countryside, to being good and idle for the last time, before then taking up work in earnest. To what extent this last intention was realized – there’s no point in enlarging on that now… “But where am I to spend the summer?” I wondered. I didn’t feel like going to my own village: my father had recently died, I had no close relations, I was afraid of loneliness, boredom… And so I gladly accepted the proposal of one of my relatives, a cousin once removed, to be his guest on his estate in the province of T——. He was a well-to-do man, kind and straightforward, he lived like a lord, and had a home like a palace. I moved in with him. My cousin’s family was a large one: two sons and five daughters. And in addition there were masses of people living in his house. Guests were constantly dropping
in – and yet it wasn’t much fun. The days flowed by noisily, there was no opportunity for privacy. Everything was done together, everyone tried to amuse themselves with something or other, to think something or other up, and by the end of the day everyone was dreadfully tired. There was something vulgar about that life. I was already beginning to dream of leaving and was only waiting for my cousin’s name day to pass, but on the name day itself, at the ball, I saw Vera Nikolayevna Yeltsova – and I stayed.

She was then sixteen years old. She lived with her mother on a small estate about five versts* from my cousin. Her father – a remarkable man, they say – had rapidly attained the rank of colonel and would have gone still further, but was killed as a young man, accidentally shot by a comrade while hunting. He left Vera Nikolayevna still a child. Her mother was an extraordinary woman too: she spoke several languages, knew a great deal. She was seven or eight years older than her husband, whom she had married for love; he had carried her away in secret from her parents’ home. She barely survived his loss, and right up until her death (according to Priyimkov, she died soon after her daughter’s wedding) wore only black dresses. I remember her face vividly: expressive, dark, with thick hair that had turned grey, large, severe eyes, in which the light seemed to have gone out, and a narrow, straight nose. Her father – his name was Ladanov – had lived for some fifteen years in Italy. Vera Nikolayevna’s mother was born of a simple peasant woman from Albano, who was killed the day after she gave birth by her fiancé, a Trasteverino,* from whom Ladanov had stolen her… This story caused a great stir in its time. Returning to Russia, Ladanov never left his study, let alone his house, and occupied himself with chemistry, anatomy, secret spells, wanting to prolong human life, imagining it was possible to commune with spirits, summon up the dead… His neighbours considered him a wizard. He was extremely fond of his daughter, taught her everything himself, but did not forgive her for running away with Yeltsov, did not let either her or her husband into his sight, foretold a life of sorrow for them