On 18 November 1865, in Baden-Baden, Ivan Turgenev began work on his fifth novel, *Smoke* which was set among the expatriate Russian community of the German spa town. On 29 January 1867 he wrote to Botkin that he had completed the novel. In March the manuscript was handed over to Mikhail Katkov, editor of the journal *The Russian Herald* (Ɋɭɫɫɤɢɣɜɟɫɬɧɢɤ), who unsuccessfully demanded various changes, and in mid-April the work was published. On 5 May Vasilii Botkin wrote to Turgenev:

*Smoke* is still being read, and no opinion of it has yet been formed. Yesterday I was at Tiutchev’s house, - he’s just read it and is very displeased. Whilst acknowledging the skill with which the main character is drawn, he complains bitterly about the moral mood which imbues the story, and at the absence of all national sentiment.¹

The title of the novel is perhaps unexpected, deriving largely from two passages in chapter 26. In the first, the smoke is, initially, that of the train taking Litvinov away from Baden:

He sat alone in the carriage: no-one disturbed him. Smoke, smoke, - he repeated several times; and suddenly everything appeared as smoke to him; everything, his own life, Russian life - everything human and, especially, everything Russian. Everything is smoke and steam, he thought; everything seems to be constantly changing […]. Smoke, he whispered, smoke. He remembered the heated quarrels, the discussions, the shouting at Gubarev’s, at the houses of other people, high and low, progressive and reactionary, old and young […]

Litvinov again repeated his previous words: smoke, smoke, smoke! In Heidelberg, he thought, there are now over a hundred students; they are all studying chemistry, physics, physiology and don’t want to hear about anything else … But five or six years will pass and there won’t be fifteen students attending the courses of these same celebrated professors … The wind will change, the smoke will blow the other way. Smoke … smoke … smoke.²

By way of validating Litvinov’s thoughts, Turgenev appends a footnote giving the precise number of Russian students at Heidelberg for
the summer semester 1866 (13) and for the winter semester (12). The smoke then may be taken to represent ephemeral, fashionable trends. This is not, however, an image which runs as any kind of leitmotif in the text. There are some earlier references: to ‘tobacco smoke’ (chapter six) which makes Litvinov’s head ache and which he associates with the uncongenial company he has encountered in Baden-Baden.\(^3\) In chapter ten it is the mixture of ‘expensive’ cigar smoke and the ‘most remarkable’ patchouli which constitutes ‘a kind of genuinely noble and Guards smell’ which characterizes the young generals with whom Litvinov attends a picnic.\(^4\) In chapter 15 a gathering chez Irina is as noisy as those chez Gubarev, but is distinguished only by the better dressed guests and the absence of beer and tobacco smoke.\(^5\) In chapter 17 Litvinov imagines himself already leaving Baden in a … ‘smoky railway carriage’.\(^6\) In chapter 23 the literal smoke has become a metaphor: Litvinov writes to Irina of undertakings which have turned to ‘dust and ashes’ or, as the Russian has it, ‘smoke and ashes’.\(^7\)

Turgenev’s symbol has been variously interpreted. It is not industrial smoke, the ‘black unparliamentary smoke’ of Elizabeth Gaskell’s Milton (from North and South, 1855)\(^8\) or Charles Dickens’ Coketown (from Hard Times, 1854) but may symbolize the unstable and ephemeral nature of revolutionary stirrings in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. The smoke can also be seen as a symbol of the chaotic nature of life in general. However, the strongest clue to its interpretation is to be found in the epilogue to the novel, which is set in Petersburg and tells of two unnamed society ladies who are discussing the qualities of Irina Ratmirova. In a mixture of French and Russian they conclude that Irina lacks faith and has an ‘embittered mind’ (‘о́злобленный ум’). In what is the last use of the word smoke (дым) in the novel, the voice of one of the ladies is described as ‘evaporating like incense smoke’. (‘испаряется, как кадильный дым’).\(^9\) This associates the noun with the artificial world in which Irina lives, and with the disruptive, destructive, erotic passion which she arouses. Whichever interpretation one favours, the multiple meanings which Turgenev appears to place on the symbol may account for what is, in this writer’s view, its rather unsatisfactory nature.

Tiutchev’s displeasure with Smoke was more concerned with content than symbol. It soon manifested itself in two publications. In May 1867 the liberal Notes of the Fatherland (Отечественные записки)\(^10\) published a poem by Tiutchev with the same title: