



On the Eve

Ivan Turgenev

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On the Eve Details

Date : Published May 29th 2008 by BiblioLife (first published 1860)

ISBN : 9781426450433

Author : Ivan Turgenev

Format : Paperback 180 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Cultural, Russia, Literature, Russian Literature



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Renata says

BRILLIANT! Too good to be true. Tragically romantic and deep and everything else. I'm glad I have read it. OMG, I can't even start explaining how good this book is. Short, unexpected, fast-paced, intense... I couldn't put it down. Unforgettable. Please, bring me more Ivan Turgenev! ????????????????

Karlo Mikhail says

On the Eve by Ivan Turgenev is a love story, the plot of which most of us today would find commonplace. When the novel first appeared, however, this story of a young upper class Russian lady falling in love with a Bulgarian revolutionary caused quite a stir among its readers.

With the novel's publication in 1861, the book's translator Gilbert Gardiner commented in the introduction, "People argued about the heroes of the story as they might have done about the real people – their characters, their conduct and their importance to Russia."

It is midway into the 19th Century. Bulgaria is under Turkish rule. On the eve of the Crimean War, Insarov, a poor Bulgarian student secretly working for the Bulgarian independence movement, is in Moscow. He is introduced by his friend, a Russian student named Bersyenev, to the beautiful Elena Stahov.

Among the Stahov's household lived another friend of Bersyenev, the eccentric young artist Shubin, who with the former is in love with Elena. The rest is predictable enough. The two are bested by Insarov, the revolutionary who, concerned only with the cause, does not pay attention to Elena. When he does realize his reciprocal feelings for the young lady, he tries to leave the company of his Russian friends, saying, "I'm a Bulgarian... I don't need the love of a Russian woman." But of course the two get past that stage. They secretly marry, earn the ire of Elena's parents, and leave for Bulgaria, which all lead to a tragic ending.

Insarov's unswerving commitment for the emancipation of his native country's independence gives him a romantic aura in the eyes of Elena. Insarov's singleminded devotion to his cause sets him apart from the seemingly meaningless lives of the aristocratic Russians, as exemplified by his father's infidelities and epitomized in Russian literature by the figure of the superfluous man.

From *On the Eve* by Turgenev

Bryn Hammond says

Revisited. Turgenev's short novels were second to Dostoyevsky for me, as far as Russians go (and Russians go far). Though I can see why Turgenev's despair of Russia as instanced here might have annoyed D... 'Go to foreign parts'. Anyhow, never mind that. I can also see why this one spoke closely to me as a girl. Yelena is a serious girl who needs an ethical and active life, and finds a freedom fight to throw herself into -- Bulgaria from the Turks. I was always impressed by Turgenev's young women, whose engagement with the questions of the day he can put centre-stage.

Bersenev is eminently likeable from page one; Uvar Ivanovich grows on you. Insarov, Yelena's Bulgarian hero, is astutely mocked by other participants and you can make up your own mind.

I didn't remember his descriptiveness, which I found of real beauty now. I dare say I paid little attention then: my idol D. is famous for describing a tree, once, in his entire writings. That may be an exaggeration. The intro to mine says the atmospherics of his Venice must have fed into *Death in Venice* (another I was in love with, so maybe I did notice).

Sad end.

hossein Babadi says

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ePat says

In "On the Eve" Turgenev offers up some beautiful, crisp prose and interesting depictions of Russian daily life among the nobility. The unhappy mistress of the Zahov household, Anna Vassilyevna, her philandering husband, Nikolai Zahov, and the flirtatious, German paid-companion, Zoya, are briefly but brilliantly drawn characters and a testament to the author's skill.

The daughter of the house and heroine of the novel is Elena Stahov, a young noblewoman disillusioned with her parents and struggling to find expression and meaning in her life. She does this by falling in love with the Bulgarian revolutionary, Insarov. Her two suitors, Bersenyev and Shubin, pale in comparison. Elena adopts Insarov's cause as her own and defies her parents to be with him - a decision which ultimately leads to tragedy.

But in the end, the characters of Elena and Insarov fall a little flat for me.

Perhaps while writing "On the Eve" Turgenev felt the specter of the Russian censors over him, choosing to concentrate on the controversial romance of the aristocratic Elena and impoverished radical, Insarov, as a metaphor for political change, political sacrifice, and heroism, and in doing so, neatly skirts the issue of politics itself. Whatever the case, to my disappointment Elena's story fades into black just when she has the potential to become more interesting and her life-experiences more engrossing, thought-provoking, and quietly heroic. Instead, her revolutionary struggles are left for future Russian writers to ponder and actualize.

Daniel Villines says

Writing a novel about love must be one of the most risky endeavors that a writer can undertake. Love is such a powerful emotion that it is easy for such novels slip into the realm of melodrama. This takes place when humans are depicted in ways that step beyond reality. It doesn't take much. The call for a duel between rivals, the admission of love one too many times, or self-pity that goes on and on are all gateways to the

melodramatic.

Turgenev manages to write about love in *On the Eve* without such missteps. To be fair, this is a Victorian novel and behaviors are typical of that era. But still, Turgenev manages to stay clear of overly-dramatic love scenes.

Turgenev maintains a sense of reality by not overwriting any given scene. He provides what is needed to understand the emotions of the characters and then allows the reader to use their own inherent sympathies to complete their connection to the feelings being conveyed.

Turgenev also uses the various settings in the book to further communicate emotions without explicit narration. The abundance of life in nature, the hard coldness of Moscow, and the surreal calm that is Venice, these settings all work to set moods in advance of scenes. From there, the plot moves forward with the reader's feelings already engaged.

Believable characters are the end result. While the story focuses on human passion, its characters do not lose sight of their own self-awareness. Turgenev gives his characters feelings but he also gives them the ability to realize their own emotional state. In this way, this is a book for the intellectually inclined and I just happen to be that way.

Bryn Hammond says

This was the Turgenev that spoke most directly to me when I was young, which makes for a peculiarly intense reading experience now: Yelena and Insarov are as if people known to me, I believe in them entirely; and indeed the whole novel comes alive to me in that rare way...

A dangerous novel to do this with, as it is Turgenev at his most gloomy. Although he took the plot from life, he wants to use it to dash our spirits with the futility of effort – for he had these moods of pessimistic metaphysics. I'll admit that doesn't commonly come across to me in his writing. Perhaps I resist his lessons; if so it's his own fault – he paints Yelena and Insarov too richly in their heroic energies, hope and passion, to philosophise futility of effort at me at the end.

I can see why this one annoyed fellow Russians who loved Russianness, for instance Dostoyevsky. To say 'there are no human beings yet' in Russia is going a bit far; particularly when you give us Bersenev, Yelena's Russian suitor, an awkward scholar and future professor, who is eminently human and likeable. Also, Turgenev, answer me this: if Russia is such a dump that the human species has yet to be found in it, how can you make your young women the most splendid people on earth? Caught you out there. Liza in *Home of the Gentry* was the Turgenev girl Dostoyevsky thought his greatest achievement; for me, Yelena. She managed to cause controversy too, and I must say I was startled at how bold he makes bold to make her.

Critics, at the time and since, like to mock Insarov, the Bulgarian freedom-fighter... just as the silly-headed artist does in the book. I can only say I'd be spoilt for choice between Bersenev and Insarov, but that Yelena chose well, as she does everything well.

Fionnuala says

So, we are on the eve of a new day here on goodreads. We have been batting ideas back and forth about what the giant female warrior will do to our community in a similar way to Turgenev's characters who spend long paragraphs meditating on the issues of their day. Like them, some of us must be asking the question: is it better to muddle through our lives peacefully, concentrating on reading, ideas and art or should we take action?

Some among us have talked about emigrating to a nearby country but the news we hear isn't very promising; there are taxes, and while we might be glad to pay taxes for better services, the people of that country don't seem to be benefitting from better conditions; their infrastructure is frankly primitive.

There are other countries we might emigrate to, but from the scattered reports that are reaching us, those countries have either already been taken over by the same tall female warrior or else, by some other formidable giants, some of whose main interests are not even books but only forage for their armies. But there is an alternative. We could create an independent republic, one where books are picked on their merit and where reviews are never biased. We might need to raise taxes to do this and buy in some mercenary soldiers to help build it but we could ensure that we owned it and that it could never be taken over by any aggressive giants in the future.

goodreaders **can** build a betterreads

Kay says

Ah, friendship, love, idealism -- in a word, Turgenev!

The "eve" in question is the start of the Crimean war. The setting, however, is provincial Russia (as usual in Turgenev's work) and the characters are a small circle of close friends. They're prone to earnest philosophical discussion. There's a slightly complex romance that drives the plot, and as might be expected things ultimately don't turn out well for the lovers. (This is, after all, a *Russian* novel.) If that sounds a bit pat, then let me assure you that Turgenev's wonderfully flowing prose draws the reader nicely and sympathetically along.

aya Abdalaziz says

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Laura says

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Opening lines:

On one of the hottest days of the summer of 1853, in the shade of a tall lime-tree on the bank of the river Moskva, not far from Kuntsovo, two young men were lying on the grass. One, who looked about twenty-three, tall and swarthy, with a sharp and rather crooked nose, a high forehead, and a restrained smile on his wide mouth, was lying on his back and gazing meditatively into the distance, his small grey eyes half closed.

3* Spring Torrents

4* Fathers and Sons

4* On the Eve

TR Virgin Soil

TR King Lear of the Steppes

TR A House of Gentlefolk

TR First Love

TR Sketches from a Hunter's Album

TR The Diary of a Superfluous Man and Other Stories

Jackson Cyril says

Turgenev ranks with Hawthorne, James and Flaubert for the faultless purity of his style-- though this particular work is written in a prose style singularly beautiful, even for him. The story too, populated by characters worthy of Tolstoy's pen, is most impressive. A vastly underrated work.

Amedine Amedine says

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Pontus says

4,5* (Translator: Gilbert Gardiner).

What a great introduction to Turgenev!

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in October 1999.

Turgenev's short novel is based around a memoir written by a friend, who suggested he might like to turn it into a novel. It tells the stories of a small group of upper class teenagers in Russia on the eve of the outbreak of the Crimean War. Elena comes from a home troubled by the infidelities of her father, and this has hardly given her a taste for any kind of marriage that might be arranged by her parents. She is loved by one of a small group of friends, Pavel Shubin, who introduces her to the Bulgarian revolutionary Dimitry Insarov. (Bulgaria was at this time ruled by Turkey, whose oppression of the Slavs in its domains was one of the major causes of the Crimean War.) Shubin thinks Insarov an interesting person, but not one likely to arouse the passions of a woman, and he is very upset when he becomes a favoured rival for Elena's love.

It is Insarov's patriotic devotion which makes him a romantic figure to Elena; no matter how passionate he may be about her, his duty to his country must come first, and this is what fascinates her. It is a total contrast to the meaningless lives of the upper class Russians she sees around her.

Though Turgenev's writing pointed the way to the psychological dramas of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, his work is far more mild and serene in the effect it has on the reader. This is especially true of *On the Eve*, despite the potential for melodrama in its plot. The title is in fact most apt, for it gives the impression of great things eagerly awaited around the corner, and this is the emotion that Turgenev seeks to produce in his

readers throughout the novel.

Fionnuala says

My Reading Life: Or How I went from Reading Turgenev to Reading Mann

The pattern of our reading lives can be as comfortable and predictable as everyday life or as creative and thought provoking as the books we read. Take my own case: I often mosey along well worn tracks quite happily, certain of finding familiar works which will be both pleasurable and rewarding. However, it can happen that an obscure detail catches my attention and before I know it, I've been propelled sideways onto an undiscovered trail which inevitably, after a little time, will lead to yet another trail, and another, *und so weiter*.

If I tried to capture the pattern of my reading experience on paper, it would look like the most 'fantastic' map, criss-crossing the continents and frequently travelling backwards through time, more akin to the realms of fiction than to any map of the world as we know it. If any proof were needed of the magic of the reading life, this is it.

I fell upon the Turgenev trail because I came across a reference to a character called Insarov in William Trevor's beautiful novella, *Reading Turgenev*, and I was sufficiently intrigued by the brief mention of Insarov to take that sideways leap. Thinking him to be a character in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, I immediately delved into that book and enjoyed the experience but failed to find Insarov or any tangible parallel with William Trevor's novella. I did find vague echoes of another book I'd been reading called *Solace* in which mention was made of the nineteenth century writer, Maria Edgeworth. The connection lay in the fact that Ms Edgeworth was a correspondent of Turgenev's; they were both interested in education and agrarian reform, themes to be found in *Fathers and Sons*. So Trevor had sent me back to a reread of Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, via *Solace* and *Fathers and Sons* and my little sidestep had returned me to one of my favourite trails, Anglo-Irish literature.

But I still hadn't found Insarov or figured out a satisfactory connection between Trevor and Turgenev.

Reading Turgenev, a quiet little story set in rural Ireland is presented along with another Trevor novella called *My House in Umbria* in a volume called *Two Lives*. I had understood that the two novellas were packaged together for publishing purposes rather than having been originally conceived to be read side by side. However, when I'd read both I noticed some definite correspondences between them: the female protagonists of both stories, Mary Louise and Emily, had each experienced life changing events in their early twenties and their methods of dealing with these events, while quite different, nevertheless involved a withdrawal from the real world, one, though psychosis, the other, through the creation of fictional worlds. I wasn't entirely sure if Trevor intended these parallels to be remarked upon or if I had merely forced them into a correspondence to suit a logic of my own. I hoped that perhaps Turgenev might provide the clues that Trevor had withheld so I set out once more in search of Insarov and began to read *On the Eve*

While reading this philosophical tale, it occurred to me that it could very well be subtitled 'Two Lives'. It mainly concerns the very different lives of a young Russian girl, Elena Stahov from a comfortable bourgeois family, and that of a Bulgarian student and idealist, Dmitri Insarov, determined to sacrifice his life for his country's freedom. The first half of the book takes place in a rural setting, the second half in Italy, and again the *Two Lives* comparison is relevant as Elena's former life in Russia comes to a complete end once she travels to Italy where a new and very different life begins. There is a traumatic event in Venice which results in Elena withdrawing from public life towards a sort of physical and psychological exile not unlike the

destinies of Mary Louise and Emily from *Two Lives*.

So, at the end of my journey towards reading *On the Eve*, I had hit on the pattern I had been seeking and was feeling nicely satisfied by the outcome.

But then I had a doubt. Perhaps I had created these correspondences from very little evidence. Perhaps Trevor didn't intend his novellas to be analysed and engineered to this extent. But then I remembered that, after all, this is just an episode in the story of my own reading life, and therefore Trevor is just another character in that story and I can do with him as I please.

This meandering journey in search of Trevor's imagined motivations reminds me again of the intricate pattern of my reading life and why I'm more and more drawn towards rendering my reading experiences into fiction: I do like stories.

And I plan to skip cross Europe and across time again soon and read Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*...

Two Lives
Reading Turgenev
My House in Umbria
Fathers and Sons
Solace
Castle Rackrent
On the Eve
Death in Venice

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Elizabeth (Alaska) says

Exquisite.

First, so expressive, the prose makes me swoon. And I am not a swooner (is there such a word as swooner?).

Elena listened to him very attentively, and turning half towards him, did not take her eyes off his face, which had grown a little paler--off his eyes, which were soft and affectionate, though they avoided meeting her eyes. Her soul expanded, and something tender, holy, and good seemed half sinking into her heart, half springing up within it.

Second, how is it a male of the 1860s was able to express a young woman's thoughts and being so accurately? There is a chapter that is presented as this young woman's diary. Turgenev gives us diary entries of some of the action that has already taken place, so that, though he has described from the outside what occurred, he gives us her feelings at the time of these known events. Then, we are given her feelings about events not yet told, and in this way, Turgenev apprises us of them.

In an introduction which accompanied an 1895 edition, we are told:

To the English reader, *On the Eve* is a charmingly drawn picture of a quiet Russian household, with a delicate analysis of a young girl's soul; but to Russians it is also a deep and penetrating diagnosis of the destinies of the Russia of the fifties.

I did not read all of this introduction because it seemed to me to begin to reveal spoilers, but I was glad to have read this much and to get this alternate perspective. It enhanced the story for me, as part of the conflict involves a Bulgarian who worries about his country.

Cindy says

I struggled with this story, at the beginning. The characters were not very likable. I thought Shubin was really strange, he almost seemed like a court jester. He was silly, played leap frog with strangers he met on the street. His sculptures were rather odd, I was not sure he was serious about his art. I stayed with the story. I have read Ivan Turgenev and I knew he could write a great story. This turned into a beautiful love story. Elena was from a well to do Russian family. She met Insarnov, who was a Bulgarian revolutionary. Something in me said, this will not work out well. Her father will never allow it. It seems like a well worn out theme. Well to do girl meets a penniless Bulgarian revolutionary. They have to hide their love, because she knows it will be forbidden. Ivan Turgenev is a master storyteller. He was brave enough to write a good love story on a well used theme. The story picks up towards the end. The descriptions of Venice were beautiful. I could not believe how much Elena gave up for love. The ending is left up to your imagination. What happened to Elena? This would make a great discussion for a group read. Many people debate the title and what it means.

Herbst lied says

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