Chapter 4  
On the Eve

4.1 Introduction

Whereas A Nest of Gentry was generally received sympathetically by Turgenev’s contemporaries, On the Eve (1860) was judged as unsuccessful, both for its ideological message and for what were seen as its artistic demerits. The ideological controversy primarily concerned Turgenev’s choice of hero. Unlike the heroes of the previous two novels, Insarov is not part of the gentry; he is among the raznočincy – literally, ‘those of various ranks’, mostly the sons of priests and doctors, who gained an increasingly prominent role in Russian intellectual circles of the time. The liberals and conservatives in particular were upset about the fact that Insarov did not belong to the gentry. They concluded that Turgenev had given up on the gentry hero and, in On the Eve, was expressing the view that the gentry had no important role to play in the determination of Russia’s future. Furthermore, Turgenev’s choice both of hero and setting (the Bulgarian revolt) was regarded as a step towards a revolutionary position. As Annenkov recalls in his memoirs, the conservatives “were shocked by the liberal and inflammatory tone of the story”. (Annenkov 1960: 432) The only circles in which the novel was received with enthusiasm were those of the radical youth, the “students and writers” in Annenkov’s words (ibid.), who looked upon the hero and heroine of On the Eve as exemplary figures.

The fact that the hero was not a Russian but a Bulgarian likewise called for disapproval. Was there not one positive and active figure among the Russian people who could serve as model for the new hero? It was also recognized, however, that a Russian setting for this story would deserve of censure. Insarov’s goal of liberating the oppressed Bulgarian people was an acceptable subject, but a Russian with revolutionary ideas would most certainly not have been acceptable. Some therefore, among them Dobroljubov, concluded that Insarov was really Turgenev’s example of the future Russian revolutionary in disguise.

The artistic controversy revolved around the general conclusion that Insarov was unconvincing as a literary character, a judgment by no means confined to Turgenev’s contemporaries but shared, also, by a number of later critics. It is felt that the lack of information regarding the hero’s social and cultural background, and the motives underlying his ideas and behavior, prevent the reader from developing a clear picture of who he is.

In their first reactions, Dobroljubov and Pisarev were quick to point this out. Dobroljubov, in his well-known essay on On the Eve (“When will the real day break?” – “Когда же придет настоящий день?” – 1860), states that Insarov fails to appeal to the reader both as a hero and as a human being (Dobroljubov 1987: 101). In the same vein, Pisarev says: “I cannot look upon Insarov as a real person” (Pisarev 1981: 223). Pisarev concluded that Turgenev had tried to paint the picture of a real hero by attributing to him several features that a heroic figure might have, such as an extraordinary biography, remarkable firmness and an ardent love for his homeland. He regarded this as a “process of mechanical building” which resulted in a hero who was made out of “bits and pieces” (idem, 226).

Whereas the adverse criticism of Insarov as a new heroic type is relevant only in relation to the time at which it appeared, the denial of its artistic success has remained an important point of discussion ever since and has, in my opinion, had a much more powerful influence on the way in which the novel has been appreciated. As I have indicated, more recent critics have similarly observed the incredibility of Insarov’s personality, V. Pritchett even going so far as to
declare that, not only Insarov, but also the other characters, are cardboard cutouts (Pritchett 1977: 131).

Indeed, when compared to the heroes of the other novels, it is difficult to define Insarov’s personality on the basis of information provided on the contemporary level. He does not belong to a clearly defined social or cultural framework. We do know that he is a raznočinec and that he studies at Moscow university (apparently in the department of history; Bersenev has met him there – VIII, 51), but this is not enough to motivate his views. In fact, we know very little about those views. It is clear that Insarov has set himself the task of helping the oppressed Bulgarian people, but apart from this he does not express any social or political opinions; neither does he engage in discussions with ideological opponents, as the heroes of the other novels do. The usual confrontation between opposing opinions, such as Lavreckij versus Panšin, or Bazarov versus Pavel Petrović, is missing from On the Eve. There is one possible candidate for such an ideological clash with Insarov: the secretary Kurnatovskij, whom Elena’s parents regard as a prospective husband for their daughter. However, he and Insarov never meet.

Insarov seems to be a man of deeds rather than words, to such an extent that he does not express himself on any subject apart from the situation in Bulgaria. Bersenev describes him as taciturn (52), and we as readers can confirm that he seems never to say more than is strictly necessary. It comes as something of a surprise to us to learn that he translates Bulgarian popular songs; this implies an aesthetic vein in Insarov that is not sustained by any other information we are given about him.

Perhaps a description of Insarov’s deeds could have served as a substitute for this lack of background information, but he is never depicted ‘in action’ either, unless we would include the small battle with his furniture that does not fit into his room the way he planned, or the incident in which he throws a drunken German into a pond for insulting a lady – a seemingly unnecessary and rather odd way of revealing the new hero as a man of action!

The death of Insarov is as mysterious as the man himself. Why does he die before he even reaches Bulgaria? This event is inexplicable on the basis either of the course of events or of the background information. Some critics have interpreted Insarov’s death as Turgenev’s way of escaping the necessity of depicting his hero in action. Dobroljubov argues that Turgenev not only lacked the will to depict an active hero, but “judging by his earlier works would not even be capable of writing a heroic epos” (Dobroljubov 1987: 97). Vladimir Fišer argues along the same lines, but puts the blame firmly on Turgenev’s lack of artistic interest, as opposed to capacity:

The author is deeply interested in how Elena falls in love with Insarov and how she leaves with him, but Insarov’s preparation for future activity is mentioned in passing and the author did not want to describe this activity and killed off the hero (Fišer 1920: 31).

Interestingly, in some of the more ideologically oriented approaches to the novel, Insarov’s death seems to be ignored. Dobroljubov, for example, does not judge the implications of it; Pisarev pays it no attention whatsoever, and Soviet critics hardly ever mention it. Insarov’s death seems to be regarded as irrelevant as far as the (ideological) message of the novel is concerned, or least it is not seen as leading to the conclusion that the new hero is doomed. The same tends to be true also of the Western studies. They treat Insarov’s death mostly as part of the personal tragedy of Elena’s life, and its implications for his position as hero are not dealt with.

41 Unless indicated otherwise, the references to Turgenev’s work in this chapter refer to part VIII of the Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v dvadcati vos’mi tomach.
It is important to realize that the lack of motivation, both for the development of the plot and for the personality of the hero, can only be seen as a weakness in the novel’s design by reasoning from a strictly contiguous model for its make-up; that is, by basing the reading only on the narrative art structure (a prose reading, in Schmid’s terms – 1991: 39). However, if we take into account the fact that the text also makes use of verbal art mechanisms for the presentation of meaning, such apparent lack of motivation simply indicates the necessity for further investigation of the text’s material. As I indicated in Chapter One, such motivational gaps occur in several of the novels. In *On the Eve*, however, its impact is stronger than in the other novels: information about the hero on the contemporary level is so limited, and his death is such a mystery, that lack of motivation creates a real hindrance to our perception.

As I hope to show in the following analysis, the verbal art structure of *On the Eve* offers a network of intratexual and intertextual associations by means of which Insarov is associated with a number of literary figures. Some of these are heroic types, by which I mean figures who can be regarded as representatives of traditional heroes – brave men, willing to die for their cause. These associations develop in congruence with the expectations both of Insarov himself and of several other characters as to the goals he has set himself. Other associations link Insarov with archetypal hero-victims who perish through destructive forces.

4.2 Allusions to various types of heroes

On the basis of the information provided on the narrative art level, Insarov qualifies as a new hero in the sense that his social background (his being a raznočinec), his ideas (his goal of liberating his people by means of violent action) and his character (non-reflective, active and somewhat narrow-minded) differ significantly from those of earlier Turgenevan heroes. As I have already noted above, this ‘newness’ entails a different presentation of the hero. Whereas the characters and fates of Rudin and Lavreckij were describable and explainable on the basis of the well-defined social and cultural strata they belonged to,42 Insarov’s personality and fate lack such a point of reference. This problematic side of the hero’s newness takes an interesting form in the verbal art structure. Insarov is associated with a number of historical heroes and literary heroic types. The effect is that of an evaluation of the type of hero that he is. As we shall see, he is associated with two types of hero – those who are remembered for their great and heroic deeds, and those who are remembered because their fates were characterized by tragic events.

As far as associations with the first type of hero are concerned, I should like to mention a number of observations made by James Woodward. He has noted three allusions to concrete historical heroes with whom Insarov is associated (Woodward 1990: 96, 99). First, while Bersenev, Insarov and Šubin are taking a walk together, the latter proposes a toast to the health of “the Bulgarian king Krum, Chrum or Chrom, who lived almost in the days of Adam” (“в Адамовы времена” - 57). Second, while Bersenev and Elena are discussing the sudden disappearance of Insarov, accompanied by two Bulgarians, supposedly in the interest of their liberation plans, Bersenev declares that the strangers ate an enormous bowl of porridge. When Elena finds this prosaic, Bersenev answers that even “Themistocle ate on the eve of the battle at Salamis” (…) “But then the next day was the battle” – adds Elena (“И Фемистокел ел накануне Саламинского сражения” (…) Так; но зато на другой день и было сражение” - 64). Third, when Insarov has fallen ill for the first time, the doctor who treats him predicts that the outcome of his illness will be: “aut Caesar, aut nihil” (120). Woodward argues that in all

42 Allowing, of course, for the reservations regarding the extent to which Levreckij’s fate is explainable that I made in the previous chapter.
three cases there is a note of hesitation as to whether Insarov can equal these ‘giants’ from history. He concludes that these associations imply that Insarov is an anti-hero, incapable of the great deeds of his predecessors (Woodward 1990: 97).

I do not find the idea of ‘hesitation’ on the part of the speaker very convincing in any of these cases, but it seems especially irrelevant in the case of the king Krum. Here I do not see any doubts as to whether Insarov will be able to act as Krum did; I only sense a devaluation of the importance of this king (and in that, perhaps, a note of irony towards Insarov’s goals). What I do find of importance for my further approach to the question of the heroic images, however, is the fact that all three allusions arise from a premeditated link between Insarov and these great men of history, implying that the speakers think he might be of their caliber.

In addition to these allusions to concrete historical figures, we also find instances in which Insarov is associated with literary heroes: a romantic hero, a hero from eighteenth century heroic poetry and a hero from folk song. These associations are for the most part triggered by Insarov’s own ideas, or by those of his friends, about his heroism. Some of these associations sustain the idea that Insarov might equal the truly great men of literature, but others contradict this idea by associating him with literary cliché images or characters whose fate is tragic. I shall now look at all these associations in more detail.

On the basis of what Bersenev has told Elena about Insarov before she actually meets him, she has developed certain expectations of what he will be like. She imagines him as a type of hero that she apparently knows from the literature she has read: a romantic, fatal hero. The fact that she is influenced by romantic, cliché images is noted by Bersenev: when he tells her what he knows about Insarov’s past, including the fact that his parents were murdered, and Elena asks if Insarov has avenged the murder, Bersenev immediately sees through the nature of her question and answers: “Revenge is taken only in novels, Elena Nikolaevna” (“Мстят только в романах, Елена Николаевна” - 53).

Upon meeting Insarov, Elena realizes that he is a different type of hero:

Insarov indeed made less of an impression on Elena than she had expected, or, speaking more accurately, he made another impression than the one she had expected. She liked his straightforwardness and informality, and she liked his face. But Insarov’s whole being, calm, steady and ordinary, somehow did not match the image she had formed for herself from the stories of Bersenev. Without realizing it herself, Elena had expected something more ‘fatal’ (Инсаров действительно произвел на Елену меньше впечатления, чем она сама ожидала, или, говоря точнее, он произвел на нее не то впечатление, которого ожидала она. Ей понравилась его прямота и непринужденность, и лицо его ей понравилось; но все существо Инсарова, спокойно твердое и обыденно простое, как-то не ладилось с тем образом, который составился у нее в голове от рассказов Берсенева.. Елена, сама того не подозревая, ожидала чего-то более «фатального» - 59).

Another type of hero with which Insarov is associated can be found in eighteenth century Russian heroic poems. Upon introducing Insarov to the Stachov household, Šubin addresses him as “иро́й Инсаро́в” (“иро́й” - 58). He is referring to the Russian ‘heroic poems’, ‘иро́ческие поэ́мы’, or, more likely, to their comical variants in which the heroes are bleak, cardboard imitations of literary examples. Šubin’s implication is clearly negative: he is downplaying the idea of heroism in general, and Insarov’s heroism in particular, by associating Insarov’s stiff and awkwardly-straightforward behaviour with the bad imitations of real heroes that the ‘heroic poems’ present.

The associations of Insarov with important historical figures and literary heroic types open up several possible aspects of his personality, including heroic qualities. As well as these associations, there is another cluster of links between Insarov and certain types of hero, arising
on the basis of intertextual links with a series of folk songs. It is well-known that Turgenev had a special interest in this field. He collected folk songs and studied ethnography and folklore (Ornatskaja 1968: 246). However, remarkably little attention has been paid to the function of references to folklore in his work.43

In On the Eve, there are several references to popular songs. Most important is Insarov’s own interest in Bulgarian popular songs, which he translates into Russian (55). Elena, in her youth, has learnt “a soldier’s song” (“солдатскую песенку” - 34) from a poor girl with whom she was friendly for a while. When Elena, Insarov, Bersenev, Šubin and others take a boat trip, they sing part of “Down Mother Volga” (“Вниз по матушке по Волге” - 72). Finally, while Insarov and Elena are preparing to leave for Bulgaria, Šubin sings the first line of another popular song: “May God Be with You on Your Distant Journey” (“С богом в дальнюю дорогу” - 147). It is primarily the quotation of this last song that entails a number of interesting associations by means of which the double image of Insarov as heroic and tragic figure is sustained.

James Woodward has discussed the implications of the recalling of the song “May God Be with You on Your Distant Journey”. He states that, since it is a funeral song (from Puškin’s collection “Songs of the Western Slavs” (“Песни западных Славян”, 1835)), this quotation can be seen as a prediction of Insarov’s death (Woodward 1990: 107). Indeed, the song indicates that the character of the ‘distant journey’ that Insarov is about to make will be different from what they all expect: it will turn out to be a journey into the realm of the dead. The implication of Insarov’s approaching death is reinforced by the remark that follows immediately upon Šubin’s singing:

He began to sing: ‘May God Be with You on Your Distant Journey’, but stopped. He suddenly felt ashamed and ill at ease. It is a sin to sing where a dead man lies in state, and at this moment, in this room, the past, which he had called to mind, was dying (‘С богом, в дальнюю дорогу’ – запел он и остановился. Ему вдруг стало совесть и неловко. Грешно петь там, где лежит покойник; а в это мгновение, в этой комнате, умирали то прошлое, о котором он упомянул – 147).

Woodward pays no further attention to the song, and thus he restricts the meaning of the quotation to its foreshadowing of Insarov’s death. However, this reference to Pushkin’s “Songs” is not an isolated case. It is the only direct quotation, but as I shall now show there are several other cases of intertextuality between On the Eve and songs from this collection. These references associate Insarov both with the historical or mythical Slavic warriors whose brave deeds are recalled in a number of the songs and with the ‘heroes’ from some of the other songs who are the victims of evil creatures from the mythical world of folklore.

Since we are told that Insarov is a translator of Bulgarian popular songs, it can be assumed that he is familiar with the image of the brave warrior that such songs foster. The goal that he has set himself is similar to the goals of those warriors: he wishes to free his people from their oppressors, just as they did. We can even assume that such songs are an important stimulus for his ideas,44 especially since he speaks to Elena about the position of his people on one occasion

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43 A few studies are available on the role of such references in the short prose: see, for instance, Walter Koschmal’s discussion of “The story of Father Aleksej” (1984), and the analyses of “Mumu” and “The Dog” by Sander Brouwer (1996).

44 Curiously, Insarov fails to follow the example of the songs in the first case of injustice that he is confronted with in his life. His determined separation of personal and national revenge prevents him from avenging the murder of his parents. Insarov declares to Elena that personal revenge would interfere with the plans of liberating the people (67). However, by failing to avenge the murder, Insarov notably deviates from the codes of behaviour followed by the heroes from folklore. Strikingly, it is in the funeral song quoted by Šubin that the
in the same wording that is found in one of the songs. The song in question is “Voivoda Miloš” (“Voevoda Miloš”). Insarov says: “The vile Turks chase us like a herd, they cut our throats...” (“Как стадо гонят нас поганые турки, нас режут...” - 68). In the song it says: “The wolves-Janissaries eat us! They cut our innocent throats” (“Заедают нас волки янычары! / Без винь нам головы режут” - Puškin 1977: III, 282). This provides a good example of how Insarov is influenced by the songs he translates. He has fully adopted their style of expression and, we might reasonably suppose, their line of thought. The song continues by calling upon all brave men to join Voivode Miloš in his planned struggle against the oppressors.

Insarov’s use of these terms links him to this warrior and his followers, and the reference thus sustains the association of Insarov with the type of hero who is known for his brave deeds. The two other cases of intertextuality with the “Songs”, however, associate Insarov with the ill-fated hero. In the first case, the association creates doubt about Insarov’s ability to act heroically; in the second case Insarov is associated with a helpless victim of evil forces.

The first of these two references concerns the image of the wolf, which, as we have just seen, is used in “Voivode Miloš” to denote the violent behavior of the oppressor. The oppressed Balkan inhabitants are depicted as sheep. Insarov has adapted the same symbolism. In a number of other songs, however, the wolf is a positive image denoting the brave warriors themselves as they set about the task of liberating their people. In a similar fashion, in On the Eve, two mysterious Bulgarian visitors who come to ask Insarov for advice are compared to wolves by Bersenev. He relates how “the two of them together ate an enormous bowl of porridge (…) they swallowed it down like wolves” (“они вдвоем целый огромный горшок каши съели. (…) и глотали, словно волки - 63).

On the basis of this pattern, it seems appropriate that Insarov himself should also be compared to a wolf, but in fact he is only ever associated with a sheep – like one of the helpless people. Šubin, who is a sculptor, makes a statue of Insarov as a ram (99), which is described as a paragon of “obtuse pretentiousness, ardor and obstinacy” (“тупая важность, задор, упрямство” – ibid.). This description suggests self-aggrandisement as opposed to real power. Compared to that of the wolf, the valor of the ram is simply appearance. The irony is further-increased by the later description of the ram as the “husband of the sheep with delicate fleeces” (“супруга овец тонкорунных” – ibid.). What Bulgaria needs is a fearless wolf; what is offered to them in the person of Insarov is one of their own kind, a silly ram, caught up in the idea that he can protect his ‘family’.

At a later moment in the novel, on the day before Insarov dies, he is visited by a person whose name again calls to mind the image of the wolf: Lupojarov (158). The first part of the name may be associated with the Latin lupus – ‘wolf’, and this is combined with the Russian jar – reminiscent of the adjective ‘jaryj’, meaning ‘fierce’. Lupojarov’s senseless political babble leaves Insarov completely exhausted, and he lies down for the last time, dying a few hours later. Thus, although Lupojarov does not literally attack Insarov, his arrival and the weakening effect of his visit still call to mind the earlier wolf-sheep imagery and suggest that Insarov, far from being a wolf himself, is ultimately the victim of one.

The second of the two references, this one associating Insarov with a helpless victim of evil forces, is based upon a comparison between a song entitled “A Vlach in Venice” (“Влах в Венеции”) and a number of details from On the Eve, as a result of which Insarov may be associated with the first-person narrator of the song, who perishes in Venice. In the song a “wily Dalmatian” (“лукавый Далмат” - Puškin 1977: 273) advises the hero, Dmitrij, to go to revenge of a son for the murder of his father is described: “Your enemy fled like the wind, but your son killed him” (“Враг твой мчался без оглядки, но твой сын его убил” – Puškin 1977: III, 275).

45 Vlachi or Volochi is the name of an Eastern-Romanic nation that inhabited Walachia and Moldavia.
the “city of the sea” (“морской город” – ibid.), promising him fame and riches. Dmitrij listens to the Dalmatian and settles into his “marble boat” (“в этой мраморной лодке” – idem 274), but he never finds the promised fame and riches. In the final lines of the song, Dmitrij describes his situation as follows: “Here I am like a little insect, swept into the lake by a storm” (“Здесь я точно бедная мурашка/ Занесенная в озеро бурей” – ibid.).

The fate of this hero anticipates that of Insarov. Like the hero in the song, who also shares with Insarov his first name, Insarov is mistaken about his expectations of the future and perishes in Venice (though the Dmitrij in the song only perishes figuratively). Moreover, the figurative image that is used by the Dmitrij of the song to describe his misery recalls the water imagery in On the Eve. Since this imagery plays an important role in the novel, I shall deal with it in detail in the next paragraph, for the moment simply noting those features that are important in the understanding of the comparison between On the Eve and “A Vlach in Venice”. After Insarov has died in Venice, Elena decides to continue their intended journey to Bulgaria with Insarov’s body, planning to bury him there. They are carried on a ship that is owned by a certain Rendič, who, like the demonic figure in the song, happens to be a Dalmatian (163). On the journey, the ship is caught up in a storm, and there are later rumours that it has been shipwrecked. Thus, it is implied that Insarov’s body is literally blown into the sea by a gale. The fact that the hero of the song is swept into a lake rather than the sea does not undermine the comparison: in the night during which Insarov dies, Elena dreams of a familiar pond that is transformed into the sea. The associations between the situations in which both Dmitrijs meet their ends support the idea of Insarov as tragic, fateful hero.

These references to the “Songs of the Western Slaves” sustain what I have called the double image of Insarov as both heroic warrior and victim, a tragic hero whose fate it is to fail and perish. In On the Eve, Insarov can also be associated with the victim of two typically evil creatures from folklore – the water nymph, and the vampire. These creatures occur in a number of the “Songs” too, but for the most part the associations with such creatures in On the Eve arise through a more general process centred on their key features, and I shall therefore deal with them now in a separate paragraph.

4.3 The hero as victim

On the basis of the verbal art structure’s associative strings, it is possible to look upon Insarov as the victim of both a water nymph and a vampire. I shall discuss these two creatures in order. The motif of the water nymph, or rusalka (русалка), is introduced as early as the first chapter of On the Eve. Walking on the bank of the river, Šubin tells his friend Bersenev that the water seems to beckon them, and points out that the ancient Greeks would probably have concluded that this was the work of water nymphs trying to lure people into the water (16). In reply, Bersenev remarks that Russia has her own water nymphs: rusalki. In Russian folklore these creatures (mostly girls who have drowned) are thought to live in or near the water, and to have the power of enchanting people and luring them into the water.46 However, it is not only the image of the rusalka in folklore that determines the associations that are conjured up by the mention of these water nymphs. They also provide a familiar topic for early nineteenth century European literature, for instance in Puškin’s poem “Rusalka” (“Русалка” - 1819) and Heine’s “Das Loreley-Lied” (1823). The mention of these creatures would have immediate connotations of death by drowning, the inevitable consequence when a man falls under the influence of an enchanting ‘water woman’.

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46 See the entry on rusalka in Mify narodov mira, II, 188.
The *rusalka* associations in *On the Eve* are sustained principally by the connection between water and enchantment, and by the implication that Insarov’s falling in love with Elena is itself a process of enchantment. As far as the first connection is concerned, it is important to note that, whenever water occurs as an element of the spatial setting, it is associated with enchantment. This pattern is initiated in the opening scene where, as I have said, Šubin associates the sight of the river with the enchanting influence of water nymphs. Later, when all the main characters, including Insarov and Elena, take a trip to the ponds near Caricynskij castle, the idea of enchantment is again called forth. Jane Costlow has pointed out that Zojja, the lady companion of Elena, takes the shape of an enchanting siren during a singing performance while they are at the ponds, and her singing seems to cast a spell on her public (Costlow, 1990: 80). Costlow treats this scene as evidence of a possible association between Insarov and Aeneas, but for my purposes it is sufficient to stress the effect of enchantment in connection with the setting of the ponds. The interconnection between water and enchantment can be seen again in the final chapters of the novel from the arrival of Elena and Insarov in Venice. This city of water is described as enchanted in every respect. I will return to the connotations of Venice in paragraph 4.5. For the moment, it suffices to establish that whenever water occurs in *On the Eve* as part of the setting, it is associated with enchantment.

Within this setting, Insarov is, by association, a victim of a *rusalka* in that his falling in love with Elena is associated with enchantment. The circumstances under which he acknowledges his love for her are very curious. He is planning to leave the countryside (where the Stachov family is staying) and return to Moscow because he fears that his feelings for Elena will hinder him from devoting himself to the cause of liberating the Bulgarian people. He wants to leave without meeting Elena again, but he stumbles upon her in the forest near a chapel where she has been seeking shelter from a thunderstorm. While waiting for the weather to improve, she has met an old woman who identified herself as a sorceress (“я та же ворожея” - 91). This woman has declared that she knows about Elena’s worries about love, and promised to “carry away all her misfortunes” (“унесу все твое горе” – ibid.). When Elena sees Insarov, she calls him and, when Insarov refuses to explain his decision, she declares her love for him. As Irene Masing-Delic has pointed out, this declaration of love has an enchanting effect on Insarov (Masing-Delic 1987: 64). He immediately cries out her name and embraces her, bursting into tears. Elena’s words, we are told, have the effect of an “immediate transformation of the whole man” (“мгновенного преобразования всего человека” - 93).

From this point onwards Insarov behaves like a man who is enchanted whenever Elena is near him. When she comes to his apartment, he looks at her “as if enchanted” (“как очарованный” – 111). He seems almost deprived of his own will while Elena determines what he is to do. She gives him orders – “Sit down” (“сядь” – 111), “take off my gloves” (“сними с меня перчатки” – ibid.) – and declares herself “the mistress of the house” (“Ведь я здесь хозяйка”- ibid.). He falls down on his knees before her (110), and when Elena sits down on the divan he sits down on the floor, at her feet (111). During a later visit, he even desires to kiss Elena’s feet (130). Moreover, Insarov’s own words suggest that Elena has power over him: “every one of your words lays unbreakable ties onto me” (“какие неокрупимые цепи кладет на меня каждое твое слово” - 128).

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47 I do not find Costlow’s idea that the plot of *On the Eve* echoes Virgil’s *Aeneid* very convincing. Of course, on a very general level, a comparison of the heroes of both stories is possible: both pursue a certain goal for the benefit of their homeland and are confronted with the possibility that love for a woman will keep them from reaching their goal. However, there are no concrete allusions to Virgil’s work in *On the Eve*. Another point is that a reminder of sirens is more logically connected to another classical work: the *Odyssey*. Once Odysseus has successfully sailed past the sirens, their enchanting powers no longer exist, and thus they have no relevance in the *Aeneid*. 
The ominous connotations of enchantment have already been hinted at in the opening scene of the novel, even before the mention of the *rusalka*. In the description of the environment, enchantment and death are set alongside one another and almost identified with one another. We are told that “the tall stalks [of grass – MO] stood motionless, as if enchanted; as if enchanted, as if dead, the small clusters of yellow flowers hung on the lower branches of the linden tree” (“высокие стебельки стояли неподвижно, как очарованные; как очарованные, как мертвы, висели маленькие гвозды жёлтых цветов на нижних ветках липы” – 11). Thus, a close connection is forged between enchantment and death, a connection which will be maintained until Insarov’s fate as symbolic victim of a water nymph reaches its inevitable conclusion: once he is enchanted, death is inescapable.

The *rusalka* motif is also sustained by a number of associations with drowning. The most conspicuous instance is the one in which Insarov throws the drunken German into one of the Caricynskij ponds, and the German nearly drowns, but the motif of drowning has already been introduced during preparations for this trip when Elena’s mother, in need of a partner to replace her husband who has refused to take part, decides to invite her brother-in-law, Uvar Ivanović, on the basis that “a drowning man will cling to a straw” (“утопающий и за соломинку хватается” - 69). At this point, Insarov appears more likely to be the cause of someone else’s drowning than to drown himself, but all of this will change when he and Elena arrive in Venice. The fact that Insarov dies in that watery city makes it possible to look upon Venice as the locus of his symbolic drowning. This idea is further enhanced by the later suggestion of his dead body having been washed away at sea during a shipwreck. The narration of events actually breaks off at the point where Elena and the deceased Insarov are caught up in this storm on the way to Bulgaria, but in the epilogue, which is set five years later, the narrator mentions rumours of their ship having been wrecked.

As I have indicated, Insarov can also be represented by association as the victim of a vampire (упырь or вурдалак). In Russian folklore, this is a dead man who leaves his grave at night to suck people's blood. In the “Songs of the western Slavs”, such a figure occurs in no less than three songs. The description of the vampire’s activities and their effect on his victims makes for an interesting comparison to some details about Insarov. In the song called “Marko Jakubović” (“Марко Якубович”), for example, a vampire sucks the blood of Marko’s son. The boy “started to lose weight (...) he stopped running and romping” (“стал худеть (...) перестал он бегать и резвиться” - Puškin III, 277). A doctor is called, and he soon makes a diagnosis: “Look at his white neck: do you see a small, bleeding wound? That is the teeth of a vampire, believe me” (“Посмотри на белую его шею: Ведь ли кровавую ранку?/ Это зуб вурдалака, поймешь мне” – ibid.).

There are several parallels between the boy’s situation and that of Insarov. He also has a wound in his neck (“у него рана на шее” - 84), and during the course of the novel he too pales

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48 This saying takes a literal turn when the German is in the water: after disappearing under the surface, the German reappears and clings to a trunk near the water side (76).

49 There are two Russian words which are used in this context: ‘упырь’ (упырь) and ‘вурдалак’ (вурдалак). They can be used for a dead man who appears under certain circumstances (at night, sometimes only at full moon) looking for victims among the living. However, strictly speaking the first is a vampire and the second a werewolf (see the entries on упырь and вурдалак in Mify narodov mira, II, 549 and I, 242-3 respectively). It is noted in the *Mify* that the vampire-type is sometimes (incorrectly) denoted as ‘вурдалак’ (II, 549). It is further explained that Puškin introduced the term ‘вурдалак’ into Russian literature, thereby altering the original West-Slavic term ‘волкодлак’ волкодлак (I, 243). In one of the “Songs of the Western Slavs”, entitled ‘Vurdalak’, the reference is indeed to the werewolf-type, but in the text of the song this creature is also called ‘упырь’. In one of the other songs, “Marko Jakubović”, the reference is clearly to a vampire, but it is called ‘вурдалак’. It thus seems that the two are not clearly differentiated in Puškin’s text.
and loses weight. This similarity between Insarov and a victim of a vampire is reinforced by the repeated motif of sucking in the novel. This motif has been examined by James Woodward. Although, as I have already noted, Woodward does not pay attention to the possibility of connecting them with folklore, his observations are of interest for the association of Insarov with a victim of a vampire.

The motif of sucking, like that of the *rusalki*, is introduced in the opening scene of *On the Eve* where Šubin, lying on his belly in the grass, tries to explain to Bersenev the self-will of the world of the insects. He uses Turgenev’s favourite metaphor of the mosquito that sits on a person’s nose and sucks his blood. Some chapters later, in the description of Elena’s youth, the motif reappears, also with reference to insects, as we are told that Elena rescues flies that are being sucked by spiders (33). Her father is annoyed by her activities and points out the one-sidedness of her pity in depriving the spider of its food: “Now, have yourself bitten, if you are such a good girl” (“Ну, теперь дай себя покусать, коли ты такая добрая” – ibid.). Woodward suggests that Elena takes the opposite position in her relationship with Insarov: far from resuing the victim of the sucking, she sucks the victim herself. He argues that she sucks away Insarov’s strength, as a consequence of which Insarov grows feeble as she blooms (Woodward 1990: 105). He bases this on the description of Elena and Insarov in Venice, where Elena’s “whole body had blossomed and her hair, so it seemed, had thickened and lay more exuberantly around her white forehead and fresh cheeks” (“Все ее тело расцвело, волосы, казалось, пышнее и гуще лежали вдоль белого лба и свежих щек” – 149), while Insarov “had grown thin and pale” (“похудел, побледнел” – ibid.). For Woodward, this is part of his theory that one of the main themes of *On the Eve* is Elena’s inner battle between egoism and altruism. He suggests that Elena strives for altruism at the beginning of the novel and is therefore attracted to Insarov, who appears to be altruism incarnate, but that the experience of love develops her egoistic side, as a consequence of which she destroys Insarov (Woodward 1990: 88-90).

I will not go into the question of Elena’s movement from altruism to egoism. For me, the image of sucking in *On the Eve* is primarily a symbol of the destructive effects of love. Such an interpretation is in tune with the images of stinging or biting in the context of male-female relationships that recur in other works by Turgenev. I will mention a number of examples. The most closely related to what we see in *On the Eve* occurs in the short story “Phantoms” (“Призраки” – 1864), where the first-person narrator tells of a series of encounters with a ghostlike woman, Ellis, who takes him to different places on nightly flights. She appears to be some kind of vampire, usurping the life of the storyteller in order to gain more strength for herself. Barely visible the first time he sees her, she becomes more lifelike and gains more color with each encounter, while the narrator, in his turn, weakens. On two occasions, we are told that her kiss feels like a sting (IX, 85, 104). She is also given snake-like associations: as she kisses the hero, it feels as though she is pecking him (“словно клонула его в губы” - X, 28). Later, Ergunov is stabbed by Kolibri’s hairpin, upon which he cries out: “Why, that is a real dagger, a sting” (“Это цепый кинжал, это жало” - X, 32). He makes two further remarks that confirm her association with a stinging insect: after the hairpin incident he concludes: “You are a wasp” (“ты оса” - X, 33), and when he hears her name for the first time he is mistaken about the animal it designates and asks: “Wasn’t it in Africa that such insects are found?” (“Это,
помнишь, в Африке бывают такие насекомые” - X, 24). She later gives the hero a sleep-inducing drug, upon which he is robbed and nearly killed.

In “The Insect” (“Насекомое” – 1878), one of Turgenev’s Poems in Prose, a stinging insect functions both as the direct cause of death and as a symbol of death itself, primarily on the basis that death comes unexpectedly to the person concerned. A grotesque insect flies into a room full of people. Everyone is upset by its being there apart from one young man, who seems not to notice it. The insect stings him on the forehead, and the young man immediately dies (XIII, 173). I shall return to the issue of insect imagery, including its connotations of impending death, in paragraph 4.6. In the meantime, let us return to the imagery of biting and stinging.

In all of these stories, the destructive nature of the influence of the women on the male protagonists is illustrated by the image of stinging or biting. This image conveys the notion of a predator and its prey – of the male protagonist confronted with the threat of death through the destructive influence of the woman. In On the Eve, both the destructive love and the impending death associations play a role. In the light of the examples mentioned, it is possible to conclude that the motif of sucking and the association of Insarov as victim of a vampire combine to signify his death through destructive love. It must surely be admitted, however, that Elena is less evidently the agent of Insarov’s destruction than are the female protagonists of “Phantoms” and “The Story of Lieutenant Ergunov”. There are no associations of Elena with a stinging or biting figure. What is more, she lacks the negative characteristics of Varvara Pavlovna and Irina – fatal women who consciously play with the feelings of men. If we have to see Elena in this role, I would conclude that she performs it involuntarily – that she is the instrument of fatal love.

The associations of Insarov as a victim of a rusalka and a vampire are not the only motifs to imply that he is the victim of the fatal influence of love. There is another important motif connecting Insarov’s destruction with the influence of love, and that is the link between him and an archetypal victim of fatal love: Tristan.

4.4 Tristan

The motif of Tristan has been explored in an interesting article by Irene Masing-Delic (1987). I shall begin by outlining her approach and conclusions, after which I shall explain why I find her approach too narrowly-formulated, and try to expand its range. This expansion will reveal the place of the Tristan image in the motif structure of the novel as a whole. At the same time, through the expansion, it will become apparent that the Tristan theme in On the Eve is one expression of a much broader current in Western culture whereby the image of Tristan has attained iconic status as representing the mysterious interconnection between love and death.

Woodward does find such an association in Elena’s “staring” at Insarov on the way back from the Caricyno ponds: “Елена didn’t close her eyes; she kept them fixed on the dark figure of Insarov” (“Елена не закрывала глаз: она не сводила их с тёмной фигуры Инсарова” – 78). Woodward argues that this is the “stare of a spider fixing on its prey” (Woodward 1990: 104). I find this idea far-fetched: the Russian text does not convey the implication of fixation, but apart from that this single sentence is not enough to suggest a connection between Elena and a spider. As I have said, there are no more direct associations of Elena to a stinging or biting figure. Moreover, Woodward definitely pushes his point too far by adding in a note that, in this connection, it is also noteworthy that Elena “listens to Insarov with absorbed attention”.

The destructiveness and fatality of love is a frequent theme in Turgenev’s stories, especially the ‘mysterious tales’ (“The song of triumphant love” (“Песнь торжествующей любви” - 1881) and “Клара Мили” (“Клара Милли” -1883)) and Poems in Prose. In the novels the relationship between love and destruction is much less overt, and tends to be suggested only at the associative level of the novels. Smoke is the single exception (see Chapter 6).
Masing-Delic notes a number of parallels between the characters and fates of Insarov and Tristan, the hero of Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*, published in 1859. Of the parallels that she notes, the following three are most important.

First, Insarov’s life story has much in common with Tristan’s: both are orphans; both have been forced by circumstances to live abroad, and both have dedicated their lives to heroic deeds. In addition, they each bear the marks of violent confrontations: Tristan has been severely wounded by one of his opponents, while Insarov has a scar on his neck (84).

Second, the respective scenes in which the heroes and heroines declare their love show conspicuous parallels. In both cases, the circumstances of the declarations are somewhat magical: Tristan and Isolde fall in love after drinking a magical love potion; Elena and Insarov are brought together immediately after the old sorceress has promised to take away all Elena’s misfortunes (91). According to Masing-Delic, the effect of the meeting for both pairs is a transformation of their personalities, especially those of the heroes. She observes that both men recover the emotions that they have buried long before, with both heroes exclaiming the names of their loved ones, and Insarov even bursting into tears and feeling a gratefulness that “crushed his solid soul” (“разбило в пях его твердую душу” – 94).

Third, in both *Tristan und Isolde* and *On the Eve*, ships and the sea play important roles. Masing-Delic mentions the facts that the death scenes of both heroes are set beside the sea, where each is waiting for a ship. Tristan awaits the ship that will bring Isolde to him. Insarov’s beloved Elena is already with him, but he is waiting for a ship to take him to his other beloved: his homeland, Bulgaria. In each case, a close friend (Tristan’s servant Kurnewal; Insarov’s beloved Elena) is on the lookout. The symbolism of ships and the sea is of great importance in *On the Eve*, and I shall return to it later in this paragraph.

It is not altogether clear why Masing-Delic chose to discuss the theme of Tristan in *On the Eve* with reference to Wagner’s opera. The only convincing reason would seem to be that the opera was first published at about the time when Turgenev began his novel, but there is no real evidence that Turgenev was at all familiar with the opera when he wrote *On the Eve.*

There is in fact no reason why we should assume that Turgenev based his use of the Tristan motif on Wagner’s opera at all. Most of the parallels that Masing-Delic mentions are also found in other Tristan texts. I think that it is more rewarding to deal with the Tristan motif in *On the Eve*.

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52 Masing-Delic considers it likely that Turgenev heard of Wagner’s preparations for the opera through Pauline Viardot, one of Turgenev’s closest relations and herself a singer. In December 1858, Viardot spent some time in the house of Wagner’s close friend, Liszt. During the summer of 1859, Turgenev stayed at the Viardot’s house for two weeks, before leaving for Spasskoe to write *On the Eve*. Masing-Delic surmises that Viardot discussed Wagner’s opera with Turgenev, since she was preparing for a concert during which the second act was to be performed. The concert took place in February 1860; Madame Viardot sang the part of Isolde while Wagner himself took the role of Tristan.

These facts leave unanswered the question as to whether Turgenev was familiar with the actual text of Wagner’s *Tristan*. No mention is made in Turgenev’s correspondence either of Tristan and Isolde or of Wagner’s preparation of the opera. Turgenev and Wagner did not meet one another until 1863, and Turgenev could not possibly have seen the opera performed before the publication of *On the Eve* since *Tristan und Isolde* did not receive its first performance until 1865. The possibility that Turgenev somehow heard of Wagner’s activities (perhaps through his contacts with Pauline Viardot, as Masing-Delic suggests) may be considerable, but that is no reason to assume that he had read the actual text of the opera.

Although we shall never be able to prove this issue one way or the other, there are one or two further points that I should like to add. Although Wagner had finished the text of the opera in 1857, it was not published until two years later, after he had completed the music. We cannot exclude the possibility that the text was circulated during that time. We know, for example, that immediately after finishing the text Wagner handed a copy to Hans von Bülow, who took it with him to Berlin. However, it seems at least unlikely that Turgenev became familiar with it this way. Bearing in mind that the idea of the novel first came to Turgenev in 1853-54, and that he worked on the plan for the novel during 1858 and the first months of 1859, it seems improbable that such a fundamental motif as that of Tristan would have been inserted only after the summer of 1859.
*Eve* on a broader basis – not as intertextuality with the concrete text of Wagner’s opera, but as an example of what I have labeled intertextuality with a cultural archetype (see 1.4). The references to Tristan in both *On the Eve* and Wagner’s opera are part of a much larger collection of texts, all of which address the idea of the fatality of love expressed through the image of Tristan, which thus functions as an icon of fatal love. Such an approach to the theme of Tristan will greatly enhance our understanding of its implications concerning the hero. To illuminate this point, I shall now provide a short survey of some important philosophical ideas that arose in Europe during the eighteen forties and fifties, and through which the notion of the fatality of love developed.

The waning of Romanticism was accompanied by an increasingly pessimistic understanding of life. The Romantic idea of the genius who experiences utter loneliness since he is too grand to be understood, and the longing of the Romantic poet to leave the limitations of earthly life and become part of a higher mystery, were transformed into a decreasing appreciation and expectation of life itself. It seems hardly coincidental that Schopenhauer became very popular at this time. His most famous work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, had first been published in 1819 but received little attention at that time; the second edition of 1844 had an enormous impact, and a third appeared in 1859.

Schopenhauer declares that the only way to find true happiness is through the elimination of the will to live (‘Verneinung des Willens zum Leben’). He argues that life brings nothing but suffering because man is striving for happiness even though it is unattainable in life. When we give up the will to live, we will also stop suffering. Both Turgenev and Wagner were influenced by Schopenhauer in their philosophical ideas. Along with many of their contemporaries, they felt that Schopenhauer voiced thoughts that they had themselves developed on a less conscious level. It is noteworthy that Wagner and Turgenev read Schopenhauer at approximately the same time – 1853-54. Not only that, it was during this period that Wagner began planning his opera *Tristan und Isolde*, and Turgenev had the initial idea for *On the Eve*. Wagner himself even explicitly linked the conception of his opera and his reading of Schopenhauer, stating in his memoirs that his decision to compose *Tristan und Isolde* was partly due to the serious mood that (‘ernste Stimmung’) Schopenhauer had awakened in him (Wagner 1976: 523-4).

With reference to the concept of love, the predominant philosophical attitude of the eighteen forties and fifties can be labelled Romantic Pessimism (Singer 1984: xi). What Singer is referring to is the movement in (late) romanticism that denies the attainability of real love on earth. This does not lead to the conclusion that love is an inferior emotion, however; on the contrary, it affirms that love is such a strong emotion that it destroys life, together with its earthly restrictions. The full implications of this can be sensed as early as Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, in which a romantic-pessimistic concept of love is coupled with the idea of inevitable self-destruction.

In his classical work *Love in the Western world*, Denis de Rougemont claims that this concept of ‘fatal love’ dates back to the twelfth century. During that period the Troubadours of southern France began to sing of what was then a new concept of love – later to be given the
One of the earliest and most influential of the songs they sang was about Tristan and Isolde. De Rougemont claims that these troubadour songs about Tristan lie at the root of what he calls the Tristan myth, the essence of which is the idea that “passion is linked with death” (De Rougemont 1983: 21). According to him, this myth, in various forms, has pervaded the cultural range of Western thought and literature ever since.

Irving Singer has rightly argued that De Rougemont overestimated the influence of the Tristan myth. Eight centuries of development in Western culture and literature are too complex to assume so strong a constant influence. The notion of courtly love does not necessarily imply fatality. Although it remains true that such lovers might come to favor the thought of dying on the grounds that in death they can finally be united, that is not quite the same thing. The idea of the destructiveness of love, according to Singer, is restricted to the period of Romantic Pessimism. Singer correctly concludes that much of what constitutes De Rougemont’s concept of fatal love is actually derived by him from the nineteenth century and then projected back to earlier periods, and De Rougemont’s valuation of the ‘Tristan myth’ falls into this category. His idea that this myth is a celebration of the fatality of love is successfully applicable only to the nineteenth century reception of Tristan. It was only then that the story of Tristan and Isolde met heightened interest and began to be identified as an emblem of love’s fatality.

To fit this emblem better, the story had to be considerably altered, and Wagner’s opera version provides a good example of the kind of transformation the story underwent. Wagner left out everything that was more-or-less directly associated with the social context of the lives of the lovers, including their strong wish to conform to the norms of their society. He reduced the story of Tristan and Isolde to one of fatal love indeed, the kind of love that takes control of people and not only makes them unafraid of death but even creates in them an active longing for it. There is no such longing in the earlier versions of Tristan. Although the lovers feel that life itself is keeping them apart, and although they long to be together as one, they never search for death as actively as they do in Wagner’s opera. The opera is so constructed that every scene leads inextricably on towards the dramatic climax of the ‘Liebestod’. An interesting example of this unbreakable connection between love and death, almost identifying them as one and the same thing, is the scene in which Tristan and Isolde drink the love-potion. In older versions of the story, they drink it accidentally, not knowing what its effect will be, but in Wagner’s version they drink it on purpose, believing it to be a death potion. Thus the ‘procedure’ of falling in love is equated to that of dying.

From the above survey of the cultural and literary context of the motif of Tristan, especially in the nineteenth century, it follows that the occurrence of the Tristan myth in On the Eve signals a romantic-pessimistic notion of love. Masing-Delic’s treatment of it as a case of intertextuality with Wagner’s opera conceals the broader cultural context. One disadvantage of her approach is that the more she generalises about what kind of person Tristan represents, the more she must find herself at odds with the ‘concept’ of Tristan described above. Masing-Delic calls Insarov an “archetypal Tristan figure”, but her concept of what that is seems to be based more on the concrete text in which she sees it embodied (that is, On the Eve) than on an evaluation of the cultural archetype into which the figure of Tristan has developed since his first appearance in literature during the twelfth century.

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54 This term was invented by the medievalist Gaston Paris in 1883 (Capellanus 1957 vi). Courtly love does not really concern what was ‘customary at court’, but denotes a code of conduct between men and women in which the man submitted to the will of his beloved.

55 His examples of its appearance in Western literature include Romeo and Juliet and La Nouvelle Héloïse.

56 The most famous early versions of Tristan and Isolde, those of Béroul and Gottfried von Strassburg, are either unfinished or have come to us with the end missing. The way Wagner turned the end into such a dramatic and inevitable climax underlines the fact that it is only his interpretation of the story.
Masing-Delic describes the “archetypical Tristan figure” as “a hero who discovers that the heroic virtues of honor, duty and valor possess but a secondary reality in comparison with the reality of love” (Masing-Delic 1987: 61), but whether this is really to be conceived as the most central and typical feature of the story of Tristan must be open to question. It is certainly the case that Tristan is transformed from a hero whose life is committed to the service of a king, on the one hand, to a man driven by passion for a woman that can only destroy his loyalty to the king on the other. Masing-Delic rightly considers this transformation in Tristan to have parallels in On the Eve, and the otherwise inexplicable change in the characterization of Insarov can indeed be illuminated through the suggestion of parallels between him and Tristan. However, it is the general rule in Turgenev’s novels that duty and individual happiness cannot be combined. Turgenev’s heroes invariably find themselves heading for destruction as soon as they try to establish personal happiness, usually through love, and therefore this aspect of Insarov’s character cannot in itself be considered a mark of his similarity to Tristan. Thus, Masing-Delic’s interpretation of the essence of the Tristan figure seems to be defined against the background of the Turgenevan novel that is to be compared with it.

In addition, Masing-Delic suggests that it is a feature of an archetypal Tristan to go through a process of liberation, the final stage of which is reached at the moment of dying. She claims that Insarov is “predisposed to experience life as an illness”, the illness being “yearning”, from which he can be freed only through death (Masing-Delic 1987: 66), and she tells that Insarov receives this “insight” (that he can be freed from life by dying) during his stay in Venice (ibid.). However, there are no indications that Insarov has any such thoughts. Moreover, there is no positive evaluation of death in On the Eve: as my further analysis of the novel will show, death is presented there rather as a destructive force, wiping out man’s desires. This idea is more in accordance with Turgenev’s usual depiction of death, and his expression of thoughts about the role of death, in his work.

On the basis of Turgenev’s understanding of death as a negative and destructive force, I suggest that the image of Tristan in On the Eve should be regarded as a symbol of the fatality of love, and the interconnection of love and death, in accordance with the romantic-pessimistic notion of love in the eighteen forties and fifties. In On the Eve, the interconnection between love and death develops gradually as the novel progresses. The beginning of the novel breathes the atmosphere of life and positive expectations about love. The opening scene is a crucial one in helping to establish this atmosphere, set as it is on the riverbank on a hot day, where the secondary characters Bersenev and Šubin listen to the “ardent sound of life” (“горячий звук жизни” – 11). In this setting, they discuss what they believe to be the essence of nature and the meaning of love. However, their statements contradict the atmosphere in which the conversation takes place as they express the central idea of Romantic Pessimism. To Bersenev’s statement that in nature there “is life and death” (“и жизнь и смерть” – 13), Šubin immediately replies: “In love there is life and death as well” (“И в любви жизнь и смерть” – ibid.). Thus, at the very beginning of the novel, we are given the theory that will be tested (and the truth of which will be demonstrated) during the remainder of the work – that love may be the ultimate fulfillment of life but inevitably also brings about separation from life.

Although Šubin makes this prophetic statement, he does not seem to understand the implications of it. From the rest of the discussion, it is apparent that he looks upon love as something that is mainly connected with life and the will to live, as most of us do. The feeling of expectation imparted by the sight of a forest in spring is, in Šubin’s opinion, no more than the “thirst for love and happiness” (“Жажда любви, жажда счастья” - 13). The idea of love being connected to happiness is what we might call the optimistic counterpart of Romantic Pessimism. The possibility of a positive influence of love is negated by associations of love with death in, for example, the connotations of enchantment, the rusalka and vampire.
associations, and the motif of Tristan, as we have seen. Moreover, at the point where Elena and Insarov acknowledge their love, allusions to death begin to arise. Elena feels a sudden “deadly burden” pressing on her chest (“мертвенньным бременем” – 102). When she tries to write letters to Insarov, her words seem “dead” (ibid.). When Elena leaves for Bulgaria, her mother laments her absence “as if she were dead” (“причитала над ней, как над мертвую” – 145. Šubin, among the company that has gathered in Insarov’s room to say goodbye and sensing that the company feels uncomfortable in that atmosphere, tries to sing but stops in shame because the whole experience reminds him of mourning: “it is a sin to sing where a dead man is lying; and at that moment, in that room, the past was dying” (“Грешно петь там, где лежит покойник; а в это мгновение, в этой комнате, умирало (…) прошлое” – 147). The departure of Insarov and Elena is thus associated with their deaths, and indeed their ensuing trip takes the form of a symbolic trip into the realm of the dead. Their first port of call is Venice – a symbol of death; then, in Elena’s dream, scenes from reality are transformed into images of impending death, and, finally, the supposed shipwreck is a symbolic realization of death. I shall now explain all of this in more detail.

The associations of Venice as a place of death depend both on allusions to death that are similar to those which I mentioned above and on a much more broadly defined activation of the literary image of Venice. This last aspect is too complicated to deal with here and is therefore placed in a separate paragraph. At this moment I will focus on the allusions to death that are prominent in the Venice scenes. When Elena and Insarov are walking by the seaside, they pass trees that the locals call ‘tubercularee trees’ (“чахоточными деревцами”, 149) because they die each year. When Insarov and Elena visit the opera, Verdi’s La Traviata is being performed, and the begging voice of the dying Violetta deeply hurts Elena: “Lascia mi vivere...morir si giovane!” (155). Even in the middle of a lyric description of the beauty of Venice in spring, the possibility of decay and looming death comes up: “Venice is dying (...), its inhabitants will tell you” (“Венеция умирает [...] - говорят вам её жители” – 151). Finally, shortly before Insarov’s death, Elena has a dream that is full of deathly symbols. I discuss this dream in more detail below.

All the associations in On the Eve between water and the threat of death culminate in the Venetian setting in which Insarov dies. I have already discussed the link between water, enchantment and the threat of drowning in connection with the destructive powers of water nymphs. I will now focus on another aspect of water imagery in the novel: that of water (especially the sea) and “floating in a boat” as symbols of impending death. Such imagery occurs in several of Turgenev’s works. In On the Eve it is activated as we approach the end of the novel, in Venice, the ultimate city of water. Elena and Insarov have a hotel room with a view of the Laguna. Elena, who is unable to sleep owing to Insarov’s illness, is sitting near the window. Everything she sees is cloaked in negative features owing to the fact that the weather has become stormy. Even the ships on the water are described in negative terms: “To the left, the masts and the yards of the ships and the pipes of the steamers colored black. Here and there a half-lowered sail hung down like an injured wing” (“налево чернели мачты и реи кораблей, трубы пароходов; Кое-где висел, как большое крыло, наполовину подобранный парус” – 156). There is a sense in which the environment itself is sick, just as Insarov is. The image of the injured wing is then transposed to a real bird, which adds to the negative impression:

She caught sight of a white gull high above the water; it had probably been scared by a fisher and flew silently with an uncertain flight, as though looking for a place where it might land. (…) The gull started circling on one spot, folded its wings and, as if it had been shot, dropped down with a lamenting scream somewhere far behind a dark ship (она увидела высоко над водой белую чайку; ее, вероятно, вспугнул рыбак, и она летела молча, нервным полетом, как бы высматривая
Elena falls asleep and has a dream in which the sea acts as a destructive force. The dream opens with a symbolic conversion of the earlier trip to Caricynskij castle. Elena floats in a boat on one of ponds, together with a number of other people she does not recognize. They do not speak or move, and the boat travels without anyone rowing. The quietness of the scene reminds us of the description of the pond during the actual trip, in which it is stressed that the surface of the pond is as smooth as if it were made out of glass (71). In the dream, the pond suddenly changes into a sea with “enormous (…) waves” (“огромные волны” – 161) that rock the boat. Something “roaring and threatening” comes to the surface (“что-то гремящее, грозное” – ibid.). At the sight of this, the other people in the boat jump up, and start screaming and waving their hands, and then the setting suddenly changes. I shall deal with the second part of the dream shortly, but first I should like to concentrate on the implications of this part.

The image of the sea as it occurs in this dream is as a threatening force. As soon as the pond has changed into a sea, the people in the boat are in danger: the boat is rocked by waves and threatened by an unidentified power. The people’s reaction is one of panic. In Turgenev’s work, the sea is often presented in this way – as a symbol of death threatening to destroy man’s life, and V. Toporov has compiled a number of examples (Toporov 1998). Two of these instances are of particular interest for our understanding of the image of the sea in On the Eve. The first is a depiction of the destruction of the world in “End of days” (“Конец света” – 1878), one of the Poems in Prose. In this sketch the hero dreams that the earth is destroyed by the sea:

Along the entire horizon something started moving; some sort of small round hills began to rise and fall. ‘That is...the sea’, we all realized at the same moment. It will drown us all in a moment. (...) It grew, grew tremendously (...) everything around started trembling (...) this was the end of everything...I wanted to grab my companions, but we were already crushed, buried, drowned, washed away by this coal black, icy, roaring gulf!” (I вот вдоль всей далекой земной грань зашевелилось что-то, стали подниматься и падать какие-то небольшие круглые бугорки. ‘Это - море’ – подумалось всем нам в одно и то же мгновение. – Оно сейчас нас всех затопит (...) оно растет, растет громадно (...). Все задрожало вокруг (...). Конец всему! (...) Я хотел было ухватиться за товарищей, но мы уже все раздавлены, погребены, потоплены, унесены той, как чернила черной, льдистой, грохочущей волной! – XIII, 154-5).

The sea is thus regarded as the force of ultimate destruction.

The second image has more concrete links to Elena’s dream in On the Eve. It is found in “Spring Torrents” (Вешние воды – 1872). The hero imagines that he is sitting in a boat and

57 This scene strongly resembles that in one of the Poems in Prose called “Without a Nest” (“Без гнезда” – 1878). A bird in search of a place to rest is flying over the sea, but she finds nowhere to land. “The poor bird grew tired...her wing beats became weaker (...) Finally she folded her wings and dropped into the sea with a protracted moan. A gulf swallowed her... and moved on, roaring as madly as before” (“Устала бедная птица...Слабеет взмах ее крылья (...) Она сложила наконец крылья... и с протяжным стоном пала в море. Волна ее проглотила ... и покатилась вперед, по-прежнему бессмысленно шумя” – XIII, 205). This scene is illustrative of Turgenev’s conception of the sea as a destructive force. It resembles the general image of nature in its absolute indifference to the suffering of the individual. See further in the main text.

58 Of course, the sea as a symbol of death is by no means confined to Turgenev’s work; in fact it is more or less universal. The sea is unpredictable and destructive. Its mysterious black depths are thought to hold all kinds of monsters. Moreover, the crossing of a sea (like the crossing of a river) is a common symbol for crossing the border between life and death. The idea of a river that must be crossed by a dead person, either by swimming or by boat (rowed, perhaps, by the classical figure of Charon), is particularly widespread. This notion is also played on in On the Eve, where Elena decides to cross the sea with the body of Insarov, and subsequently disappears.

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floating on the “sea of life”. Contrary to what one might expect from a sea, he envisages the water as crystal clear, so that the bottom can be seen. Monster-like creatures are lying there, looking like enormous fish. The hero realizes that they are life’s diseases, misfortunes, pains and sorrows. One of these monsters swims to the boat and threatens to capsize it, but then it sinks down again and resumes its old position. “But the appointed day will come when it will overturn the boat” (“Но день урочный придет и перевернет оно лодку” - XI, 8).59

The parallels with Elena’s dream in On the Eve are obvious. In both cases the occupants of the boat are intimidated by monstrous creatures that live in the sea and threaten to capsize the boat and destroy its passengers. The smallness of the vessels symbolizes the vulnerability of man when confronted with life’s destructive forces. What is more, both images convey the idea of destruction (death) waiting to pounce when no one expects it. Curiously, during the ‘real’ boat trip on the Caricynskij ponds, the company try singing “Down mother Volga” but cannot keep in tune and break off at the line “Nothing is to be seen in the waves” (“Ничего в волнах не видно” – 72). At this moment of pleasure, when life seems to lie ahead in all its fulness, it is indeed the case that no one yet sees the threat of death.

The idea of man being unable to foresee his destruction is also brought to the fore on the very last pages of On the Eve, where yet another image of a boat on a pond is enacted. It reads like a reversal of the image in Elena’s dream: this time it is not the people who sit in the boat, but death, and the people are the fish. Death is compared to a fisherman, “who has caught a fish, but leaves it in the water for some time; the fish is still swimming, but the net surrounds him and the fisherman will pull it out whenever he so decides” ([Смерть, как рыбак,] который поймал рыбу в свою сеть и оставляет ее на время в воде: рыба еще плавает, но сеть на ней, и рыбак выхватит ее – когда захочет – 166). Life is thus presented as a span of time during which, unbeknown to man, death constantly has him in its grip. In Elena’s dream, the actual effects of the approaching danger are not seen. In the further development of the novel’s plot, however, there is a suggestion that Elena is literally swallowed by the sea when she is on her way to Bulgaria with the deceased Insarov. The ship they are on is caught in a storm, and the narrator reports that the Adriatic Sea, between “Venice, Triëst and the shore, is extremely dangerous” (“Адриатическое море между Венецией, Триестом и дalmатским берегом чрезвычайно опасно” – 164). The question as to what really happened is never resolved. Some rumors say that, after a storm, a coffin was found on the beach, but others say that a foreign lady landed with the coffin and had it buried. The reader is, quite deliberately, left guessing.

In the second part of Elena’s dream, the sea changes into a snowy landscape. This sets up another cluster of images that signify death. Elena is now riding in a wagon through the snow. Next to her sits Kat’ja, her childhood friend who died when they were still only children. Elena is frightened by the sight of the dead Kat’ja. The wagon heads for a monastery where, as Elena suddenly realizes, Insarov is locked up in one of the small cells. She wants to save him, but an abyss opens up immediately before them. Kat’ja laughs as the coach drops down.

The image of the snowy landscape, the ride with a dead person and the fall at the end are all reminiscent of Bürger’s “Lenore” and its Russian versions by Žukovskij (“Svetlana” and “Ljudmila”) and Katenin (“Ol’ga”). Just like the female protagonists in these stories, Elena is

59 Two other examples of texts by Turgenev in which the image of floating in a boat arises (but without the sea-symbolism) are “The Story of Lieutenant Ergunov” and “Klara Milić”. In both of these, the hero, who is under the destructive influence of the heroine, dreams that he is floating in a boat. In the first, Kolibri, the female protagonist, is underneath the boat and knocking on its bottom, thereby resembling the unidentified monsterlike creatures in the On the Eve and “Spring Torrents” dreams. In both “The Story of Lieutenant Ergunov” and “Klara Milić”, the image of floating in a boat signifies the hero’s impending destruction.
accompanied by a dead person, who leads her to a place of death. The small cells in the monastery are suggestive of coffins (Elena feels that “it is narrow and stuffy there” (“там душно, тесно” – 162). As soon as Elena awakens, Insarov, “with a face as white as the snow from her dream” (ibid.), announces that he is dying, and indeed does die only a moment later. The Lenore-motif in the dream has the effect, not of a parody of a Romantic cliché-plot, but of the realistic adaptation of such a plot. Elena’s dream becomes reality as her beloved dies when she wakes up. Death is presented, not as a frightening fantasy, but as a horrifying reality.

The above survey of the imagery that is connected to what I have called the love-death theme shows that the tone of the novel gradually changes from one of (expectation of) life to one of impending death, during which process the early allusions to death occur only on the verbal art level whereas in the final scenes death becomes an event in its own right: Insarov dies, and then Elena supposedly does likewise. The final remarks of the narrator concerning death as a fisherman also make it the explicit subject of the narration. By contrast, the opening of the novel presents a celebration of life. It is set in midsummer, and the conversation of the characters expresses their positive expectations of life and love. Only a few remarks hint at the interconnection of life and death and of love and death – the description of the ‘enchanted’ stalks of grass, and Šubin’s words about love containing both life and death. No sooner have Insarov and Elena declared their love than allusions to death begin to arise. Finally, in the dream, the peaceful pond’s transformation into the roaring sea symbolizes the complete transition from positive into negative, or from life into death. In the dream, and in the image of the fisherman that the narrator uses shortly afterwards, death is displayed as a constant threat to man’s life in the face of which all human significance is destroyed. Immediately before the fisherman image, the narrator claims not to know whether Elena is still alive or whether, for her, “the little game of life” has already ended (“маленькая игра жизни” – 166). Whichever is the case, the conclusion seems to be that there is no inherent value to life at all.

This notion of death stands in sharp contrast to the idea of a heroic death that Insarov and Elena themselves envisage. Insarov thinks that he will die for the liberation of his homeland. In answer to Elena’s question as to whether he loves his homeland very much, he answers “That is yet to be shown (...) when someone dies for it, then we can say that he loved it” (“Это еще не известно (...) Вот когда кто-нибудь из нас умрет за нее, тогда можно будет сказать, что он ее любил.” – 67). Elena even declares that she would gladly die, as long as it was together with Insarov (“разве умереть вдвоем тоже не весело?” – 113). Insarov’s actual death, however, is not at all heroic: far from dying for the liberation of Bulgaria, he never even reaches it. Elena does not die together with him, in spite of her prediction (123). In Turgenev’s world, there is no such thing as a heroic death. If there were, it would imply that a person’s death could be incorporated into the course of his or her life in a significant way, or even that death could itself give meaning to life, but in Turgenev’s world view death stands outside man’s reality and destroys its meaning. In other words, the view of life and death that has developed by the end of the novel is radically different from the one that is implied by the story of Tristan and Isolde. For them death is a liberation, enabling them to attain the oneness that

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60 A major difference between the plots of the stories and the dream of Elena (apart from the absence of the Romantic context in On the Eve) is the different role of the beloved. In the Lenore plot and its variants, the heroine is riding with her beloved; Elena is hurrying towards her beloved. However, the description of the place where Insarov is staying (“it is narrow and stuffy there”) does imply that he is dead, or very close to death, and therefore I think that the basic implication is the same: in both the Lenore plot and the dream in On the Eve, a dead person takes the heroine to the realm of the dead. She does not immediately acknowledge that her beloved is dead, and when she does so she is also forced to acknowledge that she is herself in danger.
they cannot experience while they are alive. In On the Eve, by contrast, death is presented as nothing more than a random end to the senseless flow of life.

This reinforces our rejection of Masing-Delic’s view that Insarov is “predisposed to experience life as an illness”, of which the name is “yearning”, and from which he can be freed only through death (Masing-Delic 1987: 66). Her idea is based solely on the image of Tristan that she derives from Wagner’s opera, but there is nothing in the poetic structure of On the Eve itself to suggest that he ever has such a longing. In the first place, neither Elena nor Insarov longs to die, even though they are both willing to do so in a good cause. What is important is that they have set themselves goals within this life. Whether Insarov unconsciously wants something else, as Masing-Delic implies, is something we cannot possibly know since we are scarcely told anything about his inner life. In addition, and this is even more important, the whole pattern of life and death imagery, together with the final assertions about the nature of both life and death in the final chapter of the novel, sharply contradict any positive notion about death, leaving no room at all for possible reconciliation.

4.5 Death in Venice

I have already made a few remarks about the symbolic value of Venice, but this paragraph will be devoted in its entirety to the connotations of Venice as a setting for On the Eve. As was the case with the Tristan associations, the image of Venice must be understood as part of a larger tradition of symbolism. Within that context, Venice is characterized by ambiguity, as a place of beauty but also as a place of death. This image of death-concealed renders Venice the most symbolic of places where Insarov could have died.

The extraordinary appearance and location of the city of Venice have always given rise to mythic ideas about it. Built in the midst of water, the city takes an indeterminate position between land and water, which in itself provides a sense of ambiguity. In folk tales about Venice, the boats floating through the canals are associated with the mythical Charon, who transports the dead by boat to the underworld. Moreover, in such tales the underworld itself is often located in the vicinity of the city. They describe a sunken city named Venetia that was formerly a prospering mercantile town by the sea, and the underworld is situated on a nearby island to which the dead are transported by boat (Locher 1922: 77-80).

Another association of Venice with ambiguity arises from the tradition of wearing masks as part of the carnival tradition. Wearing a mask is naturally associated with ambiguity since it involves hiding another face – that is, another personality – beneath the outward appearance. Moreover, masks are also associated with death, a tradition that dates back to their being worn to ward off plague.61

The literary image of Venice as it has developed in European literature from the end of the eighteenth century connotes both ambiguity and death. In his study of ‘The Literary Myth of Venice’, Bernard Dieterle traces the origins of the myth to Goethe’s section on Venice in his Italienische Reise,62 adding that Goethe was the first to link the impressions of the city to the

61 Joseph Brodsky has noted the curious effects of the identification of the carnival mask with the death mask in Watermark, originally entitled Fondamenta degli incurabili. With reference to the Fondamenta, the silent monument of the plague, he says: “The name conjures the hopeless cases (...) shrouded, waiting to be carted – or, rather, shipped away. Torches, fumes, gauze masks preventing inhalation (...). Gradually the funeral procession turns into a carnival, where a mask would have to be worn, since in this city everybody knows everybody” (Brodsky 1992: 75).

62 However, we should bear in mind that, although the Reise was written between 1786 and 1789, it was not published until 1886. So, while it does stand at the beginning chronologically, it does not do so in the sense that it might have served as an example to other writers.
state of his own personality (Dieterle 1995: 78), which he did by transposing the topography of the city (already adorned with dualistic features) to the figurative topography of his soul (idem 83). Such a process can also be identified in other works from the same period that feature Venice. The hero of Schiller’s *Geisterseher* (1789), for instance, is confronted by the loss of his own identity in Venice. In such works, the city’s ambiguity takes on an ominous connotation: the city becomes a place of deception that leads to the destruction of individuals.

Consequently, Venice has become an important literary setting for the process of “discovery of the self” (‘Entdeckung des Ich’ – Corbineau-Hoffmann 1993: 164) that is such an important part of Romanticism. The ambiguity of Venice seems to appeal strongly to the Romantic sensibility that is preoccupied with the problematic entity of the self as a whole. It is therefore not surprising that the main propagators of the nineteenth century image of Venice are also leading figures in the development of European Romanticism: Platen (*Venezianische Sonette* (1824)) and Byron (*Manfred* (1817) and *Childe Harold* (1818)).

The early twentieth century Venice essays of the philosophers Georg Simmel and Ernst Bertram reflect the development of the image of Venice within Romanticism into an icon of ambiguity. Simmel identifies ambiguity in every part of the city: the houses, the streets, the canals and the bridges (Simmel 1922: 72). He states that the entire outer appearance of the city is only a façade from which reality has withdrawn (“Schein in dem kein Sein mehr lebt” – idem 71), and sees this as the actual reason for the dreamlike appearance of the city. Simmel projects his conclusions on to life itself (thereby maintaining the link between the physical environment and the landscape of the soul, so much celebrated during the romantic period): he states that life itself is a façade with death standing behind it (idem 72).

The image of Venice that Bertram provides in his essay is equally informed by the idea of duality. Like Simmel, he connects the dual features of the city with the inner make-up of the individual: “alle Naturen (…), die, gleich Byron, gleich Nietzsche, eines tragisch unheilbaren Dualismus in der Uranlage ihres Wesens sich dunkel bewußt waren und die in dem Wunder der Lagunen einem halb bestürzenden, halb beglückenden Doppelgängersinnbild des eigenen Daseins begegneten” (Bertram 1932: 23).

From the essays of Simmel and Bertram, it becomes clear that the literary image of Venice in the nineteenth century is inextricably connected to the Romantic vision of life. Within this context, the associations of Venice with death arise mainly from the dichotomy between beauty and death that pervaded the romantic mind: Venice was seen as a city of pure beauty that carried at the same time an undertone of death. These ideas were strengthened by the historical developments that reduced the city’s importance. After the fall of the republic in 1797, many felt a discrepancy between the city’s outer appearance, which still reflected the grandeur of the old Venice, and the state of decay that it concealed (Corbineau-Hoffmann 1993: 568-9). In this context it must be noted, however, that a notion of Venice as a city in decay was already present from the sixteenth century onwards (Dieterle 1995: 82). This furnished the idea that the city itself was dying (this notion is called upon in the description of Venice in *On the Eve*: “‘Venice is dying’ (…) her inhabitants will tell you” – quoted on p. 74 above). In my opinion, the association of Venice with death can only partly be ascribed to the real threat of decay of the city. It is primarily the romantic idea of duality that causes us to think of death when seeing beauty and to find beauty in death. It is exactly this notion that is conveyed in the narrator’s ‘reply’ to the remark of Venice’s inhabitants: “Maybe she [Venice – MO] only missed this final appeal, the appeal of wilting in the midst of the bloom and triumph of beauty” (“но, быть может, этой-то последней прелести, прелести увядания в самом расцвете и торжестве красоты, недоставало ей” – 151).
This duality of death-masked-by-beauty – the outer appearance of the world seen as a façade behind which death looms – forms the exact basis of the connection of Venice with ambiguity and death that is drawn upon in *On the Eve*.

In this novel, Venice is first introduced as a city of beauty that is appealing to those who visit it: “Like spring, the beauty of Venice affects us and arouses desires” (“Подобно весне, красота Венеции и трогает и возбуждает желания” – 151). Foremost among these ‘desires’ is a longing for love: in the opening chapter of *On the Eve*, Bersenev has already told us how, standing in a forest in spring, he thinks he hears “the romantic sounds of Oberon’s horn” (“романтические звуки Оберонова рога” – 13). However, in the ensuing description, the city is associated with enchantment: it is described as “magical” (“волшебный город” - 151) and as a place that gives “a promise of mysterious happiness” (“обещание таинственного счастья” – ibid.). The buildings look “light and wonderful” (“стоят легки и чудесны” – ibid.), and there is “something fairy-tale like and charmingly strange” (“что-то сказочное, что-то пленительно странное” – ibid.) in the appearance of the canals with their boats. The whole city is set under “an enchanted sky” (“очарованные небеса” – ibid.).

The terms of the description make the city seem unreal, something like a mirage. Moreover, the references to enchantment call to mind those that were made earlier in *On the Eve*, which, as I have already shown, linked enchantment both to love and to death. In the light of the ambiguous character of Venice, the associations with enchantment further emphasise the city’s connection both with beauty (or love) and death.

Insarov’s enchantment began with his falling in love with Elena, but now, in an environment that is characterized by enchantment in every detail, its final consequences are borne out: it is here that Insarov will die. Apart from its enchanted nature, Venice is characterized by two more aspects that associate it with death. The first has already been mentioned: water. We have seen that, in folk tales about Venice, the fact that the city comprises water as much as land connects it with the underworld. Also, within the poetic structure of *On the Eve*, water is itself associated with the threat of death through the motif of drowning and the *rusalki*.

The second of these two aspects is silence. Venice is “permeated with a dream-like haze of some sort of loving silence” (“все обвежено дремотною дымкой какой-то влюбленной тишины” – ibid.); she is characterized by the absence of sounds: “the silky reflection of the mute surge of the canals, the soundless pace of the gondolas, the absence of the rude sounds of a city” (“шелковистых отливах немой волны каналов, в бесшумном беге гондол, в отсутствии грубых городских звуков” – ibid.), and “everything in her keeps silent” (“все в ней молчит” – ibid.). This silence can be interpreted as a deathly silence.

The beautiful Venice that promises a good time to happy couples appears to be a city with two faces. While Elena and Insarov enjoy Venice’s beauty, the description of the city stresses its symbolic connotations as a place of ambiguity and death. Within the novel’s intratextual network of associations, Venice’s characteristics form the climax of the sense of threat that the imagery of enchantment and water has attained during the course of the novel. Venice thus acts as a highly symbolic locus for Insarov’s death.

4.6 Nature

In addition to the motifs that I have dealt with above, we find in *On the Eve* two of Turgenev’s basic images that he developed as part of the formulation of his philosophical ideas on man. I have discussed these ideas in Chapter One, where I examine Turgenev’s review of Aksakov’s hunter stories, together with the essay “Hamlet and Don Quixote”, both of which can be considered key texts for the understanding of Turgenev’s concept of nature as a dual force, and
of the concept of man he derives from it. These ideas are explored in the opening chapter of On the Eve through intertextuality with these works. In this connection, I should like to draw attention to the special function of the opening scene within the novel as a whole. It has already been mentioned several times as the point where the novel’s main associative strings are initiated, and in this paragraph I shall first elaborate on its function as regards the rest of the novel and then deal with the intertextual connections.

To a certain extent, the opening can be regarded as the typical opening to a novel by Turgenev: the main characters are not yet on the scene but are introduced through the words of the secondary characters who are present. However, there is more to it than that. The discussion that takes place between the secondary characters Šubin and Bersenev also touches upon central philosophical issues, especially that of man’s place in nature. They express Turgenev’s own ideas about the interconnectedness of life and death, and of love and death. Bersenev says that nature constantly swallows man, and adds, “In her there is both life and death” (quoted above), whereupon Šubin answers, “In love, there is life and death too” (quoted above). Basic to these ideas, though it is not explicitly mentioned in the scene, is the principle of balance, which forms a crucial part of Turgenev’s concept of nature. Nature exists through maintaining a balance between creation and destruction; thus, life is connected to death (the death of one means life for the other), and love is connected to death (since love means procreation, which is a disturbance of the balance, and therefore the old individual must die to make room for the new one). Turgenev is not so much interested in the biological reasoning of these ideas (which he largely derives from Schopenhauer) as in the human tragedy that they encompass.63 The interconnection between love and death is presented by Turgenev as a far more mysterious principle, not only in On the Eve but also, as we have seen, in many of his other works.

The discussion between Bersenev and Šubin in the opening scene of On the Eve functions as the philosophical prelude to the developments in the novel. It can be said to indicate that the concern of the novel has more to do with these essential questions of life than with the presentation of a new type of hero. This idea is further sustained by the return to the subject of life and death in the epilogue (the fisherman image, in which man’s life is depicted as a period in which he is already in the power of death (in the net) but ignorant of this fact until pulled out of the water). Thus, the events of the novel are presented within a philosophical framework, such that the opening and ending present its ideas on an abstract level while the events in between show them ‘in practice’. To elaborate a little further, at the beginning of the novel the principles of nature (nature “constantly swallows us” – “не беспристанно ли она поглощает нас” - 13) are stated, but only in the abstract, without consideration of how they are followed in practice. By the end of the novel, however, when the consequences of these principles have become visible in the fates of Insarov and Elena, the narrator’s conclusion is that life is senseless in the face of the inevitable approach of death. Regarding Elena, he concludes, “Nobody knows if she is still alive (...) or perhaps the little game of life has already ended” (quoted above).

On the subject of the respective intertextuality between On the Eve and the two key works by Turgenev – the Aksakov review and “Hamlet and Don Quixote” – I shall begin with the last of these.

The two characters in the opening scene, Šubin and Bersenev, can be seen as representatives of the two basic human types that Turgenev describes in his essay, but there are some differences of emphasis. In the essay, Hamlet and Don Quixote represent respectively the types for whom the “basis and goal of their existence lies either inside themselves or outside themselves” (“основа и цель их существования находится либо вне их, либо в них самих”)

63 For more details on Turgenev’s world view; see Chapter One. For Turgenev and Schopenhauer: see McLaughlin 1984.
They can be designated as the egoistic and altruistic types. Like them, Šubin and Bersenev are presented as complete opposites, in outward appearance as well as in outlook. Bersenev is tall, with sharp features, a tanned skin and gray eyes; Šubin has a rounded, almost childlike frame, a white skin and brown eyes. Bersenev wears a narrow black overcoat, while Šubin is dressed in a loose-fitting white blouse. Šubin is self-confident and enjoys life, whereas Bersenev seems at odds with himself and tortures himself with philosophical questioning. This opposition is reflected in their ways of looking at the world around them, which in turn mirror their differences in attitude towards life. Bersenev lies on his back and looks at the landscape, while Šubin lies on his belly and looks at the bugs in the grass.

Bersenev is a historian and a philosopher; he studies apparently isolated phenomena and ponders on their relationships with a view to inducing universal laws. Šubin, by contrast, is an artist; he is only interested in the isolated phenomena and states, with reference to his profession, that the landscape is not a good subject for him since it lacks borders: “My job is to mould flesh, shoulders, arms, legs, but that [the landscape – MO] lacks forms, it has no borders, it runs off to all sides…” (“Мое дело – мясо, мясо лепить, плечи, ноги, руки, а тут и формы нет, законченности нет, разехалось во все стороны” – 9).

Šubin displays an egoistic orientation; he wants to enjoy life and expects life to cooperate with him in this: “I expect, I demand happiness from the forest and from the river and from the earth and the skies, from every cloud and every stalk of grass” (“и от леса, и от реки, и от земли, и от неба, от всякого облачка, от всякой травки я жду, я хочу счастья” – 13-14). Later he says, “I want to be number one” (“я хочу быть номером первым” – 14). Bersenev, however, represents the altruistic orientation. According to him, “making oneself number two is the very destiny of our lives” (“поставить себя номером вторым – все назначение нашей жизни” – ibid.).

When we compare these characteristics to the description of the two human types in “Hamlet and Don Quixote”, what is remarkable is that we find a difference in the evaluation of the two types. Šubin’s lighthearted personality, his careless posture and his white, loose-fitting clothing suggest a certain ease and lightness, whereas Bersenev’s troubled character, uneasy posture and tight dark clothing imply an uncomfortable and depressive life. This is not the way in which the egoistic and altruistic principles are evaluated in “Hamlet and Don Quixote”, where it is implied that both types are equally hampered by their orientation. It is possible to argue that, in On the Eve, the altruistic principle is judged negatively, if only for the fact that Bersenev is left empty-handed after he has helped Elena, even though he is in love with her, whereas Insarov is able to develop a sustained relationship with her once they have become acquainted. As I have already noted, James Woodward’s approach to On the Eve is along these lines: it is based on the assumption that the novel is about the victory of egoism over altruism. Woodward argues that Elena is at first altruistic in attitude (feeding stray animals and freeing flies from cobwebs) but becomes egoistic through the experience of love and thereby destroys Insarov, who is altruism incarnate (Woodward 1990: 98-99). I have already indicated above (in 4.3) that I am not convinced by Woodward’s assertion that Elena, having changed into an ‘egoist’, destroys Insarov. Instead, the novel’s final scenes suggest to me that the fate of every man is the same, regardless of his attitude. Indeed, both the egoist Šubin and the altruist Bersenev are still alive at the end of the novel, whereas the altruistic Insarov and (as Woodward would have it) the egoistic Elena have perished. Therefore, I shall adopt a different approach, focusing not on the differences between the altruistic and egoistic type, but rather on what they have in common. The Hamlet type and the Don Quixote type are, first and foremost, individuals, and both the egoism of the one and the altruism of the other are irrelevant as far as their position in relation to the whole of nature is concerned. Each of them is a fixed part of the whole. I must make clear at this point that the altruism of Don Quixote is not the same thing as
nature’s ‘altruism’. When Turgenev speaks of the dichotomy of nature, he is referring to two forces: the centripetal and centrifugal (184). The altruism of Don Quixote takes the form of a conscious and voluntary self-sacrifice, whereas the sacrifice of the individual in order to sustain the whole, presupposed by the centrifugal force of nature, is essentially an involuntary principle: nature sacrifices the individual in order to maintain the whole of itself.

On the basis of these considerations, I conclude that the associations of Bersenev and Šubin with the two basic human types that Turgenev describes in the essay have two effects. First, as I have said, the reference to the philosophically-oriented essay in itself highlights the concern of the novel with these existential themes. Second, the association has the effect of typification. Although the descriptions of Bersenev and Šubin, when read as character descriptions within the narrative art structure, designate them as unique individuals (their opposite features contributing to this effect by underlining that the one is unlike the other), their clearly-marked egoistic versus altruistic attitudes associate them with the basic human types that Turgenev describes in “Hamlet and Don Quixote”. Their opposite features now appear in another light: not as adding to their individual portraits, but as establishing their characters as opposing types. This process of typification sets the pattern for the rest of the novel: the hero and heroine will be similarly typified and their fates will develop according to type. That Bersenev and Šubin discuss the principles of nature, and are then depicted as exemplars of these principles, provides an important clue to a proper reading of the novel.

A similar process of typification occurs in an association between On the Eve and both of the key philosophically-oriented texts I have mentioned. It is provided by the image of the insect as symbol for the egoistic principle. I will first quote the instances in the Aksakov review and “Hamlet and Don Quixote” in which this image comes to the fore.

The Aksakov review tells us:

For a mosquito that drinks your blood, you are food, and he uses you as calmly and shamelessly as the spider, in whose net he has fallen, uses him” (“Для комара, который сосет вашу кровь, - вы пища, и он так же спокойно и беззазорно пользуется вами, как паук, которому он попался в сети, и самим” – V, 415).

In the essay, we read:

Every creature considers itself the center of the world, and looks at everything around him as if it exists only for him (just as a mosquito sat down on the forehead of Alexander the Great and, fully convinced of his rights, drank his blood as his rightful food (“…все живущее считает себя центром творения и на все остальное взирает как на существующее только для него (так комар, севший на лоб Александра Македонского, с спокойной уверенностью в своем праве, питался его кровью, как следующей ему пищей)” – 184)

In both of these cases, Turgenev uses the image of the mosquito to illustrate the self-contained spirit of the individual creature. Although Turgenev does not explicitly say so, we may assume that his choice of this insect as his example is intended to stress the fact that the egoistic orientation (on the basis of which one considers oneself the centre of the world) is a basic

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64 Although Hamlet and Don Quixote are not mentioned in the novel, the contemporary reader would almost certainly have linked the description of the characters with those of Hamlet and Don Quixote in the essay, since the two texts appeared almost simultaneously. The essay appeared in 1860 in the year’s first number of The Contemporary (Современник), while On the Eve appeared in the January 1860 issue of The Russian Messenger (Русский Вестник).
orientation which does not depend on the human criteria of what is or is not important. According to these criteria, it is hardly thinkable that an insect has any such considerations. It is especially this point that comes into focus in On the Eve. In the opening scene, Šubin uses the same image of the mosquito drinking man’s blood: “A mosquito will sit down on the nose of the czar of creation and start using him as his food. That is insulting.” (“комар сядет на нос царю создания и станет употреблять его себе в пищу. Это обидно.” – 8)65

Šubin’s words suggest that man is a higher creature than the insect; the term “czar of creation” presupposes that man is ruler over creation and thus, in a sense, stands above it. His further comments on the insect world show that, as he sees it, man can have goals, while lesser creatures cannot:

The most astonishing thing about ants, bugs and other mister insects, in my opinion, is their surprising seriousness; they run about with such important faces, as if their lives meant something as well! Just imagine: man, the czar of creation, the highest creature, looks at them, but they do not care about him one bit (“Меня больше всего поражает в муравьях, жужках и других господах насекомых их удивительная серьезность; бегают взад и вперед с такими важными физиономиями, точно и их жизнь что-то значит! Помирайте, человек, царь создания, существо высшее, на них звяряет, а им и дела до него нет” – 8).

Šubin assumes that the insects have no reason to find their own lives important since, from his point of view, their existence has no real meaning. Thus Šubin, while using the same imagery as is found in the Aksakov review and the essay, reasons the other way around: he does not acknowledge that insects have exactly the same orientation that he has himself. The reason for this is simple: he thinks from his own egoistic point of view and therefore considers only his own interests important. The intertextual association with the review and the essay reminds us of the principle that the insect image stands for in those texts: the egoistic orientation of every creature. In that context, Šubin’s presupposition of man’s superiority is seriously undermined, since every creature considers himself the ‘czar of creation’.

This last implication is further sustained by the text material of the opening scene. The point is that man and insect are associated with one another. This means that they are implicitly placed on equal terms whereby the importance of man is reduced to that of the insect. This linkage of man and insect is found in two instances. The first is the description, already quoted, that Šubin gives of the insects he sees. In his irony, he ascribes human qualities to the insects. He calls them ‘mister insect’, describes them as having physiognomies and imagines them capable of expressing typically-human attributes such as ‘seriousness’ and ‘importance’. The effect is that humans and insects become interchangeable: if insects are like humans, then humans can also be looked upon as insects. This is exactly what happens in the second instance that I want to mention. It occurs one page earlier. Bersenev and Šubin have just been introduced to the reader, and Bersenev’s position is described as follows:

He lay in an awkward pose; his large head, broad at the top and triangular at the bottom sat clumsily on his long neck; clumsiness even spoke from the positioning of his arms, from his upper body wrapped tightly in his short, black overcoat, and from his long legs with the knees raised, resembling the hind legs of a cricket (“Он лежал неловко; его большая, кверку широкая, книзу заостренная голова неловко сидела на длинной шее; неловкость казалось в самой положении его рук, 65 The fact that the persons whose blood is being sucked are described as Alexander the Great and the ‘tsar of creation’ underlines the total ignorance of the ‘value’ of the other that the egoistic individual displays.
The description clearly associates Bersenev with an insect, not only by the positioning of his legs, which are explicitly compared to those of a cricket, but also by the shape of his head and his long, thin body. All of these associations curiously place Šubin’s words in an ironical light. He is trying to explain what he sees as the overt difference between man and insects, but through his very words, by personifying the insects, he actually shows that they are alike. The description of Bersenev as resembling a cricket further underlines this. As a consequence, the significance of man’s life is likened to that of the insects: like the insects, man considers his life and goals to be very important, but this importance is dependent upon his own point of view – his own egoistic orientation. From this orientation, the interests of insects mean nothing to man (as Šubin’s ironical description shows), but by the same principle the interests of man are irrelevant to other creatures (as the image of the mosquito drinking man’s blood shows).

In this connection it is interesting to mention one of Turgenev’s *Poems in Prose* in which the interests of man and insects are depicted as equally (ir)relevant to nature. In the piece entitled “Nature” (“Природа” – 1879), the speaker relates a dream he has had. In this dream, he sees a woman wearing a green dress, and recognizes her as nature. She seems to be absorbed by a difficult problem. It transpires that she is wondering how to make lice jump better. The speaker suggests that it would be better for her to worry about human beings, since they are the most precious of all creatures, but to his astonishment nature replies that she cares about human beings as much as about any worm (XIII, 188-189). The viewpoint of nature, as presented in this text, resembles that of the individual creature towards another creature: in both cases the purposes and interests of the individual appear relevant only to the individual himself.

The insect associations in the opening scene of *On the Eve* thus hint at mankind’s unimportance in relation to nature as a whole. The fisherman image at the end of the novel echoes the insect imagery: in both cases man is depicted as an animal (an insect and a fish) which symbolizes the relative value of the individual.

In addition to these associations, there is one other aspect of insect imagery that I should like to discuss. It plays a role in several of Turgenev’s works, and also has relevance for *On the Eve*. This is the association of insects with death. Such associations do not apply specifically to Turgenev; they are found in Russian folklore and also occur in the works of other Russian authors, especially Dostoevskij (see Ternovskaja 1979).

In Russian folklore, insects (and some other creatures, such as mice and frogs, that are all included in the generic term ‘гады’) are generally associated with the chthonic, and therefore with evil and death (*Mify narodov mira*, II, 202, also Gura 1997: 276). For some insects, the association with death is not necessarily a negative one. For instance, flies and butterflies are regarded as the souls of dead people (Gura 1997: 439), and spiders are sometimes associated with eternity (Ternovskaja 1979: 77).

In Turgenev’s work, it is the stinging insects in particular that are treated as symbols of death. A very explicit example of this is one of the *Poems in Prose* that I have already

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66 Strictly speaking the Russian word ‘strekoza’ that is used here means ‘dragonfly’ rather than ‘cricket’. A cricket is a ‘sverćok’. However, the described pose of Bersenev clearly resembles that of a cricket, not that of a dragonfly. The exact etymology of the word ‘strekoza’ is unclear. Of course the association with the verb ‘strekotat’ (meaning ‘to chirp’) is ready at hand, and supposedly this is the reason why the two are sometimes confused. Turgenev is not the first to do so. Krylov’s translation of La Fontaine’s fable ‘La Cigale et le Fourmi’ is entitled ‘Стрекоза и муравей’. Neledinskij-Meleckij’s translation of the same fable is entitled ‘Стрекоза’.

67 Actually anything that can sting can acquire the same association with death. This includes not only the stings of insects, but also the bills and claws of birds, snakes, pins, needles and the like. See the examples mentioned in paragraph 4.3 as part of my discussion of associations with vampires in *On the Eve*.
mentioned: “The Insect”. In this story, a young man dies immediately after being stung by a horrifying green insect. The insect is like a personification of death, an impression that is reinforced by the reaction of instinctive fear that the sight of it causes among the people who are present.  

Seen in this light, Elena’s efforts to free flies that are caught in spiders’ webs can be seen as an attempt to annihilate death. She similarly tries to prevent Insarov’s death (as she also does in the dream in which she is hurrying to free Insarov from his small cell that resembles a coffin), but by doing so she threatens to unbalance nature. The guilt Elena appears to feel after Insarov’s death (in her letter to her parents, she writes: “who knows, maybe I killed him” – “ктознает,можетбыть,яегоубила” – 165) might be interpreted as guilt for unbalancing nature through her self-centred wishes, especially the wish for love.

4.7 Conclusions

In Chapter One, I argued that, in Turgenev’s novels, the desirability of a verbal art reading was not necessarily indicated by means of motivational gaps arising on the basis of a narrative art reading (as was the basis for Schmid’s analysis of the Stories of Belkin). In On the Eve, however, a reading of the narrative art structure does leave the reader with a very unsatisfactory and incomplete picture of the hero and his fate. The motivation of Insarov’s fate can only be found in a verbal art reading, through allusions to an archetypal victim of the influence of destructive love. I have already indicated that the structure of the novel as a whole is geared more towards the discussion of the universal and existential theme of man in confrontation with the destructive laws of nature than towards the presentation of a new contemporary heroic type. I shall now discuss the central features that co-operate to achieve this effect.

First of all, it should be noted that the fragmentary information regarding the social and cultural position of the hero, together with the lack of insight into his ideas and motives, are in themselves an indication of the limited importance of Insarov’s designation as a new contemporary type: the information provided hardly allows for a clear picture of such a new type to emerge. Moreover, these lacunae hint at the importance of a verbal art reading for the understanding of the text. The verbal art associations present the theme of the potential new hero in another light, as the idea of newness is countered by patterns of typification that render the hero an archetypal tragic hero, doomed to perish.

Furthermore, the structure of the overall text indicates the importance of its existential themes. As I have argued in the previous paragraph, the opening scene provides a philosophical discussion about life and death which echoes the main ideas that Turgenev was exploring in his philosophically-oriented works of that period. As such, it introduces the philosophical frame of thought that determines the novel’s concerns: man’s position in relation to nature as a whole. The end of the novel moves back towards an abstract, philosophical level, and thus the opening and end together present a philosophical framework for the perception of the events that comprise the main body of the work.

In addition to this, it is important to note that the development of plot becomes weakened in the course of the novel. Walter Koschmal has argued that deviations from the realistic norms prescribing the central interest of the development of the plot occur in a number of Turgenev’s stories that were written between the mid forties and mid sixties (Koschmal 1978: 11-12). He argues that, in some stories, the main interest (“Sinnzentrum”) is no longer in the events, while  

68 Compare the scene in “Stavrogin’s Confession” in Dostoevskij’s Evil Spirits, excluded from the final version, in which the hero sees a small red spider at a time when someone he knows is committing suicide (Ternovskaja 1979: 78).
in others it is hardly possible to describe a plot at all (idem, 12). In On the Eve, we see a similar process. At first the novel develops along the usual (that is, realistic) normative path and follows the sort of plot that we have come to expect of Turgenev: the appearance of the hero arouses expectations of his personality; then the heroine falls in love with him and decides to follow him. From this point, however, the development seems to take a new turn: whereas in the previous two novels the progression of the events is blocked at this point, Insarov and Elena proceed to reach what is now their common goal. It is not until this point that the development of the plot comes to its expected halt: once they have left Russia there is hardly any further progression. Several months later, they are in Venice, still trying to reach Bulgaria. The scenes in Venice are marked by non-progression: they are taken up by a narrative description of the city, a description of the couple’s tour of the city, and Elena’s dream. The dream marks the point where reality gives way to images of death. Insarov immediately dies. Death, as a manifestation of the cosmic level, cuts into the development of the events as they unfold on the contemporary level. Insarov’s death marks the definitive end of the development of the events.

The role of the dream as an intermediary step between the previous events and the annihilation of the event scheme by death is interesting in the light of the usual function of dreams within a realistic context. Dreams are a well-established way of placing the irrational and supernatural within a realistic setting, and Turgenev quite frequently makes them serve this function. However, whereas within a realistic context the dream is usually ‘unmasked’ as a dream, thereby enabling the realistic perspective to be maintained, in Turgenev’s work this separation of dream and reality tends to fade. It often happens that an irrational event is introduced by means of the suggestion of a dream, but in such a way as to leave it unclear whether the person who experiences irrational elements is in fact dreaming. We might think, for example, of the supernatural experiences of the first-person narrators in “The Dog” (“Собака” – 1864) and “Phantoms”, who are themselves not sure whether they are awake or asleep when they have their supernatural experiences. In such instances, the suggestion of dream keeps up the general ‘realism’ of the story even though the subject concerns that which lies beyond the real. In On the Eve, the function of the dream is not so much the introduction of the supernatural as the transformation of reality. Elena is awakened by Insarov’s desperate calls, and he dies a few moments later. Thus, when the dream ends, the transformation of reality is not unmasked, but confirmed. The images of death in the dream are visions of the ensuing reality.

To conclude my analysis I want to make a few remarks about the narrative perspective in the novel. Its outlines are the same as those in the previous novels: the narrator takes the position of a close acquaintance who observes the characters and tells us about their outward appearance, words and behavior, but is also able to provide background information. The narrator in On the Eve, for instance, has information about Elena’s youth, and knows what she writes in her private journal. However, it is remarkable that he never comes at all close to the person of Insarov. Only in one scene does the narrator render the thoughts of the hero, and that is when Insarov tries to obtain, for Elena, a permit for traveling abroad. In all other scenes, the only information concerning Insarov is what would have been gained by any observer who saw what was happening and heard what was said. As I have already stated, it is this fact, in combination with the overall lack of information regarding Insarov’s background, that makes it extremely difficult for the reader to establish who he is, let alone to become engaged in his fate. Thus, the narrator’s position also contributes to the limited picture of Insarov on the contemporary level.

If we compare it to the positions of the narrators in the other novels, there is one peculiarity about that of the narrator in On the Eve that is worth noting: he clearly and definitively steps outside the limitations of the characters’ own views of their lives at the end. The image of the fisherman, together with the ensuing conclusions about the futility of life in the face of
impending death, marks a position of overview that the characters themselves generally lack. It
provides a view of mankind from the perspective of the cosmic level. The fact that the narrator
takes such a perspective marks his position as principally different from that of the characters
more explicitly than in any of the other novels.