Russia – Academy of Arts and 19th Century

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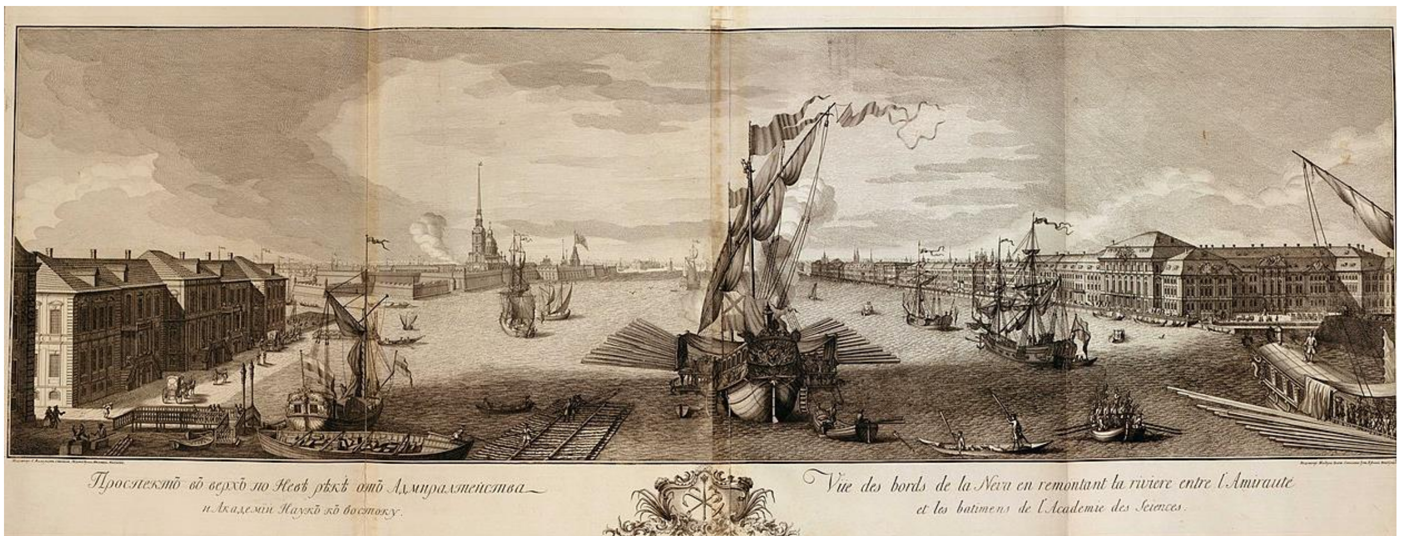
St Petersburg Academy of Arts

Peter the Great (reigned 1682-1725) revolutionised Russia's institutions and life for the nobility. From boyhood he loved boats and determined his country would have a navy. He worked in shipyards in the Netherlands and on the Thames to study techniques and designs, and brought back experts to build a fleet. While there he was fascinated by Western habits. On his return he forced the nobility to adopt Western dress and banned the wearing of beards, outraging the Orthodox Church. While remaining an autocrat, he formed departments to help him administer the country's affairs. Of great importance, Peter ordered that every male in the nobility should serve him for life from the age of 15 in either the army, navy or civil administration. To that end he started a registry of noble births; attempts to evade service resulted in the confiscation of estates, lands and serfs. Moreover, he insisted on proper education (to Western standards) to serve in government posts and the military, proclaiming; *"for learning is good and fundamental, and as it were the root, the seed, and first principle of all that is good and useful in church and state".* This drew even greater objections from a largely uneducated and coarse nobility. Even more alarming, Peter insisted that noble youths should start their service at the bottom and advance only according to their merit. He made sure every aristocratic boy was sent at an early age to a military or civil academy.

Peter saw Western rulers glorifying themselves through portraits and architecture. His new capital, St Petersburg was built by Western architects. He was keen for European ruling houses to see pictures of it. He paid for small groups of Russian artists to study in Europe (the first left Russia in 1716, mostly for Italy and the Netherlands), but with their background of icon painting, they struggled with Western techniques. Peter therefore had to resort to employing Western artists for portraits. He remained keen to develop native artists and brought French artists to Russia to train more students. He moved the Armoury icon workshop from Moscow to St Petersburg, aiming to use it as the basis for an art department in his new Academy of Sciences. Peter's attitude is explained by his comment when supporting the maiden expedition of Vitus Bering (of the Straits); *"having ensured the security of the state against the enemy, it is requisite to endeavour to win glory for it by means of the arts and sciences."* A year after Peter's death in 1725, Catherine I (1725-27) did establish an art academy, but it taught only drawing and engraving. The most famous graduate was Mikhail Makhaev who produced a series of views and maps of St Petersburg.



Mikhail Makhaev, *View of the Neva between the Admiralty and the Academy of Sciences*, 1753

No further official encouragement was given to Russian painters for the next three decades. Empress Elizabeth (1741-62) employed foreign artists to paint court portraits. Talented serfs were really the only native painters, most being taught by the nearest icon painter. Of course, that did not qualify them as portrait painters in the sense accepted by the nobility but it was the only training available. The first noted Russian portraitist was **Ivan Argunov** (1729-1802). He was a serf belonging to the high-ranking noble family of Sheremetev who greatly appreciated the arts. Their house at Ostankino outside Moscow was a magnificent palace, and the family had its own theatre. Argunov was able to break into portrait painting because his owner, Count Sheremetev, arranged for him to study for four years (1746 – 1749) under a German portraitist employed by Empress Elizabeth. Argunov was a precocious talent and painted portraits of his owners and their friends.

A departure from this came with *Peasant Woman in Russian Costume*, which Bird says, *"argues the beginning of an interest in rustic life and folk costumes."* Such an interest among the high aristocracy seems doubtful. The Tretyakov Gallery maintains the picture was simply of an actress in one of the Shermetev's theatrical productions – an argument strengthened by her ear-ring, surely far too ornate for a peasant.

Ivan Argunov, *Peasant Woman in Russian Costume, 1784*

Argunov turned teacher from 1753 and had many prominent pupils. Soon, however, Peter the Great's wish became reality. The favourite of Empress Elizabeth, Count Ivan Shuvalov, persuaded her to establish an Academy for the Fine Arts. This opened in St Petersburg in 1764 and adopted the regulations of the French Academy. It included a secondary school which took pupils from the age of six, and trade schools for those boys who did not develop sufficient aptitude for fine arts. The state paid all the expenses of the students at the Academy, including food and board. Many of Argunov's pupils became teachers, but French artists served as the first Directors.

Now, instead of arranging private lessons with the Tsar's foreign painters, nobles could send their serfs to the Academy. This was popular with the nobility. Young serf boys who showed promise at drawing and who might later paint backdrops for the noble's theatre or decorations or portraits of his family could be sent to the Academy, with the (not inconsiderable) consolation that if they did not develop artistically, the state would pay for them to learn a trade.

It was not only young boys who gained an entrance to the Academy in this way. **Mikhail Shibanov** was a serf artist belonging to Prince Grigory Potemkin. To celebrate his conquest of Crimea, Potemkin arranged a tour of the south for Catherine the Great (he was her great favourite). This was a grand undertaking and involved many temporary structures which had to be decorated. Potemkin took Shibanov with him on the tour, and among his many duties, Shibanov painted Catherine in travelling costume. She loved the work so much that she had several copies made as gifts and, more importantly, instructed that Shibanov should be sent to the Academy to study. He was not the only she sent.

Mikhail Shibanov, *Catherine the Great*, 1787-8

Shibanov had painted peasant scenes before his tour with Potemkin. Quite who he did them for is a mystery. He was originally the serf of an Admiral who later sold him to Potemkin; perhaps the Admiral who was usually away from his estate wanted occasional records of the activities of his chattels? The first peasant scene known in the history of Russian art was Shibanov's *Peasant Meal* painted in 1744. However, his later *Wedding Contract* is the more celebrated, with its detail of clothes, hair and decorations.

Mikhail Shibanov, *The Wedding Contract*, 1777

Back to the Academy; continuing Peter's idea, students winning medals in exhibitions won scholarships abroad for three years. Up to 1789, 40 Russian painters received additional training in the French Academy and the studios of Paris and others went to Italy. They were, however, obliged not to deviate too much from what they learnt in the St Petersburg Academy which, just like the French, stifled individualism. Essentially, just like its Parisian counterpart, it produced civil servants able to paint portraits to a standard required by the imperial family and the nobility. Only rarely did artists break from the dry Academic style.

Dmitry Levitzky (1735 – 1822)

Dmitry Levitzky was the son of a priest who, as a side-line, worked in the Printing Office in Kiev. From his father, Levitzky learned about Italian art and drawing. His talents were spotted in Kiev and he was taken to the Academy in St Petersburg. Levitzky *"as Van Dyck earlier in England created an image of an aristocracy which the members were from that time onwards were obliged to emulate (Hamilton)."* Levitzky's sensitivity to personalities marked him out. Two very different portraits show his skill in adapting his art to his patrons. Prince Golitsyn held several senior positions under Catherine the Great and is shown in formal pose, with Knight's Order and Sash, pointing to business papers under the watchful gaze of a bust of his sovereign. Demidov, who from his huge fortune founded hundreds of schools across Russia, informally gestures towards potted plants.

Dmitry Levitzky, *Prince Alexander Golitsyn*, 1772

Dmitry Levitzky, *Prokofi Demidov*, 1773

Levitzky's portraits prompted Catherine to commission him to paint her favourite pupils at the Smolny Institute of Noble Maidens, opened in 1764 as a finishing school for ladies-in-waiting. Two hundred girls at a time, aged 6 to 18, were taught 'socially pleasing' subjects; French, German (Russian nobles did not speak Russian), singing, dancing, music, social etiquette, amateur dramatics.

Dmitry Levitzky, *Ekaterina Nelidova*, 1773

Dmitry Levitzky, *Ekaterina Kruscheva and Ekaterina Khovanskaya*, 1773

Levitzky painted seven portraits in all "*which have rarely been equalled for sheer charm … captured their eternal youth (Bird).*" The future favourite of the unfortunate Tsar Paul dances a minuet, all light and grace, and two girls perform a scene from a pastoral. Rather startlingly, his portrait of a fourth Ekaterina shows a girl who preferred reading and science (mad keen on mathematics and physics) posing in front of a vacuum pump. These portraits are the reason Levitzky is sometimes referred to as the Gainsborough of Russian art. He captures the features and personality of the girls – undeterred from showing the slightly ugly features of Ekaterina Kruscheva (dressed as a boy in blue, above right) but lighting them up with liveliness and fire.

Dmitry Levitzky, *Ekaterina Molchanova*, 1776

Dmitry Levitzky, *Denis Diderot*, 1773

Levitzky's portrait of Denis Diderot, shown without wig in his dressing-gown was a result of Catherine the Great's strong interest in the Enlightenment in France. Diderot, with D'Alembert, published the *Encyclopedie* which stressed the importance of scientific knowledge. The first volume appeared 1751 and by 1759 because of scepticism over 'the myths of the Catholic church' it was banned by religious authorities and the French government revoked Diderot's licence to publish. Catherine offered to publish volumes in Riga, which forced the French government to back down. Catherine later helped in a more material way. Diderot had lost all his three children to early deaths, but when his wife was 43 she bore him a daughter. Diderot idolised the little girl but realised he had no money for her dowry; he had sunk everything into the *Encyclopedie*. He decided to sell his library, his only asset, and sought 15,000 pounds. Catherine heard about this and offered 16,000. Moreover, she said Diderot could keep the books during his lifetime for which she would pay him a salary of 1,000 a year to look after them for her. The following year she forgot to pay the salary: the embarrassed empress sent 50,000 to cover to the next 50 years in advance. Diderot was astonished and resolved to visit Catherine – a remarkable decision, as he had never left France and hated travel. He was her guest for five months and they had 60 private afternoon chats. He was completely at ease with her – contradicting, shouting and calling her *'my good lady'*. He took her hands, shook her arm and tapped her legs while making his points. Catherine wrote; *"I emerge from interviews with him with my thighs bruised and quite black. I have been obliged to put a table between us to protect myself and my limbs"*, but she loved his enthusiasm. During his stay in St Petersburg, Dmitry painted his portrait, capturing his relaxed nature and also something of his joyful innocence: Catherine said that Diderot was*, "in certain ways … a hundred, in others not yet ten.*" Diderot's time with Catherine threw Voltaire into a fit of jealousy. He and Catherine had been pen friends for more than a decade, but never met.

Levitzky was very popular among the nobility. Countess Ursula Mniszek was a brilliant aristocrat and the sister of the last King of Poland, Stanislav Augustus Poniatowski. Stanislav was one of Catherine's many lovers. She connived the Polish throne for him and then used him to partition the Commonwealth of Poland out of existence: Prussia and Austria gaining the parts Russia didn't take. Ursula's flawlessness is captured perfectly; a goddess far removed from the world of viewers who will all fall for her.

Dmitry Levitsky, *Duchess Ursula Mniszech*, 1782

Dmitry Levitsky, *Catherine II in the Temple of the Goddess of Justice*, 1783

He followed this up with a portrait of Catherine the Great which was much copied and engraved. She stands in front of a sculpture of Themis and burns poppies - symbols of sleep and peace. At her feet are the books of Law (which she tried hard to streamline), protected by one of the eagles from the Romanov coat of arms. In the background, ships represent the power of the empire. In 1770 a Russian fleet sailing from the Baltic to the Mediterranean thrashed the Turkish navy at Chesme Bay.

Vladimir Borovikovsky (1757 – 1825)

Vladimir Borovikovsky came from a Cossack family of icon painters in the Ukraine. His icons and decorations for Catherine's triumphal journey to the Crimea arranged by Potemkin caught her eye and she sent him to the Academy where he studied under Levitzky. Borovikovsky shows Levitsky's influence in his paintings of Russian women and girls, all truthful depictions and set against a park-like background (again recalling Gainsborough). But Borovikovsky's girls seem Slavonic and are marked also by his predilection for large eyes and languid postures.

Vladimir Borovikovsky, *Mrs Skobeeva*, 1790

Vladimir Borovikovsky, *Catherine II in Tsarskoe Selo*, 1794

Catherine admired his style and posed for him, in front of the Chesme Column she had had erected in 1776 to the glory of Prince Grigory Orlov whose idea the naval expedition had been and who commanded the fleet in battle (she also owed her throne to him and his brothers). Borovikovsky's picture of Catherine is *"surely one of the most unaffected portraits of a sovereign ever to be painted (Rice)."*

Borovikovsky also reflected in his later works the new French influence. His portrait of Ekaterina Arkharova has the frontal pose, precise detail and crisp drawing of Ingres. He retains the trademark eyes, and a feel for the Slavonic character.

Vladimir Borovikovsky, *Ekaterina Arkharova*, 1820

Vasily Tropinin, *Portrait of Konstantin Ravich*, 1823

Vasily Tropinin (1776-1857) was a serf who was given to his owner as part of a wedding dowry. He was sent to St Petersburg to train as confectioner, but by attending the free drawing classes at the Academy, impressed his teachers and was allowed to study part-time there from 1799 to 1804. Just as artistic fame beckoned – Troponin had a painting exhibited at the Academy – he was called back to the estate in Ukraine and served mostly in the kitchen until 1823. Then he was freed and settled in Moscow, where his portraits enjoyed wide popularity, always showing the subject's character. Konstantin Ravich was an official who got into trouble because of his love of gambling. Troponin shows Ravich relaxed, his carefree conscience clear. Troponin painted many pictures of a girl or boy busy with some occupation. Preliminary studies for *Lacemaker* show that he softened the features of his model to produce an ideal. He seems to have done the same in his other genre works. Troponin worked into the 1850s and influenced the Realistic approach taken in the Moscow School of painting.

Vasily Troponin, *The Lacemaker*, 1823

Vasily Troponin, *The Gold-Embroideress*, 1826

Troponin's genre scenes of girls were repeated in the works of **Alexei Venetsianov (1779-1847)**, who appreciated the dignity of peasants and thought they had their own beauty. Venetsianov was a land surveyor and draughtsman who took up painting as a hobby in his twenties. He moved from Moscow to St Petersburg when he was admitted into the Academy. He bought a small estate in the province of Tver and, apart from wintering in St Petersburg, spent the rest of his life there engrossed in the life of the people of his village. He painted many portraits of peasant girls, serene and slightly idealised, just as Troponin had done.

Alexei Venetsianov, *FortuneTelling*, 1830s

In fact, the most famous of his works celebrate the cycle of nature, in which he represents the seasons through images of girls or boys. Spring is represented by a serene peasant who glides over the field with her calm horses. The symbol of new life is emphasised by the baby to which she turns her glance. The same costume, together with baby, also appears in *Harvesting: Summer*. The respect and interest Troponin and Venetsianov had in peasant life would flourish later in the century.

Alexei Venetsianov, *In the Ploughed Field: Spring*, early 1820s

<u>Orest Kiprensky (1782-1836)</u>

Orest Kiprensky was also brought up as a serf, being the illegitimate son of a noble. Presumably his owner took some of his female serfs to bed – not an uncommon practice. His talent was spotted at an early age and he was sent to the Academy, and went on to win the gold medal in 1805 and a travelling scholarship. While waiting for the Napoleonic war to end so he could begin his travels, Kiprensky spent much time studying the works of Rubens and Rembrandt in Catherine's collection at the Hermitage. With European wars continuing he moved to Moscow, where his portraits were treasured by the nobility.

Like Rembrandt, Kiprensky adjusted his style and his compositions to the subject. His portrait of the poet and warrior Evgraf Davydov caught the *"romantic yearning for heroic exploits which marked the generation absorbed in the Napoleonic wars (Hamilton)."* Kiprensky also followed Rembrandt by producing many self-portraits and, like the master, always glares out penetratingly. Kiprensky went to Italy on his travelling scholarship when peace descended in Europe, but initially took to painting sentimental heads of beggar boys and peasant girls.

Orest Kiprensky, *Colonel Yevgraf Davydov*, 1809

He didn't get on with the Russian colony of painters in Italy. They believed Kiprensky had killed one of his models. She was found burnt to death and his manservant died a few days later in hospital. Kiprensky put the model's daughter into convent school. After returning to Rome in 1828 he converted to Catholicism and married her, which naturally drew much criticism.

Orest Kiprensky, *Self-Portrait*, 1809

Back home in 1825 he painted one of his best works; the portrait of the great Pushkin, convincingly posed against a classical statuette, combining realism and idealism. The work was done after the failure of the Decembrist Revolt in 1825. Russia's great victory over Napoleon had given her a prominent role in European affairs and Tsar Alexander I enthusiastically championed rights for nations in Western Europe. The drive of the Russian army across Europe chasing the retreating Napoleon had allowed officers (who were nobles) to see how wealthy and productive French and German farmers were and how industry flourished. Those same officers had seen how brave and determined serf soldiers were in the wretched battle of Borodino (captured brilliantly in Lermonotov's poem) and the horrendous campaign that followed. The result of all this was the conviction among officers that reform was required in Russia. Instead, Alexander's view at home was, *"We have defeated the mighty Napoleon, why do we need to change?"* The Decembrist Revolt was founded in the bitter disappointment felt over the contrast of Alexander's liberal opinions in European congresses and reactionary views at home.

Orest Kiprensky, *Alexander Pushkin*, 1827

Of course, Alexander was not minded to offend nobles by granting serfs rights or freedom. He had ascended the throne because his father, Tsar Paul, had disappointed the aristocracy with reforms and was strangled for it. Alexander's grand-mother, Catherine the Great, reached the throne after Tsar Peter had been killed by nobles affronted by his behaviour. This family history largely explains Alexander's conservatism at home. Pushkin deeply mourned the fate of the Decembrists, who included many of his personal friends; five of the plotters were executed and most of the rest exiled to Siberia. His friends decided not to tell Pushkin about the planned revolt, as he was a chatterbox. Kiprensky depicts Pushkin in a romantic stance, gazing off. There is elegance but also melancholy. Pushkin's eyes are luminous, his head and right hand are highlighted, sources of wonderful literature.

Karl Bryullov (1799- 1852)

Karl Bryullov represented the best of the Academy. He was Russia's first all-round artist, and immensely famous – the first Russian artist to gain international fame. He had an artistic spirit – vigorous creative flights mixed with bouts of woe-is-me - sometimes genuine, sometimes staged. He behaved in way that shocked other artists, for example refusing to paint the portrait of Nicholas I when the emperor arrived late for his first sitting.

Karl Bryullov, *An Italian Midday*, 1827

Bryullov was born in Italy and came to Russia as child with his father, a sculptor of Huguenot descent, who insisted Bryullov practised drawing before eating breakfast. By 1823 Bryullov had completed his academic education, won prizes and went to Rome. There he stayed for 15 years, combining classical and sentimental themes, most notably celebrating the brilliance and beauty of Italian life with a series of paintings of girls as times of day. Nikolai Gogol claimed Russian painting owed its regeneration to Bryullov. Gogol almost certainly had in mind *The Last Day of Pompeii* – a work which made the artist's name.

Bryullov set important precedents for Russian art. He was the first to depict crowds, and placed strong emphasis on accuracy. Excavations at Pompeii from 1806 to 1815, revealed the size and appearance of the town, and inspired Giovanni Pacini's opera. Bryullov attended a performance. Alessandro Sanquirico's set for the final scene of the eruption of Vesuvius (right) made an impression. Bryullov, friendly with many Italian archaeologists, visited the site and saw the ancient city and the remains of everyday life that had been unearthed. He selected a specific part of the town as background for his painting.

Karl Bryullov, *The Last Day of Pompeii*, 1830-3

Foreign visitors flocked to Bryullov's studio to see his masterpiece. Walter Scott is said to have looked at the painting for an hour, calling it an epic. Karl returned to Russia in 1841 hailed as the greatest master. The poet, Pyotr Lavrov summarised the electric effect the work had on artists; *"The Last Day of Pompei/Has been the first day of Russian painting."* More history paintings were expected from Bryullov, but he struggled to repeat his success. The *Siege of Pskov* on which he worked for five years was never finished and was confused and crowded. Instead, he came to be regarded as a dazzling portraitist, particularly of men. He was innovative here too, spending as much effort on the setting of *Prince Golitsyn* as on the portrait. Flooded with light, which catches many objects and sheens the complex flooring, and with the far room giving depth (and repeating the trellis) the work is reminiscent of 17th century Dutch interiors. Russian painters loved it and would excel at interior scenes.

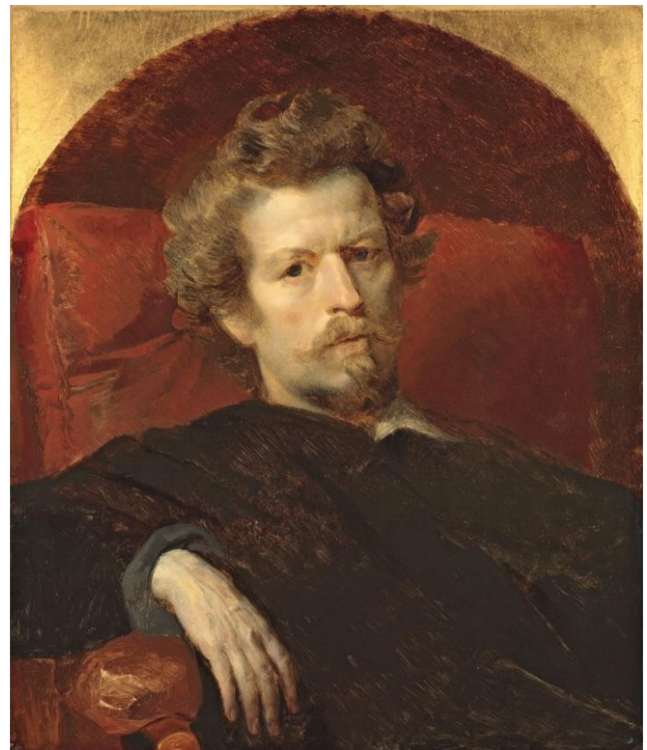
Karl Bryullov, *Prince Alexander Golitsyn*, 1838-40

The poet and translator Alexander Strugovshchikov (noted for his rendition of Goethe's *Faust*) is more representative of the times. Although in a relaxed pose, his gaze is troubled, evidence of some inner discord. Sarabianov explains that the poet *"comes over as a representative of a lost generation, unsure how and to what to apply his energies, talents and intelligence … that surfeit of enforced or voluntary idleness which had produced a multitude of so-called 'superfluous' people".*

Lermontov's *A Hero of our Time* is the literary expression of this superfluity; energy being wasted when there was so much to be done. There had long been a feeling that Russia needed to be corrected. There was a division between Westerners who thought Peter the Great's reforms need to be extended to the liberal and representative governments appearing in the West and Slavophiles who believed Peter had discarded the true nature of the country, and that reverting to the ancient traditions of Kievan Rus would revitalise society. Despite these grave differences, both groups were clear that Russia could not continue as she was.

This conviction, and the faith in reform, received a blow when the 1848 revolutions in Europe failed. That year, Bryullov was seriously ill, spending a long time on his sickbed, but managed to paint a self-portrait which somehow captures the disillusionment of the time. There too is the Romantic theme – the struggle between the impotent body and the powerful spirit.

Karl Bryullov, *Alexander Strugovshchikov*, 1840



Karl Bryullov, *Self-Portrait*, 1848

Alexander Ivanov (1806 – 1858) is important to Russian painting, even though his main work was considered a failure. Ivanov was the son of a professor at the Academy, and was consumed with a burning desire to repeat Karl Bryullov's fame by producing a vast canvas. He was religious and chose *The Appearance of Christ* as his subject. To Ivanov this was when slavery ended and society was transformed as the dignity of common men and women became recognised.

Ivanov worked on the painting for more than 20 years, again and again changing the composition. The figure of Christ was moved deeper into the background which weakens the work. He ransacked studios and museums in Rome for sculptures for body-types and facial expressions. The work failed to arouse enthusiasm when exhibited in Saint Petersburg in 1858. Ivanov became tired of the work too; *"My labour – the great picture – has sunk lower and lower in my eyes."* However, his work was widely appreciated. Gogol encouraged him and Turgenev said; *"this idealistic painter … still has the rare merit of being able to inspire great works, of continually arousing thought."*

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Alexander Ivanov, *The Appearance of Christ before the People*, 1837-57

Ivanov's many studies for *The Appearance of Christ* proved to be more influential than the work itself. His search for truth to nature took him into the country around Rome, and his landscapes in fresh colours inspired his peers. This was important as landscapes were instrumental in the Moscow School taking over the leadership of Russian painting from the St Petersburg Academy.

Alexander Ivanov, *Olive Trees at the Cemetery in Albano and New Moon*, 1835-1840

Landscapes

Sylvester Shchedrin (1791 – 1830)

Landscape was first taught at the Academy by Semyon Shchedrin, but was limited to elegant views of parks for portrait backgrounds. Yet by the 1830s landscapes were wildly popular in Russia. The reason was Semyon's nephew Sylvester Shchedrin who went to Italy in 1819 on his scholarship from the Academy. The 1820s saw the growth across Europe of landscape painting in open air. The Dutch painter Anton Pitloo was invited to Naples by Russian diplomat and art collector Count Grigory Orlov in 1816 to paint open air scenes of Naples. Shchedrin knew Pitloo, mentioning him in several letters.

Shchedrin's first work reflected this trend; he wrote home; *"The Coliseum has commissioned me to paint its portrait."* He set up a studio in a house opposite and produced a realistic view of light playing on the ruin's arches. When the painting arrived in St Petersburg, Tsar Alexander commanded that it be exhibited in the Hermitage. In *New Rome* St Peter's and Castel Sant'Angelo (so beloved of Poussin and Claude) appear as background to a living city, represented by the fishermen in the Tiber. The work was popular in Russia: Shchedrin received commissions for at least ten copies.

Sylvester Shchedrin, *Colosseum*, 1819

Sylvester Shchedrin, *New Rome: Castel Sant’Angelo*, 1823.

Sylvester Shchedrin, *Sorrento*, 1825.

Count Orlov's interest in scenes of Naples was shared by Russian Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich (son of Tsar Paul) who commissioned from Shchedrin landscapes of Naples and the surrounding villages, like *Sorrento*. These works, shown in the Hermitage and at the Academy back home, sparked a deluge of interest from leading aristocratic families in Russia. So, although Shchedrin was happy to stay in Italy, spending his last 15 years in Naples, his works were sent home. During those years his paintings showed his love of contrast and diagonals. *Veranda* moves diagonally in depth, splashes of red here and there.

Sylvester Shchedrin, *Veranda Entwined with Vines*, 1828

Sylvester Shchedrin, *Moonlit Night in Naples*, 1828

Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900)

Shchedrin also captured the effect of light at night on the Bay of Naples. Light on water inspired Ivan Aivazovsky. Aivazovsky's most famous work, *The Ninth Wave*, refers to the belief among Russian seamen that this wave is the most powerful and destructive in a storm.

Ivan Aivazovsky, *The Ninth Wave*, 1850

Aivazovsky was the most prominent Russian artist of his time, enjoying enormous success all over Europe and in the United States, where he held many solo exhibitions. His 4000-5000 pictures were made possible by a host of assistants but he was genuinely fascinated by ships and water. This interest arose at the Academy when he joined the battle painting class given by Alexander Sauerweid, during which he accompanied the Baltic Fleet on manoeuvres in the Gulf of Finland in 1837.

This sealed Aivazovsky's career. After graduating he spent two years in the Crimea recording military exercises. There was an interlude for his scholarship in Rome and Naples, where Ivanov prophetically said *"nobody here paints water as he does"* followed by touring and exhibitions across Europe. On returning to Russia in 1845 he was appointed painter to the Naval General Staff for which he painted seascapes, coastal scenes and battles. His pictures *'crowded as they were with naval battles, sinking ships, storms, rocky shores and tempestuous waves caught the public taste and his fame spread to Europe very quickly (Bird).'* He also gained fame with sunset scenes of Constantinople, Egypt and Odessa.

Ivan Aivazovsky, *View of Constantinople*, 1856

Ivan Aivazovsky, *A Moonlit Night on the Bosphorus*, 1894

Bird reckons *The Ninth Wave* is an allegory of the instability of the Romanov line. Perhaps this interpretation makes the painting famous. However, Aivazovsky was unlikely to be critical of a regime which supported him so whole-heartedly. His other shipwreck scenes were by no means pessimistic. *The Rainbow*, with the bird echoing the dove of the Ark and the diffracted light signalling the end of the storm, is full of hope.

Ivan Aivazovsky, *The Rainbow*, 1873

Aivazovsky accompanied the Russian Fleet as a kind of artist-journalist and while his works in this vein were immensely popular with the public and collectors in the West, his best paintings are not of this type. The same is true of **Vasily Vereshchagin (1842-1904)** who, likewise, was famous beyond Russia for his pictorial records of Russian land campaigns. His first was the Turkestan series, in an expedition in which he was decorated for bravery. After that he travelled widely over the Himalayas and in India, painting photographically realistic scenes (Registan at Samarkand, the Taj Mahal). Vereshchagin served again in the Army in the war with Turkey, which prompted another series of war paintings. He depicted English rule in India, latterly produced a series on Napoleon's Russian campaign and was with Russian forces in China during the Boxer Rebellion and the war with Japan. Often, he shunned the traditional portrayal of battle-scene-as-parade, instead depicting the horrors of war. *Apotheosis of War*, which he dedicated *"to all conquerors past, present and to come"* was banned from being exhibited in St Petersburg in 1874 as it was deemed to show the Russian military in a bad light. What do people expect war to be?

Vasily Vereshchagin, *The Apotheosis of War*, 1871

Back to Sylvester Shchedrin's landscapes. They prompted the private art college established in Moscow in 1832 to set up Classes of Nature, encouraging plein air studies. The college was renamed the School of Painting and Sculpture of the Moscow Art Society in 1843. Fairly quickly the college dropped the St Petersburg Academy system of students devoting three years to drawing from prints and classical sculpture. Instead, a choice of subjects was offered. From the start admission was based on artistic merit and a high school diploma was not required.

Alexei Savrasov (1830 – 1897)

Gray notes that the Russian school of landscape developed largely in Moscow. Students were encouraged to return to teach. Alexei Savrasov, known *as "the father of the Russian School of landscape painting,"* who graduated in 1850, returned in 1857 to teach. He specialised in lyrical scenes of Russia.

Alexei Savrasov, *The Monastery of Pechora near Nizhny Novgorod*, 1871

Alexei Savrasov, *Spring Day*, 1873

Savrasov was taken with scenes of spring, always exceptionally welcome in Russia after the hard, long and bitter winters. The fowl and washing on the line in *Spring Day* under blue skies signify the onset of better weather. Savrasov's famous masterpiece shows rooks building their nests – the promise of new life to come. Beyond the fence the village in the Volga continues its daily toil, watched over by the domes of the Orthodox Church and backed-up by the endless Russian landscape.

<u>Ivan Shishkin (1832-1898)</u>

Rather than being lyrical like his teacher Alexei Savrasov, Ivan Shishkin preferred the majesty of Russia, particularly forests (sources of ship timber, a lucrative export for centuries), sometimes with bears, which he asked others to paint unless they were small as in this example.

Alexei Savrasov, *The Rooks have Returned*, 1871

Ivan Shishkin, *Pine Wood: Mast Timber in the Vyatka Governorate*, 1872

Shishkin's other theme was vast Russian fields – acres upon acres of lush cereal; another vital export for Russia during the 19th century – usually with a winding road, seemingly endless to complement the far horizon. *The Countryside near Moscow* is a joyous work – there is nothing melancholy about the ripe cornfields stretching on under still blue skies of bright sunshine.

One of Shishkin's best works is *Field of Rye*. On one of the studies for this canvas, he wrote, *"Expanse, open space, land, rye, divine abundance, Russian wealth."* The two tiny figures, perhaps serfs enjoying a well-earned romantic interlude, set the scale of the work. In the foreground two swallows flit, bringing to mind Afanasy Fet's poem, the first verse of which is;

> *Nature's ever indolent spy,*
> *Forgetting cares and tasks, I'm fond*
> *Of watching darkening swallows fly*
> *Above a twilit pond*

Ivan Shishkin, *Midday: Countryside near Moscow*, 1869

Ivan Shishkin, *Field of Rye,* 1878

The presence of serfs in some of Shishkin's landscapes reflect the interest in peasant life among Russia's intellectuals. For decades, writers had depicted the rural world: Nikolai Gogol and Ivan Turgenev being the most famous. This interest was picked up by artists, but with a romantic tinge: we see happy peasants on a road or at rest in a field of rye rather than being worked to death.

Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842 – 1910)

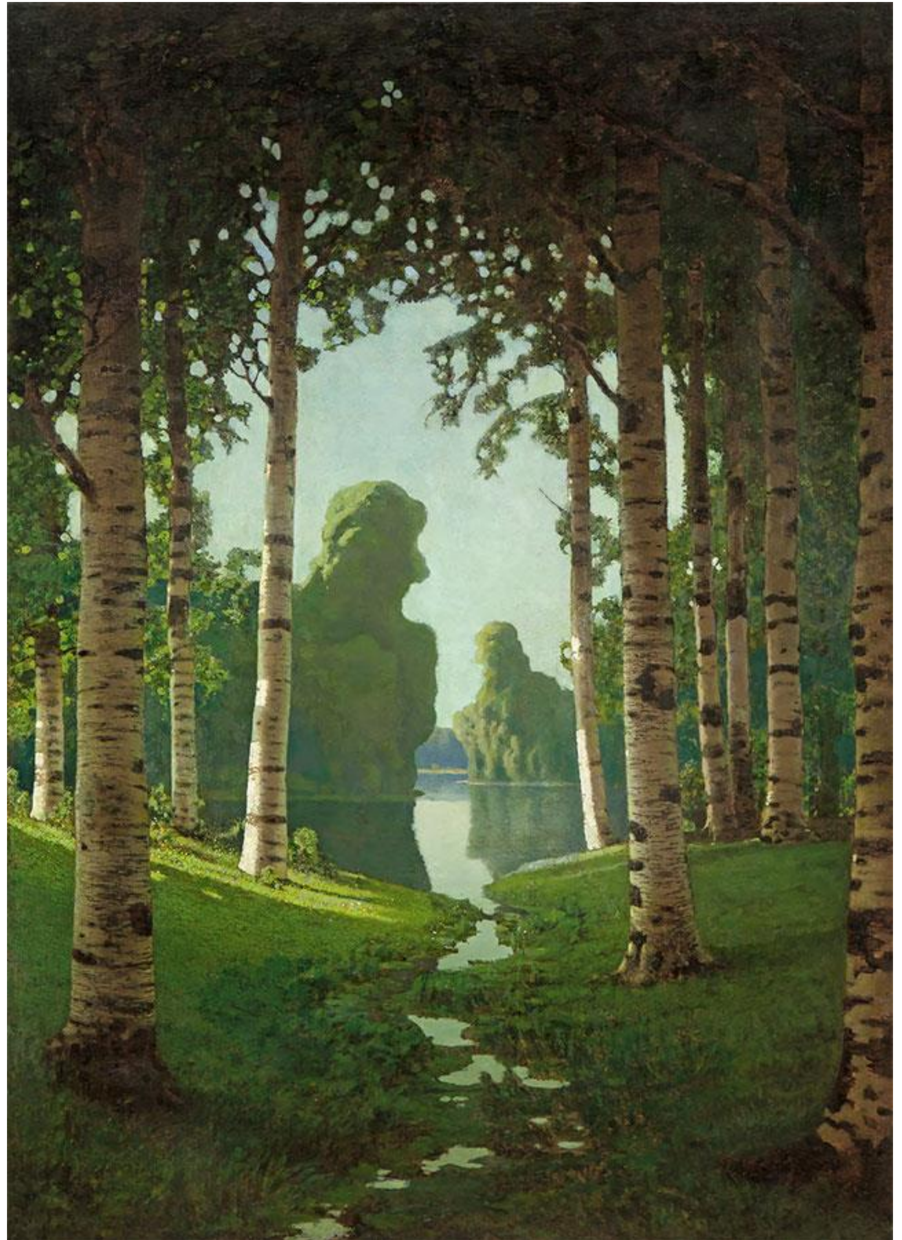
Arkhip Kuindzhi was Greek, born in Southern Russia, and largely self-taught. His landscapes are almost abstract; simple compositions, avoiding an abundance of detail or distracting colour.

Arkhip Kuindzhi, *After the Rain*, 1879

Arkhip Kuindzhi, *Moonlight on the Dnieper*, 1880

The dramatic chiaroscuro of *Moonlight on the Dnieper* captured the imagination of St Petersburg society. Kuindzhi opened his studio for two hours on Sundays to allow the public to see the painting – word of its novel light had got out; Ivan Turgenev was among the first visitors. Kuindzhi arranged for all the curtains in his studio to be closed and the only source of light was a small electric lamp. The high distant viewpoint gives much of the canvas over to the sky, moonlight illuminates the river and makes the shoreline look elegant. One of the founders of the Wanderers, Ivan Kramskoi visited too, commenting, *"…the river truly is majestic in its current and the sky is real, bottomless and deep."* The Dnieper inspired Kuindzhi; he painted a brilliantly red sunset over the river and the last painting he exhibited was a gentle scene.

He was also loved painting birches, following the format of *After the Rain*: dark foreground and background bracketing a shaft of sunlight. His later works (including this one) were not seen by the public until posthumous exhibitions were held in St Petersburg in 1913 and Moscow in 1914. Kuindzhi continued to be a master of light, and bequeathed his fortune to the society set up in his name to teach young painters.



Arkhip Kuindzhi, *Birch Grove*, 1901

Vasily Polenov (1844 – 1927)

Vasily Polenov was another student of Alexei Savrasov and, according to Sarabianov the most important landscape painter after Arkhip Kuindzhi of late 1870s. He painted many genres, but landscape was Polenov's true vocation, as he had a mastery of plein air techniques, developed in his studies in Normandy accompanying Ilya Repin (later below).

Moscow Yard is his most famous work and done just after his return from France; shadows are rendered in colour (Polenov has learned from Monet that the sun casts blue shadows on white walls) and distant objects are less intense in colour. "… *Moscow Yard, Grandmother's Garden … new and fresh, full of truth, with subtle musical lyricism and exquisite technique, suddenly reminded me of a number of Turgenev's intimate stories",* wrote Ilya Ostroukhov, fellow landscape painter and collector of Polenov's works.

Vasily Polenov, *Moscow Yard*, 1878

Vasily Polenov, *On the Sea of Tiberias (Lake of Gennersaret),* 1888

His *Sea of Tiberias* has gorgeous rocks and clear air. Polenov claimed that, *"art should promote happiness and joy"*. He liked the New Testament; *"I have an inexpressible love for Evangelic narration, I love this naive, truthful story, I love its purity and high ethics, its incredible humanity which permeates the teachings of Christ".* Polenov painted 68 works in his *Life of Christ*, showing his skill with light and colour.

Vasily Polenov, *Christ Among the Doctors*, 1896

Vasily Polenov, *Christ and the Adulteress (Who is without Sin?)*, 1888

Isaac Levitan (1860-1900)

Polenov and Alexei Savrasov taught the outstanding landscape painter of the 1890s, Isaac Levitan. Levitan combined plein air technique with lyricism, and is the best exponent of 'landscapes of mood'. His works are often compared to Chekhov's prose, with whom he was a close friend. Levitan *"searched for the soul of Russian nature (Petrova)"* in his paintings. From the start he concentrated on landscapes, loving the beauty of the Russian countryside. Almost all of his student works were sketches. The exception was *Autumn Day*, a young soul on an endless road offering no turn-offs. The young Levitan, unable to paint a woman's figure, had to ask Nikolai Chekhov (the brother of the famous author) for help. The painting brought instant fame and was quickly acquired by Pavel Tretyakov for his gallery.

Isaac Levitan, *Autumn Day: Sokolniki*, 1879

Levitan's friendship with the Chekhovs was strengthened when he moved in 1884 to Zvenigorod near the Savvinsky monastery to paint sketches. The Chekhov family lived close by at the Babkino estate. When they found out Levitan was living across the river, they invited to him to live with them at their summer house. *Birchwood*, painted with a thick brush was started at Babkino.

Isaac Levitan, *Birchwood,* 1885-9

The work was finished during one of Levitan's trips to the Volga. He was fascinated by the grandeur of the region and the image of this great Russian river became inseparable in his mind from the fate of Russia and her people. He painted scenes around the little town of Plyos on the Volga.

Isaac Levitan, *After the Rain: Plyos,* 1889

Isaac Levitan, *Evening: Golden Plyos*, 1889

Spirituality was central to his work. *Evening Bells* and *Quiet Abode* feature a monastery, set apart on an island, a world of prayer and devotion to the spirit, remote from mundane concerns.

Isaac Levitan, *Evening Bells,* 1892

Quiet Abode was seen by Chekhov at the 19th Wanderers' Exhibition in 1891, and he wrote to his sister lauding the work. Chekhov paid tribute to the painting through Yulia Sergeyevna, the heroine of his 1895 novella *Three Years,* a critique of Russian society. The version published in the two monthly issues of *Russian Thought* was heavily censored - anything to do with religion was removed. That explains why Yulia does not mention the monastery in her description of *Quiet Abode* which in the novella she sees at an art exhibition at Easter with her husband:

> *" … she stopped before a small landscape. In the foreground was a stream, over it a little wooden bridge; on the further side a path that disappeared in the dark grass; a field on the right, a copse; near it a camp fire - no doubt of watchers by night; and in the distance there was a glow of the evening sunset. Yulia imagined walking herself along the little bridge, and then along the little path further and further, while all round was stillness, the drowsy landrails calling and the fire flickering in the distance. And for some reason she suddenly began to feel that she had seen those very clouds that stretched across the red part of the sky, and that field before, many times before. She felt lonely, and longed to walk on and on along the path; and there, in the glow of sunset was the calm reflection of something unearthly, eternal. 'How finely that's painted!" she said, surprised that the picture had suddenly become intelligible to her. 'Look, Alyosha! Do you see how peaceful it is?'"*

Isaac Levitan, *Quiet Abode,* 1890

Isaac Levitan, *Vladimirka,* 1892

Levitan featured a road, so often a motif in 19th century Russian art, in one of his best-loved works. *Vladimirka* was the track along which political exiles trudged under guard to Siberia. The endless road, used by Shishkin to suggest limitless harvest fields as Russia's wealth, is converted into a symbol of the endless despair facing the exiles. Yet, along the way, a lone woman stops at a roadside cross and icon; a reminder of the vital importance of spirit and faith for those committed to labour camps.

Faith, beset by cruelty and misfortune, could be fragile, yet has the strength to prevail against all hardships, as Levitan reminds us in *Above Eternal Peace*. Nature, majestic and eternal, dominates the world - powerful forces can wreak havoc with man's puny creations. A wooden church sits precariously on a cliff, exposed to the elements. Gales, sweeping through the trees, threaten the little building, just as earlier winds have bent and shifted the tattered crosses in the graveyard. Yet, none of them have been completely sundered and, in a window, gleams a light; hope against the darkening skies.

Isaac Levitan, *Above Eternal Peace*, 1894

Later in the decade came scenes of Autumn and Spring, the former expressing wonder at the beauty of nature, as she heads into the depths of winter, the latter at the joy that thaws and warmer sunny days evoke. March was the prototype for many snowy landscapes at the turn of the century by Russian artists. The horse with empty sledge peacefully waits for the riders to return from inspecting the dacha to see how the country home has fared through the winter months. At least the bird-house has survived in the tree. Levitan's brushwork gives the sense of a scene captured rapidly.

Isaac Levitan, *Golden Autumn*, 1895

Isaac Levitan, *March*, 1895

This technique would get broader – his *Haystacks* looking very like Monet's – and his moonlit scenes rendered in a cursory style. Levitan never married, but for many years had an affair with Sofia Kuvshinnikova. He was introduced to her and her husband, Dmitri (a doctor in the police department) by the Chekhov brothers soon after he moved into their summer residence. Dmitri was older than Sofia who in turn was 13 years older than Levitan. It was with Sofia on a steamboat trip on the Volga that Levitan discovered Plyos in 1888 and the pair stayed there until 1890.

In 1892 Chekhov produced *The Grasshopper* – a short story about a lecherous younger man who has an affair with an older married woman, whose husband dies after she leaves him. Chekhov was a close friend of Sofia but was critical of her betrayal of her innocent husband. The publication of *The Grasshopper* provoked a small scandal and much anger and, according to Chekhov's brother and biographer Mikhail, nearly ended in a duel with Levitan. The intervention of a mutual friend prevented that, so removing the possibility of Anton joining Lermontov and Pushkin as dead duellists. Clearly, good relations were restored, as Chekhov later paid homage to Levitan in *Three Years.* Dmitri tolerated his wife's affair, which ran (with a couple of breaks until 1897). Levitan died from a long-standing heart disease in 1900, painting until the end.

Isaac Levitan, *Sofia Kuvshinnikova*, 1888

Social Criticism

The failure of the Decembrists in 1825 and the repression that followed under Nicholas I (who reintroduced the death penalty to hang five of them) contrasted starkly with the Liberal Revolutions in Western Europe in 1830, and the expansion of economies which ensued. The intellectuals among the nobility became more dissatisfied with the conservatism in Russia, even as the country was regarded as the strongest European land power. The realisation that Russia had to change grew more widespread and, as noted above, divided thinkers between Westerners and Slavophiles. The impetus was the publication in Moscow's literary, philosophical and political magazine *Teleskop* in 1836 of the *Philosophical Letter*, one of a series completed by Pyotr Chaadayev soon after the 1830 revolutions. Chaadayev had served during the war against Napoleon and afterwards, but was disgusted with the Russian regime. In his *Letter* he argued that Russia had played no part in European civilisation or in the great Asian civilisations, nor did it represent any civilisation of its own;

> *We have learnt nothing from experience - the general law of mankind does not apply to us. Lonely in the world, we have given nothing to the world, we have not taught the world anything; we have not poured a single idea into the mass of human ideas; we have made no contribution to the progress of the human spirit, and all that has come to us from that progress we have disfigured. We have something in our blood that pushes back any real progress.*

Nicholas I reacted to the publication by closing down *Teleskop*, exiling the editor and pronouncing that Chaadayev should be considered mad and was to be regularly inspected by doctors. Months of this humiliation did not lessen the impact of his *Letter*: although his followers split into Westerners and Slavophiles they all wished for political and social reform. In art, the shame felt among the ruling class about Russian customs and history was suppressed – the only genre and history paintings accepted for the annual Academy competitions were classical Roman scenes.

Pavel Fedotov (1815 – 1852)

Pavel Fedotov was the first artist to criticise the societal norms held in esteem by the Russian military and nobility. His *Newly Decorated Knight* shows an officer the morning after a drunken celebration, pointing proudly to the origin of his new title. This meant an elevation in the Table of Ranks introduced by Peter the Great, giving the knight a more important post in civil administration and more lucrative bribes. He is the embodiment of vice – the scattered bottles and glasses; the mirror and grooming tinctures and devices on the table and in his hair. His self-important pose towards his cook (whom he has made pregnant) is returned mockingly as she holds up his worn-out boot.

Pavel Fedotov, *Newly Decorated Knight*, 1846

Fedotov wrote in his notebook about the dishevelled scene*; "Tidiness around oneself in one's home is a sign of self-respect. Physical tidiness will require, in parallel, moral tidiness."* Nicholas I was keen to suppress any criticism of the worship of the military and official ranks, and the government refused to permit the publication of a lithograph of the painting until the medal on the officer's chest had been removed and the title changed to *The Morning After a Party*.

Fedotov was a military man and like many of his fellow officers played music, wrote poetry and painted. His talent for the latter prompted his superiors' encouragement and gained him an invitation to special classes at the Academy for budding painters of 'battle pieces'. Fedotov, however, was more drawn towards Dutch and Flemish genre paintings and, especially, those of Hogarth in the Hermitage. Illustrations for books blossomed as literature became popular, and Fedotov began his artistic career that way. Early in 1840s he had to decide whether to stay in army or resign his commission to become a professional artist. Karl Bryullov advised against the latter but Fedotov ignored him.

Pavel Fedotov, *The Major's Marriage Proposal*, 1848

The Major's Marriage Proposal depicts the excitement of a rich merchant's family when a matchmaker (the woman in the red coat, a common feature of Russian society matrimony – see Gogol's play *Marriage*) brings a middle-aged aristocrat to court their daughter. Everyone knows that the aristocrat simply wants money, but the happiness of the daughter is sacrificed by her mother for the opportunity to climb up the social ladder. "*The pretty young girl distraught at her fate, her coarse and over-dressed mother, the bewildered father in his old Russian caftan is a sly criticism of the manners of the rising middle class (Hamilton)".* Unlike Hogarth, Fedotov does not hold up his characters for ridicule or humour – they are ordinary people simply following the norms of society which, in this case, demote marriage to a dirty deal. Similar themes were common in Gogol's *Dead Souls* and central to the *Inspector General*, as well as in Dostoevsky's works (which Fedotov illustrated)

Another example is *The Fastidious Bride*, which was taken from one of the fables of Ivan Krylov which tells of an elderly woman who refused all her suitors in her youth and is now obliged to marry a hunchback. The enthusiasm of the bride-to-be for her disfigured lover is feigned, as she realises this is her last chance, but the emotions of her parents are real – the father groaning in anticipation of yet another rejection but the mother shushing him in the hope of good news. Again, Fedotov is not criticising the bride (perhaps even being sympathetic to her). Indeed, he suggests that though the practices of society may lead to bad results in life, aspects of existence may yet be beautiful. Thus, the objects (the standard lamp, the birdcage and the chair) just like those in *The Major's Marriage Proposal* (the chandelier, table lamps and ceiling decoration) seem to be chosen for their decorative beauty.

Pavel Fedotov, *The Fastidious Bride*, 1847

Despite Bryullov's reservations by the end of the 1840s, Fedotov had made a name for himself. His exhibitions in St Petersburg and Moscow were acclaimed and buyers aplenty sought his works. Yet, just at this moment his troubles began. The 1848 revolutions in Europe made Nicholas I extremely sensitive to dissent. Mikhail Petrashevsky, a junior official of the Foreign Ministry, formed a literary group, largely made up of teachers, writers, students, minor army officers and officials which discussed Western ideas and literature which were censored by the Russian government. They did not intend taking any action but had during their talks debated the merits of violence compared to propaganda as a means for change. Nicholas, terrified of any possible insurrection, had the group arrested. They were treated harshly and fifteen were sentenced to death, including Dostoevsky. With great cruelty, despite knowing that he intended to spare them, Nicholas had them marched out into a public square to face the firing squad. The first three were tied to stakes (Dostoevsky, who recalled the event in *The Idiot,* was in the next set of three) and after an unbearable minute, a messenger ran to the scene announcing the Tsar had commuted the death sentences to forced labour in Siberia. Dostoevsky spent six years in a prison there, from which came his masterpiece *Notes from the House of the Dead.*

The trial of the Petrashevsky Circle marked the onset of heavier repression. Fedotov was harassed by officials and, as people became afraid to buy his art, he lost his clientele and was unable to support himself. His last two or three years were full of despair and he spent his last months in a lunatic asylum. Despite this unhappiness, Fedotov continued to produce fine paintings.

Pavel Fedotov, *The Aristocrat's Breakfast*, 1849-50

The Aristocrat's Breakfast reflects the satirical article *Letters of a Metropolitan to His Provincial Bachelor Friend (1848)* by the novelist Ivan Goncharov which described a dandy; *"… He will agree to dine badly for two months ... just to be able to put on today the pair of trousers of a certain colour that was delivered to him three days ago."* The dandy is desperate to show in society that he lives in a grand style, but lives in fear of an unexpected visitor (an alternative title for the work) who will become aware of his poverty. Fedotov shows the aristocrat breakfasting on a slice of simple black bread, which he hastily covers with a book when he realises someone has appeared at the curtained entrance to his room. *Breakfast* could serve as an allegory of Russia at that time. Of course, the Tsar's morning meal was much more lavish. Also, his army had easily quelled rebellious forces in Hungary. But this success and frequent visits to diplomatic courts in full regalia accompanied by an entourage of be-medalled nobles obscured from the view of Western European leaders the poverty and backwardness of life across Nicholas' country.

Fedotov's later works are full of sympathy and compassion. He painted three versions of *A Young Widow* depicting grief mixed with the realisation of the poverty and homelessness to come. This was a common fate of soldiers' widows: their husband's death depriving them of a roof over their heads and the means of subsistence. Fedotov's sister had been left virtually penniless in this way, and his efforts to provide for her, as well as his other sisters and his aged father eventually proved too much for his sanity.

Despite his brief career (his paintings were exhibited only from 1848), Fedotov's influence was considerable. He proved that an academic education was not necessary for true talent to develop and he rejected the classical subjects of the Academy for contemporary scenes which proved immensely popular. His critiques seem mild but they were the first to be seen and, amid the repression of Nicholas I, produced a profound impression on Russian artists and intellectuals. Soon after his death, these last two works became even more relevant. Mighty Russia, defeater of Napoleon and regarded as the strongest military power by Western Europe, was humiliated in the Crimean War. Suddenly the Tsar's finery could no longer hide the backwardness of his country. Russia lost territory and her economy broke down. *"Her power in eastern Europe was broken and fear of it abated (Thomson)*" This outcome was welcomed by her opponents France and England, who perhaps fought the war (albeit with great incompetence) to that end rather than to save Turkey. More young widows were produced than anyone imagined. Russia lost 300,000 men – a huge number in the 19th century. A third of the soldiers perished marching nearly a thousand miles from Moscow to the Crimea. Hundreds of thousands of peasants also died taking ox-carts along the same route over tracks to re-supply Sebastopol during the winter. Russia had no metalled roads and only one railway, linking St Petersburg with Moscow (built under the management of Whistler's father, curiously enough). Crimea pushed Russia to the side-line in European affairs - she remained there, ignored, for almost a century.

Pavel Fedotov, *A Young Widow*, 1851-2

Fedotov's paintings marked the birth of a long phase when Russian painting illustrated social ills. The repression of Nicholas I ruled out political discussions, so Alexander Herzen, a Westerner suggested literature and art should serve humanity by being media of dissent: *"For a people derived of its social freedoms, literature is the only platform from which it can make the cries of its conscience and indignation heard."* Writers like Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy (who had served at Sebastopol), Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolay Nekrasov, and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin confronted social ills with a high sense of morality. Literature led the way, but painting followed in the wake. Nikolai Chernyshevsky promoted socialist ideas and peasant communes in his novel *What is to be Done (1863)* which cost him many years in prison. Earlier, in his dissertation of 1855, *The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*, he suggested art should depict social evils in order to promote reform.

Chernyshivseky's suggestion gained currency after Valery Yacobi painted *Prisoner's Rest*, showing people travelling to exile in Siberia along Vladimirka (the road painted by Levitan, and which passed Yacobi's home), with prominence given to the well-clothed and booted dead man on the cart. Woman and children often chose to accompany their husbands. That the work provoked the government to take steps to improve the treatment of people being transported to Siberia added credence to the idea that art could lead to reform.

Valery Jacobi, *The Prisoner's Rest*, 1861

Vasily Perov (1834 – 1882)

Vasily Perov adopted the ideas of Herzen and Chernyshevsky. Vasily Perov's father, Baron Kreudener, was exiled to Siberia because of his political activities. Perov made his way back to Moscow in 1853. Perov was able to be much bolder in his criticism at first because the accession of Alexander II brought a period of liberalism as the new Tsar recognised the need for reform. Perov studied at the Moscow School, which was much more open-minded institution than the Academy in Saint Petersburg. The Moscow School gave him a gold medal for *Easter Procession* but trouble ensued when the painting was exhibited in St Petersburg in 1862: *"although the picture was rapidly removed", wrote an eye-witness to the collector Tretyakov, "it still raised quite a storm of protest. Let us hope that Perov will not end up in the Solovetsky monastery [a notorious place of exile] rather than in Italy [on his scholarship].*" The painting is an early theme of Perov's; the earthly desires and greed of the clergy who abandon their duties to the faithful. A drunken priest, who is supposed to lead the procession, reels down the steps, carelessly treading on a painted egg donated by a villager (a Russian tradition at Easter) which has been dropped by church official worse for drink. A woman carries a badly-maintained icon while an old man holds another icon upside down. The Orthodox Church might neglect its flock but was very zealous in getting Perov's paintings removed from public view and banned from reproduction in newspapers or magazines.

Vasily Perov, *Easter Procession*, 1861

Perov also won a gold medal for *The Village Sermon*, which shows how the church pandered to the nobility. The local landlord sleeps in front of the pulpit while his wife listens to the whispers of her lover and the priest lectures the peasants, who are naturally kept at a distance from the noble family by a lackey. Everyone should stand during an Orthodox service.

The third in this early set shows a fat indolent priest studiously ignoring the plea of a child holding his cap for alms. The child's father wears the Order of the Hero of the Crimean War on the chest of his tattered coat – evidently one of many who survived but lost a limb and, thus, became unemployable. In the background another cleric wakes from an afternoon snooze in a plush carriage.

Vasily Perov, *A Village Sermon*, 1861

Vasily Perov, *Drinking Tea in Mytishchi*, 1862

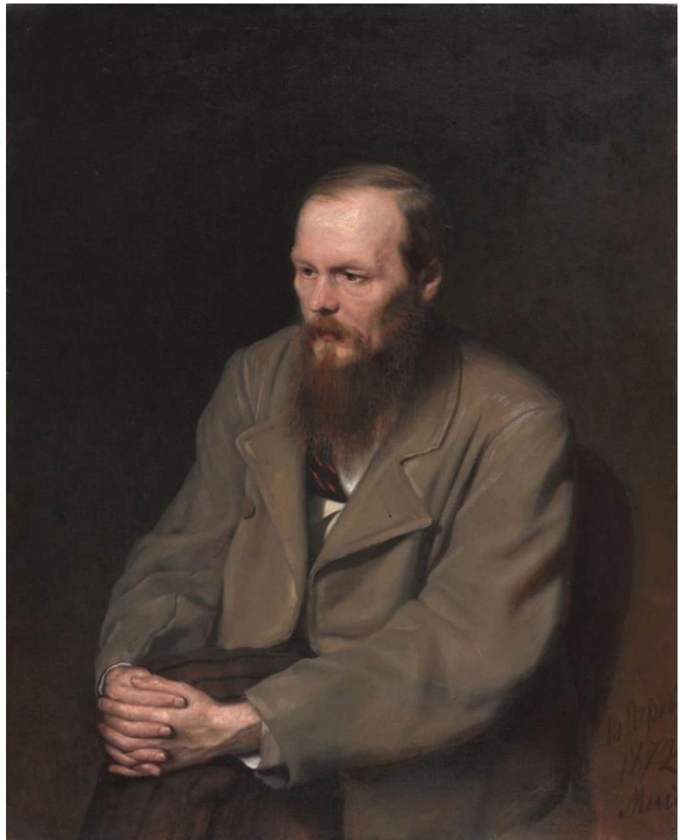
Perov spent only two years in Paris on his scholarship before becoming homesick for Russia. While in Paris his sketches were of simple folk, and this is reflected in his works when he returned which are more sympathetic than his earlier paintings. *The Drowned Girl*, shows the corpse of a woman who has committed suicide in the Moskva River. A policeman watches over her kindly, perhaps contemplating her freedom from pain or pondering the senseless treatment of the girl which has led to this tragic end. The outlines of the Moscow Kremlin are barely visible, *"symbolic of the far removal of the leadership from the misfortunes and unhappiness which plague the people of the city (Sarabianov)."*

Troika – the term usually used to describe the three horses which pull a cart or sledge in Russia – depicts the exploitation of child serfs. They labour alongside the wall of a monastery. Catherine the Great had seized church lands. Until then, monasteries owned serfs – hardly a Christian characteristic. Despite the hard work of pulling a large barrel of water up a hill which must have seemed never-ending, the children's faces seem to be lit with hope, as they gaze into the future.

Vasily Perov, *The Drowned Girl*, 1867

Vasily Perov, *Troika: Apprentice Workmen Carrying Water*, 1866

Perov also painted portraits. One of the most striking is that of Dostoevsky, who is caught deep in thought. Fyodor's wife, Anna, said that, *"Perov captured…Dostoevsky's 'creative moment' … he seems to be 'peering into himself'."* There is also a sense of completeness and self-sufficiency, created by the arms and hands which contain and outline the man, and which also separate him from his immediate surroundings – isolated in considering more profound realities. The portrait was painted while Fyodor was working on *Demons*, one of the four masterworks he wrote after his return from Siberian exile.



Vasily Perov, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, 1872

Perov's gold medal pieces, *Easter Procession* and *A Village Sermon* had been hastily removed from public view in St Petersburg. This did not dissuade ***Vasily Pukirev (1832-90)*** from social criticism. His *An Unequal Marriage* delighted the public in the capital. Indeed, on seeing it, the Academy made him a professor.

Vasily Pukirev, *An Unequal Marriage*, 1862

The work revisits the theme painted by Pavel Fedotov – marriage as a means for an impoverished noble to gain money, and for the bride's family to improve their social status. Disgust at such arrangements is written on the face of the young chap behind the bride, commonly thought to be Pukirev himself.

Pukirev's public success hard on the heels of Perov's anti-clerical pieces, prompted the Academy to have second thoughts. To prevent socially critical paintings, the Academy for 1863 decided to withdraw the right of students to choose their own subjects for exhibition pieces and set the theme of Odin in Valhalla as the topic for the annual gold medal. Thirteen painters and one sculptor ("The Fourteen") resigned in protest and formed The Artists' Co-operative Society to exhibit their works, which proved such a success that in 1870 they formed the Society for Travelling Art Exhibitions: *Peredvizhniki* (travellers) or The Wanderers.

The Wanderers (*Peredvizhniki*)

Over three decades, The Wanderers put on exhibitions of paintings in towns and cities across Russia showing pictures which advocated social reform. From the start Pavel Tretyakov, founder of the Moscow merchant bank, subsidised the movement – the expanding business class in Russia were also in favour of reform. He consistently bought paintings exhibited by The Wanderers over a period of 30 years. In 1892 he donated his collection to Moscow in a gallery which bears his name – the first museum devoted entirely to Russian works of art. All the important artists in Russia contributed paintings to exhibitions arranged by The Wanderers. The highlight of the early years was Ilya Repin's *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, which remains the featured painting of any exhibition on the movement.

Ilya Repin, *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, 1870-73

Repin (who will be covered in detail below) was not a member of The Wanderers, but supported their ideals. The idea for the painting came when, walking along the banks of the Neva while studying at the Academy in St Petersburg, he spotted barge haulers bent with effort pulling a boat past a group of gay young people having a picnic on the riverbank. The juxtaposition made the haulers look like animals, but Repin saw them as real people and went to the Volga in 1870 to study their way of life.

Seton-Watson wrote about them: *"The burlaki or Volga bargemen, may have numbered as many as 300,000 in the first half of the 19th century … The journey from Astrakhan to Nizhny Novgorod, walking along the bank upstream with the tow-rope around them, took 50 to 75 days … It was important to keep to the agreed date of delivery: thus, if contrary winds held the team up, the journey might end with a terrible spurt, with only three hours sleep or so in twenty-four for days on end."* Repin spent time with a gang and depicts them: an unfrocked priest leads; a prize-fighter to his right and a sailor staring angrily to his left. The rest include a sick old man, a young lad (called Larka), a Kalmik from Siberia and a Greek. Repin called the team the *"population of the Empire."*

Ostensibly *Barge Haulers* follows the social criticism of Pavel Fedotov and Vasily Perov, but Ilya Repin includes other aspects which were very important to The Wanderers - the strength and moral worth of ordinary people and a sense of hope in the future. Larka looks towards distant horizons as if realising that the world will improve for its youngsters. The Wanderers also wanted to depict good behaviour and the need for sacrifice. The works they exhibited varied enormously.

Ivan Kramskoi, *Forest Warden*, 1874

Ivan Kramskoi (1837 – 1887)

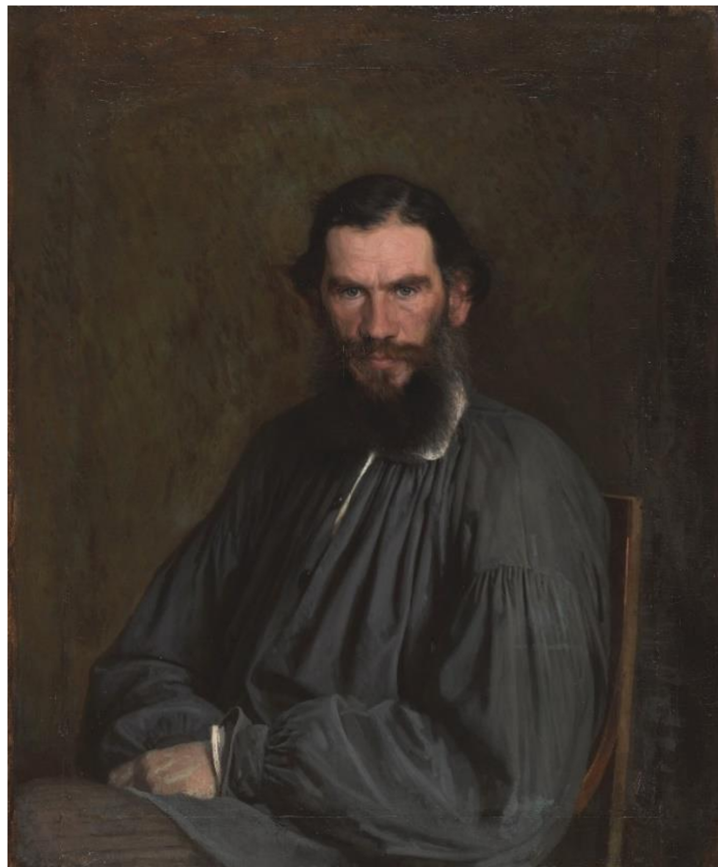
The leader (and also the most talented of the original Fourteen) of The Wanderers was Ivan Kramskoi. Like Repin he wanted to show the virtues of peasants. Turgenev's *Hunter's Sketches* had shown peasants in their daily life as real people and had, as Crankshaw explains, deeply affected Alexander II and influenced his decision to emancipate the serfs. *Forest Warden* might be a serf but he is a clear-eyed, intelligent man.

Ivan Kramskoi, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 1872-4

Kramskoi's most famous work seems at odds with The Wanderers' aims, being religious. Depicting contemporary people who were agitating for reform in the 1860s was dangerous. Emancipation, long expected, brought only problems. There was a delay of two years, land earmarked for serfs was not sufficient to sustain them and their families, and they had to pay huge fees (based on excessively high land valuations) over the following 49 years to acquire even that. Moreover, peasants were still liable for poll-tax. Moreover there was the bitter anger of peasants who expected to get the land that they worked for free: "*We are yours, but the land is ours"* was a well-known and widespread attitude. Alexander II knew emancipation would deeply disappoint because he mobilised troops across the country before the rules were read out in churches. 1861 and 1862 were marked by violence. There was no coherent revolt, but peasants across Russia attacked their landlords and burned down manor houses: 102 peasants were killed in Bezdna when troops opened fire on folk who had gathered to wait for a messenger said to be from Moscow bearing the real Emancipation Act. When intelligent people heard of the massacre and the growing unrest, they concluded that nothing had changed, and that emancipation was a fraud. Several groups began producing leaflets advocating revolution. In May 1862 an epidemic of serious fires beset St Petersburg. The authorities assumed they had been set by intellectuals and students. Waves of imprisonments of people merely suspected of dissent resulted. Chernyshevsky was put on trial in 1864, convicted on false evidence and exiled to Siberia until 1883. A member of one of the revolutionary groups then attempted to assassinate Alexander II in 1866. Afterwards, repression grew more vicious; further reforms were abandoned and those implemented were slowed down. Against these events, painting an actual revolutionary would have resulted in the arrest and exile of the artist. Kramskoi chose Christ to stand as a metaphor for the contemporary hero. Alone, he has to decide his fate, contemplating the sacrifice (which for a 19th century Russian revolutionary often meant death – immediately or in Siberia) required in the service of truth and justice. Kramskoi said, *"This is no Christ, it is an image of the sorrows of humanity which are known to all of us."*

Of course, repression fed revolutionary fervour. Literature remained at the forefront of reforming ideas. Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* marked a shift towards violence as a means of change. Leo Tolstoy also contributed to the increasing support for reform. As a result, writers were often used as examples of contemporary heroes. Kramskoi painted Leo Tolstoy on the writer's estate at Yasnaya Polyana when he was working on Anna Karenina. Tolstoy seems severe but also watchful, as well he might as assassination attempts against the Tsar recurred and reaction became more severe.

Not all of Kramskoi's work was devoted to the cause of The Wanderers. He produced more than 400 portraits. He felt that art should be *"wise and educational, as well as beautiful.*"



Ivan Kramskoi, *Leo Tolstoy*, 1873

Nikolai Ge (1831 – 1894) graduated from the Academy well before the Fourteen rebelled, but contributed a couple of pictures to The Wanderers exhibitions. For the first he drew from the bible setting an example which Kramskoi followed. Ge's strikingly different *Last Supper* has Judas donning a cloak as he prepares to leave. He has turned his back on Christ and his figure symbolically obscures the light. Ge saw not just the betrayal but the battle between materialism (the thirty pieces of silver) and spiritual justice and truth, which was relevant to contemporary Russia; the greed for power and wealth in the Tsar and the nobility preventing proper reform. The work caused a sensation in St Petersburg when exhibited.

Nikolai Ge, *The Last Supper*, 1863

Ge's other contribution to The Wanderers used Peter the Great as an historical hero. Peter was convinced that his son, Alexei, would reverse his reforms and so had him killed in the interests of the state. Ge must have been sympathetic to the Westerners, because he believed Peter was just in putting his country ahead of his family.

Nikolai Ge, *Peter the Great Interrogating Alexei, the Tsarevich*, 1871

In contrast to Peter the Great whose enlightened reforms made him a hero, Ivan the Terrible's unstable despotism was seen as an evil force. In anger over an incident at which Ivan himself was at fault, the tsar killed his son with a blow to the head from his pointed sceptre. The grief and sorrow resulting from reckless uncontrolled autocracy was depicted in Vyacheslav Schwartz's painting – Ivan desperately grasps his son's shroud.

Vyacheslav Schwartz, *Ivan the Terrible next to the Body of his Son*, 1864

Grigory Myasoedov, *The Zemstvo Dines*, 1872

Ivan Kramskoi's idea of showing the worthiness of peasants became more popular in The Wanderer's exhibitions of the 1870s. Emancipation did little to improve the economic lot of the mass of peasants, but it broke the absolute authority of landowners. In 1864 district and provincial assemblies, *zemstvos*, were set up to administer rural affairs. Peasants were elected to them. During the first years of *zemstvos*, the proportion of seats at local level held by nobles was 42%, peasants 38%, merchants and clerics the remainder.

Grigory Myasoedov (1834 – 1911) shows a local *zemstvo* having lunch. The peasant members with onions, bread and milk, are shown with respect – their faces intelligent and thoughtful, as they share their meagre rations. None of the noble members appear; one of their servants cleans their silver at the window. Most *zemstvos* struggled against landowners' indifference. But some did *"magnificent work … above all in the establishment and running of primary schools, fire services (especially important in a land of wooden houses), roads, rural medical services and the encouragement of improved agricultural practice (Crankshaw)"* *Zemstvos* increased expenditure on rural public health and education (both of which the nobility considered a waste of money) from 1,300,000 roubles and 700,000 roubles respectively in 1868 to 4,000,000 and 3,300,000 in 1875 (Seton-Watson).

Konstantin Savitsky, *Repairing the Railroad*, 1874

Konstantin Savitsky, *Paying Their Respects to the Icon*, 1878

Konstantin Savitsky (1844 – 1905) also stressed the positive attributes of peasants. The debacle of re-supplying Sebastopol in the Crimean War sparked a good deal of railway building in Russia, not all of it of a very high standard. The strength and dogged determination of men and boys working wheelbarrows is clear, but the intentional muting of their colours convey them as anonymous draught animals; bright colour being reserved for the overseer. Rural peasants were generally pious, despite the shortcomings of the local priests. Konstantin contrasts their enthusiasm with the apathy of the cleric and his assistants.

Vasily Maksimov, *Sorcerer comes to a Peasant Wedding*, 1875

Vasily Maximov (1844 – 1911) was the son of a state serf, and thoroughly familiar with the life of peasants. He wanted to depict them and their rituals. *Sorcerer comes to a Peasant Wedding* shows the traditional activity celebrating a marriage. The candle-lit *izba* is decorated with traditional gaily-coloured cloths and packed with wedding guests in their best clothes, paying homage to the finely dressed bride and groom who stand beneath the icons. A snow-covered old sorcerer arrives unexpectedly. Like Grigory Myasoedov with his *zemstvo* diners, Maksimov depicts the individual faces of the peasants clearly, representing them as the unique human beings they were. Another of his works, *The Boy Engineer*, shows a peasant lad making a complicated wooden machine in front of bewildered parents. The work hoped to change the official view that ordinary children could not possibly have any useful talents. Under Alexander III, the education of peasants was actively discouraged *("these children should certainly not be brought out of the social environment to which they belong"* stated a government policy document). Children of peasants were effectively barred from secondary schools and their elementary schools taught them only scripture, church singing, Russian, writing and arithmetic. Anything more would turn peasant children out *"with an unlimited and perverted self-love, which demands everything from life",* so wrote Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Tsar's right-hand man. Maksimov also promoted women's education.

Vasily Maksimov, *The Sick Husband*, 1881

Indeed, his paintings gave the Wanderers' exhibitions a penetrating insight into the life of peasants, and deserve close attention. Other works show traditional activities such as children being told fairy-tales by their grandmother by the fire. But some are darker. The chaos and angry ill-feeling involved when a family's communal holding had to be divided (which effectively precluded any advances in agriculture) or partly donated to others in the village. In *The Sick Husband* the wife prays fervently for the life of her man, having no other recourse to feed her family. Even in this work, peasant virtues are clear: the well-made walls, ceiling and floor of the *izba*, the tidiness and prominence of the icon corner. Maksimov wrote to Tretyakov: *"Living here amongst common people and seeing neither art nor artificiality, you constantly compare yourself with these people and compare the painting with the life that you are trying to depict."*

In 1873 and 1874, the Populist movement saw students filled with revolutionary zeal "going to the people"; living with peasants in villages to promote revolutionary action. The response shocked the students; their message was jeered, they were abused and beaten, and many were reported to the police: 1611 were arrested between 1873 and 1878, and two show trials were held. The experience undermined the idea that rural peasants could be a revolutionary force. The People's Will group was formed in 1879 advocating terrorism as an alternative route to political change, and spent the next two years attempting to assassinate the Tsar. In 1881 they succeeded, a bomb killing Alexander II. Most of the People's Will group were executed or rounded up within a year, and repressive measures under Alexander III virtually ended revolutionary activity in the 1880s. One incident left a mark. A student demonstration in 1886 was put down so brutally by the government that fifteen people made bombs in an attempt to kill the Tsar. They were discovered and five were executed in May 1887 – among them Alexander Ulyanov, whose younger brother Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov swore revenge: as Lenin he exacted it.

Artists realised they would be in danger if they painted scenes celebrating revolutionaries. Instead, they produced works showing examples of people who had made a personal sacrifice for the good of the state, much as Ge had done depicted in *Peter the Great and Alexei*. This became an important theme for The Wanderers, and it was made manifest in history paintings.

Vasily Surikov (1848 – 1916)

Vladimir Stasov, Russia's most respected 19th century critic, and a supporter of The Wanderers had commented that; *"just as Pavel Fedotov's 'Newly Decorated Knight' stands at the origins of our genre painting, so does Vyacheslav Schwarz's 'Ivan the Terrible' at the origins of truly historical painting"*. Vasily Surikov is the *"first pure history painter, following the precedents of Schwartz and Ge (Sarabianov)".* Surikov was born to a Cossack family of long history in Siberia. He set out for St Petersburg on horseback in 1868 to join the Academy. He stopped at Kazan and Nizhni-Novgorod, but it was Moscow that bowled him over – *'Coming to Moscow, to that centre of national life, I immediately saw my way'* he wrote later. At the Academy he failed to stand out but at the end of the 1870s while decorating the interior of church of Christ the Saviour, Surikov claimed to have had a vision of the execution of the Streltsy in Red Square. *Morning of the Streltsy Execution* was his first history painting. Tsars who had thrown off medieval practices were celebrated in the 19th century by intellectuals who wanted reform. Inevitably, this would involve suffering by people who held views which were regarded as inherently correct but which were considered to stand in the way of progress.

The Streltsy, the corps of pikemen and musketeers founded by Ivan the Terrible, revolted in 1698 against the military reforms based on Western European methods instituted by Peter the Great. The bearded Streltsy were traditional in belief and dress. Peter, on horseback in Surikov's painting, displays the new close-fitting uniform and shaven face which he introduced to Russia's military men. As punishment for their rebellion Peter sentenced many of them to death. They are brought to Red Square in open carts by soldiers of Peter's Preobrazhensky regiment, one of those dating back to his boyhood games of soldiery, which had remained loyal during the Streltsy uprising. The condemned men hold candles and display a variety of emotions. One red-hatted and red-bearded Strelets, evidently still keen on killing the tsar, locks his gaze with Peter's across the canvas. They represent the two irreconcilable forces, each convinced of the righteousness of their own deeds; the Streltsy victims of the price of social progress.

The scene covers many events, the details of which Surikov learnt from memoirs and eye-witness accounts of the executions which had been preserved. In this he followed Bryullov's research for *The Last Day of Pompeii*. One important incident is not clear from painting. Catherine the Great was later brought to power through the efforts and unwavering support of the Orlov brothers. Their grand-father had been a member of the Streltsy and was in the group to be executed on this morning in Moscow. When his turn came for death;

> *"he strode unhesitatingly across the platform covered with gore, and, using his foot to push aside the freshly severed head of a comrade, declared, 'I must make room here for myself'".*

Peter, impressed by this contempt for death, immediately pardoned him and placed him in one of the regiments being formed for Russia's coming war with Sweden. Thus were the future supporters of Catherine saved by their ancestor's bravery.

Vasily Surikov, *Morning of the Streltsy Execution*, 1881

Feodosia Morozova was a member of the higher nobility and a lady-in-waiting to the wife of Tsar Alexis (reigned 1645 – 1676). Feodosia's husband died in 1662 and she inherited a vast fortune. She was an Old Believer: her confessor was Avvakum who led the opposition to the reforms of Patriarch Nikon during the Great Schism in the 1660s. In 1671, Alexis ordered Feodosia's arrest and torture, but she refused to recant. He wanted to burn her at the stake but was persuaded instead to incarcerate her in an underground cellar of a monastery. There she was intentionally starved to death, succumbing in 1675. A chapel was built in 2002 over the spot of her death. Surikov depicts the day she was taken from Moscow to her place of confinement. Feodosia, haggard from torture, defiantly raises her hand to heaven with two-fingered gesture of the Old Believers (Nikon's reforms included using three fingers to make the sign of the cross), mirrored by the beggar in the right foreground. Feodosia was sacrificed herself for her beliefs – another innocent victim of the march to modernity. People's Will celebrated her as a figure of resistance to the state as did Soviet writers, notably Anna Akhmatova.

Vasily Surikov, *Boyarina Morozova*, 1887

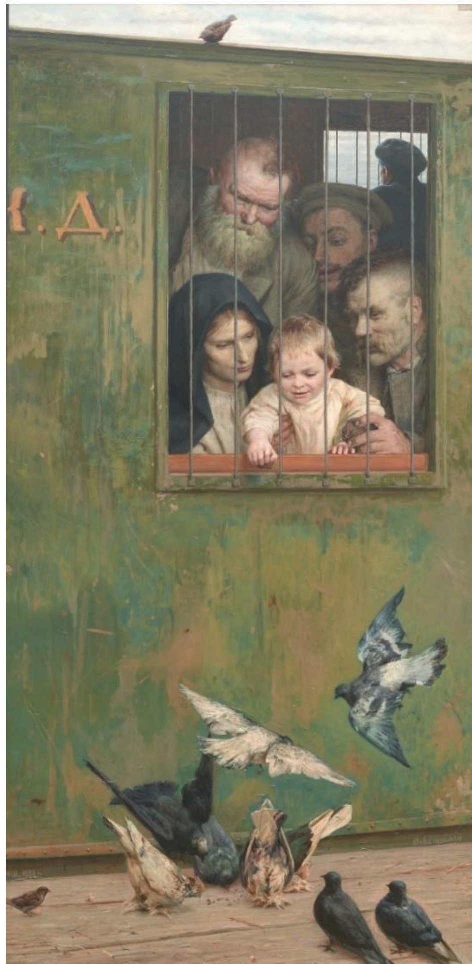
Yermak's Conquest of Siberia has a different revolutionary message. With only 840 men, he fought and defeated the Tartars from 1582 to 1584. Unlike Surikov's other two works, Yermak's men are not carefully delineated, but form a solid and cohesive mass, full of energy: spiritual unity among a small force can produce great power.

Vasily Surikov, *Yermak's Conquest of Siberia*, 1899

Later, Surikov moved away from historical subjects and painted a series of portraits of different types of Russian women (Siberian beauty, city girl, Cossack girl). He contributed to the revival of scenes celebrating peasant life, which once more started to appear late in the century. Surikov showed the traditional game played on the last day of Shrovetide, when a snow fortress was built and a mock battle was laid on. As in his early history works, Surikov pays great attention to dress; many of the peasants wear their best clothes.

Vasily Surikov, *Taking a Snow Town*, 1891

Peasants were again often portrayed as worthy people. Nikolai Yaroshenko's picture of convicts being taken to prison, but delighting in feeding pigeons was inspired by Leo Tolstoy's short story *What Men Live By (1885)*. Yaroshenko chose his convict group carefully, mirroring the Holy Family. Tolstoy's story, written when he was increasingly deeply religious, concludes that we live best through loving and caring for others.



The revival of peasant scenes among The Wanderers reflected increasing hardship in the countryside. The last two decades of the century saw agriculture stagnate as government investment focussed in industry, despite grain being Russia's chief export. Rural poverty was worsened by communal land being divided into ever-smaller parcels as the population grew (on average by one million a year) and the situation was made dire by the dreadful famine of 1891-2.

Nikolai Yaroshenko, *Life is Everywhere*, 1888

Nikolai Kasatkin, *The Poor Gathering Coal in a Worked-out Mine*, 1894

Sergei Ivanov, *On the Road: Death of a Refugee*, 1889

The need to address over-population in the countryside coincided with Russia's desire to take her share in the trade with China and obtain a warm-water port in Korea. The Trans-Siberian railway was built to link central Russia to the port, and emigration was encouraged. Families whose share of communal land was inadequate to support them or who had lost their homes in uprisings in villages migrated east. Not by train, of course, that was far too expensive. Many died on the way. Sergei Ivanov travelled to the new settlements and depicted the tragedies.

Although maligned in the 1860s as being indifferent to revolution, the discontent of the peasants was the chief cause of the revolution after the crushing defeat and obliteration of her navy which Russia suffered in the war with Japan. The industrial depression in 1899 had stimulated the already politically active factory workers (who had staged strikes from the late 1870s) and they would continue to be a driving force in revolutions. Lenin, however, signalled his realisation that peasants would be important in the struggle with his pamphlet *To the Rural Poor (1903),* recognising that land had been denied them. In fact, it would be peasants in military uniform who would join workers in the decisive blows in 1917.

Ilya Repin (1844-1930)

Despite *Barge Haulers on the Volga* being regarded as the quintessential work of The Wanderers, Repin was not an active member. His fame among his contemporaries was based on his portraits. Yet, his long career is dotted with paintings which followed the trends of The Wanderers. Repin's father was a common soldier in the town of Chuguyev, part of a military settlement in Kharkov. After studying with a local icon painter, Repin moved to St Petersburg. He earned a place at the Academy in 1864, won a travelling scholarship and repaired to Paris.

Ilya Repin, Paris Café, 1875

Paris Café shows the influence of Manet, and is a foretaste for one branch of Repin's art later in life; the crowded scene. Repin's opinion of Impressionists alternated between admiration and accusations of shallowness and futility. A second visit to Paris in 1883, by then dominated by the Impressionists, brightened Repin's palette and his light became more intense as in *Surgeon E V Pavlov*.

Ilya Repin, *Surgeon E V Pavlov in the Operating Room*, 1888

Repin painted many portraits in the 1870s and 1880s, often capturing the subject's emotional state. That of the brilliant composer *Modest Mussorgsky* is a striking example.

Repin painted the portrait in four sessions ten days before the composer died in hospital. Modest is depicted with a complex of emotions in his face; his strength and intellect a striking contrast to his dishevelled state. According to an eye-witness, Repin was faced, "*with every possible inconvenience; the painter did not even have an easel and he had to perch somehow near the desk at which Mussorgsky was sitting in a hospital armchair.*" Repin wanted to refuse payment for the work, but the destitute Modest insisted. Repin later donated the money to the composer's monument.

Repin returned to The Wanderers' themes in the 1880s and 1890s. Inspired by paintings of peasant life in the 1870s, he produced *Easter Procession in Kursk*.

Ilya Repin, Modest Mussorgsky, 1881

Ilya Repin, *Easter Procession in Kursk*, 1880-83

On his travels, Repin sketched episodes from village life and Russian characters in a pictorial diary. Many of those images found their way into *Easter Procession.* Burly peasants carry the candle-lit lantern; the sick and maimed follow closely in the foreground – one cripple being pushed back to the sideline; the vain priest primps his hair; behind him, an icon is carried by a woman leading the local gentry. Among the crowd, peasants and police on horseback beat back any who threaten disorder. Although most reviewers considered the work lacked the power of the *Barge Haulers*, it was very successful, attracting large crowds at The Wanderers' exhibitions and prompting Tretyakov to fork out a vast sum for the painting.

Repin then followed The Wanderers into history paintings, but his are weaker. He re-visited Ivan the Terrible, but whereas Schwartz showed the unending grief, Repin prefers the tsar's immediate panic and deep anguish at the consequence of his uncontrolled anger. The emotions are extreme but are less powerful than the deep regret which tainted Ivan's remaining life. Thus, there is a tendency to sympathise with Repin's Ivan and miss the larger message. Alexander III, refusing to believe the first tsar was a murderer, banned the painting from exhibition for three months. The painting was slashed in three places in 1913 by an Old Believer. More recently, Soviet historical revisionism was shown to be a hard habit to break as Putin claimed Ivan was innocent; the painting was attacked again in 2018.

Ilya Repin, *Ivan the Terrible and his son, Ivan, on November 16, 1581*, 1885

In the last two decades of the century Repin celebrated revolutionaries as heroes. *Arrest of the Propagandist* (there are three versions) has echoes of the Populist movement, when intellectuals attempted to enthuse peasants with idea of reform. The revolutionary has been shopped to the police by the very peasants he is trying to help, to whom he glares stonily. Repin sympathised with the People's Will and visited followers in prison, where they were tortured and executed. *Refusing the Confession* shows an adherent rejecting an Orthodox priest. Of course, the revolutionary believes he has not sinned, but is right to oppose the brutal and unfair regime.

Ilya Repin, *Arrest of the Propagandist*, 1880-89

Ilya Repin, *Refusing the Confession*, 1879-1855

Repin was inspired to paint this scene after he read Nikolai Minsky's poem *Last Confession*, dedicated to executed revolutionaries and published in the first issue of the underground magazine of People's Will in 1879. The illegal magazine aimed at creating a sympathetic view of revolutionaries to the public.

A third of the members of People's Will were women, and some had leading roles. Vera Zasulich shot the brutal St Petersburg police chief, General Trepov, at point blank range in 1878 but was gleefully pronounced not guilty by a sympathetic jury. Sofya Perovskaya directed the plans and led the team which resulted in Alexander II's death. *Revolutionary Woman awaiting Execution* is one of few works portraying the heroines of the movement – just as her compatriot, calm and fearless in death. Repin's most famous work of these years, *They Did Not Expect Him*, was first conceived with a heroine too.

Ilya Repin, *Revolutionary Woman awaiting Execution*,1884

Ilya Repin, *Unexpected Return*, 1883

The final version has more people who also react differently. The young boy is delighted; his sisters uncertain, even afraid; the maid looks bitterly towards the man whose actions brought much trouble to his family and friends – evidently other relatives have suffered, as evidenced by the woman in black. Quite how she is related to the returning exile is unclear – both have been aged by the experience. Bracketing the print of Charles de Steuben's *Christ at Golgotha (1841)* on the far wall are two portraits which make the sympathies of the family clear. On the right Nikolai Nekrasov, whose compassionate poems about Russian peasants made him a hero of liberals and radicals. On the left, Taras Shevchenko, considered the founder of Ukrainian literature and modern language who ridiculed Imperial Russian family members as he pressed for Ukrainian independence, for which he was arrested and exiled to one of the worst prisons. Repin was himself of Ukrainian origin. To emphasise the antipathy of the exile's family to the Romanovs, the side wall bears a picture of Alexander II, not as hero who issued the Emancipation Edict, but dead on his funeral bier.

Ilya Repin, *They Did Not Expect Him*, 1884-8

In 1900 Repin fell in love with Natalia Nordman and went to live in her house at Kuokkala (renamed Repino in 1948 after annexation) in Finland, remaining there for the rest of his life. Their home was only an hour by train away from St Petersburg, and they hosted visitors regularly. After the 1917 Revolution the border was between Finland and Russia was closed, condemning Repin to a lonely end in a poor isolated village; *"now it's a desert"*, he said.

Far more than any other nation, Russian art in the 19th century was closely allied to social and political movements. So, this chapter reads more as a history with paintings thrown in. Literature, both fiction and poetry, had led the way for artists. It would continue do so in the 20th century.

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