

## RUSSIAN CULTURE – 19<sup>th</sup> Century

**Overview** Culture refers to the entire way of life of a society. Russian culture, like other cultures in the world, reflects the views, values, traditions, rituals, attitudes and beliefs of its people, defining their evolutionary identity. Starting with Vladimir's conversion to Christianity, Russian culture not only reflected Christian ideas and values, but also traditional Russian culture, national themes and style. It was the 19<sup>th</sup> century when creative Russian minds produced independent, original and authentically national works while revolutionary and intellectual life were put under state pressure.

### VERBAL ARTS

#### Literature

Russian writers produced original works, employing national themes and style during the time of tsar Alexander I, a period noted for its literary creativity. Without a doubt the quintessential works of this period are those of A.S. Pushkin. Although European culture is assimilated and debated at this time, in years to come a Slavophile opposition will emerge, challenging western ideas in culture not only nationally and psychologically, but also in the arenas of culture and art.

Alexander I's era was a period of creativity when Russian literature produced independent, original and authentically national works. It was a period in which literature moved from neoclassicism to Romanticism and from the writing of imitative works to ones which would be the basis of a national cultural model.

It was only during the reign of Alexander II that Russian writers were able, for the first time, to experience the satisfaction of independent, creative work which was national in both its spirit and its style. Poetry above all was regarded as a spiritual exploit and a worthy vocation.

**Golden Age:** Traditionally the 19<sup>th</sup> century is regarded as the "Golden Era" of Russian literature. Poetry, in particular flourished in this century under a new literary movement called Romanticism, and the two of the most prominent poets in this period were V. A. Zhukovsky and A. S. Pushkin.

**Romanticism:** A new literary movement, Romanticism, that emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a reaction to Neoclassicism, which had dominated art and literature in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Romanticism spread throughout Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Romanticism only became a major movement in Russian literature from 1810 to 1840.

The romantic idealism of Europe was first brought into Russian poetry by V. A. Zhukovsky. The stories of I.A. Krylov display an interest in national characteristics; the Napoleonic wars would only deepen this interest. A. S. Pushkin, often regarded as the greatest Russian poet, developed a realistic, nationally conscious modern Russian style, influenced to a degree by romanticism and European poetry in the 1820s. Following Pushkin, the poetry of M. Y. Lermontov was able to maintain such stylistic excellence for a while. Poetry remained the dominant literary form until Lermontov's death in 1841.

However, the displacement of poetry by prose began at the end of the 1820s, and by 1830 prose was clearly becoming the dominant form. Russia soon adopted the main Romantic prose genres: the society-tale, novel-in-letters, travel notes, memoirs and historical romance. Although Russian romanticism was initially seen in poetry, it shifted to prose in the course of its development.

Although unsuccessful as a poet, N. V. Gogol did become a successful prose writer. Regarded as the pioneer of realistic prose, Gogol's stories contained elements of romantic and the grotesque. Romantic literature often extolled the extraordinary man who somehow rose above society, seeing such a person representing the individual spirit.

The prose works of Russia's literary golden age were written in the context of a strong tsarist autocracy. While generally composed within a realist framework, the masterpieces of this period are also characterized by mysticism, brooding introspection, and melodrama. I. S. Turgenev became internationally renowned for his complex novels which were also extremely critical of Russian society. The moral and religious idealism found in F. M. Dostoyevsky's works earned him both critical and popular acclaim, as did the novels of L. N. Tolstoy. These two writers remain even today among the giants of world literature. A. P. Chekhov closed the golden age with his sensitive plays and stories, and the following period is better known for its poetic works.

Known as the Golden Age of Russian literature, the first forty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the literature of this period was the outcome of two developments in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One was the creation of a literary language that acted as a bridge between the daily speech of educated Russians and the official Church Slavonic. The other was the solution in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century of technical issues of poetic form. One noticeable trend of the Golden Age was the abandonment of literary genres serving the state and patron, such as the ode.

Writers in the romantic era came to see their normal position in society as one in opposition to the existing order, but also came to see writing as a profession. Previously writers had not expected to earn their livelihood from writing, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature became more commercialized. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century writers were either landowning aristocrats, or had some form of government support. However, writers increasingly relied on the reading public to earn their living as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed.

**Slavophiles and Westernizers:** It was in the 1830s that a cultural divide between Slavophiles and Westernizers became apparent. V. G. Belinsky, the main Westernizer proponent, emphasized the connection between national life and literature, and advanced the development of realism in Russian literature. Likewise, N.V. Gogol, the main initiator of realistic prose, also demonstrated romantic qualities in his satirical and humanitarian tales. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, I. A. Goncharov developed a harsh realism, tinged with humor; A. N. Ostrovsky, the first depict the merchant world in Russian literary works, wrote numerous plays, although most of them are no longer performed. F. I. Tyuchev's poetry endowed everyday events with philosophic significance, and N. A. Nekrasov penned verses with social purpose.

**Petrashkevsky Circle:** In 1848 the view that Europe was degenerating was driven home to the Russian government, as revolutions convulsed most of continental Europe, with the notable exception of Russia. Tsar Nicholas I responded to this revolutionary turmoil by harshly suppressing all forms of free expression in Russia. The period from 1848 until Nicholas I's death in 1855 came to be known as the gloomy seven years, and constituted a bleak period in Russian literature and culture. In 1849 F. M. Dostoevsky, M. Saltykov-Shchedrin, I. S. Turgenev and A. N. Ostrovsky, all members of the *Petrashkevsky circle*, were arrested and put on trial.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1-Who are Slavophiles and Westernizers? What are the differences between the two thinkers?
- 2-Why did Nicholas I respond to the revolutionary movements so harshly?
- 3- What made the Petrashevsky Circle so significant and why did it elicit such a strong reaction from the authorities?

### **Reading**

- 1- *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, Edited by Charles A. Moser, 1992.
- 2- *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, Edited by Neil Cornwell, 2001.

## **Language**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, standard Russian took on its modern form, and modern norms were introduced. In addition to Lomonosov, writers such as G. R. Derzhavin, N. Karamzin and A. S. Pushkin made notable contributions in the development of the national language. The modern literary language is considered to have begun in the time of Pushkin, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By rejecting the high style and using low style vocabulary from the spoken language Pushkin created modern literary Russian; his language can be read without difficulty even today.

### **Discussion/Questions**

How did Pushkin create the Russian modern literary language and raise it to its peak? Did secular-aristocratic culture and the influx of Western styles and genres make contributions in the development of Russian language?

### **Reading**

- 1-Worth, Deans S., "Language", *The Cambridge Companion Modern Russian Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky, 1998, pp.19-38.
- 2-Comrie, Bernard, "Russian", in *The World's Major Languages*, Edited by Bernard Comrie, Routledge, 1987, pp. 274-288.
- 3- Cubberley, Paul, *Russian: A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 12-51.

## **Script**

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Empire imposed mandatory usage of the Cyrillic alphabet for non-Russian communities, such as the Baltic and Central Asia as part of the Russification policy.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Writing brings power and civilization to modern societies by making it possible to transmit knowledge and information, and it aids in political and social growth in that sense it plays a major part in how modern civilization came to be. If this is the case, can we say that the Imperial imposed policy on mandatory usage of Cyrillic alphabet was able to bring civilization to Empire's illiterate societies like Central Asia?

### **Reading**

- 1-Iliev, Ivan G., "Short History of the Cyrillic Alphabet", *International Journal of Russian Studies (IJORS)*, Issue No. 2 (2013/2), pp. 221-285.
- 2- Alpatov, Vladimir M., "Scripts and Politics in the USSR", *Studi Slavistici* xiv, 2017, pp. 9-19

## **Folklore**

The study of Russian folklore was radically transformed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Oral folktales began to be collected, being transformed in the process, and folktales and other folkloric elements made their appearance in literary works. The first writer to make use of folktales in his writing was Aleksandr Pushkin, who then went on to make collections of folk songs in the 1820s-1830s. Pushkin was soon followed by other writers such as Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Zhukovsky. These writers collected folk-songs and folk-tales, incorporated them into their works, and made them an element of the Russian identity.

The compilers of folktales generally categorized these stories by genre, although the criteria for determining a particular story's genre vary. Tales of magic and the supernatural, *voishebnye skazki*, may include enchanted objects, ogres, witches, spirits, dragons and vampires. However, approximately 60% of all Russian folktales fall into the category of *bytovaia skazka*, or everyday tales. The most recent genre of folktales, these tales emerged from the peasantry and their worldview, and the heroes of these stories are

often the poor and workers. About 10% of Russian folktales are animal tales, *skazka o zhivotnykh*. In these, animals with human qualities frequently appear to aid the human characters in the story. In addition to these genres, there are also religious, allegorical and satirical folktales, although the line between these stories and the everyday tales is often ambiguous. However, they all revolve around peasant life, giving voice to their dissatisfaction.

**Ballads:** This genre of poetry only appeared in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by German romantic poetry. Generally, on the themes of family and romantic relationships, their subject matter is less diverse than the *bylina*. Vasily Zhukovskiy is generally regarded as the first composer of Russian ballads, with his first, "Lyudmila", written in 1808. Ballads were eventually displaced by shorter songs called *chatushki*.

### Discussion/Questions

Why did many Russian writers incorporate folktales into their writings?

### Reading

Wigzell, Faith, 'Folklore and Russian Literature', *Companion to Russian Literature*, Routledge, 2001, Ch. 4, pp. 36-49.

## VISUAL ARTS

### Painting

**Landscapes:** It was not until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that Russian landscape painting became widely popular. There had been artists before this time who had produced fine landscape paintings, among them Fyodor Alexeyev, Maxim Vorobiev, Fyodor Matveyev, and Silvester Shchedrin, but their works were products of the Italianesque romantic tradition. True Russian landscape painting only emerged with the works of Nikifor Krylov, Alexei Venetsianov, and Grigory Soroka. Venetsianov's depiction of the Russian landscape and Russian peasants helped start this artistic tradition. Fedotov and other artists took the middle class as the subject of their paintings, works which also contained elements of social criticism. However, artists such as Ivan Aivazovsky and Mikhail Lebedev continued to paint in the Italianesque romantic tradition. In the field of landscape painting, French Impressionism was a major influence on Russian works in this category.

**Wanderers (Itinerants-Peredvizhniki):** Growing dissatisfaction with the conservative aesthetic and pedagogical principles of the Academy in the 1860s led to a student revolt in 1863. Instead of being required to follow the Academy's recommended themes, they wanted to use theme of their own choosing. The Academy refused to accept this, leading to the resignation from the Academy of one sculptor and thirteen painters. The leading figures of this group were Ivan Kramskoi, Vladimir Stasov, Vasily Stasov, Ilya Repin, Vasily Surikov, and Vasily Perov. At a later date they established *The Society of Wandering Art Exhibitions* which strove to reach people that the Academy and its art did not. Travelling throughout Russia, society members who became known as *Wanderers (Peredvizhniki)*, inspired by the *narodniki* (Populists) held exhibitions of the art that they had produced during their travels and espoused political reform. Cognizant of the fact that Peter the Great's reforms had produced a schism in Russian culture between the upper and lower classes, the Wanderers attempted to bridge this gap through their exhibitions.

Outside the limits of the Academy, the Wanderers embodied a realism in their ideology and shown a national spirit that attempted to re-establish the bonds between their land and their art through depictions of the people, history and landscapes of Russia.

Ilya Repin, one of the most famous members of the Wanderers, became best known for his paintings depicting historical subjects, although he was equally skilled in many other genres. These paintings would become the model for realism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century due to their blend of realistic depictions and criticism

of society. The blossoming of Russian art in these years was, to a great degree, due to the Repin, Nikolay Gay and Ivan Kramskoy. The works of the latter two artists on religious themes were particularly influential.

**The World of Art (*Mir Iskusstva*):** In this period a number of new artistic societies appeared; one of the most famous was *The World of Art* established by the avant-garde writers and artists based in St. Petersburg in 1899. It was also the name of their art magazine. Nikolai Roerich, Alexander Benois, Lev Bakst, Evgeny Lancere, Konstantin Somov and Sergei Diaghilev were among the founders of this society that was focused on popularization of Russian history and folk art and art's aesthetic properties. Despite the diverse characters of the artists in this movement, they were united by three important principles – their emphasis on individual experience, the concept of “total art work” (*gesamtkunstwerk*), and the aesthetic that art was self-justified.

Their intention was to create an art movement that was Russian, yet also part and parcel of general European culture. Past Western culture was admired by artists in *The World of Art*, but not to the degree that the West was seen as superior to Russia. Perhaps the greatest contributions of *The World of Art* to Russian art was teaching young artists about issues in Russian and European art, and that the most important quality of a nation's art is its uniqueness.

Sergei Diaghilev can be credited with much of the success of *The World of Art*. The clear goals of the movement and the international recognition given to Russian art in this period was the result of his efforts. One factor that contributed to Diaghilev's success was his deep understanding of European and Russian artistic trends. He used this knowledge to find ways to introduce Russian art into the world of European art. One way he did this was by holding exhibitions that would display his artistic vision to both viewers and other artists. In 1906 he held an exhibition in Paris entitled *The Russian Seasons* which featured talented, traditional Russian artists from St. Petersburg and Moscow.

**Religious motives:** Works produced by the Wanderers (see below) were noted for an intensity, both psychological and imaginative, that had been lacking in Russian art since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century during the time of Alexander Ivanov.

**Still Life:** Objects from daily life constitute the subject matter of still life painting. Ivan Khrutsky was one of the first major artists in this genre whose paintings, like those of Ilya Repin and Mikhail Vrubel in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were influenced by the masterpieces of Dutch still life painting.

**Genre Painting:** Genre painting came to occupy a firm place in Russian art, despite having been considered less prestigious than other styles of painting. Peasant culture in all its aspects would be the focus of works by Aleksei Venetsianov, while depictions of the middle class, and even social criticism, would feature in the paintings of Fedotov and other artists.

**Slavic Revival:** This artistic movement rejected Western subject matter and turned its attention to depictions of Russian culture, particularly as seen in peasant life. The works of Viktor Vasnetsov and Mikhail Nesterov depict heroic episodes of Kievan history and scenes related to the Orthodox Church, and, in general, strive to reflect the richness of Medieval Russia's artistic heritage.

**Realism:** In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Realism was the predominant artistic trend. As a reaction to what they regarded as an excessively restrictive artistic tradition, painters such as Ivan Kramskoi insisted on depicting life realistically in their art. Kramskoi and other like-minded artists would come to be known as the Wanderers due to their travelling exhibitions of their art.

### **Discussion/Questions**

1-What was the aim of the World of Art Movement (*Mir Iskusstva*) in Russia? What were their key achievements?

2- What is the origin of the Wanderers (*Peredvizhniki* -Itinerants)? How was a relatively minor incident at the Imperial Academy of Arts transformed into an artistic movement that would have a profound impact on Russian society and culture?

### Reading

1-Bowlt, John, E., "Art", *The Cambridge Companion to Russian Modern Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Ryzhevsky, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 205-235.

2-Grover, Stuart, R., "The World of Art Movement in Russia", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1973, pp. 28-42.

### **Sculpture**

The first Russian sculptors of note only emerged after the establishments of Arts Academies in St. Petersburg (1757) and Moscow (1832). Most were protégés of the renowned Parisian sculptor Nicolas-François Gillet, and the first to earn fame for his realistic, expressive works was Fedot Shubin. In recognition of his talent the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts appointed Ivan Vitali to the grade of professor, first degree. Other 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian sculptors included Mikhail Vrubel, Theodore Gordeev, Ivan Martos, Mikhail Kozlovsky, Fedor Shedrin.

**House of Fabergé:** In 1842 Gustav Fabergé established the House of Fabergé in St.Petersburg. The House of Fabergé was particularly famous for the decorative Easter eggs, intricately designed and decorated with precious jewels, they produced for the Tsars. Management of the House of Fabergé passed to Peter Carl Fabergé in 1882 and continued until 1918 when the Bolsheviks nationalized the company.

**Kasli Iron Sculptures:** Cast iron sculptures produced by the lost-wax process began to be produced at the Kasli Iron Works in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Russian and Western European artists such as Eugene Lanceray, Peter Karlovich Klodt, M.D. Kanayev, and N.R. Bakh all produced works at Kasli.

### Discussion/Questions

Why were the statues treated as dangerous objects by the Orthodox Church?

### Reading

Rice, Tamara Talbot, *A Concise History of Russian Art*, Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967, pp.189-213.

### **Architecture**

Throughout its long history architecture has been a mirror of Russia's history, and its people's self-perception and ideals. Russian architecture has taken traditional native forms and combined them with features derived from East Asian, Persian, Indian, Byzantine and Western European architectural styles.

**Russian Revival (Russo-Byzantine Style):** Russian Revival, or Russo-Byzantine, architecture combines elements of Byzantine architecture with those of pre-Petrine Russian architecture. This style is the Russian interpretation of their architectural heritage that was part of the broader renewal interest in "national" architecture that occurred in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Grand Kremlin Palace and the Armory in Moscow are well-known examples of Russian Revival structures.

**Neo-Byzantine architecture:** In the 1850s during the reign Alexander II the Russo-Byzantine style was replaced by the Neo-Byzantine style for new churches. Although new state buildings would again be built in the Russian Revival style during the reign of his successor Alexander III, the Neo-Byzantine style remained popular down to the start of the the First World War. The Cathedral of Saint Vladimir built in Kiev and the Church of Dmitry Solunsky built in St. Petersburg are the first projects utilizing this style.

**Eclecticism:** In reaction to the strict, limited elements of classicism, Eclecticism attempted to expand the potential of architectural by combining elements taken from earlier styles. Popular until the first years of Nicholas II's reign, Eclecticism utilized elements from Baroque, Renaissance, Neoclassical and Rococo styles. Andrey Stackenschneider's Mariinsky Palace is one of the most prominent examples of this style.

### Discussion/Questions

Compare the Russo-Byzantine and Neo-Byzantine style of architecture. What are the differences between these two styles?

### Reading

1-Brumfield, William Craft, *A History of Russian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 9-64.  
2- Shvidkovsky, Dmitry, *Russian Architecture and the West*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, pp.357-412.

## PERFORMING ARTS

### Dance

**Ballet:** Ballet masters in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued to come from abroad; among the most important were Pehr Christian Johansson, Jules Perrot, Charles-Louis Didelot, Marius Petipa, and Arthur Saint-Léon.

**Russian School:** The Russian school, which came to be regarded as possessing the most well-developed technique of any school, emerged as a synthesis of the French school and the Italian school whose techniques was introduced by Cecchetti. Some of the young Russian dancers trained by Cecchetti in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century became some of the most famous dancers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – Anna Pavlova, Vaslav Nijinsky and Michael Fokine. Other students of his such as Agrippina Vaganova in Russia and Ninette de Valois in England became founders of their own companies of developed their own teaching systems. These teachers and dancers took the techniques of the Russian school back to France, and from there they spread into other parts of Europe and the world.

**Grand Ballet (Age of Petipa):** Taken from the French term *ballet à grand spectacle*, Russian grand ballet was developed under Marius Petipa, a French dancer and choreographer who worked more than six decades at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. Grand ballet, productions that matched contemporary operas in terms of length and storyline, became the favored form in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when modern classical ballet reached its peak in Russia. Considered an “art of spectacle” [*zrelishchnoe iskusstvo*], the visual effects of grand ballet overshadowed the music, and even rivalled the dancing itself in importance.

**Ballet-Féerie:** Popular in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in private theaters in Russia, *ballet-féerie* was an Italian-based popular derivation of grand ballet which emphasized visual effects at the expense of choreography, flashy performances by the main dancers and set routines for the others. The plots were generally based on fairy tales; the most famous *ballet-féerie* was the 1881 St. Petersburg production of Luigi Manzotti's *Excelsior*.

**Bolshoi Ballet:** Taking its name from the Bolshoi Theater in 1825, some of the most important choreographers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Arthur Saint-Léon, Marius Petipa and Carlo Blasis – staged their works at this theater. Even during the Soviet period the Bolshoi Ballet was able to keep its name.

**Mariinsky Ballet (Kirov Ballet):** Originally named for the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, the Mariinsky Ballet would be renamed twice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first was in 1917 when it became the State Academy of Ballet and Opera, and the second in 1934 when it was renamed the Kirov Ballet following Sergei Kirov's assassination.

### Discussion/Questions

Why was Russian ballet dominated by foreigners in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

### **Reading**

Homans, Jennifer, *Apollo's Angels, A History of Ballet*, Ch. 7., Random House, New York, 2010.

### **Music**

As Russia had no conservatories prior to the 1860's, Russia's first composer, Mikhail Glinka, had to travel abroad to obtain the majority of his musical training. This allowed him to study the folk music of many different countries and to make the acquaintance of many well-known European composers. After his return to Russia Glinka would greatly influence Russian music's development in general, and opera in particular.

A number of composers after Glinka followed his lead and composed music based on Russian fairy tales; among them were Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*; Stravinsky, *The Nightingale*; and Prokofiev, in *Love for Three Oranges*. In the compositions for ballet, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and Prokofiev would also be influenced by Glinka's use of fairy-tales.

Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Ludmila* which was first performed in 1842 would be the first in a long line of operas based on Russian fairy tales. Glinka's compositions mark a turning point in Russian music, the point at which Russian music truly becomes a part of European music, while still retaining its folk music traditions.

**Russian Musical Society:** Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna and the composer Anton Rubinstein established the *Russian Musical Society* in 1859. Its primary aim was to encourage and expand the musical study and performance in the country. Regarded as Russia's first school of music, the Society provided instruction to anyone who wished to study music.

One of the most important events in the growth of Russian music occurred with the opening in St. Petersburg of Russia's first conservatory in 1862.

**Balakirev Circle:** Mily Balakirev established the Balakirev Circle, a musical group, in St. Petersburg. The Circle studied a wide spectrum of musical traditions to employ in their own compositions: Russian folksongs, classical composers and music from Spain, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Exoticism was becoming as important a part of Russian music as it was in European music. This can be seen in the Middle Eastern influences in *Scheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov, and the Central Asian elements in Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*.

In 1866 Russia's second conservatory was established in Moscow by Anton Rubinstein from St. Petersburg and Nikolai Rubinstein from Moscow. Both brothers would play important roles in making Russian music more professional. Famous graduates of Russia's first two conservatories include Tchaikovsky (St. Petersburg) and Rachmaninoff (Moscow).

**Mighty Handful (Moguchaya kuchka):** At approximately the same time, five composers from St. Petersburg formed a group which became known as "The Mighty Handful" (or "The Mighty Five"). They shared common political and aesthetic opinions and held that music made by Russians should accurately reflect the people of Russia, and not what was taught by Germans in the conservatory. The group's leader was Balakirev, with Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin and César Cui making up the rest of the group.

They advocated the use of Russian elements such as folk music and folklore in compositions, and were disturbed by the predominant position of European music and European musicians. Because of their ability to convey a narrative message they preferred song, symphonic poems and opera over other genres. Despite the group's early solidarity, by the mid-1870s Balakirev and the other members were no longer on good terms and the group was, for all practical purposes, dissolved.

A number of well-known works would be composed by members of the Mighty Handful, among them the operas *Sadko* and *The Snow Maiden*, and the symphonic poem *Scheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov; *Khovanshchina* and *Boris Godunov* by Mussorgsky; *Tamara* by Balakirev; and *Prince Igor* by Borodin. All are regarded as masterpieces of romantic nationalism and are inspired, as many of the Mighty Handful's works were, by Russian literature, history and folk stories.

One of the first graduates of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Pyotr Tchaikovsky disagreed with the Mighty Handful over the composition of classical music, in particular which tradition, Western or Russian, should determine how it was composed. Although Tchaikovsky's interest in nationalistic music grew in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he remained opposed to the Mighty Handful's nationalistic bent. Despite his disagreements with the *Mighty Handful*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* shows the influence of Balakirev.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Discuss Westernization and its effects on Russian music. How were the 19th century Russian composers influenced by Western composers and how did they influence the popular culture of the West?

### **Reading**

- 1-The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture, Edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Ch. 10.
- 2-Robinson, H., "Music", in the Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture, 1998, Ch.10, pp. 236-263.

### **Theatre**

The theaters in St. Petersburg and Moscow were later combined to form a state bureaucracy, as a means to control forms of expression that Catherine the Great regarded as dangerous. By 1827 this bureaucracy had become a monopoly which registered actors as civil servants, and which placed as much importance on protocol as it did on art. Earlier, in 1819, the Ministry of the Interior had taken control over theatrical censorship; the severity of its censorship would only increase over time and expand outside of the theaters. In some cases periodicals which made negative comments about actors found themselves the target of the Ministry's displeasure – since actors were civil servants, criticizing them was tantamount to criticizing their employer, the state. However, the effect of official censorship was felt most keenly in the theaters in St. Petersburg and Moscow, whose creativity was stifled by government guidelines. Beyond St. Petersburg and Moscow, the situation was slightly better, as independent theaters could put on performances, but still under the watchful eye of the police.

The roles of St. Petersburg and Moscow as the Russia's theatrical centers grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as new theaters were founded. In Moscow in 1824 the Maly (Small) Theater was established, followed in 1825 by the Bolshoi (Big), which was a replacement for the Peter's Theater which had burned down. In 1832 the Alexandrinsky Drama Theater opened in St. Petersburg, and in 1898 the MAT (Moscow Art Theater) established by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky opened in Moscow which later renamed the Gorky Moscow Art Theater in 1932.

The MAT proved to be the most influential with their productions of the last four plays written by Chekhov which brought them great fame, and the theater would go on to profoundly influence theater in Russia. Combining their talents, playwright Nemirovich-Danchenko and actor-director Stanislavsky adopted Wagner's approach to play production as high art.

Directors would now determine how a drama would be staged, as well as their atmosphere and style – an innovation in Russian theater. The MAT was saved from financial ruin in its initial season by its sixth production, *The Seagull* by Chekhov which opened on December 17, 1898. Its first performance two years earlier in St. Petersburg had been a disaster, and Chekhov was understandably hesitant to give his permission for a second production of his play. However, Nemirovich-Danchenko's persistent pleading paid

off and Chekhov was more than rewarded by the reception his play received from its second production. The following year in 1899 the MAT staged *Uncle Vanya*, and Chekhov wrote his two last plays, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* with the MAT in mind.

The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed the appearance of Russian drama's first masterpieces. Among these works were *Inspector* by Nikolay Gogol, and Alexander Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit*. The plays by Alexander Ostrovsky which appeared around the middle of the century would inspire a new generation of performers. His series of plays on merchant life highlighted the negative qualities of merchants as cheats, tyrannical bosses and fathers, and narrow-minded philistines.

After the emancipation of Russian serfs in 1861, and the abolition of the imperial monopoly during Alexander II gave impetus to the people's theater movement which was promoted by the *Narodniks* (populists). The theater now began to serve less as a leisure activity than as an educational tool.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Why did the state create a monopoly on theatre, and introduce strict censorship?

### **Reading**

1-Senelick, L., T., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, Ch.11. The Cambridge University Press, Inc., 1998, pp. 264-299.

2-*A History of Russian Theater*, Edited by Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

### **Cinema**

Russian filmmaking emerged as an offshoot of European films, introduced by Russian film enterprises that had connections with European film companies. The Lumière brothers introduced the first films in Russia in 1896 and their cameraman Camille Cerf produced his first short film in Russia. It was a recording of the coronation of Nicholas II at the Kremlin. Initially, foreign films predominated until the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Why did foreign film companies produced the first Russian films until the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

### **Reading**

Lary, Nikita, "Film", *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 299-329.

### **WORLDVIEW**

#### **Religion**

**Sobornost:** The idea of *Sobornost* (communality) appeared in Russian religious thought, which was identified with the Slavophiles Ivan Kireyevksy and Alexey Khomyakov's concept of the communal unity of all believers, like Russian *obshchina*, a peasant commune, united by Orthodox values denying Western individualism.

**Russian Bible Society:** The first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed active endeavors for spiritual satisfaction on the part of large segments of Russian society. One group, called the Russian Bible Society, opened in 1813. Although initiated by the upper strata, it derived support from all classes and from many faiths with Prince Alexander Golitsyn who also happened to be Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod, at its head. Later in 1817 he was appointed head of a new Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and Education. The ministry

introduced the fusion of secular and sacred into the state, and issued a statute declaring all religions equal. By virtue of the prominence of many of its leaders, the Society had significant impact in the government, and it eventually became an official arm of the government.

**Toleration Though Isolation:** In the Russian Empire non-Orthodox religious communities fell into different legal categories. Some were legally recognized and tolerated; others were tolerated but lacked legal recognition; and still others were neither legally recognized nor tolerated. However, official toleration did not imply freedom of conscience, since toleration was considered to have been granted to a distinct, recognized group, an approach that frequently resulted in nationality and religious identity being inextricably linked.

In the 1860s, a group known as Baptists, active in the Caucasus and the Ukraine, began to expand rapidly within the borders of the empire. Worried by this development, the Holy Governing Synod banned all sects and denominations. Members of the Baptists were kept under surveillance and those who were caught were persecuted. Orthodox missionaries were sent to all the villages and efforts began to convert to Orthodoxy anyone who belonged to another denomination. The church's attitude became so strict that it eventually alienated its own people.

**Revolution of 1905:** After the Revolution of 1905, for the first time, the state promulgated an Edict of Religious Toleration in April 1905, granting legal tolerance to all other religions in Russia, and allowing members of other religious groups to act more freely than before.

### Discussion/Questions

How was Russian religious thought reflected in the Russians social life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

### Reading

The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Ch.3: Religion: Russian Orthodoxy.

### **Philosophy**

The development of philosophy in Russia was strongly influenced by a number of intellectual circles that emerged after 1815.

**Philosophical Circles:** Nikolay Stankevich's circle, established in the 1830s played a key role in introducing such figures as Granovsky, Bakunin and Belinsky to Hegel's idealism. In the next decade Slavophiles and Westerners discussed on what bases a new Russia should be established, and in the last years of the 1840s the Petrashevsky circle criticized the institution of serfdom and debated how to transform Russian society into a socialist, democratic one.

**Slavophiles:** In line with German Idealism, Slavophiles argued that Russia should seek solutions to current problems from its own unique culture and traditions, and turned their backs on the Western influences that had begun during the reign of Peter the Great. Slavophiles claimed that three institutions were the basis of Russia's unique character – the Russian Orthodox Church, the tsarist autocracy and the peasant commune. The movement was conservative in its reverence for tradition and the past, presenting a potent vision of an ideal Russia that was in contrast to "the West" that has remained influential even to this day.

**Alexey Khomyakov:** Khomyakov combined elements of classical German Idealism, and the theories of Hegel and Schelling. In particular he argued that Christianity's spiritual and moral freedom that lay at the heart of Orthodoxy distinguished it from the Catholic Church's "despotic tradition".

**Konstantin Aksakov:** Aksakov, introduced to the philosophy of Hegel through the Stankevich Circle, interpreted it through the lens of Slavophilism. In addition, in the more relaxed political atmosphere of the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century Aksakov worked as a playwright and social critic.

**Stankevich Circle:** Established in 1831 by Nikolay Stankevich, the Stankevich circle was closely linked to the beginning of the Westernizing movement. Among its members were Granovsky, Aksakov, Lermontov, Bakunin, Belinsky, Kavelin, Koltsov, and Botkin. They shared an interest in the philosophy of Hegel, history, literature and Schelling's aesthetics and philosophy of nature. Although sharing many ideas with the Herzen-Ogarev circle, they had no defined political agenda.

**Westernizers:** In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French and German Romanticism had profound influence on Russian thought, and it was in this period that calls were made for government reform, educational improvement, and individual freedom in the light of rationalism and science. For the Westernizers Russia's future lay with Europe and would be based on the ideals of the French Enlightenment, rather than in the romanticized vision of Russia's past presented by the Slavophiles. The Petrashevsky Circle would be instrumental in formulating an adaptation of Western European utopian socialism for Russia.

**Petrashevsky Circle:** A devotee of the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, Mikhail Butashevich Petrashevsky organized his group in the 1840s in St. Petersburg. Linked by common interests and a desire to reform Russian society and government, the Petrashevsky Circle met weekly.

**Peter Chaadaev:** Chaadaev examined Russia's historical role and future in his *Philosophical Letters*, written in the late 1820s. His philosophical understanding is religious in general, and his views on history show French, Catholic influence in particular. Like many members of Russia's educated elite in this period, Chaadaev expressed in his work a sense of powerlessness and apprehension about Russia's future.

**Vissarion Belinsky:** As a member of Stankevich's circle Belinsky was introduced to the ideas of Hegel and Schelling's philosophy of nature, and later those of French socialism and the German thinker Feuerbach. In contrast to the Slavophiles who argued that Peter I's reforms were responsible for the gap between the common people and the educated elite, Belinsky claimed that the reforms that had created this gap were merely the first step in the modernization of Russia, and that as the necessary reforms of Russian society and politics were carried out, the gap between the elite and the common people would eventually disappear.

**Alexander Herzen:** During his student years in Moscow at the Physico-Mathematical Faculty Herzen became acquainted with the ideas of St. Simon, Feuerbach, Goethe, Proudhon, Schiller and Hegel. Imprisoned and exiled to northeast Russia in 1834, Herzen emigrated to France in 1847 where he published two magazines, *The Polar Star* and *The Bell*. Herzen's socialism was a major influence on the early Russian revolutionary movement in general, and on the participants in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 in particular. Convinced that Europe was on the verge of collapse and that fundamental reform could only be achieved through protracted, bitter conflict, Herzen urged Russia to reject capitalism and bourgeois society in order to avoid this fate.

**Nihilism:** Popularized in the novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862) by Ivan Turgenev, nihilism was an ideology that rejected traditional sources of authority, saw individual freedom as its highest goal, claimed that materialism was the only reliable source of knowledge, called for society to be based on rationalism and had tenuous links to a revolutionary movement between 1860-1917. However, nihilism soon degenerated into mere anarchy and by the late 1870s was group linked to terror or political murder could be labelled nihilist.

**Existentialism:** Advocating individual definitions of meaning in life and the effort to make rational choices in an irrational cosmos, existentialism claims that embracing existence is the only means of finding meaning in universe that lacks, meaning or purpose. Two of the most important Russian existentialists were Feodor Dostoyevsky (particularly in *Notes from the Underground*), and Nikolay Berdyaev, a political and Orthodox thinker.

## **Anarchism:**

**Mikhail Bakunin:** Considered the founder of collective anarchism, Bakunin was introduced to the ideas of Kant, Fichte and Hegel as a member of Stankevich's circle. Bakunin's role in several political uprisings earned him years in prison, death sentences, and exile to Siberia where he escaped in 1861 to England. From there he went to Italy and eventually Switzerland, where he became an influential figure among Russian and European radicals.

**Leo Tolstoy:** Tolstoy was a student of Schopenhauer's philosophy whose travels in Europe brought him into contact with Proudhon and other French anarchist intellectuals. Tolstoy's strongest social criticism was aimed at institutionalized religion which he believed had corrupted Christ's true teachings. His Christian anarchism was based on Jesus' stress on resisting evil, which Tolstoy interpreted as *never do violence* to another. According to Tolstoy, Christ had been crucified by the authorities of his time as a conscious response to the threat his teachings posed to social structures based on violence or the threat of violence.

## **Materialism:**

**Nicholas Chernyshevsky:** Chernyshevsky's thought was shaped by numerous influences – Feuerbach, 18<sup>th</sup> century French materialism, Hegel, Proudhon, Leroux, St. Simon, and Leroux. Religious until 1848, Chernyshevsky became a materialist, atheist, socialist and democratic republican who advocated the use of the scientific method and denied both divine revelation and the Orthodox tradition. Arrested and sentenced to penal servitude in Siberia in 1862, Chernyshevsky argued for "rational egoism" in his novel *What Is to Be Done?*.

**Dmitry Pisarev:** Moving from religious mysticism during his university years to Büchner, Vogt and Moleschott's crude materialism later in life, Pisarev was proud to be called a "nihilist". He argued that useless traditions and concepts should be eliminated without mercy.

**Populism (Narodnichestvo):** The last secular intellectual movement before Marxism in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Populism advocated agrarian socialism among the Russian peasantry (narod). While Populism may have had its roots in the thought of Herzen and Chernyshevsky, Peter Lavrov was its most important theoretician.

**Peter Lavrov:** Under the influence of Spencer, Comte, Feuerbach and John Stuart Mill, Lavrov came to believe that science could provide the principles of both creative activity and knowledge. Lavrov hoped that the Russians would be the first to carry out a socialist revolution through common cultivation of the land and sharing the products of their labor. His revolutionary associations led to forced retirement and exile to Vologda in 1866. After escaping from exile Lavrov settled in Paris.

**Nicolay Mikhailovsky:** Editor of *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, Mikhailovsky was the second most important Populist thinker. Like Lavrov, he was an enthusiast for the views of John Stuart Mill.

**Tchaikovsky Circle (Tchaikovtsy):** Established by the radical Nicholas Tschakovsky, the Tchaikovtsy began as a literary group promoting self-education, but went on to print, publish and distribute scientific and revolutionary works as it evolved into an activist, Populist (Narodnist) organization in the early 1870s.

## **Religious Philosophers:**

### **Pochvennichestvo Movement:**

**Apollon Grigoryev:** At one time a member of the pochvenniki group, whose members included Dostoyevsky, Grigoryev claimed that each nation developed in line with its own internal principles, like living organisms. This was in contrast to the ideas of Hegel who argued that nations and societies were merely a series of players in the dialectical advance of history in accordance with the spirit of humanity, or the world-spirit.

**Fyodor Dostoyevsky:** The existential ideas presented in Dostoyevsky's work have had a profound influence on Russian and Western thought and have inspired a number of important religious thinkers such as Lev Shestov, Sergey Bulgakov, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Nikolay Berdyaev. In particular, Dostoyevsky wrestled with issues related to anthropology, ethics and philosophies of history, religion and the human spirit.

### **Naturalism:**

**Vasily Rozanov:** Rozanov's intellectual roots lay in conservatism and Slavophilism, and was an admirer of Dostoyevsky and Strakhov. As an existentialist, he rejected both commonly accepted religious tenets as well as the revolutionaries' secular vision. Rozanov considered the teachings of the New Testament to be too focused on death, and espoused an original metaphysics of family life and sexual relations that he believed was more akin to the Old Testament.

**Konstantin Leontyev:** Worried that Russia would fall under the sway of decadent Western European liberalism and pluralism, Leontiev defended the principles of faith, authority and hierarchy, as well as advocating political and aesthetic ideas in line with those of Nietzsche.

**Nicholay Berdyaev:** Berdyaev began as an active Marxist, which led to his eventual arrest and three-year exile in Vologda. After moving to St. Petersburg in 1904 Berdyaev abandoned his Marxist views and immersed himself in study and discussion of the spiritual and mystical aspects of various groups. Despite still considering himself a radical, spiritual development took precedence over political struggle for Berdyaev, so the Bolsheviks' restrictions on personal freedom made the regime unacceptable for him. Berdyaev regarded freedom as a gift from God, who had created the world out of freedom, to humanity. These views led to Berdyaev being arrested twice; after his second arrest he was ordered to leave the country or face execution.

### **Sophiology:**

**Vladimir Solovyev:** As the founder of the theological doctrines of Sophiology and Godmanhood, and the philosophy of all-unity Solovyev attempted to merge rationalism, mysticism and empiricism in order to better know God, man and nature. He believed that Russia could play an important role in reuniting the Catholic and Orthodox Churches to create the one, true, universal Church.

**Sergey Bulgakov:** Bulgakov's complex spiritual journey took him from abandoning religion and embracing Marxism, to rejecting Marxism in 1900 and gradually returning to his Orthodox faith. In his effort to refute Positivism and Marxism, Bulgakov focused on creating a religiously-oriented idealism by combining Orthodoxy, Neo-Kantianism and Marxism. He stressed the superiority of God over this material world, although existence in this dimension remained meaningful.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Discuss the emergence of professional philosophy and the philosophical ideas that flowed into Russia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Reading**

Lossky, N.O., *History of Russian Philosophy*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952, pp.9-64.  
Russian Philosophy in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/russian/>

### **Science**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the blossoming of Russian science and the emergence of a number of Russian scientists in a variety of fields who would become known around the world. Most, like Lomonosov, were from families of modest means living in distant quarters of the empire. Despite the greater educational

opportunities available in the major cities, children from the privileged upper classes made almost no contribution to the development of Russian science. Although scientists benefitted from educational reforms implemented by the tsarist regime and were able to establish a firm base for the advancement of Russian science, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia still lagged far behind its western European neighbors politically and economically.

**Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevskii:** Sometimes referred to as the “Copernicus of geometry”, Lobachevskii became prominent for his work in mathematics and geometry. The non-Euclidian geometry he developed was named after him, Lobachevskian geometry, as was his important work on Dirichlet integrals which came to be known as the Lobachevskii integral formula.

**Dmitrii Ivanovich Mendeleev:** One of the most important figures in the history of chemistry, Mendeleev was the discoverer of the periodic law and the creator of the periodic table which enabled scientists to predict both new chemical elements and their properties. In 1869 Mendeleev wrote *Principles of Chemistry*, a textbook on inorganic chemistry and his name was given to the Russian Physical-Chemical Society that had just been established.

### **Discussion/Questions**

What factors hindered the teaching of philosophy at the universities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

### **Reading**

Russian Philosophy, in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/russian/#SH2b>