Picturing Russia’s Men
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Masculinity and Modernity in 19th-Century Painting

Allison Leigh
For my mother,

the Honorable Dr. Susan J. Rabern,
Captain, U.S. Navy (retired), Former ASN (FM&C)
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Note on Translations

This book incorporates a range of writings produced by a diverse group of historical figures, many of which are appearing in English translation for the first time. All translations in the text, unless otherwise indicated in the notes, are my own. I have included the transliterated Russian text in square brackets when a single English equivalent may not entirely or with full accuracy convey the meaning of the original Russian word or phrase. The Library of Congress system for transliteration of Cyrillic has been used throughout. To diminish confusion, I retain the common forms of well-known places and proper names, such as Moscow as opposed to Moskva, and Dostoevsky rather than Dostoevskii. Names of rulers are also given in their more familiar English variants, for example, Nicholas rather than Nikolai and Catherine instead of Ekaterina. In most cases, I have not transformed Russian names into their English equivalents, thus Pavel does not become Paul, nor does Mikhail become Michael. For greater readability, patronymics (middle names derived from the first name of one's father) have also been eliminated, as have diacritical marks for proper nouns, hence Ilia instead of Il’ia and Gogol as opposed to Gogol’. The Russian language has no articles, but in most instances I added them to the titles of artworks, hence The Gamblers instead of Gamblers for the painting Igroki. I expound on nuances of the Russian language when relevant to the text under discussion in the notes. In order to facilitate future research, the notes and bibliography contain all titles transliterated from the original language rather than translations. Both the style of transliteration and the notes have been organized to make the materials easier to locate for those who wish to continue research on nineteenth-century Russian art.
Let us consult history again; it is history which explains people.

Pëtr Chaadaev

On Christmas Day of 1826, a new gallery of paintings opened in a specially designed hall in the Winter Palace of St. Petersburg [Plate 0.1]. This magnificent new room in the tsar’s residence, called the Military Gallery, contained some two hundred portraits of the men who had fought in Russia’s campaign against Napoleon from 1812–14. The works had been painted over the course of the preceding seven years by the British artist George Dawe, who had won the commission, according to contemporary accounts, by “prowling” around members of the Russian court in the autumn of 1818 when Tsar Alexander I was visiting Aix-la-Chapelle to discuss the balance of power in post-Napoleonic Europe. By the time the project was completed, Dawe and his two Russian assistants would paint an astounding total of 329 portraits. Packed tightly together and arranged in five rows running the full length of the long hall, the canvases show some of Russia’s most prestigious men in moody, bust-length paintings. Generals look down from these images affixed to the walls; some are smiling, but most are not. The vast majority demonstrate a poised assertiveness and dignified, even friendly, self-possession. Some of the men came from old princely families, others had more recently been promoted to the nobility, yet all were depicted in their military uniforms and decorated with a plethora of honors and medals.

Many of the upstanding men on view were in attendance for the gallery’s grand opening. The construction of the space had been rushed so that the inaugural ceremony would coincide with the anniversary of the expulsion of Napoleon’s army from Russia on Christmas Day in 1812. It was carried out with much pomp and circumstance. Cavalry and infantry regiments marked the inauguration with a march past the portraits and the tsar himself attended the festivities. Church dignitaries read prayers and frequent discharges of cannon announced to all those gathered that this was a solemn ceremony. Open to the

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public during restricted hours after this grand opening, the Military Gallery was frequently discussed in the Russian press. The appointment of a foreign artist for such an important patriotic commission sparked some controversy, leading one critic to write: “We regretted that the honor of executing this monument, most precious for our homeland was granted to a foreign artist, while our Academy had many excellent portrait painters.” Further polemics ensued when rumors circulated that Dawe had claimed the work of his two Russian assistants as his own and paid them little while forcing them to work in poor conditions. But these controversies were offset by praise for Dawe’s forceful brushwork and by tributes from poets like Alexander Pushkin, who described the artist’s “divine pencil” and “genius” in a poem entitled “To Dawe ESQ.”

Foreigners who saw the gallery mostly disapproved of Dawe’s portraits. One British commentator described the barrage of masculine bravura on view as “male chaos.” He further pronounced the space an “endless gallery … all male and all military; like the pit in a French theatre.” There was, however, an internal order to all this “male chaos.” The gallery was to serve several functions—it demonstrated the adoption of European tastes and showed Russia’s place in the grander scheme of Western culture and political power. As one of the first portrait galleries in Russia not based exclusively on family lineage and dynastic history, it also set a precedent by showing the relationship between major state events and the citizens who shared in the history of the nation. The dissemination of a large number of engravings and lithographs made from copies of portraits in the gallery also showed that the work was intended to have a public life, one that brought the example of heroic Russian men well beyond the confines of the tsar’s palace. The art historian Galina Andreeva has described the groundbreaking function of the space, arguing that the elongated nature of the gallery resembles the main nave of a cathedral, calling to mind the traditional iconostasis in Russian Orthodox churches. Proceeding down it slowly, one would scan the faces and the names inscribed into each frame and absorb each man’s personality and public presence. Summoning this context, Andreeva calls the floor-to-ceiling nature of the Military Gallery a new type of “secular iconostasis,” one that was “canonizing a new type of hero” for the Russian public.

Picturing Russia’s Men

What kind of new “hero” did the Military Gallery glorify? Who were the men on its walls beyond their role in the war against Napoleon? What ideals of masculine virtue were displayed by those chosen for commemoration in this space, and
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who was meant to be affected by the kind of manhood they represented? While the gallery did not produce a single or unified picture of the ideal male servitor, certain key traits shared by many of the men can be ascertained. Perhaps the most compelling connection between the men is that many of them fought heroically in battle. Several sustained numerous wounds on the frontlines but kept fighting anyway or returned to wars after short periods of recuperation. Grigorii Berg, seen on the southwest wall, is a good example. He showed great courage in the Battle of Amstetten, where a bullet wounded him in the head. He then fought with equal courage later that year at Austerlitz, where he was wounded in the left foot and held in captivity for several weeks. Nonetheless, he went on to fight in the Battle of Polotsk, where he was again wounded, but remained in the ranks and kept commanding his troops.\textsuperscript{16} Andrei Glebov, also pictured in the gallery, survived an even more extraordinary number of injuries. He was wounded in the left leg in the battles at Brescia and Lecco, wounded in the right leg during the battle of Trebbia, wounded in the head during military action at Novi, and then again in the head at Schwanden and during the Battle of Borodino.\textsuperscript{17}

Men like Berg and Glebov are a testament to the lingering ideals for masculinity which came to dominate in Russia during the reign of Tsar Peter the Great (r. 1682–1725). This period saw the rise of standards for men which emphasized physical dynamism, bravery, and military skill. According to the historian Nancy Shields Kollman, “Peter secularized and universalized warrior virtues,” and this period saw the rejection of earlier Muscovite notions that “military valor was expected only of the elite and was associated with a Christian’s duty to defend Orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{18} The Petrine vision of masculinity still held in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and emphasis continued to be on assertiveness and courage as intrinsic male attributes.\textsuperscript{19} Plenty of men who embodied these traits can be seen on the gallery’s walls. Denis Davidov, who appears on the east wall, invented a whole genre of poetry noted for its emphasis on macho themes like fearlessness in battle, harlots, vodka, and the value of true friendship.\textsuperscript{20}

Other men figured in the Military Gallery took such ideals to an extreme. Aleksei Yermolov, whose portrait hangs just to the left of Davidov’s, was renowned for his brutality as commander-in-chief in the Caucasus. He implemented a strategy of systematic subjugation in the region, claiming that only by executing Muslims would the lives of Russians be saved.\textsuperscript{21} Yermolov had company on the walls of the Military Gallery in the figure of Aleksei Arakcheev [Figure 0.1]. A representative of Russia’s elite noble estate, Arakcheev was renowned for his maniacal dedication to order and his unwavering sense of duty to the autocracy.\textsuperscript{22} Indications of such esteemed qualities can be seen in Dawe’s portrait of him. The ironed rigidity of his red gorget combines with the impeccably systematic fall of
each epaulette tassel to underscore the control this man possessed over his outer and inner life. The painted miniature he wears around his neck further reflects his devotion to the autocracy, a trait also highly valued for men at the time. It shows Tsar Alexander I and signals Arakcheev’s obedience to the emperor.²³

In this period, the army came to be seen increasingly as the arena where male identity could be constructed and superior officers like these were key to the modeling of ideal behavior for subordinates. Michel Foucault analyzed a similar phenomenon in eighteenth-century France. Key for Foucault was the emergence of what he perceived to be a new concept of the soldier—one that saw men as

Figure 0.1 George Dawe, Portrait of Aleksei Arakcheev, 1824; oil on canvas, 70 × 62.5 cm., The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.
malleable: “the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed.” In Russia, male traits were not perceived as necessarily inherent from a purely biological standpoint—men were increasingly believed to be made and the bodies of army men became sites for the production of such supreme masculinity. The tsar who organized the opening of the Military Gallery, Nicholas I, was particularly devoted to the formation of ideal soldiers and officers. For him, defining what a soldier was led to a definition of what a man should be on a larger level. This commitment to educating young men would have important implications for artists training at the Imperial Academy of Arts as well. Instilling strident gender values became a characteristic policy at the state-sponsored institution throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

Even before Nicholas I came to power, Tsar Alexander’s rule saw the expansion of the university system, but also the creation of military colonies throughout the empire, a task Arakcheev was appointed to oversee. These colonies became renowned for their strict order and severe discipline—to the point of dehumanization. Arakcheev was known to force serf women into marriages and he ruthlessly tortured those who could not live up to the standards he set. Hatred of him grew so intense that peasants actually stabbed his mistress to death in 1825. He responded by sentencing twenty-four servants to be brutally beaten with the knout, including one pregnant woman and three maids, all under the age of eighteen. Men like Arakcheev and Yermolov were, mercifully, on the wane though. Their abusive behavior was countered by portraits showing the younger generation of generals—men like Alexander Chernyshëv [Figure 0.2], who became an important spy in his role as personal emissary to Napoleon. Part of Chernyshëv’s success in espionage seems to have been due to his ability to infiltrate the boudoirs of high-society Parisiennes. Handsome and dashing, Chernyshëv was rumored to have had an affair with no less than Napoleon’s sister, a renowned beauty who was immortalized as Venus Victrix by Antonio Canova in 1808.

According to contemporaries, women were in raptures over his “hair thrown in big tufts, that Tatar face, [and] his almost perpendicular eyes.” In Dawe’s portrait, Chernyshëv is shown, much as those lustful ladies described him—young and handsome, with “big tufts” of curly bronze hair falling in waves to frame his youthful face. Fashionably long sideburns creep down toward his jawline and his carefully clipped mustache emphasizes the sensual curve of his full lips. Unlike the confrontational gaze of Arakcheev, Chernyshëv looks unassertively off into the distance. His body remains utterly frontal though and a
veritable wall of medals cascades down the center of his chest. Chernyshëv was, in Dawe’s portrait, not the sycophantic and aging servitor that Arakcheev was, but a new breed, the kind of man who had not proven himself by wounds, or battle poetry, or torturing those beneath him, but through charm and social graces.\textsuperscript{34}

Chernyshëv was not alone in serving as a representative of the new generation of men who had come to the fore during the war. Pëtr Kikin also provides a good example of the rising cohort—in his youth he was something of a fashionable dandy and an art lover [Figure 0.3]. Clear-eyed and shown looking as though he is just about to speak, Kikin wears his general’s uniform with ease and casual nonchalance. Although born only six years after Arakcheev, the collar of Kikin’s jacket is loosed slightly and a torrent of muddy azure and cerulean
blues swirl in the sky behind him. He had commanded an infantry brigade during the foreign campaigns of 1813–14, but had retired after the victory in 1815. He went on to become a staunch supporter of Slavophile ideas and co-founded the Society for the Encouragement of Artists—an organization which sought to promote Russian art. The overcoat thrown nonchalantly around his shoulders in the Military Gallery portrait seems to allude to Kikin's original stylish sensibilities and Westernizing worldliness. In many parts of Europe, including Russia, it was considered important for gentlemen of the period to take an active interest in matters of appearance and demonstrate fashion sense, but one had to be careful not to let modish clothing usurp ideals for dignified masculine comportment.
The depictions of these men—only seven examples in a gallery of over three hundred portraits—reveal an overall fragmentation in models for manhood occurring in the wake of Napoleon’s defeat. These paintings reflect the multivalence of men’s responses to patriarchal traditions and new fluctuations in the dynamics of masculinity which arose at the time. On a larger level, the Military Gallery demonstrates how ideals of gender comportment “always had to be guarded or regained” through substantiation within culture more generally. Artworks played a significant role in such projects of gender ideality and maintenance; they had the power to foster standards already present in other cultural and political arenas, or, as we will see, to disrupt and even transform notions of what it meant to be a man.

If masculinity can be defined as “a set of normative assertions about the nature of the adult male and his conduct in society,” then this book addresses how painterly representations reflected, violated, or sometimes even produced such parameters in Russian culture over the course of the nineteenth century. Each chapter elucidates the core tenets for manhood specific to the historical moment being scrutinized, but at the same time seeks not to flatten the inherent disorder and multiplicity which characterized prescriptions for masculinity over the course of the period. As is evident from the Military Gallery, tenets for ideal male behavior were in flux at the outset of the nineteenth century and they continued to change persistently as larger social, political, and economic sectors mutated over the course of the era.

Harry Brod once wrote that: “the word ‘man’ is perplexing because each historical period, every society, and each group within a society interprets the raw materials of existence in its own way.” What follows reveals the complexity of these different articulations in Russian society. It examines the role art played in the construction of varying precepts for masculine behavior, revealing that “masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are the products … not of nature, but of historical processes.” From paintings that were made for major exhibitions in Russia to those entered into foreign Salons, from those made for a specific public commission to those only for private viewing among close friends—all of the works under examination in this book speak about what it meant to be a man in Russia at different points in the nineteenth century. Artistic works made in the period reveal a vacancy within the very heart of masculine value systems and provide unique insight into the breakdown of myths surrounding masculine strength, independence, and self-control—all long esteemed as “essential” male qualities and exclusively masculine virtues.
Nationalism and Modernity

As part of the general aftermath of the war against Napoleon, the Military Gallery provides important background for my assessment of ideologies surrounding masculinity. Victory over the foreign invader ushered in a period of hope for reform and at the same time an intense new consciousness about Russia's future and the potential of its artists. The perception surrounding the defeat of the Grande Armée was that heroic men from all sectors of Russian society had risen up against a seemingly insurmountable foe. Together, they had not only conquered the foreign invader and expelled him from Russian lands, but cinched the matter definitively by marching the vanquished French all the way back to Paris, into which the Russians entered triumphantly in 1814. In the wake of this accomplishment, Russian men at various levels of society, especially those in the elite nobility, began to assess the role of Russia on the world stage along with their own roles in history. A new sense of both the present and the future, and individual men's roles within that future, was awakened, one that has important implications for the study of modernity.

Renato Poggioli once claimed (and Göran Therborn has more recently argued) that modernity can be “defined culturally, as an epoch turned to the future, conceived as likely to be different from and possibly better than the present and the past.” This turn occurs in Russia in the years after the Patriotic War, when a sense of pride ushered in a parallel consciousness about the future of Russia and the distinctiveness of the present moment. This period saw the rise of debates surrounding Russian culture both internally and in terms of the nation's relationship to other European powers. It was an “epoch turned to the future” in the sense that Poggioli described, and the transformation in worldview that occurred in the wake of Napoleon's defeat would have lasting implications for the duration of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the newfound sense that Russia's future would be distinctive from both its past and present serves as a vital sign of the birth of modernity in the nation.

The Military Gallery is a testament to this change in sensibilities. The opening ceremony held in December of 1826 served to consolidate Russia's past with its present and glorify those men who were considered ideal servitors of the autocratic state. Those on its walls were meant to reinforce the ideals for manhood described earlier—physical dynamism and courage, devotion to order and duty to the autocracy, magnetic social graces, and a keen sense of refined appearance. Perhaps never was the need for institutionalization of such gender idealities more
pressing. For in December of 1825, only one year before the opening ceremony for the Military Gallery, the authority of the tsar had been challenged in an event that has become known as the Decembrist rebellion. Tsar Alexander I had died under mysterious circumstances in November of that year and by virtue of the laws of succession, the throne should have gone to his oldest brother, the Grand Duke Constantine. When Constantine renounced his right to the throne, Nicholas, Alexander’s third brother, became the new emperor of Russia.

Yet on the very first day of his rule, a group of insurgent guardsmen, many from leading noble families, staged a mutiny by refusing to swear allegiance to the new tsar. In response, Nicholas ordered artillery forces to open fire, killing some sixty or seventy men and forcing the rest to scatter across the frozen Neva River. Five men were sentenced to death for their part in the event and 121 individuals were sent to hard labor, disciplinary battalions, or exile. Some three hundred more were transferred to dangerous and remote garrisons, where they were kept under surveillance. Nicholas ultimately commuted the sentence of the five leaders to death by hanging instead of quartering, but their execution proved hardly more merciless. So began the reign of Nicholas I and a period in Russian history characterized by hostile persecution of all dissent.

Nineteen years younger than his brother Alexander, Tsar Nicholas I had not been brought up in the atmosphere of enlightened humanitarianism that characterized his sibling’s youth. He had instead come of age in a time of war and, according to the historian Nicholas Riasanovsky, he “always remained an army man … devoted to his troops, to military exercises, to the parade ground, down to the last button on a soldier’s uniform.” Contemporaries attest to this core element of his personality: “the predilection for things military displayed by Nikolai Pavlovich from his early years remained the basic feature of his character and never left him.” He spent hours drilling soldiers, insisting on precision and obsessing over details of appearance among the troops. According to Elise Wirtschafter: “The desire of the imperial government to reeducate and discipline its subjects through law was nowhere more visible than in military society.”

The Military Gallery thus served an important function in the year it was first revealed to the public. The portraits within it were an attempt to solidify not only the authority of those who had honorably served the tsar in the war against Napoleon, but the traits they possessed as men that raised them to such powerful positions. Yet where monuments like the Military Gallery seem to establish secure and stable ideals for masculine behavior to be emulated by those who visited the space, the portraits showed anxiety about the meanings men’s bodies could possess. Christopher Forth has written that “any history of masculinity
must also be the story of weakness denied” and it is exactly this dynamic which is made vivid on the walls of the Military Gallery.\textsuperscript{52} It is undeniably a monument to manhood, but what also comes to the fore on the walls of the Winter Palace is the intensity of the desire to establish models of ideal masculinity and to posit such tropes as intimately connected to the state. Row after row of heroic male faces gaze assuredly down from the walls, so many are in evidence that they must be packed tightly on top of each other, creating a veritable sea of male exemplars [Figure 0.4]. Yet all this only thinly veils the apprehension surrounding men’s actual relationship to the state in the wake of the Decembrist rebellion. The need to commemorate the War of 1812 specifically in terms of its primary male actors shows a new necessity to confirm the role of the masculine in terms of paternalism and order.\textsuperscript{53}

**Men’s History**

As a hall filled with pictures of wealthy, white men of the ruling class, the Military Gallery highlights a further factor that is crucial to this project as a whole. Put simply, it represents the standard space of history. The gallery is a celebration of history’s victors and a testament to the recording of powerful men’s lives and
achievements over all those who were submitted to them—women, children, servants, and serfs. So why should we spend time thinking about the gallery? If men like those on its walls have been the subject of nearly all historical research to date, why add to this?54 There are several answers to these questions. David Morgan once described the paradoxical problem of how gender is treated in historical narratives as one in which women are obscured from our vision by being placed consistently in the background, while men are obscured by being pushed too much into the foreground.55 This dynamic is made vivid by the Military Gallery. The portraits within it only put men’s public achievements on view, each man became only his role in the War of 1812. The thoughts, motivations, and social prescriptions that led to such historical actions were concealed.

Such elevation of male behavior to the level of history actually tells us very little about men’s real feelings, skills, knowledge, or capabilities.56 Thus, where women were systematically written out of history, men like those in the Military Gallery have been consistently hidden in plain sight. Judith Shapiro has described this as the tendency whereby “the social and cultural dimensions of maleness are often dealt with implicitly rather than explicitly.”57 This book seeks to redress this imbalance and investigate men’s experiences in the nineteenth century not obliquely, but by mining the details that made up exhortations for masculinity. In this way, the project serves as a complement to women’s studies and seeks to elaborate the tensions which resulted for both sexes from “dominant dialogues about gender.”58 Such pressures have, unfortunately, often been considered peripheral to the study of modernism. Nevertheless, I investigate the dynamics at work in men’s lives in the hope of creating a fuller picture of masculine experience, one that goes beyond the limits of normative narratives and, in so doing, also generates a fuller history of modernity.59

As a whole, this book focuses on paintings made by Russian artists during the reign of two tsars. The first half of the book explores the role that art played in envisioning a spectrum of masculinities during the autocratic regime of Nicholas I, the outset of which has been the subject of brief elaboration in this introduction. As we have seen, the war against Napoleon ushered in a more modern conception of both self and nation in the country, but then the Decembrist rebellion saw hopes dashed as Russia’s young “sons” failed to bring about change in the face of strident autocratic power. In response, Tsar Nicholas I would seek to establish himself as the “father-commander,” ruling over his citizens as a stern, even sometimes cruel and abusive, paterfamilias.60 The initial chapters focus on the period when Nicholas I forged the ideological doctrine of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality,” also known as Official Nationality.
This began what was ultimately to be the heyday of patriarchal culture in Russia, but it was nevertheless an era wrought by differing notions of what it meant to be a “good” man.

These years also saw the emergence of a new character type in Russian literature, one that would recur in prose and poems by a range of authors throughout the century. He came to be known as the “superfluous man [lishnii chelovek]”—a figure who was usually from the upper classes, suffered from extreme existential boredom, and for whom purpose in life was always either a daydream never met with action or an anxious afterthought among the search for satiety. The term itself was originally popularized by Ivan Turgenev’s 1850 novella The Diary of a Superfluous Man, but was then applied retroactively to characters from earlier works, such as Alexander Pushkin’s verse-novel Eugene Onegin (1825–32) and Mikhail Lermontov’s A Hero of Our Time (1839–41). The superfluous man has been seen as afflicted with a deep-seated sense of alienation and disenchantment, one resulting at the most profound level from the growth of industrial production, the disintegration of the aristocracy, and the emergence of women in professional spheres.

As a figure estranged from society and from the normative behaviors associated with his gender, the superfluous man has resonance with various malaise-ridden figures prevalent in Western European discourse—in particular the flâneur, dandy, and neurasthenic. All attest to a growing interest in what was seen as a new and pervasive kind of existential pain among men, one frequently linked to the detrimental effects of modernity on men’s sense of themselves. What all of these masculine types and the fictional representations derived from them shared was that they were evidence of what some scholars have referred to as a “crisis of masculinity,” one that arose despite sharp differences in cultural environments, socio-economic structures, levels of industrialization, and political systems. Unfortunately, these models for understanding masculinity by creating typologies of male experience may have blinded scholars to the tremendous variety of men’s lives outside of these standard tropes and conventions. In the case of Russia in particular, the superfluous man came to so heavily dominate scholarly discussions of masculinity during the nineteenth century that the archetype has precluded study of much else.

In the years when the superfluous man first came to prominence in literature, members of the intelligentsia recognized that he was not just an imagined character type, but a figure taken to represent a real range of men who had lost their sense of purpose and become disillusioned by unsuccessful efforts for change. In this sense, the superfluous man was seen as a direct byproduct of
Nicholas I’s repressive rule. Thus, this book begins with an examination of this period of oppression and disaffection but does not rely too heavily on notions of what constituted the superfluous man in the period. As a conceptual model, this character type simply does not fully explain the varied experiences of men in the nineteenth century. Moving beyond the dominance of this trope allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the changing conditions of both masculinity and modernity as they found visual form in paintings across the turbulent period.

Russia’s “Short” Nineteenth Century

To begin this investigation, Chapter 1 focuses on Karl Briullov, a painter who came from a long line of artists and was trained at the Imperial Academy of Arts, an institution modeled on rigorous military ideals which served to mold the masculine social identities of its artists as future servitors of the state [Figure 0.5]. Briullov achieved more professional success than any other artist in his generation, but he resisted prescriptive gender standards and was in several ways unsuccessful as a man according to the strictures of the time. Men’s duties as fathers, sons, and husbands were key to the constitution of their masculinity in this moment, but Briullov ultimately failed to fulfill these roles. Instead, he found ways to evade the standard system for progression through manhood by substantiating himself in other arenas. The second chapter relates directives for male behavior among military servicemen with those that became evident in society more generally. The 1830s were a time in which “the entire machinery of government came to be permeated by the military spirit of direct orders, absolute obedience, and precision.”

Thus, my attention turns to the work of an artist who grappled most profoundly with that ethos. Pavel Fedotov began serving in an Imperial Guard Regiment in 1833, yet he longed to leave the service to become a professional artist [Figure 0.6]. The portraits he made of his fellow officers show the ways men struggled to live up to the expectations for masculine behavior in Nicholas I’s autocracy.

Chapter 3 begins the second part of the book and spans the end of Nicholas I’s reign and the beginning of that of his successor, Alexander II. The latter’s years of rule, from 1855 to 1881, finally brought much sought-after change to the country, including the abolishment of serfdom in 1861, yet much of social and cultural life remained staunchly traditional. I turn first to issues of sexual identity in the work of Alexander Ivanov, who was also trained at the Academy of Arts, but spent the
majority of his adult life living in Italy [Figure 0.7]. Ivanov painted numerous male nudes throughout his life and these works lend insight into both his sexuality and, on a larger level, the way men’s desires and erotic proclivities were implicated in the establishment of their masculinity. Chapter 4 turns away from
the sexual dimension of close male relationships to explore the nature of more widely accepted patterns of homosociality as they became central to art-making in associations like the Artel of Artists, which was formed in St. Petersburg in 1863. An all-male collective based on networks of exchange and cooperation, the Artel provided its members with shared working spaces and was centered around
the pooling of all earnings from the sales of paintings. It lasted only a short time, but was captured in painted works by some of its most prominent members, who strongly believed in the potential of this homosocial commune.

The final section of the book turns to the production of two of Russia's most prominent realist painters, Ivan Kramskoi and Ilia Repin. Chapter 5 explores...
Kramskoi’s various depictions of women—from portraits he made of his wife and daughter to his famous picture of a Petersburg prostitute [Figure 0.8]. Women’s occupation of roles on the problematic borderline between the domestic and public spheres in Russian society was, by the time Kramskoi made these pictures, a source of tremendous anxiety. Yet Kramskoi’s depictions of women show a profound and unusual kind of identification with the position of the female
Introduction

sex throughout his life, something not typically associated with male painters living in patriarchal societies at the time. The final chapter explores the cultural debates in Russia which accompanied rising rates of alcoholism and suicide through a focus on the portraiture of Repin, who painted tragic figures like Modest Musorgsky and Vsevolod Garshin as they struggled with depression and addiction [Figure 0.9]. Repin's depictions of men in states of injury or debility

Figure 0.9 Unidentified photographer, Ilia Repin, 1884; © Heritage Image Partnership Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo.
from the 1880s can be understood as evidence of a continually growing crisis in the gender order, one that is connected to the original rise of the superfluous man in the wake of the failure of the Decembrist rebellion in 1825, but which had grown in intensity since the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

As is evident from these chapter summaries and the title of the book itself, my focus throughout remains largely on painting. As the art historian Rosalind Blakesley has pointed out, the medium of oil painting “was considered the predominant and most innovative field of visual artistic endeavor throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”

Oil painting was indeed held in high esteem throughout the period, but watercolor also came to the fore in the nineteenth century and was highly valued as a painterly technique which revealed the artist's temperament due to the spontaneous application of colors that it required. Thus I assess a number of both oil paintings and watercolors, as well as works made in the largely Russian medium known as “sauce”—all of which were vital to these men's creative process and, along with their drawings, lend special insight into their gendered reality.

In sum, this book focuses on painting in the period from approximately 1825 to 1881, dates which encapsulate, on one side, the aftermath of the Decembrist rebellion, and on the other, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Both moments brought tremendous change to supposedly settled versions of masculinity. This periodization seeks to provide a new understanding of the era by putting forward a “short nineteenth century” which counters the more prominent, and widely accepted, Western European “long nineteenth century”—generally understood as spanning from the French Revolution in 1789 to the beginning of the First World War in 1914. Several scholars have put forward alternative periodizations that focus on the distinctive structures and events comprising the Russian context, but the idea of a distinctive short nineteenth century has not become prominent.

I propose this innovative periodization because it also echoes the rise of Russia's earliest modern art movements, namely, romanticism and realism. The decade after the victory over Napoleon saw the influence of European romanticism begin to chip away at the hegemony of the academic neoclassical style which had been dominant and, as in Europe, realism came to overlap and eventually supplant romanticism by the late 1850s. This style and the subject matters it brought to the fore reached a highpoint in Russia in the period between approximately 1860 and 1890. Each of the artists under study in this volume was identified with one (or both) of these two stylistic registers, making
the period between 1825 and 1881 exceptional in terms of both gender evolution and artistic practice.

Microhistories of the Masculine

What comes to the fore in this description of the book’s overall scope is my reliance on two principal modes of organization and methodology. My general procedure is to use micronarrative case studies to analyze the circumstances surrounding masculinity with a degree of detail that would not be possible in a more fused or singularly focused work. The complexity found in each individual history allows us to see both gender norms and the ways men negotiated, upheld, or transgressed them—often all three—over the course of a lifetime. Raeweyn Connell has written that understanding the historical processes that undergird subjects with the amount of depth and complexity as masculinity “requires concrete study; more exactly, a range of studies that can illuminate the larger dynamic.”69 It is my hope that the type of microhistories found in this book fulfill that imperative by providing “rich historical texture for understanding and interpretation.”70 As Clifford Geertz once pointed out, if scholars engaged in the production of case studies are to be more than “mere peddlers of singularities … they must contrive to place such singularities in an informed proximity.”71 Thus I have sought to contextualize and connect each individual case in this volume as Geertz envisioned. The artworks made by each chapter’s protagonist are related to works by other artists as well as to the relevant social, economic, and political context in order to “preserve the individuality of things and enfold them in larger worlds.”72

That being said, while microhistories proved the most effective way of structuring the text given the project’s wide scope, they do not by any means provide a comprehensive or exhaustive view of the period. Instead, the case studies are organized loosely according to chronological period and by overarching themes central to each artist’s work and era. Every chapter examines the role of masculinity in the life and work of the artist under study and relates issues associated with maleness to the time in which their paintings were produced. As Christopher Forth has pointed out, “masculinity is an inherently unstable and even elastic cultural construction, one capable of being disrupted as well as validated depending on where and when it is being articulated. Yet
as a set of ideals, attributes and potentialities ... certain continuities can be discerned when viewed over la longue durée.”

It is exactly these two sets of seemingly opposed qualities that are examined here. These case studies bring to the fore both continuities in masculine experience and the unique occurrences of individuals within a larger system.

Microhistories like those contained in this book also work against the tendency to consider the male gender too simplistically, a problem that sometimes plagued scholarship in the social sciences. Case studies allow for an exploration of the multiplicity of male roles and account for factors such as geography, family background, social class, professional environment, and sexuality. I take as my guiding principle that there are a “spectrum of masculinities” which co-exist in any given culture and that artworks have an exceptional, perhaps matchless, ability to capture not only those qualities that are supposed to predominate, but actually do in lived practice. As Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee have pointed out, “the differentiation of masculinities is psychological … but … in an equally important sense it is institutional, an aspect of collective practice.” It follows that the study of men must be embedded in the dynamics of institutions and this book sees the structures that surround art-making as integral to understanding the conflicting desires of men themselves.

This leads me to make one last point about my methods of assessment. I firmly believe that institutions like the Imperial Army and the state-sponsored Academy of Arts must be assessed alongside the personalities of individuals to form a complete framework for understanding gender relations in nineteenth-century Russia. Thus, my approach is biographical as well as social historical and brings to the fore various kinds of texts to form arguments about the elastic nature of masculinity across the period. I believe that biography often helps us see artworks more clearly and that it can allow us to understand the complex ways in which creative acts participate in beliefs about gender. Biographical assessments have fallen out of favor to some extent in recent art historical scholarship, but the study of gender demands that connections be drawn between art and life. Thus, I draw on a wide variety of source material from the period—from poetry, advice books, and novels, to letters, personal journals, and contemporary criticism—to explore both the macro-level social ideologies and the more intimate psychodynamics within masculine experience. Much of this writing has never been translated into English or has appeared only in fragmented forms that fail to provide a complete picture of the personalities of the artist-writers. In bringing these texts to the attention of Western scholars, I want to grow the resources available for future study of Russian art. I hope
that by introducing readers to artists and paintings that have rarely resounded outside of Russia, I can create new understandings of how rapid and continual change in the nineteenth century affected men (and women) at the time.

My study does not seek to make an orderly account of the transformations art underwent in this period, rather it puts in motion an interpretation of the development of modernity that sees fluctuations in gender and art as unfailingly inconsistent, complicated, and indeterminate. Picturing Russia’s men, whether that meant envisioning the self or looking deeply at another, often meant reckoning with the inherent contradictions that comprised competing ideals for manhood across the period. At the same time, looking at the paintings which were produced often means delving deeply into the most private thoughts and memories of the men who made them and bearing witness to the pain of their experiences. Photographs of the five men whose paintings form the core of this study have been included in this introduction to begin this process of embodiment.

There was a discontent among men in the nineteenth century that sometimes did not stem from hunger or poverty, did not arise from threat to life or fear of war, rather it arose out of the impossibility of ever successfully negotiating the gendered antinomies of modern life. This book is a study of the dissatisfaction that grew from such paradoxes. As an interpretive history, it aims to reshape our understanding of man by challenging the enduring myths which still surround him. The Military Gallery was an early example of such mythmaking and it remains a space saturated with the heroic codes for virtuous manhood today. What follows tests the lingering power of such projects of idealization to uncover the deep structure of masculinity—the very real (and often intensely conflicted) desires, needs, and aspirations of men themselves.

Notes

2 The gallery is known as the Voennaia galereia in Russian, which can translate to either the military or the war gallery; it is interchangeably referred to as both.
3 The English painter Sir Thomas Lawrence described seeing Dawe “prowling close” to the Court of Alexander I and “creeping round it in the street.” Fragment of a letter from Lawrence, October 21, 1818, Aix-la-Chapelle, in Sir Thomas Lawrence’s Letter-Bag, ed. George Somes Layard (London: Ballantyne Press, 1906), 138.
Not all of the portraits show men who were of Eastern European descent. Included among the portraits are such figures as the Duke of Wellington, who was made a General-Fieldmarshal of the Russian army after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. See “The Creation of the War Gallery of 1812,” State Hermitage Museum, accessed January 4, 2018, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/explore/history/historical-article/1800/War+gallery+creation/.


One could gain admittance after being granted a special pass from the keeper of the Hermitage collection. These visitors often included artists, especially those who were pupils at the Petersburg Academy of Arts. See Andreeva, “The Military Gallery,” 154–5.


The iconostasis is a wall of icon paintings that often reaches nearly to the ceiling and separates worshippers from the clergy and the altar which resides behind the proscenium of holy pictures.

Andreeva was the first to raise this point about the kind of movement the gallery encourages in “The Military Gallery,” 152–3.

17 Ibid., 121.

18 Nancy Shields Kollman, “‘What’s Love Got to Do with It?’: Changing Models of Masculinity in Muscovite and Petrine Russia,” in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, eds. Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 24.

19 The same attributes were highly valued in Western Europe, especially in England and Germany, where war was seen as a glorious opportunity to show one’s ability “to cope with pain without showing distress”—a quality which was key, along with willpower and courage—to the constitution of what George Mosse has called “normative manhood.” See *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 101.

20 For more on these themes, see Davidov’s memoirs: *In the Service of the Tsar against Napoleon: The Memoirs of Denis Davidov, 1806–1814*, ed. and trans. Gregory Troubetzkoy (Westport, CT: Greenhill, 1999).

21 *Russia at War: From the Mongol Conquest to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Beyond*, ed. Timothy C. Dowling (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 967.

22 Ibid., 43.

23 The miniature shown in the portrait may in fact have been a gift from Alexander I himself. Michael Jenkins describes the tsar sending him this gift and indeed, Arakcheev always is shown wearing it in portraits made across his lifetime. See *Arakcheev: Grand Vizier of the Russian Empire* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), 177.


25 This has been a major point of discussion (and contention) among sociologists writing on masculinity in the twentieth century. The idea of sex roles as biologically determined has fallen out of favor as part of the general move away from static structural dualisms in the social sciences, but also as a result of the influence of feminist scholarship. I agree largely with David Gilmore’s verdict on the subject: “we must try to understand why culture uses or exaggerates biological potentials in specific ways.” See *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23. The idea that gender roles are socially performed as opposed to inherent in biological sex also forms the linchpin of Judith Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).


29 Documents reveal that peasant daughters were obliged to marry soldiers within the colony. Such unions were supposed to be voluntary, but reports show that soldiers “seized peasant girls and dragged them to church and that soldiers’ wives who had not lived with their husbands for a long time were also forced to remarry. There were also accounts of peasant girls being chosen as wives ‘by lot’.” See P. P. Kartsov, “O voennykh poseleniakh pri grafa Arakcheeva,” *Russkii vestnik* 106, 1890, 2: 154–5 and A. N. Petrov, “Ustroistvo i upravlenie voennykh poselenii v Rossii 1809–1828,” in M. I. Semevskii, *Graf Arakcheev i voennyia poseleniia 1809–1831* (St. Petersburg: V. I. Golovina, 1871), 159. Both cited in A. Bitis and Janet Hartley, “The Russian Military Colonies in 1826,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 2 (April 2000): 322.


31 Ibid., 249–50. One servant was sentenced to receive 175 blows of the knout—this despite the fact that a law had been passed stipulating that minors were not to receive more than thirty blows. He died as a result.


34 Chernyshëv maintained an active correspondence with a number of court officials, including Arakcheev. The two men likely knew each other after the war as well. See Menning, “A. I. Chernyshev,” 195.


38 They were also significant tools for establishing hierarchies of power among men, a topic that the psychologist Joseph Pleck has productively explored in a different context. For him, men compete with one another in terms of their wealth, physical strength, age, and heterosexuality and this produces a considerable amount of conflict. See “Men’s Power with Women, Other Men, and Society: A Men’s Movement Analysis,” in *The American Man*, eds. E. H. Pleck and J. H. Pleck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980).
39 Russian Masculinities in History and Culture, 3.
41 Ibid., xii.
42 The entry of Russian troops into Paris is often cited by scholars as a key event in the history of interactions between Russia and the West. The Russian army pursued the French all the way from Moscow to Paris, where they staged grandiose parades involving some 80,000–150,000 troops. These parades focused in particular on disseminating powerful images of Tsar Alexander. See Hartley, Russia, 1762–1825, 172 and Michael Adams, Napoleon and Russia (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 489–522.
43 Göran Therborn, European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945–2000 (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 4. Renato Poggioli argued along similar lines in his foundational work on the avant-garde: “In the consciousness of a classical epoch, it is not the present that brings the past to a culmination, but the past that culminates in the present … But for the moderns, the present is valid only by the potentialities of the future, as the matrix of the future, insofar as it is the forge of history in continual metamorphosis, seen as a permanent spiritual revolution.” See The Theory of the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 73.
45 Alexander’s own rule had begun under difficult circumstances in 1801 after the short and unpredictable reign of his father Paul I, who had been murdered in a palace coup organized by some of his most trusted associates. On the coup, see David Saunders, Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, 1801–1881 (London: Longman, 1992), 8–10. For more on the strange circumstances surrounding Alexander’s death, see Leonid I. Strakhovsky, “Alexander I’s Death and Destiny,” The American Slavic and East European Review 4, no. 1/2 (August 1945): 33–50.


Raewyn Connell has written productively on “the tragic encounter between desire and culture,” citing the patriarchal organization of societies which transmit gender constructs between generations in this way as leading to “the fragility of adult masculinity.” See *Masculinities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 12. Along related lines, Herb Goldberg has written of the psychological fragmentation which results from the unresolvable tension “between inner needs and social pressures” in men’s lives. For him, one’s real self becomes suppressed amidst a barrage of contradictory expectations resulting in constant conflict in adulthood. Goldberg’s writing was part of a trend within masculinity studies that came to the fore in the 1970s—the idea that men can be seen as having been oppressed in ways that are comparable to women. In this understanding, the oppressor was not women, but the male role itself. I agree that the more dominant and repressive dialogues about gender roles become, the more everybody loses, nonetheless this book does not subscribe to an understanding of mutual oppression. While I do examine the repressive reality of exhortations for male behavior with sensitivity, no self-respecting feminist historian should fall into the trap of believing that men and women have been equally oppressed. It simply is not true. See *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege* (New York: Nash, 1976), 96.


In addition, I contend that not examining men’s lives leaves their privilege unexamined as well. As two sociologists once put it: “Until we know how it is that men do sexual politics we can’t stop them; and we know for sure that they won’t stop themselves, for they’ve far too much invested in the successful continuance of patriarchy.” See Wise and Stanley, “Sexual Politics,” 2.


Blakesley, The Russian Canvas, 4.


The phrase was popularized by the British historian Eric Hobsbawn in The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848 (1962). Several alternative periodizations have been offered for the nineteenth century in the Western context. In 1909, Sir John Arthur Ransome Marriott espoused the idea of a short nineteenth century lasting from 1789 to 1878 in The Remaking of Modern Europe. Several scholars support a different conceptualization of the long century and use the dates 1750–1914. Just a few recent examples include Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann’s Civil Society: 1750–1914 (2006) and Andrew and Lynn Hollen Lees’s Cities and the Making of Modern Europe, 1750–1914 (2007).

Studies in English focusing on the nineteenth century in Russia tend to be organized along three standard systems of chronological demarcation. The most common is simply by general century, usually keeping the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries firmly separate. Volumes utilizing this periodization include: Marc Raeff’s *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (1966) and Wendy Rosslyn’s *Women and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (2003). The second primary method for periodization involves works which cluster around the idea of Imperial Russia as an era unto itself. Notable studies in this category include Elise Wirtschafter’s *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (1997) and Richard Wortman’s *Scenarios of Power* (2006). The final prominent category does entail utilizing specific dates similar to those in my periodization, but the range of dates proposed for Russia is stark. Several important volumes take 1762 as their starting point, although they usually designate different end points. Likewise, a number of scholarly studies choose 1825 as their end point, but often begin significantly earlier than 1762 in their assessment. A periodization which seems to be coming strongly to the fore centers on the Manifesto on the Freedom of the Nobility, enacted by Tsar Peter III in 1762 and the Decembrist uprising in 1825. Works centered on this periodization include Janet Hartley’s *Russia, 1762–1825: Military Power, the State, and the People* (2008) and the anthology *The Europeanized Elite in Russia, 1762–1825: Public Role and Subjective Self*, eds. Andreas Schönle, Andrei Zorin and Alexei Evstratov (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016). For more on the problems of periodization in Russian history, see my review of the last work for H-Net Reviews: https://networks.h-net.org/node/166842/reviews/1853887/leigh-scho%CC%88nle-and-zorin-and-evstratov-europeanized-elite-russia-1762.

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70 *The Europeanized Elite in Russia, 1762–1825: Public Role and Subjective Self* (2016), 14.
72 Ibid., xi.
77 A recent article in the *New York Times* puts the issues surrounding the assessment of an artist’s work in the context of the recent surge of sexual harassment accusations. It cites several scholars and critics who believe that art and life should be kept separate. But separating the art from the artist not only distorts our picture of the work under investigation, it often implicitly sanctions abusive behavior. See Amanda Hess, “How the Myth of the Artistic Genius Excuses the Abuse of Women,” *New York Times*, November 10, 2017, C1.
Plate 0.1 Grigori Chernetsov, *Perspective View of the War Gallery of 1812 in the Winter Palace*, 1829; oil on canvas, 121 × 92 cm., The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg