

Perov and Mussorgsky

1834-1882 and 1839-1881

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[Владимир Васильевич Стасов: Перов и Мусоргский]

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Venerable Mikhail Ivanovich, I ask you to provide some space in 'Russian Antiquity' [*Русская Старина*] for a few of my pages where I attempt to study and compare two of our great artistic individuals, in part using already publicised materials, and in part using those which have not appeared in print before.

Both of these artists have already passed away into eternity, and hence they directly represent 'material' for 'Russian Antiquity', but it is the contents which they consistently instilled into their creations and which was always drawn from our old serfdom life, which represent national material. Since it is often with great interest and compassion that your readers meet the thoughts, judgements, assessments, and characterisations coming from the mouths of the multitude of personalities who have passed away long ago and who are passing through your journal in a rotating gallery, then maybe they will also find some interest in the thoughts and characterisations coming from people who although are still living, but are such that will aid in the complete understanding and definition of those great personalities who are already no more and who indeed belong to history.

V. S.

I.

To my surprise no one in our country has expressed this yet, but Perov and Mussorgsky display an amazing parallelism in the Russian artistic world. It seems to me that anyone who looks at these two individuals will arrive at this conclusion. Perov's and Mussorgsky's, overall mood, the nature of their talent, the things they liked and disliked, their mentality, their choice of subjects for their creations – everything in them was extremely similar. They did not even know each other, had never met in their lives, perhaps did not even know each other's works at all or knew them very minimally, and nevertheless it was as if these two artists, who were in two completely different areas of art (one was a visual artist and the other a musician), lived their whole lives together and worked together, side by side, in the same room, having discussions every minute, and showing each other their new creations.

This phenomenon is so extraordinary that special attention should be paid to it. It is interesting to see why such a phenomenon occurred, but it is even more interesting to recognise what results of this have remained for our lives.

¹ Translator's note: Italics for transliterated Russian words in the text were added by me. Any of my personal commentary is also given in italics and in square brackets. Figures of paintings and footnotes of recordings are also added by me and were not present in the original. Also, a glossary is presented at the end, explaining historically and socially significant words that are used in the text.

Perov and Mussorgsky were born, lived, and died in nearly exactly the same years.

Perov was born in 1834 and died in 1882, Mussorgsky was born in 1839 and died in 1881. Each of them lived for only forty-something years. For both of them, the period of their significant and rather independent activity commenced around 1860, and lasted approximately until 1875, thus spanning about fifteen years. After this, both artists' last few years represent a time of their talent's decline, so only some separate parts of their works again show us the previous Perov and previous Mussorgsky, and even then, only occasionally. Finally, let us note another similarity: in their lifetimes, both artists were subjected to fierce attacks specifically because of those aspects of their creations which were the most important, most original, and most historically valuable. They were condemned to read and listen to reprimands for the very features of their talent because of which they will forever occupy a great place in the history of Russian art. With that, there was a remarkable consistency amongst their opponents: those who did not like Perov's paintings probably never liked the musical creations of Mussorgsky, and those who did not like Mussorgsky's creations, probably never liked Perov's artworks. Everything that was truthful, vital, sincere, and faithful in both of these artists, seemed similarly disgusting, offensive, and most of all, useless to their opponents with little understanding. But at the same time, it never occurred to all these people to compare these two artists who belonged to two areas of art which are never compared to each other: visual art and music. The hatred was instinctive. These enemies were people of the same nature: lofty rotten idealists.

Only, one must note that relatively speaking, Perov's fate was still much better than Mussorgsky's fate. Perov had predecessors: Fedotov, and not only a whole lot of samples of new art, but additionally all of Russian literature which by means of Griboyedov, Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Ostrovsky, Nekrasov, and others, had already long ago victoriously planted deep, indestructible realism in the hearts of the Russian people. Perov could be attacked for particulars, for personal details of his talent and paintings, but at this stage no one dared to pull the ground out from under his feet: it lay firmly like a granite cliff, and no doubts occurred to anyone regarding its legitimacy. With Mussorgsky it was different. He was not a visual artist but a musician, and that ray of light which was already shining brightly, as if at midday, in Russian literature, and was starting to glisten through, as if on a bright morning, in visual art, at that time did not yet dare to penetrate into music. Before Mussorgsky we had only *one* attempt of musical realism – this was Dargomyzhsky. But he was loved and understood only by a few, by the people who of course deeply loved the great genius creations of Glinka, but who additionally saw that new times also needed new forms, that from now on a lot might and should be realised in our music differently than before, and that this Russian music will still go far ahead, along new paths. It is these new paths, which have already been clearly seen in visual art, that twenty years ago were still barely seen by anyone in music. Dargomyzhsky stood alone and unrecognised with his brave attempts of musical realism. "I am not mistaken", he wrote sadly in 1857, "My artistic position in Petersburg is unenviable. Most of our music lovers and newspaper scribblers [*Russian: нукак*] do not recognise inspiration in me. Their routine viewpoint looks for melodies which are flattering to the ear, something I do not pursue. I do not intend to reduce music to fun for them. I want sound to directly express word. I want truth. They are not capable [*Russian: не умеют*] of understanding this. My relations to Petersburg's experts [*Russian: знатокам*] and talentless composers are even sadder because they are ambiguous. The trick these gentlemen [*the Russian has an ironic tone: зочнод*] use is well known: to unconditionally extol the works of the dead, so as not to give justice to contemporaries. Oh, how many unflattering hints do I hear [*Russian: выслушиваю*], but I am used to and am cold to them." Nothing of the sort had to be experienced by Perov's predecessor Fedotov over his lifetime. He was liked, people liked him, the new track

he was on was not disputed by anyone. But if that's how it was with Dargomyzhsky, who was in many respects the Fedotov of Russian music, how many hundreds of times worse was it for Mussorgsky, the Perov of our music, since in the beginning he had neither operas and 'large-scale' compositions to which the crowd, in any case, does have some certain respect, nor a reputation accumulated over many years. Besides, Mussorgsky was in many ways braver than Dargomyzhsky, chose topics from the living reality more decisively and diversely, and went even further in 'expressing the words of speech with musical sound'. Thus, how many definite reasons [*Russian: решительных резонов*] for hostility, for repulsion and for the crowd to not give Mussorgsky even a penny's worth, did all of this contain! In Perov's creations such major motives for antipathy did not exist.

But if one is to leave these little 'specialties' aside, nearly everything else in the lives and work [*Russian: деятельности*] of Mussorgsky and Perov moved completely in parallel. In total, neither one nor the other did not particularly suit the tastes of the majority, and both were not understood nor appreciated to a proper degree during their lifetimes. Both of them were of course recognised as good artists, talented, even rather original, but a little under-trained, and without the skills of 'commanding all the techniques of their art', and most importantly, as people 'with a tendency' (which meant people who are not treading on a real path ('the one on which all tread!')). They were recognised as people who were rough [*Russian: грубыми*] and tasteless, who touched what ought not to be touched, painted what ought not to be painted, as people in whose creations this must be thrown out, and that must be banned, and in general as people who are of no particular importance. God forbid comparing them with whomever of the great contemporary European celebrities! These caricaturists! This painter, this musician, who have neither nobility of character [*Russian: благородства*] nor true sublimity and dignity? Not under any circumstances [*Russian: ни за что!*]

True, there was always a certain share of people on Perov's and Mussorgsky's side, whose presence beside them and their ardent empathy rewarded them for the grave hardships in dealing with the masses – these were all people who had valued their nature, their marvellous initiative and those new treasures which they invested into our art. True, these people doted on them, they rushed to acquire for themselves the paintings of one and propagated the creations of the other as much as they could, stood up for both of them in the face of a public which was absent-minded or not paying attention, but there were not many of such people out of a total of eighty million, particularly twenty years ago. Luckily, now, it is becoming more and more seeming by the day that it is the opinion of these few people which will prevail in the end.

II

The main features of the image of both artists, Perov and Mussorgsky, were *narodnost'* [*sense of the national features/spirit present amongst the people; Russian: народность. My italics – N. K.*] and reality. Their entire artistic nature was comprised of this, here lay their entire strength and talent, and none of their other qualities can be compared to these two. It is specifically for *narodnost'* and reality that both artists will be valued by future generations. Like for all artists in the world, many things in their works will fade and diminish over time, but everything that their creativity expressed *narodno* and realistically, will forever remain mighty monuments of our time and of the creative force contemporary to us now. And that is because both Perov and Mussorgsky, with complete sincerity and incorruptible truthfulness, expressed in their works only what they saw with their own eyes, what actually existed, and did not think about any

made-up things or idealisms. Everything which reproduces truthful real life has the potential [*Russian: задатку*] of survivability, from which all other forms of art are far off.

The works of Perov and Mussorgsky contain the affect of the mighty step forward our time has taken in comparison with the previous period. Subjects accessible to the artist became wider and much more voluminous as a result of the conditions of life, but also because the artists themselves became broader and deeper in their views. The painter Fedotov and the musician Dargomyzhsky had the opportunity to depict only a very small part of the whole volume of Russian reality, just as their great predecessor Gogol himself. The world of the nobles [*Russian: дворян*] and the officials was not forbidden to them at all and they used it, they depicted it with all the strength of their talent, although, of course 'in Godly fear', within the limits of the most absurd, sticky, [*Russian: привязчивой*] and cowardly censorship. Fedotov had the right to present in his paintings an official who was idolatrising before an order, a martinet major insinuating himself into a merchant's mouldy house. Dargomyzhsky had the right to present an official idolatrising before a rank ("He was a titular councillor, she – a general's daughter!", or "For I am a worm in comparison to him, who is such an individual [*Russian: с ним, таким*], his Excellency himself!"), but all this could appear before the eyes and ears of Russians only because it had the form of a 'joke', of light 'naughtiness' [*Russian: баловства*] in visual art and music, of something entertaining and amusing. At the censorship outposts of the time it was accepted that in all of this there is nothing serious, and nothing goes into the real depth of the matter. The tragedy hidden in the depth of these 'jokes', the rottenness of the officials and martinets pointed out in all its nakedness by the art, eluded the spiers-bailiffs [*Russian: соглядатаев-приставов*]. As for the lowest strata of the people, they could be depicted as either entirely safely happy [*Russian: благополучным*] and idyllically-graceful, completely ideal, or if one was to go for the truth, then only as being stupid, rude, drunk and caricaturistic. In accordance with this, Dargomyzhsky too, no matter how original, how talented he was, dared to portray only completely ideal (although sometimes tragic) paysans [*the word нейзаны indicated an idealistic image of a peasant in fiction, visual art and theatre*]: the miller and his daughter Natasha, or real (but only comic) men, drunk and fooled by their wives ('As the husband came from beneath the hills' [*Как пришел муж из-под горок*])). The remaining ocean of Russian people, life, characters, relationships, misfortune, unbearable cumbrance, abjection, clamped up mouths – it was as if all of this never existed in the world, as if it even has nothing to do with art at all.

Perov and Mussorgsky belong to an entirely different phase of Russian life – the phase where Russian art finally came into being. In this time our artist had already little-by-little opened his eyes and looked around himself. Oh what a pang he felt inside, what piercing notes started to be heard in his creations! Perov and Mussorgsky gave themselves entirely to this aching feeling of indignation and pain.

They are both painters of the people, people long forgotten, long pushed back behind beautiful sets, and languishing there, unknown to anyone. In their lifetimes, Perov and Mussorgsky had many subjects and aims which they wonderfully accomplished, but there is nothing higher, stronger and more important than those parts of their works where the figure of the *narod* [*the people*] stands in all its truth, all its unadornment, its severity, and maybe sometimes even roughness. *The Russian serf world* – that's where the real sphere of the highest and most perfect creations of Perov and Mussorgsky is. Here a deep strength, originality and novelty was expressed. This was the true task of their lives, and it is this task which they both completed with the greatest perfection.

Both artists were born amid the complete collapse of serfdom. For the first half of their lives they were its witnesses, and then they used the second half of their lives to reproduce this monster in all its splendour, from the front, from behind, from the left, from above, and from below.

For this, neither Perov, nor Mussorgsky ever had a tight or correct system, an even, organised plan. Never did either of them say to themselves: “Why don’t I start to portray serfdom with all its savage sores, why don’t I draw its portrait”. No, nothing like this ever happened. But they both spent their childhood and adolescence in the village, in the backwoods, amongst the *pomeshchiki* [landowners] and peasants, amongst everything that grew into being from their terrible cohabitation. For many years of their youth they bathed in all this, full of indignation, grief and empathy, and later on when the opportunity came to at least partially open their mouths, simply recreated scenes seen with their own eyes one after the other, one could even say involuntarily.

The things that Mussorgsky had heard and seen enough of in the landowners’ circles are expressed in many of his letters to his mates at the start of the 1860s, practically straight after the great coup of freeing the peasants. In one of his letters he writes from the village: “What kind of *pomeshchiki* have we! Real plantation-owners!.. And you meet them every day, and every day they tearfully torment you about ‘lost rights’, ‘extreme ruin’. Screaming, moans and tantrums! True, there are some decent young people, ‘boys’, but I rarely see them, as these youths are mediating and because of this are constantly travelling. And I, sinful person [*Russian: многогрешный, similar to referring to oneself as ‘God’s servant’*], revolve in this rotten [*Russian: ретурадной, an adjective related to a toilet-hole*] atmosphere: it rarely touches the graceful instincts, one thinks only about how not to stink right through and to not suffocate...” From another of Mussorgsky’s letters we find out how he studied the people. In 1868 he once writes from a Pskov village: “Was observing women and men [*Russian: бабами и мужиками*], extracted some mouth-watering exemplars. One man is a copy of Antony from Shakespeare’s “Caesar”, when Antony gives a speech at the forum, over Caesar’s corpse. A very smart and originally snide man! All this will be useful to me. And the female exemplars – they are just a treasure chest! With me it’s always like that: I’ll note some people, and then, when there is an opportunity, I’ll make a press of them.”

Perov’s first independent attempt was ‘The arrival of the district superintendent to the inquest’ [*Приезд станового на следствие*] [Figure 1]. A wretched peasant caught while cutting down forest trees, the menacing superintendent, the sly scribe, birch rods being tied at the threshold of the house, and, as if



Figure 1: Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, The arrival of the district superintendent to the inquest [Приезд станового на следствие] 1857. Oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15908607>

staring from all corners and from all faces: poverty, ignorance, cold and hunger, the mean *kulak* and the sheep-like obedience – here are the topics of this painting from his youth. Mussorgsky's first independent attempt was 'Kalistrat'² and here the topic of this picture made in his youth was taken from the Nekrasov's stanzas:

There is no one happier, no one finer,
No one more well-dressed than dear Kalistrat [*Kalistratushka*]!
In the spring water I bathe,
Scratching my dear hair with my five fingers,
Waiting for the harvest
From the unseeded strip!
And my wife [*хозяйка*] is busy
Doing the washing for the naked little children,
Dresses up more than the husband –
Wears *lapti* [*bast shoes*] with a hole [*с подковыркою*]!

*[Нет нарядней Калистратушки!
В ключевой воде купаюся,
Пятерней чешу волосыньки,
Урожаю дожидаячи
С непосаянной полосыньки!
А хозяйка занимается
На нагих детишек стиркою,
Пуще мужа наряжается –
Носит лапти с подковыркою!]*

Neither Perov nor Mussorgsky ever betrayed this youthful mood of theirs. Never in their entire lives did they paint little men [*Russian: мужичков*] living happily and sweetly reasoning while sitting on the *zavalinka* [*a small mound of earth along the outer walls of a peasant's house*]; never did their paintbrush lie or fake. They painted only what really exists and what they really saw. It is for this that it turned out that there were so many people unhappy with them. Because the truth of life is the main universal enemy, especially when it is presented to us from a completely different access lane than the one which is indicated.

Peasant character types and peasant scenes belong to the very highest of what was ever created by Perov and Mussorgsky. The figures of the men in Perov's 'Scene by the railway' [*Figure 2*], in 'Hunters at rest' [*Figure 4*], in 'Village sermon' [*Figure 3*], in 'Village funeral' [*Figure 6*], and even partially in 'Pugachyovtsy' [*Figure 5*] are typologically just as accurate and stunning as men in the first and last act of Mussorgsky's 'Boris Godunov'³, in his 'Khovanshchina'⁴, and in 'Trepak'⁵.

² <https://youtu.be/yninnAW1R80>

³ <https://youtu.be/7LOUvAIWY3o>

⁴ <https://youtu.be/2p5sWAVOi94>

⁵ <https://youtu.be/YKswROL-QM>



Figure 2. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Scene by the railway [Сцена у железной дороги], 1868.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15874778>

This marvellously typical *'dedko'* [old man] peering with two other men at the railroad train rushing past – these are essentially *pendants* to the men in the Mussorgsky opera, standing as a crowd on the Moscow square before Boris's election as tsar. Both the former and the latter have the same mix of good nature, naivete, submissiveness, and of being oppressed – and also right there, intelligence, slyness, pungent mockery. Look into the pewter eyes of the *'dedko'* [old man] that stands in the middle of Perov's painting, his smile of a mummy – all products of the long years of the serfdom yoke. Have a look at these scratching men in the 'Village sermon' [Figure 3], who don't quite clearly understand the father's sermon that "any power is from God", when the *barin's* [master's] lackey nearby is zealously pushing away their kind, when the *pomeshchik* [landowner] is sweetly sleeping, when the *pomeshchitsa* [female landowner/landowner's wife] is being courteous with a dandy – these here before you are the exact same men that are painted in Mussorgsky's 'Boris', and some of whom ask: "Mityukh, hey Mityukh, why are we screaming?", while the others answer: "Hey, why would I know!"⁶

⁶ <https://youtu.be/7LOUvAIWY3o?t=973>



Figure 3. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Village sermon [Проповедь в селе], 1861. Oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15874704>

The comrades of the *dedko* [old man] who burst out laughing at the train, are exactly the same men who in Mussorgsky humorously answer the police *pristav* [officer/bailiff] who waves his stick at them for the fact that they are silent: “We’ll just take a rest, and then we’ll scream again!”⁷

Perov’s women are really a *pendant* to Mussorgsky’s women in the fact that they chit-chat, are noisy, chatter like tap dancers, make fun of each other, jokingly argue with their husbands and uncles, or shout at the policeman in a hobnobbing way (“Don’t be angry, Mikitych, don’t be angry, my darling [мой родимый!]”⁸), the man from “Hunters at rest” [Figure 4], pungently mocking the fibbing *barin* [master] – these are as if the women and men mocking Boris’s *voyevoda* [military leader] in Kromy (the fifth act of “Boris”).

⁷ <https://youtu.be/7LOUvAIWY3o?t=1052>

⁸ <https://youtu.be/7LOUvAIWY3o?t=1052>



Figure 4. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Hunters at rest [Охотники на привале], 1871, Oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=426701>



Figure 5. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Pugachyov's trial [Суд Пугачева], Oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3207244>

One of Pugachyov's comrades, sitting near him on the porch, already with an axe in hand, riotous, evil, merciless (in the Perov) – is exactly one of those who as a whole gang are intending to inflict reprisals on Khrushchev and the Jesuit in the last act of Mussorgsky's "Boris

Godunov". Both here and there are people who had at one point ran out of patience, had gone wild and ferocious.

If a musical illustration was required for Perov's men and women, or a visual one for Mussorgsky's, I would have suggested that one would illustrate the other. The Fomkas, Epiphans, Mityukhas, Afimyas and a multitude of other individuals in Mussorgsky's two operas are in character, appearance, mood, in their kindness and evil, are spitting images of the same Fomkas, Epiphans, Mityukhas and Afimyas of Perov, for whom we just don't know the names.

But Perov doesn't have the following curious Russian character type: the type of a reckless [*Russian: разбуженной*], cheerful, swaggering [*Russian: разухабистой*] woman, who had passed through thick and thin; Mussorgsky has this type, represented by the innkeeper in 'Boris' crooning a song about the 'Drake',⁹ and represented by the woman singing 'Hopak'. Both of these personalities are wonderfully characteristic. The concluding note for all of these lives overall is the same in both authors' work: a dismal death.



Figure 6. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Village funeral [Проводы покойника/Сельские похороны], 1865.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3149358>

⁹ <https://youtu.be/7LOUvAIWY3o?t=3153>

Perov's 'Rural farewell of the deceased' [Figure 6] is wonderful, and Mussorgsky's "Trepak"¹⁰ is in no way at all inferior. The tragedy, the depth of feeling, the aching notes, are the same. In the Perov the wife and children are carrying the wretched coffin on the wood-sledge, the coffin offhandedly hammered together from planks, the poor deceased inside it. They have all crumpled up into one group, the living and the dead, they are so cramped up on the wood-sledge, the little children are squeezed to the side by the coffin, the widow is sitting on the lower end of the coffin, some of the children are sleeping, others are about to wail, the poor mother has hung her head and bent down towards her bad nag, which is now carrying such a procession instead of hay or firewood, and all this, among an icy winter landscape, snow-covered fields, and a barely beaten road. The cold, the wastelands, the snow-covered backwoods, oblivion and obscurity, as if one of the millions of little birds froze on the road and no one knows about it and will never know, no one was interested in either its life or death – that is the context of this painting.



Figure 7. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, The return of the peasants from the funeral [Возвращение крестьян с похорон зимою], 1881. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16059018>

'The return of the peasants from the funeral' [Figure 7] is a continuation of this scene and mood. Again winter, again snow, again the wasteland, again backwater places, again helpless, forgotten folk, walking in cold homespun coats and tattered sheepskin coats on a barely trodden road, men with shovels on their shoulders, women with dead faces. But the painting is interesting only in the subject matter and thought. Its execution is entirely like a sketch, unsatisfactory; not a single figure is drawn from nature, and all the expressions are thought up and artificial (it was painted in the last few months of Perov's life). In Mussorgsky, this same terrible note is repeated in his

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/YKswROL-OM>

“Trepak”¹¹: [here the first 13 lines of the lyrics are quoted. A translation can be found at <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2107>] Long, difficult years of tiring work, cold and hunger, blisters on the hands, misfortune in the home with the family, and then the poor body, hidden under snow heaps, among the blizzard and wind, this is what Perov and Mussorgsky painted with the same brush.

But in Perov’s painting, there was one scene before our eyes from the early stages of life of peasant children. Misfortune, poverty, helplessness, and all this compounded still a hundred times more after the death of he who they carried in the coffin. So, let these little children grow up a bit, how will their life become then? Perov paints this for us in one of his paintings; but also next to him is Mussorgsky, in two of the most perfect of his romances.



Figure 8. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Troika [Тройка], 1866, Oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3149337>

Who among us doesn’t know Perov’s ‘Troika’ [Figure 8], these Moscow kids who were forced by the owner to drag the enormous water vat on sleds over black ice. These little kids are probably all villagers by origin and have just been driven to Moscow to trade/earn [Russian: промысел]. But oh how much they have suffered while doing this ‘trade’! The expression of interminable suffering, the marks of constant beatings were painted on their tired, pale little faces; a whole life story is told by their rags, poses, by the heavy turn of their heads, by their tortured eyes, by their sweet mouths, half-open from exertion. In Mussorgsky you find a living *pendant* to all this. His romances ‘The Little Orphan’¹² (with his own text) and his ‘Sleep, fall asleep, you peasant’s son’¹³ (text from Ostrovsky’s ‘Voyevoda’) are just as tragic and similarly wonderful in beauty as Perov’s painting. “I warm and feed myself with cold and hunger” rambles the ‘Little Orphan’

¹¹ <https://youtu.be/YKswROL-OM>

¹² <https://youtu.be/gyZNeoSedOg>

¹³ <https://youtu.be/PmdyJqewYsE>

with an aching expression and faltering voice... “For my hungry moaning, kind people feed me with scolding and beatings, with fear and threats... No more strength have I...” Ostrovsky’s ‘peasant’s son’ has the same share. Mussorgsky presented his poetry with an inimitable expression of heavy grief, feeling, and musical beauty: “We’ll rid ourselves of our woes by doing work, the work we don’t like, that is not ours, work we can’t put off, everlasting, evil, intense...”

One should have heard, how both of these *chefs d’oeuvre*’s of Mussorgsky were performed by two great Russian artists: the song of death ‘Trepak’ by the late Osip Afanasyevich Petrov, and ‘The Little Orphan’ by his spouse, also formerly a famous singer, Anna Yakovlevna Petrova. One should have heard both of these high-level artists (although they were both in advanced age) to appreciate the whole truth and depth of these two of Mussorgsky’s creations.

Perov did not happen to also depict Russian peasant children in a bright light. Mussorgsky, however, did. And with what soulful warmth and with what wonderful lines he painted this side of our children’s world too! In the last act of ‘Boris’ he has a scene, taken from Pushkin’s drama, remarkably original and beautiful. It is the scene with the God’s fool. Nearly everything here is as it is in the Pushkin, only the setting is not on a Moscow square in front of the cathedral, but in the forest in the South of Russia, near the city of Krom, a minute before the appearance of the Imposter with the crowds of his mobs. The God’s fool enters on stage, pursued by a whole horde of boys, who are mocking and laughing out loud [*Russian: хохочут*] at him, and then take his ‘little penny’ out of his hands. “Iron cap! Iron cap! Uly-lyu-lyu-lyu!” – they should and buzz into his ears, clinging all around him like mosquitoes. Mussorgsky makes this tiny scene full of such frolic, such a light [*not in the sense of weight, but in the sense of sunlight*] childlike mood, such cute mischievousness and liveliness which cause one to be fascinated (of course not the dumb musical conservatives). I only know one example of peasant children in our visual art to match Mussorgsky’s peasant children: the children in the talented ‘Night Pasture’ [*Figure 9*] of Vladimir Makovsky.



Figure 9. Vladimir Yegorovich Makovsky, Night Pasture [Ночное], 1879. Reproduction on a 1940 card. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20050001>

Mussorgsky's 'Mischievous Boy'¹⁴ is another figure of the same breed as the boys in the last act of 'Boris': the latter harass the God's fool, mock and make fun of him, exactly like the nimble jaunty mischievous boy in the romance in question harassing the old woman on the street: "Oh, grandma, oh dear, you beauty-beaut – turn around! Sharp-nosed, silver, goggle-eyed – kiss me! Isn't your stature arched, propped up by a walking-stick, little legs are little bones, as if little canes. Oh, don't hit me, oh, don't hit!"

Such deeply *narodnyye* [people's] artists like Perov and Mussorgsky couldn't release the deeply *narodnyy* type of the 'God's fool' from their gallery. This type, which is perhaps destined to soon dwindle in our country, always played too big a role in old serfdom Russia, it was always too much in full view, and that means that it just had to deeply touch Perov and Mussorgsky. They both depicted him in a remarkable relief-like way [*relief as in the 3D sculptural technique*].

For Perov, his 'God's person' [Figure 10] is one of his major paintings. In sackcloth, barefooted, straggly, covered in heavy iron chains, the God's fool stands leaning on the wall with his



Figure 10. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, God's Fool [Юродивый/Блаженный], 1879.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16058996>

backside, with a pose and with the gesture of someone semi-insane, and directs his mad sparkling gaze at you; his mouth is wide open, he smiles, having grabbed his head with his hand, and seemingly is giving some kind of weird speeches, breathless from a fast run. Mussorgsky's God's fool in 'Boris' also runs onto stage breathless, he is pitiful, he is odd; like the other one he also gives his strange talks with insanity in his voice, pitifully singing: "The crescent moon goes, the kitten cries, God's fool stand up, pray to God, bow to Christ! Christ our God, the weather will be fair, there will be a crescent moon..." (words in accordance with Pushkin). But this very same God's fool, a few minutes later, having been robbed of his penny by the village boys, is a witness to the rowdy entrance of the Imposter with his mob, is left alone on the empty stage, and while the glow of a fire lit by the Imposter's outlaws starts to redden afar, he sits on a pebble and pitifully laments: "Flow, flow bitter tears; cry, cry you Orthodox soul, soon the enemy will come and dark impenetrable darkness will begin. Woe, woe to Rus'. Cry,

¹⁴ https://youtu.be/zZwTV_OAwTQ

cry Russian folk, hungry folk!...”¹⁵ Here again that same figure of Perov’s is evident, only here it is raised to being tragic, to being truly pathetic.

The other God’s fool which appears in Mussorgsky’s works is in his famous romance ‘Savishna’, which had always been admired by our greatest musicians.¹⁶ All of Mussorgsky’s romances in general are scenes taken from life, a direct result of what he saw and heard himself, but this romance is one of those few creations of Mussorgsky’s the origin of which is known to us because it has been documented. Once standing by the window in a village, he accidentally saw that scene, how the ugly [*Russian: безобразный*] semi-crippled God’s fool was proclaiming love to a young woman [*Russian: бабенкой*] who caught his fancy, and was flirting with her, but was himself so ashamed of himself (as if the ‘Beast-Monster’ declaring his love to the beautiful merchant’s daughter in Aksakov’s lovely fairy tale ‘The Scarlet Flower’ [*similar to ‘Beauty and the Beast’*]). The feeling, the timid obedience, the self-shaming are all deeply tragic and wonderfully beautiful here in Mussorgsky’s romance.



Figure 11. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, God’s Fool [Юродивая], 1872.
<https://www.wikiart.org/en/vasily-perov/holy-fool-surrounded-by-pilgrims-1872>

Additionally to all his character types and scenes, Perov has one superb creation, where a type untouched by Mussorgsky is expressed. This is the type of the female ‘God’s fool’ [*Figure 11*], a painting made during Perov’s best time (1872): the God’s fool is sitting on the corner of a street, one which must be in Moscow, is proclaiming something in her own way, and a crowd of venerator, women, fawningly listens to her wild and ridiculous words. This scene is striking.

¹⁵ <https://youtu.be/7LQUvAIWY3o?t=9791>

¹⁶ <https://youtu.be/ZwfFh2ljoO0>



Figure 12. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, The Drowned Woman [Утопленница], 1867.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15874790>

A figure always very close to the people is the policeman. Perov and Mussorgsky portrayed him only once each, but magnificently. In Perov's work it is that soulless idol who is sitting beside the corpse of 'The Drowned Woman' [Figure 12] and drawing shag from a little short pipe, as if guarding a stolen bale of goods which was re-found by him. His wide Kalmyk face, all dabbled by smallpox, his indifferent eyes, his official posture – all this tells of a person who is already trained rather enough, who is 'ready' from head to toes, and whom nothing can affect. In Mussorgsky's work, this character type is equally magnificent and equally true. It does not matter, that it is not a current policeman, but one who had lived three hundred years ago – nothing has changed since then. He is not guarding any dead body, but he is guarding a whole mass of living human bodies, a crowd of simple folk, who were herded onto the square to beg Boris Godunov to be Tsar. He needs only one thing: for these human mouths to be shouting and plaintively asking, for knees to be taken and hands held out ahead, for the official task to be completed. He does not care at all about anything else, about what is happening in the minds of this crowd while some solemn historical act is taking place here. Similarly in Perov's painting, a thought does not even pass through the mind of the pock-marked Kalmyk in the police coat, about that great mystery of death, which has descended upon this poor woman, who threw herself into the water from desperation.

Perov and Mussorgsky did not portray *pomeshchiki* [landowners] many times, but did so characteristically. In this, the advantage of strength, bulge and versatility are on Mussorgsky's side. The most remarkable *pomeshchik* character type in Perov's work is exhibited in his 'Village sermon' [Figure 3]; it is simply an old buffer, measly and ignorant [Russian: темный], meek and benign by the look of it, probably greedy and merciless 'in practice'. Much more complex and deeper is the character type of the old-time *pomeshchik*, painted by Mussorgsky in his Prince

[*Russian: князь*] Ivan Khovansky (in 'Khovanshchina').¹⁷ It is an old man, kind and good-natured in some things, and fierce, evil and merciless in others; inflated by ancestors and limitless power, peacefully raging in his home harem, hot-tempered to the point of fury, limited, interpreting everything around him like inborn slaving servants [*Russian: холопство*]. Mussorgsky also intended to interpret this very type of *pomeshchik* in the opera 'The Bachelor', the scenario of which survived in his papers and about which the two of us conferred a lot, soon after 'Boris Godunov'. Some of parts for it were already composed. The scene of Marfa 'fortune-telling' for Prince [*Russian: князь*] Golitsyn in 'Khovanshchina' is taken directly from the scene of 'fortune-telling' for the old man-*pomeshchik* in 'The Bachelor'. In this opera there was meant to be a '*pomeshchik*'s trial' at his home, with the setting like at the magistrate's, dealing with a caught bachelor-poacher (this is somewhat in *pendant* to the scene of Perov's 'Arrival of the district superintendent for the inquest' [Figure 1]).

III

A major and significant category in the list of Perov and Mussorgsky's creations consists of the clergy, both black [*monk-priests and hieromonks*] and white [*parish clergy*]. But, as it had also been with the '*narod*', the depicted personalities all belong to the village, backwater, provincial folk. In this regard neither Perov, nor Mussorgsky touched on the capitals. They painted only what was the most characteristic and what they had personally found out during their time living in the village.

'The Seminarist' is one of the most magnificent character types created by Mussorgsky.¹⁸ For the second decade, many hundreds or maybe even thousands of young men from the student youth of St Petersburg are admiring this marvellous real-life painting. This character type was close to all of them, well known to all of them in reality, and here it was reproduced with such truth which one can rarely see in art, least of all in music. A dolt from the priest's or deacon's children, already rather grown up, was condemned to hammer out Latin about which he did not care at all, with which he never had, never has, and never will have anything *in common*, which he does not need for anything, and which he is still forced to tyrannically drive into his head. Hundreds of years have passed from the time of the first introduction of Latin in the Zaikonospasskoye Theological College in Moscow, and not for a single person of those who have studied here has it ever had to come into use over their whole lives as deacons or priests. However, despite everything, the insane beating of air [*Russian: толчение воды*] had to continue. How many curses, how much hatred and contempt, how many reproaches were addressed to it [*to Latin*] on hundreds of ends of Russia over hundreds of years! What a torturous horse-collar/clamp [*Russian: хомут*], what disfigurement of the brain by an unnecessary instrument of torture! And if only there was any working result from it. But no, the unfortunate seminarists, despite all their Latin and all the rest of their scholastics, remained dark, ignorant creatures, without a ray of light in their mind, without thoughts and independence, remained timid and submissive, playing no role in Russian life, birthing not a single high-level thought nor a deep feeling in those for whom they should have been serving as support, consolation and aid throughout their whole lives. So, what has this wretched scholasticism started to lead us to? It is this very world of corruption of the living human nature and the perversion of fresh forces that new art was meant to portray. This is indeed what it did, in bright, talented colours of

¹⁷ <https://youtu.be/2p5sWAVOi94>

¹⁸ <https://youtu.be/GToikTf2114>

Mussorgsky hand. For the superficial and absent-minded listener Mussorgsky's 'The Seminarist' is just an object of amusement, a subject for merry laughter. But those for whom art is the highest creation of life, would look at what is depicted in this 'funny' romance with horror. A young life, captured into a ridiculous iron collar and writhing in it with despair – what a grim tragedy! A young man condemned to the rat race [*Russian: to the squirrel wheel*], the uselessness of which he feels every second, but nevertheless, you have to keep running in it, and also keep turning swiftly – what could be worse? And here you have the fist beatings on the back of the head by the



Figure 13. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Fishermen [Рыбаки], 1879.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16059006>

savage amongst all this insanity? And he, the one who in Mussorgsky's romance, is still a fresh, healthy and young lad, still sweet [*Russian: милый*] and interesting, humorous and chipper



Figure 14. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Reception of the traveller seminarist [Приём странника-семинариста], 1874.
https://gallerix.ru/pic/_EX/21028680/700045776.jpeg

mentor 'Father'. And here is the Father's daughter Stesha, 'with little cheeks like your poppies' colour,' with 'little smoky eyes', who is standing before his eyes on the left kliros during the prayer service 'to the reverend and glorious Mitridora, while he himself read out Prokeimenon, Tone 6.' How can one hammer out 'panis, piscis, crinis, finis... et canalis, et canalisi' here like an idiot. How can one not go

dumb, his colours of life will dim, and a soulless crude doll will remain.

In Perov's work the seminarist appears twice. The first time is in 'Fishermen' [Figure 13]: he is still a lively, agile boy, diligently preparing buckets for the fish on the shore [*Russian: на бережку*], while the 'Father' together with father-deacon are pulling the net with the fish along the river.

The other time the seminarist appears, the transformation has already happened (painting: 'Reception of the traveller seminarist' [Figure 14]). He, who was at the start a lively, happy boy, and who was then beaten for so long, so systematically fooled, has already transformed into a burlak dummy [*Russian: бурлацкую тупицу*]. Here he is sitting in the izba [house] which he wandered into on his way. On his huge boots there is a pound [*Russian: pood. Used figuratively*] of dirt and dust, his dress is a sackcloth. He was

taken in and sheltered by hospitable women – an old lady and her young daughter-in-law. They placed before him what they had and with pleasure look on how he, tired and severely hungry, greedily slurps the soup [Russian: похлебку] from the cup. This painting, is however not one of Perov's best; it belongs to the year 1874, so the time when he was turning backwards, downhill, and there is much imperfection in it. However despite this the character type of the main actor has been wonderfully successful. The 'seminarist' has now evolved into an indifferent, crude, insensitive/hard-hearted [Russian: безчувственный] guy, already eternally [Russian: безпробудная] prosaic.

Mussorgsky's 'dyachok' [off-handed slighting form of the word 'dyakon' – deacon] and Perov's 'dyachok' are similar portraits of the same individual, only in Perov he happens to be a bit older. He (in the painting 'Son of a dyachok, inducted into being a collegiate registrar' [Figure 15]) already has an old woman-wife, an adult son, that very son who, as soon as he tried on his uniform for the first time, had his face show all the trashy qualities which he will then be flashing for thirty-forty years straight, crushing and squeezing out everything around himself (remember Nekrasov's 'Lullaby': 'You will look like an official, but be a scoundrel at heart'). In this artwork the *dyachok* is already old and crooked, he doesn't let the church keys out from his hands even at home, for the whole day all he does is mess about with the services and the wages, even now he has only returned home to admire the newly-inducted official. In the Mussorgsky, the *dyachok* (Afanasiy Ivanovich in 'Sorochinskaya Fair') patient is much younger. He still climbs over fences to see his older-age sweethearts, he still awkwardly flirts with them, but the fact that his heavy Church Slavonic manners, grubby air, servility and greed are all on the forefront is exactly the same in the characters of both Perov and Mussorgsky.



Figure 15. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Son of a dyachok, inducted into being a collegiate registrar [Сын дьячка, произведенный в коллежские регистраторы], 1860.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15908725>

We see priests in Perov's work five times: in 'The village sermon' [Figure 3], in 'Rural religious procession' [Figure 16], in 'Repast' [Figure 18], in 'Fishermen' [Figure 13] and in 'Pugachyovtsy' [Figure 5]. In the first painting [Figure 3] we see a completely different figure from that which was envisaged by the author: the picture was painted in the year 1861 and as a result of the mentality of the time, the Academy of the Arts, having examined the initial sketch, ordered Perov not to paint the priest in a *riza* [phelonion], but to present him in a *ryasa* [robe].¹⁹ But

¹⁹ Stasov's footnote: This strange way of thought did not exist even in the times of Alexander I, for which Venetsyanov's 'The Dying Woman's Communion' serves as proof, since there the priest is presented in a riza. However, the persecution of rizas in paintings, which as far as I remember coincided with the persecution of cross-like figures on ladies' dresses and coats did not last long and already in 1802 Pukirev did not receive any critical remarks about the fact that his painting 'Unequal Marriage' the priest was depicted in a riza.

no matter in a *riza* or a *ryasa*, this sturdy, quiet, dark old man is preaching with conviction before the 'masters' of his village on the topic 'There is no power that is not from God' and raising his old trembling finger to the sky.



Figure 16. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Rural religious procession [Сельский крестный ход на Пасхе], 1861, oil on canvas. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=426703>

In 'Rural religious procession' [Figure 16] the matter is very different. The Father was celebrating Easter and as he exits the *izba* [house] (where he was assiduously treated with a feast) he cannot remember anything neither about 'masters' nor about power being from God any more. It is unlikely that he even remembers himself, despite being in a *riza*, despite the fact that people are carrying a cross and an icon in front of him. He bowed his head with his tangled hair, he is searching for something to lean on near the house's porch... His *dyachok* is the same. In 'Repast' [Figure 18] the priest or the deacon is the only representative of the white clergy, the whole painting consists of monks, therefore I will talk about it further down. In 'Fishermen' [Figure 13] the Father and the Father-deacon are not at a service at all and are not acting in their official roles. On a hot summer day they are busy with their own favourable activity: they have undressed, gotten into the water to their waist and are amusing themselves with fishing, dragging the net in the water. Although this painting is not one of Perov's best, there are a lot of good things in it, and the figures of the two main acting characters are comical in the manner Gogol; their heads naked bald or tied up with a scarf, their faces used to always being meaningful and staid, now deeply concerned only with the fish. The priest in 'Pugachyovtsy' [Figure 5] is one of the wondrous exceptions of this little successful painting that's why we will talk about him when we talk generally about this picture.

Mussorgsky does not have priests in his works, and only once a priest is depicted cursorily, in passing – it is in 'The Seminarist'.²⁰ But no matter how much in passing, but here he turned out with incredible relief-like qualities [*'relief' as in the 3D sculptural technique*]. He is a heavy priest of the old cut, with a heavy fist, teaching Latin at the seminary in his spare time and flagging the seminarist in his 'booklet' for the fact that during the prayer service he 'kept casting glances' at the left kliros and 'winking' at his pretty daughter Stesha. They must have had some good education between them!

There are very many monks depicted in both Perov's and Mussorgsky's work – a whole gallery of them. Here both authors have a stunning variety of types and characters. Meanwhile all of them clearly belong to the same type of folk, the same type of national style.



Figure 17. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Tea-drinking in Mytishchi [Чаепитие в Мытищах], 1862. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3149320>

In Perov, the first time that monks appear is in his 'Tea-drinking in Mytishchi' [Figure 17], in the form of the porky, red, husky man, resting in the heat, halfway to the Troitsk Monastery, under the shade of the trees, and puffing tea at the samovar. The young servant pushes the begging legless retired soldier away from the tea table. Everything – for this one, who is idle for a lifetime, nothing – for that one, who has worked like an ox for a lifetime, and now walks in rags and on a wooden stick. The situation is obviously the same as in 'Village sermon' [Figure 3] where the *pomeshchik* is sweetly sleeping and the lackey is shooing the men away with his fists.

²⁰ <https://youtu.be/M9ApjVeqM9c>



Figure 18. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Repast [Трапеза], 1865, oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=76656356>

In 'Repast' [Figure 18] the same motive continues only now not in the fresh air, but in the magnificent monastery chamber, wide and richly decorated, with painted walls, icons in golden frames, with a big crucifix in the depth of the hall. It must be a rich wake in process, and the courteous monk gestures to the greedy and huge general's wife (a merchantess by kin) inviting her to also taste. And the tables are laid through the whole hall, and the whole brethren are sitting at them ceremoniously in their picturesque oriental costumes, black hoods with coverings descending upon their backs, and in wide mantles, also black, falling in magnificent folds. How many different natures, how many dissimilar characters! Some of them are good-natured, others are evil and sneering, some are meek, others bilious, some are completely uncouth men [Russian: *неотесанное мужичье*], others are those who have snapped some bookish wisdom and are capable even right now to debate for forty hours straight, some are arrogant and imperative, and there are even those who are humiliatingly banging their forehead on the ground. But they all converge on one thing: they like to eat and drink, what and how each one finds more pleasant. But the only thing is that they are unaware that here at the entrance to their magnificent wide-open repast hall paupers are also crowding, and one of them, a poor woman with a child, is sitting barefooted on the floor and is extending a hand from afar. As if as an explanation, the inscriptions in Church Cyrillic on the walls include: "Lazarus, get out". And everyone is treating themselves, everyone is caringly transferring what is better from the table and into the stomach. Someone, valiantly [Russian: *молодецки*] throws back their head, pouring a large portion of happy potion into themselves in one go. Someone biliously reprimands the grey-haired lackey for dawdling for so long while pulling out the cork from the neck of the bottle. Someone, having grabbed the edge of the kerchief with his teeth, is pouring into it various tasty stuff from the plate. Someone has already drunk enough and, while squinting his eyes, is holding a wise

conversation, proving something convincingly with his finger. And someone who is already completely all right, and having crossed his hands on his little belly, is lifting his woeful face with reddened [*Russian: turned pink*] cheeks, not thinking about anything else at all, wanting nothing more. He is peacefully in bliss, despite the fact that some guest, some worldly cleric (seems like it is a deacon) in a bright silk robe is telling him something on the sly [*Russian: наговаривает под сурдинкой*], sneaking or telling tales, while he himself [*the worldly cleric*], already all pale and distorted from the wine, is hideously giggling, leaning right to the very table. But over all this the following inscriptions are spread out on the walls: 'Do not judge and you will not be judged', 'May my heart not be shy'. And everyone is content [*Russian: довольны*], everyone is happy, the rich repast is conducted how it should be, the ray of sunlight enters the window in a slanting golden pole, and a white dove, which accidentally got in there through some open window-pane, is thrashing around in the air.



Figure 19. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Dividing the inheritance in the monastery [Делёж наследства в монастыре (Смерть монаха)], 1868, pencil drawing. <https://uploads3.wikiart.org/images/vasily-perov/dividing-the-inheritance-in-a-monastery-death-of-a-monk.jpg!Large.jpg>

A completely different story is taking place in Perov's small but very original painting 'Dividing the inheritance in the monastery' [Figure 19]. The action is happening at night. One of the brethren has died. The doors of the cell are closed by firm propping up. The deceased is lying on the floor with open eyes. With a rough and merciless hand someone drags off his clothes; others are hastily swilling from the remaining bottles; still others are greedily rummaging in the drawers, finally another one of

the brethren is forcing open the chest lid with an enormous crow-bar. Everywhere is a mess, there is turmoil, as if there has been an enemy invasion. What's the difference between today and tomorrow, when this very deceased will be lying on the catafalque in a dignified way, and around him harmonious and stern funeral voices.

As a conclusion to this category of Perov's creations, I will point out a small painting, which is not only unfinished, but even exists only in the form of a draft sketch. The painting is called 'Conversation of two students with the monk, by the chantry' [Figure 20]. It was started in 1871, then was neglected for a whole ten years; why, I don't know, but it must not be because



Figure 20. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Conversation of two students with the monk [Разговор студентов с монахом], 1871. <https://uploads7.wikiart.org/images/vasily-perov/students-talk-with-the-monk-1871.jpg!Large.jpg>

the topic stopped being interesting to Perov. On the contrary. In 1880 we find the same scene in his work (in the form of a pencil drawing) but only slightly modified: it is set not in the fresh air, but in a railroad carriage, there are more people present, but the main acting characters and their poses have remained the same. What is happening is that the youths, the students, have started an argument with the monk, and have driven him to such a state that he is sorely missing those of his own kind, tightly sat down on the bench, pressed his hands against the board and is as if saying with his raised wide-open eyes: "Lord, what are these people saying!" probably not knowing what to answer them himself. I consider this small unfinished painting to be one of Perov's greatest creations: I consider the topic one of the most contemporary out of those which he selected during his lifetime – the clash of the new generation with the old, and this is without any ridicule, without mockery, without silly trifling harassment. No, everything is serious, with an air of importance, with full dignity. The young man on the left in the glasses, is particularly great [*Russian: хопов*] and truthful, sitting clamping his knee with his hands, and wholly concentrating on the thought he is proving. Such scenes, and not only with monks, are occurring in the new generation every minute, only prior to Perov no one had the idea of bringing them into the picture, and what's more, doing so with such talent, simplicity and fidelity. Perhaps there are few scenes from new life which are as important for art, and which call on it as much to embody life, as this one does: the 'new', stepping over the 'old', persistently demanding reports and answers from it. Perov's thorough, observant, attractive [*Russian: симпатичный*] and inquisitive mind appears here in all its glory. In my opinion this small painting is one of the best examples of Perov's rights to Russian fame [*Russian: славу*].

Mussorgsky has nothing of this kind in the whole list of his creations; perhaps only 'The Seminarist' reminds us of this task. He is also protesting, attacks and complains about what exists around him; it is also difficult for him to be in the stocks that were arranged long ago, and oh how much would he want to throw them off! But here the task is less and of a lower level than Perov's task: he is complaining only about nonsensical scholastic study, about the constraint on his life imposed only by this factor. 'The Seminarist' has not yet gotten to complaining about constraints on his thoughts, to pointing out pimples and warts on it.

However Mussorgsky has a whole platoon of monks which are not only equal to Perov's monks but also by far surpass them. Such a broad and diverse individual as Varlaam in 'Boris Godunov' has never appeared in Perov. He is a mighty herculean [*Russian: богатырская*] personality who had wasted life [*Russian: прожигавшая жизнь*] for many years, hardened in wine and revelry. He is a person who has wandered the roads and villages, like Perov's 'The Wanderer', but he is completely different from the latter in the following way – the type of power which wasn't expressed anywhere in the Perov. He revels, like the brethren in Perov's 'Repast' [*Figure 18*], he is greedy, he is gluttonous, like his other different monks, but he also has that savageness in his nature, that denseness, neither of which appear in Perov's characters and which find itself rather expressed in the song 'How it was in the city, in Kazan'²¹ which he sings out in a beastly and fierce way as if he himself is some broken-off fragment from vanished cannibal peoples. Later on that very Varlaam raises a ferocious people's storm with his mighty hand against two Catholic monks, Jesuits, who dropped in into Russia with False Dmitry.

²¹ <https://youtu.be/Urzk5dZ4AZc>



Figure 21. Илья Yefimovich Repin, Archdeacon [Протодиакон], 1877.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30064>
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raskolnik monk [*raskolniki* were schismatics; those who were members of a group split off from the Russian Orthodox Church] in a little hat and with a bifurcated white beard, as if in wedges, who is standing behind Pugachyov next to the crooked-eyed Tatar. This monk is a deep and mighty-typical figure.

In all visual art there is only one *pendant* to him – it is Repin’s ‘Protodeacon’ [Figure 21]. Perov did not touch or express characters of such nature.

Another of Mussorgsky’s monks, Misail, is as deep an embodiment of Pushkin’s type, as is Varlaam. Cowardly, weak, always holding on to his mate, even getting drunk from behind his wide back, he is one of the personalities which can be pointed out on Perov’s ‘Repast’ [Figure 18]. Mussorgsky’s Pimen and Dosifey are completely different in nature. They are ascetics, deeply serious personalities who already have nothing in common with disgraces and carnivorous gluttony. Important, strict thought fills both of them. One of them is a chronicler, affectionate and contemplative, who is completely absorbed in the folk tales which his hand writes down. The other – a true leader, a people’s fanatic and a fearsome despot. In Perov’s ‘Pugachyovtsy’ [Figure 5] there is one figure who is essentially a *pendant* to Mussorgsky’s Dosifey: it is the

IV

Now I will point on a completely different type of Perov and Mussorgsky’s convergence according to their subjects. Mussorgsky’s piano piece ‘The Seamstress’²² is a depiction of a worker, a graceful, sweet, but poor, pensive and elegiac creature, constrained by need. This image was inspired in him by Hood’s ‘The Song of the Shirt’²³; he told me himself. The same ‘Song of the Shirt’ inspired (as is known) Perov’s ‘The Drowned Woman’ [Figure 12], that terrible scene, which so often plays out everywhere in our country [Russian: у нас]: early morning, damp fog, the riverbank, and on the shore – a poor inflated body of a young woman taken out from the water. These two works are the start and the end of a drama respectively. Perov’s ‘In the pawnshop’ [Figure 22] is the middle note of this, presenting a poor girl [Russian: девyука] who must also be a seamstress or dressmaker, contemplative and sad, waiting at the pawnshop for the little window to open. The picture is not Perov’s best, but I have to point it out here as one of the subjects which are so similar for both authors and so tragic in life.

²² <https://youtu.be/YJUNOGOoGVM>

²³ https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Song_of_the_Shirt



Figure 22. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, In the pawnshop [В ссудной кассе], 1867.
<https://uploads4.wikiart.org/images/vasily-perov/in-the-pawnshop-1867.jpg!Large.jpg>

The former's [Perov's] 'The dilettante' [Figure 23] is a fat military man daubing canvases at home in his spare time, blissfully enjoying them himself together with his wife, who is sedulously looking at the painting through her fist while he is lazily puffing from a short little pipe before his own work. The painting is stunningly true and one that instantly transports the viewer into an atmosphere of the most paltry [Russian: ничтожнейшего] and the most unneeded mischievous toying with art. But Mussorgsky went broader and further. First, under the heading 'The Classic'²⁴ he hilariously depicted a musical dilettante who is 'simple and clear, and humble, polite and beautiful, and a pure classic and courteous', who is 'the enemy of the newest wiles' because 'their hubbub and terrible mess make him anxious and scare him', in



Figure 23. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, The dilettante [Дилетант], 1862, oil on canvas.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15908750>

²⁴ <https://youtu.be/wbP-IfUXOdM>

them 'he sees the coffin of art'. This satirical caricature was so talented, so correct and amusing that the whole musical world of Petersburg was laughing out loud uncontrollably. But soon after, Mussorgsky again chose this same topic, only broader. In his 'Rayok'²⁵ [*Peep-Show*] he again presented the same dilettante who 'was innocent, and captured the hearts of the elders with his obedience; his sweet childishly embarrassed [*Russian: стыдливо*] babble had seduced many many hearts'. Next to him Mussorgsky positioned another two musical dilettantes. One of them, the heavy pietist and mystic who was preaching in conservatory classes that 'the minor key [*Russian: минор*] is original sin and the major key is the sin of redemption' [*A compilation of Stasov's works published in 1952 has an editorial note identifying this person as N. I. Zarembo, the former director of St Petersburg's Conservatory*]. The other, light on his feet and fidgety, 'doesn't take in anything and is not able to take in anything, takes in only Patti, adores Patti, glorifies Patti' [*a compilation of Stasov's works published in 1952 has an editorial note identifying this person as Rostislav (F. M. Tolstoy)*]. But these three didn't stop at being on the peaceful and innocent ground of their platonic dilettantism and bad composition – no, they went on to persecution, pursuit, of true, talented musicians (all this was really happening in Petersburg in the times contemporary to Mussorgsky). For that they combined forces with another musician (already not a dilettante) who 'is going mad with rage, is angry, is threatening' [*a compilation of Stasov's works published in 1952 has an editorial note identifying this person as A. N. Serov*], approached the highest authority, the muse Euterpe herself, with the request she 'irrigates their fields with the golden rain of Olympus', 'to send them inspiration', 'animate their infirmity' and they will 'sing songs of praise to her on ringing zithers'. Here innocence is no more; those who were previously meek dilettantes have transformed into evil and ferocious ones. Perhaps Perov's meek dilettante would have also become the same at the first unexpected opportunity (when disturbed in their rotten sanctuary, dilettantes are always capable of such an opportunity). It is this very swarming aphid that Perov and Mussorgsky painfully dabbed with their talented paintbrush. How good was it, how wonderful, and how needed! Here, art did not just paint and portray what exists, here it was also in its highest and greatest role: an evaluator and a judge of life.

I went over all the main aims and motives at which Perov and Mussorgsky converged throughout their lives. But towards the end of their lives they met even more and closer: all his final years Perov was busy with a huge complex historical painting 'Nikita Pustosvyat' [*Figure 24*] which he never finished, and Mussorgsky with a huge complex historical opera 'Khovanshchina' which he also did not finish. The plot of both creations is completely identical. The time is that of the *streltsy* uprisings, the social environment is the world of the Russian *raskolniki*, the task is the depiction of the clash between the old receding Rus' with the new emerging Russia. Both authors have nothing hostile, nothing intolerant to the *raskolnik* [*schismic*] and sectarian Russia, despite the whole residue of nonsensicalness [*Russian: нелепости*], inveterate ignorance and savageness, which was present there alongside many good things. Both authors saw clearly [*Russian: светло, i.e. with light*], saw with the entire eyes of their soul, how many wonderful, mighty, pure and sincere things there were after all on the side of this Rus', and most of all saw how it was in its own right, standing up with teeth and claws for its old life. From this Perov and Mussorgsky instilled so many likable things into the main characters of their paintings. In the former's work [*Perov's*] Nikita Pustosvyat himself and his main mate standing a few steps behind him with a silver icon in his hands, are true *chefs d'oeuvre*'s of national character: what strength, courage, what flaming energy, fiery impetuosity in one, and what measured, stubborn restraint in the other! Perov had little ability to portray complex scenes, events, characters, and moments; whatever he tried of this type, nothing worked out, everything ended up being weak and inept.

²⁵ https://youtu.be/bFYagBz_3jw

But he could not *not* [my italics N. K.] be successful at portraying individual personalities from the people themselves, and that is why in such a poor and disorderly painting like 'Nikita Pustosvyat' [Figure 24] among the general desolation and unfortunateness we see stunning creatures such as the two schismatic [Russian: раскольничьи] personalities I pointed out above.



Figure 24. Vasily Grigoryevich Perov, Nikita Pustosvyat [Никита Пустосвят. Спор о вере], 1881.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1422494>

Even amongst the raging disorderly mass of the *raskolniki*, thrashing around on the painting, there are still a few quite luckily [Russian: *счастливо*] captured characters and figures (the *raskolnik* with the scroll in his hands, and the *raskolnik* right behind Nikita, raising the icon painted on a wooden board into the air). Only the left hand side of the painting, where the tsarevna Sofia, the boyar women, the Russian Orthodox clergy and the foreign guests are depicted, is rather devoid of any talent, characterisation, or truth. By his nature, Mussorgsky was much broader than Perov; his talent was multifaceted, deeper, and more varied. In addition to the other features of his talent Mussorgsky was endowed at the highest level with talent of historical creation, and nothing can be more 'historical' than both of his operas: 'Boris Godunov' and 'Khovanshchina'. The spirit of each of these two epochs, the varied personalities which belong to them, those scenes which deeply characterise them – all this appeared in his operas with great perfection. Of course, it cannot be my aim to break them down here in detail – for that a special detailed study would be necessary – but I still can't not say here, although in passing, a few words about 'Khovanshchina' (there is no parallel for 'Boris Godunov' in Perov's work). The overall impression of the picture expresses the *mass of the narod* [people's], the people's movement, people's passions, people's interests, but right beside them – the figure of Dosifey: it is the leader of the *raskolniki*, the fiery and cautious fanatic and deep patriot, clear in his mind, and alongside this, a slave to old folk legends. Next two him, the figures of two princes [Russian: князей] have found their place: Golitsyn – a representative of the new, semieuropean Russia, and Khovansky – a representative of the dark, wildly-patriarchal *domostroy* Russia. Right there

there are also two *raskolnitsy*: Marfa – young, fiery, breathing with love for life and pleasure, and next to her Susanna – an old lady, a withered, angry, jealous, mad ascetic.²⁶ Then there are also a few secondary-role personalities, and as a background to everything – the *streltsy* [archers] and the *raskolniki*, the formidable, deep mass of people, dark and raging, like the stirring abyss of the sea. Mussorgsky went further and deeper in all this than Perov had. He completed his task (notwithstanding the other imperfections) with great talent in plasticity. But nevertheless both artists closely converged in the essence, choice and the whole direction of their task.

Another unfinished creation of Perov is his 'Pugachyovtsy' [Figure 5]. Would it not be curious to find out that Mussorgsky (who, by the way, had never heard of Perov's painting) had the intention to write an opera 'Pugachyovtsy' after 'Khovanshchina'? He had many conversations about this with me, and traces of this intention are left in our correspondence. Again, completely like Perov, Mussorgsky was thinking of basing it to some degree on Pushkin's 'The Captain's Daughter', but then to also add many other new elements to his own work. In one of the acts of the opera that very scene which Perov presented was meant to appear in the theatre: Pugachyov on the porch, surrounded by comrades, helpers and a whole crowd of wild, unbridled freemen, Asian and Russian, and right there nearby Father Gerasim (in accordance with Pushkin), standing with a cross in his hands in a poor village *riza* and perhaps also like in the Perov, barefooted and trembling with horror. Also here are merciless human butchers, cruel, implacable, with axes in their hands. But probably the figures of *pomeshchiks* [both male and female], and in general all the folk captured in the cities and villages by surprise, would have been portrayed more successfully by Mussorgsky rather than by Perov; the latter in his later time wasn't very successful at much, and definitely not in anything historical. If we speak comparatively, his little sketch of this painting turned out to be very remarkable. This sketch now belongs to P. M. Tretyakov. If it expresses the overall impression from the fire, the invasion, the ferocious reprisals and helplessness, then one can't forget that this sketch was written in 1873 when Perov was still real, only barely-barely weakened, and that even in a historical task foreign to him he was able to create a lot of magnificent things then. Two large paintings: 'Pugachyovtsy' [Figure 5] painted by him in 1875 and 1879 already had very little artistic and historical significance, and the pencil drawings 'Pugachyovtsy riding horses' and 'Pugachyovtsy leading the prisoners of war' (1879-1880) meant even less.

Many of Perov's and Mussorgsky's works I did not discuss here, despite many of them belonging to the authors' best creations: for example I didn't talk about Perov's 'The arrival of the governess to the merchant's house', 'Clean Monday', 'The drawing teacher', 'The bird catcher', 'The fisherman', 'Hunters at rest', 'Father and mother of Bazarov on the grave of their Son', and others, and about Mussorgsky's 'Feast', 'The goat', 'The nursery', 'The forgotten one' amongst others. This is because all these were subjects which belong to them separately and were not repeated in the work of the other. I did not intend to present full studies of these two artists, but only to show their similarities and points of close mutual contact. A comprehensive study of their creations demands much broader studies.

But, continuing my thoughts right until Perov's and Mussorgsky's passings, I once again find a striking similarity between them: both died without finishing their main task, and even, in their last years of life, having lost a significant part of their creative strength and talent, both turned in some new, foreign direction. Perov creates paintings on religious and allegorical or mythological subjects, which are not characteristic of him at all ('The Mother of God', 'Taking off from the Cross', 'Crucifixion', 'Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane', 'The First Christians in

²⁶ [A compilation of Stasov's works published in 1952 presents the following as a footnote Stasov wrote: 'In the last years of his life, being in a hurry to finish 'Khovanshchina' sooner, Mussorgsky entirely excluded Susanna's part from the opera.']

Kiev', 'Spring'). Mussorgsky creates a series of romances, setting the lyrics of Count A. K. Tolstoy and Count A. A. Golenishchev-Kutuzov, on lyrical subjects which are completely unsuitable for him, things like 'Trubadour' ('Serenade'), 'Polkovodets' [*The Field Marshall*] and so on. Both also wrote many works with idealistic goals, deprived at the very root of that national feeling and that reality in which Perov's and Mussorgsky's strength lay entirely.

All of these are losses which may be bitterly regretted; but that is how life of both of these artists turned out. It may indeed be that some elements of that very Russian life of serfdom times, which they portrayed in such a talented way, were themselves partially the reason of their fall and the defacement of their own nature and talent towards the ends of their lives. The dirty touch infected these bright characters too.

Brief explanation of selected words (provided by the translator):

- баба [baba]: A woman. Used to refer to a woman of the lower class, has a connotation of the woman being uncouth. Can be used in a derogatory way. When the translation refers to a peasant woman or one from the 'people', Stasov's original generally used *баба*.
- барин [barin]: The way serfs and/or poorer employees often addressed a person of higher stature. The female version of the word was барыня [barynya].
- бояре [boyare]: The highest feudal group in 9th-17th century Russia. This title was abolished by Peter the Great at the beginning of the 18th century.
- дворяне [dvoryane]: Russian nobility.
- князь [knyaz']: type of hereditary title amongst the tsarist nobility, some being equivalent to a prince. Prior to tsarism, the word was used to denote the head of a state or of a political entity in Rus'.
- кулак [kulak]: in this context refers to peasants who had other workers work for them. The word had negative connotations both in the 19th century, at the time of Stasov's writing, and especially later in Soviet Russia where these connotations were taken to the extreme. The word often implied that the person exploited his workers and cared only about money.
- купец [kupets]: Merchant. The female version of the word, often implying the wife of the kupets, was купчиха [kupchiha].
- мужик [muzhyk]: A man, traditionally a peasant. Usually used to refer to a man of the lower class, has a connotation of the man being uncouth. Can be used in a derogatory way. When the translation refers to a peasant man or one from the 'people', Stasov's original generally used *мужик*.
- народ [narod]: the people/folk.
- помещики [pomeshchiki]: landlords in Russia from the late 15th century to the early 20th century. Prior to the abolishment of serfdom in 1861 pomeshchiki owned serfs. The male form of the word is помещик [pomeshchik], and the female form is помещица [pomeshchitsa].
- царевна [tsarevna]: The tsar's daughter.
- чиновник [chinovnik]: Official. Someone serving in civil or court service. In tsarist Russia a Table of Ranks for *chinovniki* existed.