

Title: The Unbearable Superfluity of Being in 19th-Century Russian Art and Literature
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In 1859, Ivan Goncharov published his monumental *Oblomov*, solidifying forever in the literary and greater public consciousness the notion of “the superfluous man.” While this trope can be found in the works of earlier writers, notably Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* and Griboyedov’s *Woe from Wit*, and was picked up by many of the great authors of the remaining 19th-century, few have examined superfluity as it in appears in contemporary fine art. This essay seeks to ascertain the visual aspect of this trend in its earliest forms in the work of Pavel Fedotov, tracing it as a metaphor, manifestation, and symptom of modern life. The Russian answer to the French “flâneur,” I trace the tension between the need for distraction and the realization of chronic misery which would later inspire works like Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*.

By examining how awareness of futility challenges personal and social contentment to a large extent regardless of class distinctions, I seek to explore unities of public consciousness in relation to the complicated concept of “byt’.” I believe it is this notion of the very extraneousness of being that motivated the artistic production of Russian intellectuals at the time and continues to haunt and fascinate us today.