

Conceptualizing Beauty and Capturing Love: Images of Women in the Works of Ivan Turgenev and Aleksei Kharlamov
An Honors Thesis for the Russian Department

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Significant scholarly attention has been paid to the relationships between nineteenth-century Russian authors and artists, from the famous novelist Leo Tolstoy's friendship with the artist Ilya Repin to the association of the playwright Anton Chekhov with the landscape painter Isaac Levitan. My honors thesis illuminates another such relationship: that between the well-known author Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev (1818-1883) and the lesser-known artist Aleksei Alekseevich Kharlamov (1840-1925). Both men spent the majority of their lives outside of Russia in émigré communities in Western Europe, particularly Paris. Over the course of my analysis, I argue that these two men, throughout their decade-long relationship, shared ideas about their respective arts—and specifically about the representation of women in fiction and painting. In both Turgenev's novels and Kharlamov's paintings, women play a central role, serving as exemplars of both physical beauty and personal and spiritual strength. Although Turgenev's writings have been well analyzed, scholars have not paid significant attention to the role of paintings in his fiction. My study fills this gap, showing that reminiscences of paintings by the Old Masters at key moments in Turgenev's works perform a crucial narrative, psychological and aesthetic function. Moreover, my analysis also offers the first scholarly interpretation of Kharlamov's paintings, with a focus on *Young Woman and Child* (1894), which is in the Bowdoin College Museum of Art's collection.



Aleksei Alekseevich Kharlamov,
Young Woman and Child, 1894.

A critical component of my research was to gain exposure to the current scholarly work on Turgenev and nineteenth-century Russian art. Using funds from the Grua/O'Connell Research award, I travelled to Boston for the 2018 Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian (ASEEES) convention. Over the course of the four-day conference, I attended a number of lectures relevant to my research, including "Turgenev at 200: Re-assessing Literature's Role in Russian Society" and "Exhibiting Artistic Change: Social and Aesthetic Dimensions of Art Exhibitions in Imperial Russia." In addition to learning more about the ongoing research on Turgenev through attending panels, I met with several scholars individually and had conversations about both their work and my thesis. A number of these conversations yielded new information pertaining to my research, such as the dynamics of the market for Kharlamov's paintings in both Europe and America in the last twenty years, and how Turgenev's narrators invoke paintings as a narratological device.

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