Morozov: The Story of a Family and a Lost Collection

by

Natalya Semenova

NATALYA SEMENOVA
Translated by Arch Tait

MOROZOV

The Story of a Family and a Lost Collection

'A riveting biography of an intensely private man who became one of the world's greatest collectors of modern art.'

Rosamund Bartlett, author of Taling

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Synopsis

The first English-language account of Ivan Morozov and his ambition to build one of the world's greatest collections of modern art. "A century of Russian culture distilled in the story of the life, family and collection of the lavish, lazy, kindly, eccentric grandson of a serf who brought Monet and Matisse to Moscow, waited three years for the right 'blue Gauguin'—and survived the first years of Bolshevik rule."—Jackie Wullschläger, Financial Times "Best Books of 2020: Visual Arts"

A wealthy Moscow textile merchant, Morozov started buying art in a modest way in 1900 until, on a trip to Paris, he developed a taste for the avant-garde. Meticulous and highly discerning, he acquired works by the likes of Monet, Pissarro, and Cezanne. Unlike his friendly rival Sergei Shchukin, he collected Russian as well as European art. Altogether he spent 1.5 million francs on 486 paintings and 30 sculptures—more than any other collector of the age. Natalya Semenova traces Morozov's life, family, and achievements, and sheds light on the interconnected worlds of European and Russian art at the turn of the century. Morozov always intended to leave his art to the state—but with the Revolution in 1917 he found himself appointed “assistant curator” to his own collection. He fled Russia and his collection was later divided between Moscow and St. Petersburg, only to languish in storage for decades.


Sort review

"[A] jewel-like focus yet epic scope, reads as sumptuously as a 19th-century novel, and makes stunning use of material still emerging from Soviet archives to illuminate dark corners of history"—Jackie Wullschläger, Financial Times

"A century of Russian culture distilled in the story of the life, family and collection of the lavish, lazy, kindly, eccentric grandson of a serf who brought Monet and Matisse to Moscow, waited three years for the right “blue Gauguin”—and survived the first years of Bolshevik rule."—Jackie Wullschläger, Financial Times 'Best Books of 2020: Visual Arts"

"Drawing on a lifetime of research, Natalya Semenova has produced a riveting biography of an intensely private man who became one of the world's greatest collectors of modern art. Her pioneering account of the life and times of Ivan Morozov restores a vital lost page in the cultural history of imperial Russia. Morozov's importance has always been unfairly eclipsed by the better-known and more flamboyant Sergei Shchukin. Natalya Semenova has been able to redress the balance, and her latest biography completes a magnificent diptych chronicling the life and times of Russia's two great collectors."—Rosamund Bartlett

About the Author

The Russian art historian Natalya Semenova is author of The Collector: The Story of Sergei Shchukin and His Lost Masterpieces, coauthor of Collecting Matisse, and coeditor of Selling Russia's Treasures. She lives in Moscow. The award-winning Arch Tait has translated more than thirty books by leading Russian authors. --This text
refers to the hardcover edition.

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Every sound man has, aside from his work, something else to which he devotes himself with a will. Let us call that something his avocation. Sometimes it takes over his life.

Vladimir Ryabushinsky

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In the main part of the book, the system of transliteration is based on the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) system, with some simplifications made for the sake of readability. In the Notes and Bibliography, where Russian sources are cited, the Library of Congress system for romanization of Russian without diacritics is followed. Throughout the book, names more familiar to readers in a different spelling have not been changed.

Dates in the book are complicated by the switch in calendars in Russia in the early twentieth century. In the nineteenth century there were twelve days' difference between the Orthodox Julian calendar used in Russia, and the Gregorian calendar that had been used in Europe and the rest of the world ever since Pope Gregory XIII's reforms in 1582. This increased to thirteen days in the twentieth century. The Gregorian calendar was adopted by Lenin's government on 31 January 1918, at which point the following day officially became 14 February. In this book, therefore, unless otherwise specified, dates regarding matters in Russia before 1918 are given in the Old Style, and thereafter and elsewhere in the New (Gregorian) Style.

FOREWORD

Ivan Abramovich Morozov, one of the world's great art collectors, lived in Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century. With works by Monet and Renoir, Cézanne and Picasso adorning its walls, his private home was a veritable museum of early masterpieces of modern French art. But, despite the astonishing grandeur of the collection Ivan Morozov carefully built up during his life, he was, for a long time, eclipsed by his friend and rival, Sergei Shchukin.

In the 1960s, paintings from the collections of the famous tandem of Shchukin and Morozov – by Monet, Renoir, Gauguin, Cézanne, van Gogh, Bonnard, Derain, Matisse and Picasso – began to be exhibited around the world. In the listings, seniority was prioritized over...
alphabetic order, and the name of Morozov, seventeen years Shchukin's junior, always came second. So they have remained. If someone says 'Shchukin', the reflex is to add 'and Morozov'. This has come about because their collections – so similar, yet at the same time very different – were both lost during the Russian Revolution. They were then merged, shuffled like a pack of cards, and split between two museums, one batch going to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow and the other despatched to the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. In the process, the names of two of the greatest collectors of modernist art that graced the twentieth century were, for several decades, expunged. Shchukin's name was, to a spectacular degree, restored with the 2016–17 exhibition of his collection at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, which attracted a record-breaking 1.25 million visitors – a triumphant success, which reinstated the collector with the unpronounceable Russian name in the history of twentieth-century culture. But Ivan Morozov, like his elder brother Mikhail, has remained in the shadows, with few in the West able to tell the brothers apart or distinguish them from their more famous uncle, Savva. Fifteen years ago, Pierre Konowaloff, the great-grandson of Ivan Morozov, read my book about the life and collection of Sergei Shchukin and asked me to write about his great-grandfather. Leaving Pierre's tiny Parisian apartment on rue Boucicaut, I could not forget Morozov's tragic face looking out from a last photograph taken when he was already in exile. The sepia tones of the faded image made him appear terminally ill, and the disconsolate look in his eyes haunted me. But how was the story of someone of whom all that remained was a sun-bleached photograph, two portraits and a single interview to be told? Mikhail, born barely a year before Ivan, had at least left behind books and reviews and featured in the fairly scathing memoirs of his contemporaries. For Ivan there was not a single letter which might have afforded a clue to his personality. There remained nothing but invoices, business documentation, and the catalogues of Parisian salons with laconic pencilled comments: 'not bad', 'unimportant', 'passable'. Even his correspondence with Henri Matisse and Maurice Denis read more like business memoranda, almost all of it mediated by the copperplate handwriting of the secretary of the director of the Tver Textile Mill Company. Neither do we know what the rooms of the mansion-cum-museum on Prechistenka Street looked like. Apart from the Music Salon, decorated by Maurice Denis, they were off limits to outsiders. Nor have any photographic portraits of Ivan Morozov survived. All we have are photos in which he appears in the midst of a throng of relatives. The precise date of his birth has only recently been established. Even the whereabouts of his grave was, for a long time, unknown. Happily, a birth certificate was found in an archive and, after many years of searching, his grave was discovered in a local cemetery. Today it is even difficult to decipher the Cyrillic lettering. I nonetheless managed to produce two books about Morozov, but there still remained a great deal I did not know about his life and times. The challenge ensued, I returned once more to the history of my protagonist and, in the following pages, I have produced what I hope is the definitive life of this great collector.

Moscow, 2020

CHAPTER I

Sketches for a Portrait

In the spring of 1920, a year before his death, Ivan Morozov gave an interview to the French art critic, Félix Fénéon.1 It was a year since the famous
The collector had left Soviet Russia and he had only recently arrived in Switzerland, where Fénéon, the former art director of the Parisian Bernheim-Jeune Gallery, met his old acquaintance. As Fénéon writes:

Last June [1919], together with his wife, daughter and a niece, Ivan Morozov left Russia (where he had resided without respite for five and a half years) to settle in Switzerland – Interlaken, Ouchy, Lausanne. . . . We are finally to learn the fate of his collection. With his very first words he reassures us:

'The collection is unharmed. None of the 430 Russian works, none of the 240 French paintings have suffered. The collection is still in the palace where I assembled it and whose walls are decorated with Bonnard's Spring and Autumn and the Story of Psyche by Maurice Denis. It has been nationalized, however, just like my factories, and is now called the Second Museum of Western Art.'

'The second? . . . What is the first?'

'It is the French collection of our mutual friend, Sergei Shchukin, and is now being looked after by his daughter, Ekaterina Keller.'

'And what about you? Do you still have control over the Second Museum?'

'The state has appointed as its – how do you translate zaveduiushchii? – as its manager (you would say, “director” or “curator”) the sculptor Boris Terovets, who studied with Bourdelle, and it appointed me assistant manager, allocating me three rooms to live in. The rest of the accommodation is open to the public. The government has just extended my own system. During the Tsarist period I gave open access on Sunday mornings to anyone who was curious and, with a minimum of formalities, artists and critics could visit me on the other days, except Mondays. As assistant manager I was required to help compile a catalogue raisonné, and even talked a little to visitors about the paintings. Ekaterina Sergeevna [Shchukin's daughter] performed the same function in her father's museum. We were pleased to be able to celebrate your country's art: the paintings were there as confirmation of what we were saying, and the audience listened attentively.'

'As you have been in such direct contact with these people, Ivan Abramovich, can you tell me which of our painters most appealed to your compatriots?'

'Cézanne. I was able to provide eight pieces of testimony to his genius: two of his paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire, the Jeune fille au piano, a Jas de Bouffan, a portrait of his wife, and so on. You know them all, or nearly all. Van Gogh was also much admired. Derain also, and Picasso, but I owned only three of his canvases. That Spaniard and Henri Matisse are much more fully represented in Sergei Shchukin's collection.'

'You have mentioned the names of several French painters in your museum. Could you kindly complete the list?'

'Degas, Camille Pissarro, Gauguin (a dozen works, mostly of Polynesia), Lebourg, Simon, Henri-Edmond Cross, Maillol (four statues and seven statuettes), K.-X. Roussel, Vuillard, Louis Valtat, Lebasque, Marquet, Puy, Guérin, Espagnat, Vlaminck, Flandrin, Friesz, Chabaud, Herbin, I am omitting some which are far from negligible, but if I do not mention Seurat it is not because of a lapse of memory: there is that lacuna in my collection.'

'And in the Russian section of the collection, whom do you have?'

'Whom? Well, to start with those who are dead: Vrubel, Levitan, Serov, Sapunov; then Malyavin, Korovin, Vinogradov, Golovin, Somov, Benois, Igor Grabar, Kuznetsov, Larionov, Natalya Goncharova, Mashkov, Kuprin, Konchalovsky, Chagall, and others.'

'Obviously in this era of the dictatorship of the proletariat your artist compatriots must be unable to function.'

'The government views them...
as workers who are meeting a positive need, and for the artists it is a means of subsistence. An association has been formed under the chairmanship of Tatlin, and the far-left artists cluster around that. Among its most active members I would name Mashkov and the painter Dymshits-Tolstaya. This committee is in some ways analogous to your Société des Artistes Indépendants: it has no admissions panel, gives no awards, but it enjoys generous government subsidies to pay for exhibitions and acquisitions. In Moscow, during the winter of 1918–19 — my last in the capital — at least ten exhibitions of left-wing artists were organized, each showcasing artists of related trends. The most interesting among them, in addition to Mashkov and Tatlin, seemed to me to be Kuprin, Kuznetsov, Konchalovsky, Krymov, Chagall and Falk. Artists on the right have set up a committee of their own, but it is stagnating because the public authorities are wholly indifferent to it. Many avant-garde painters — and again I instance Tatlin and Mashkov — have got themselves appointed as academics. The old professors continue their apostolic work in parallel and, my goodness, their lectures are absolutely packed because students are entirely free to choose their teachers. In Russia, as elsewhere, the mass of the students gravitate towards academic routine. Some adventurous young artists have decamped to the provinces — Saratov, Vyatka, and so on — in order to create centres of artistic propaganda. This has sometimes represented a risk for Museum No. 2. I encountered one emissary from the provinces who, arguing that his town did not have a single Cézanne or Derain, had come to Moscow to requisition one, on the grounds that we had a surplus. To defend the integrity of the museum against his claim I had to appeal, successfully, to the authority of Igor Grabar, the artist and art historian and right-hand man of Madame Trotsky. Trotsky's wife? Is she actually involved? She is in charge of a committee whose preoccupations can best be explained by an example. In more than one location in the Republic there were grounds to fear that rioting or troop movements might compromise the security of paintings, statues, or religious or secular items of historical, documentary or aesthetic value. At the request of the owner, or officially, if the owner was negligent or had abandoned his residence, Madame Trotsky's committee brought them, with the assistance of competent commissions, to Moscow, where they were professionally assessed by scholars and officially exhibited. Completely unexpected treasures came to light. Is all this activity due to the initiative of the citizen or of the state? Let us say that it is done, if you will, on private initiative, but often prompted, and always facilitated, by Lunacharsky and his acolytes. Lunacharsky the minister? Yes, the People's Commissar for Enlightenment and the Arts. He failed, at the very least, to stop the muzhiks in Petrograd fashioning themselves boots out of the Rembrandts in the Hermitage. The muzhiks are not so impractical. No, nothing so unfortunate took place in any museum, either in Petrograd or anywhere else. The main works in the Hermitage had already been sent to Moscow at that time, now long past, when Petrograd was expected to be captured. They are waiting in the Kremlin to be sent back. Similar precautions were taken by the Louvre in 1914 and 1918. But in Moscow... what about the Tretyakov Museum? It has nothing to complain about. Its catalogue was sketchy and incomplete. Its new director, Igor Grabar, whose name I have already
mentioned, has significantly improved it. It includes comprehensive details of the size of the paintings, the surface, the media; the signatures have been scrutinized and, in an undoubted excess of zeal, their length is being registered. Archival research and examination of the originals has made it possible to correct attributions, to identify many subjects, and to establish dates reliably. All this was difficult because of the diversity of the elements which make up the Tretyakov Gallery."

"Please explain."

"They come from two brothers of that name, flax spinners. One, Sergei, collected Russian paintings, while the other, Pavel, collected Western art, primarily landscapes by your great painters of the 1830s (Corot, Rousseau, Dupré, et al.). These were supplemented in 1910 by the legacy of Mikhail Morozov, which included a Manet (the sketch for the Cabaret de Reichshoffen, which Manet painted twice), a Renoir (the full-length portrait of Jeanne Samary which the Bulletin de la vie artistique of 1 January reproduced but attributed to my collection), a Monet, two Gauguins, a Carrière, a Van Gogh, a Bonnard and a Denis."

"Were you and Mikhail Morozov related?"

"Closely. He was my brother, one year older than me. I was born in 1871. He died in 1904 at the age of thirty-three. He wrote a number of books, including The Life of Charles V, and published art criticism and letters from Egypt in journals. When we were growing up we took lessons together from Korovin, once a week for two years."

"So you are a painter!"

"Oh, hardly. In 1892, 1893 and 1894 I was a student at the Polytechnic in Zurich, and when I got tired of drawing plans I painted landscapes on Sundays in oils. I haven't held a paintbrush since. I know too much about painting to attempt it."

"But now that you have more free time and are not troubled by rheumatism . . .?"

"Perhaps I'll think about it," Ivan Abramovich says with a smile. "You'll need to give me the address of someone who sells oil paints."

It is no easy matter to sketch a portrait of Ivan Morozov. As Abram Efros, an art critic who knew him well, put it, he seemed to walk 'surrounded by silence', unlike his fellow art collector Sergei Shchukin who walked 'surrounded by commotion'. Very few memoirists have reminisced about our hero: he was just too private and shunned the limelight. It is understandable that he wanted to screen his private life from prying eyes, concealing the fact of his marriage to a cabaret singer and pretending his illegitimate daughter was his niece. The desire to obscure the truth of relations somewhat ran in the family. The Morozovs' spectacular ascent to the summit of Moscow's mercantile Olympus as founders of what would become the magnificent Tver Textile Mill Company had, by the end of the nineteenth century, become so encrusted with myth and legend that it is now all but impossible to separate truth from fiction. The family lived in fashionable mansions, and spent vast amounts of money on all manner of caprices. The most famous representative of the family name today, Savva Timofeevich Morozov – Savva the Second, in our tale – graduated in natural science from Moscow University, went to study chemistry at Cambridge University, donated money to the Bolsheviks, and later became famous for granting 300,000 rubles to Konstantin Stanislavsky to fund the Moscow Art Theatre. But our story concerns his nephew, Ivan, the second of the three sons of Abram Abramovich Morozov and his wife Varvara Khludova. Ivan's elder brother, Mikhail, was much talked about for his palatial residence on Smolensk Boulevard, his very beautiful wife, and his marked..."
eccentricity. The younger brother, Arseny, had a passion for hunting and owned a Moorish-style castle on Vozdvizhena Street, at the sight of which his mother exclaimed crossly that now it would be clear to anyone who was anyone in Moscow that her son was an idiot. Many were inclined, however, to see the roots of the Morozov brothers' quirkiness in the personality of Varvara herself: the Khludov traits in her sons seem clearly to have prevailed over those of their father and the Morozovs. The members of this powerful family had no inclination to dwell on the ancestral origins of their clan, and firmly refused to talk about their founding father. For the last thing they wanted was to be reminded that the patriarch of the glorious Morozov dynasty, their great-grandfather Vasily Morozov, had been sold like a domestic animal by his owner. Mr Vsevolozhsky, landowner, had sold to Mr Ryumin, collegiate counsellor and gentleman, land, together with the structures thereon, and also a few dozen serfs, including Vasily Morozov and his entire family. Vasily was a peasant from the village of Zuyevo, a fisherman; but his son, Savva the First, rather than fish alongside him, went into business. At that time, sons of peasants faced twenty-five years of compulsory army service – not a prospect twenty-year-old Savva particularly relished. The owner of the factory where Savva worked as a weaver, Fedor Kononov, lent his industrious worker 1,500 rubles to buy himself out; fortunately, Peter the Great's decree allowing payment in lieu of recruitment extended to all classes, including serfs. Many a serf who had thus escaped the soldier's lot would just have drunk himself silly in celebration and there his story would have ended. Savva Morozov, however, was made of sterner stuff. His wife Ulyana, a peasant from a neighbouring village, brought her husband a modest dowry but, more importantly, her family's secrets for dyeing fabrics. These enabled Savva to pay back his debt in a matter of two years. Why, then, should he not start a business himself? Plucking up courage, Savva began producing silk lace, with which peasant women were delighted to trim their traditional sarafan dresses. In 1798 the first child of Savva and Ulyana, Elisei, was born, and, by the time their fourth son appeared, Morozov's workshop, employing twenty workers, was annually producing silk goods worth over 1,000 rubles. The 1812 war against Napoleon contributed not only to the beautification of a rebuilt Moscow but also to the prosperity of the Morozov business. Thanks to the inhabitants of the old capital and their desire to look elegant and fashionable, Savva Morozov was able to earn sufficient money to liberate his entire family, including his aged father. He paid the landowner the colossal sum of 17,000 rubles in cash. The Morozovs were Old Believers, and lived according to Holy Scripture. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it' (Psalm 126). The Lord did, no doubt, lend a hand, but shortages after the war with Napoleon also helped. There was a great demand for fabrics, and especially for linen and the cotton Savva Morozov was still producing at his first factory. The legend that the nimble merchant left his village at dawn and was in Moscow by dusk is just that: the most fleet-footed walker would have taken at least two days to put those 60 miles behind him, assuming he carried no baggage. What we do know is that, year by year, the enterprising Savva grew richer, not only arousing envy, but also gaining the respect of his entire neighbourhood, which was a rare achievement. His fellow villagers entrusted to him...
safekeeping the rubles they had earned by the sweat of their brow, knowing he would look after the money well. Savva did not, however, merely store the peasants’ money, but invested it, without taking a single kopeck for himself in commission. If the Morozovs had been ennobled, their family motto could justly have been ‘Honesty and Diligence’. It is said that Timofei, the youngest son of Savva the First, born in 1823 and a merchant of the First Guild, travelled the expanses of Russia quite without cash, concluding his deals on the basis of the Morozov word of honour.1

Representatives of four branches of the Morozov clan. From left to right, Abram Abramovich, Timofei Savvich, Ivan Zakharovich (?) and Vikul Eliseevich, mid-1860s.

By the start of Alexander II’s reign in 1855, Savva the First was considered the largest producer of high-quality cotton yarn in Russia. His sons too were enjoying success in the textile industry. When the elder sons, Elisei and Zakhar,14 split off and began running their own business, the youngest, Timofei, became the main force driving his father’s enterprise. The middle brothers, Ivan and Abram, were also involved in the company, but showed no great aptitude for commerce and remained in secondary positions.

The Morozovs had by then been living in Moscow for some time, and had settled in the Rogozha quarter, today the district of Nikoloyamsky Street. As early as 1825 the head of the family had established a manual weaving mill, modest for the times, with only 200 looms. Savva went on to acquire the adjacent two-storey stone-built house and garden, and over the next thirty years tirelessly increased his Moscow property holdings: today’s Shelaputin Lane should in all justice be renamed Morozov Lane. At the same time Savva was buying up plots of land in Vladimir province, where the main Morozov enterprise, the Nikolskoye factory, would shortly be built. On his father’s instructions, Timofei, Savva’s right-hand man, began buying land for a new factory in the neighbouring Tver province.

The statute of the Tver factory was to be approved in 1859, when Timofei’s brother, Abram, was no longer alive. Abram’s sons, twenty-year-old Abram Abramovich and his younger brother, David Abramovich, became full directors of the Savva Morozov and Sons Trading Company, established in 1860. Timofei signed the minutes of the first general meeting of shareholders on behalf of his father because Savva, the founder of a vast textile empire, could neither read nor write.

The second generation of the Morozov clan was also less than brilliantly educated, but all the brothers studied the Bible. This was particularly true of Abram. Like most of the Morozovs, he and his wife, Dariya, belonged to the Old Believer sect, and gave their sons Old Testament names. Son David inherited his mother’s piety. He married the daughter of an extremely wealthy Moscow furrier, and built an almshouse and refuge bearing his own name on the site of the factory his grandfather had founded in Shelaputin Lane. When his father, Abram Savvich, died, David’s mother, Dariya, became a nun and ended her days on earth in a nunnery under the name of Deborah.2


David’s brother, Abram Abramovich, was less devout and not particularly enterprising, but did become chairman of the board of directors of the Tver Textile Mill Company.15 The brothers came into full possession of the Tver factory only in 1871, when their grandfather’s legacy was finally shared out. Their Uncle Timofei ceased
involving himself in managing it and concentrated solely on the Nikolskoye factory. That same year Abram and his young wife Varvara had a second son, Ivan.

CHAPTER IV

Varvara Khludova

The life of Varvara Morozova, née Khludova, has all the elements of the plot of a play: a setting of the scene, a complication, peripeteias, a climax, a dénouement and an epilogue. A young girl from Moscow's merchant district of Zamoskvorechiye, kind-hearted by nature albeit independent and emphatic, has dreams of dedicating herself to a noble cause. ‘I often have a sense that I am not altogether an ordinary being and that I absolutely must distinguish myself in some extraordinary manner, by saving my fatherland, for example, and so on,’ she notes in her diary.

One of Moscow’s foremost beauties, young Varvara goes to balls and flirts with would-be suitors, but to her diary she confides: ‘How ridiculous it is to pay attention to every young man, to show off to him, to try to please and even to fall in love with him. That is what every woman does nowadays, but it is not only out of pride and vanity that I want to be different: there is something in my head. Would it not be better to live my life the way I dream of living it now? That is, to remain a maid, because marriage seems simply dire. I know I could never be happy in marriage, unable to fulfil my desires independently, to do good . . . By willpower and using my intelligence I can realize my plans . . . I would like to pay no attention to men, and yet it is so tempting to look at them and to be liked, first by one, then by another.’

‘If I were in good hands I could become a good human being . . . I want to live decently, if not really well . . . to help the poor to the best of my ability, not to squander money.’ Such is the aspiration of Varvara Khludova, wealthy debutante. She wants to do something useful with her life. ‘This is how I would like to spend it: firstly, never to get married, to give music and French lessons to children, and help the poor with those earnings because I will have no need of them.’

Varvara Khludova had no one to share her feelings with and could confide them only to her diary. ‘I don’t even have a friend . . . I’m too hot-headed and, over the years, I fear that will probably become more pronounced,’ Varvara writes, as if foreseeing her future.

Her mother died, and from the age of six the little girl was brought up by a nanny and a governess. For all that, she considered she had had a happy childhood. Her father adored her and her older brothers thought she was wonderful. Young Varvara might have gone on to live her life much like other girls, but when she was sixteen or so the merchant’s daughter noticed injustice being done all around her and became pensive. She began reading books, often without her father’s knowledge. By chance she came upon Sovremennik, a journal popular in those years, and reading it she ‘developed a hatred of evil and attraction to what was honourable, noble and exalted’. It awakened ‘a desire to endure suffering and ordeals’. Instead of reading novels for entertainment, the merchant’s daughter secretly studied critical articles of ‘the incomparable Belinsky’.

‘We really must progress, at least a little. You cannot just read Belinsky and leave it at that. I have fallen in love with him, although I have only ever seen his portrait, in which he is not at all handsome. That is how important his intelligence is!’ Her first disillusionment was with her beloved father, for whom his loving daughter’s admiration gradually ebbed away: ‘I consider Papa almost perfect, and if he were just a little more educated I would consider him perfect.’ A much more severe assessment appears a
few months later: ‘I too am becoming a hero. I advance my little self to rebuff what is bad, which for me is personified by my father. These domestic squabbles drive me to distraction. They are just frightful.’6 This overweening tyrant, her father Alexei Khludov, was the son of a humble weaver and co-owner of A. and G., Sons of Ivan Khludov. Varvara’s grandfather, Ivan Khludov, wove belts and silk sashes for coachmen on a handloom in his village in Ryazan province before, just like Savva Morozov the First, becoming a merchant and moving in 1817 to Moscow. In 1845 his sons, merchants of the First Guild, built a factory in the city of Egorievsk on the banks of the River Guslyanka, and there 300 workers on 15,000 spindles produced 2,200 pounds of yarn per day. Alexei Khludov travelled to Liverpool, and the brothers brought back with them machinery and specialists in the trade. He firmly told his wife, who was urging him not to get involved in such a risky enterprise, ‘Our decision is irrevocable: we shall either be rich men or we will go a-begging.’7 The Khludov brothers were soon rich men. In the early 1870s the Egorievsk Cotton-Spinning Mill, one of the first in Russia, was producing some 36,000 pounds of yarn every day. Alexei Khludov built his Yartsevo factory near Smolensk, equipping it with the latest machinery. He married young, at the age of eighteen, and just eighteen years later became a widower. He was left with seven children in a huge, three-storey house in Khomutovka Close, later renamed Khludov Close. The ideal successor for the family business was Alexei’s eldest and favourite son, Ivan. He studied at the College of Saints Peter and Paul in St Petersburg, where he learned German, and went to study for a time in Bremen. After graduating, Ivan travelled to England, and then set off to study cotton production across the Atlantic. The timing of his trip was unfortunate, because the American Civil War had broken out. Ivan returned from North America unscathed, but without managing to get a deal with the Americans to supply cotton directly, cutting out intermediaries. At this time the Khludovs became interested in Central Asia, and Ivan, eager to stay ahead of the competition, travelled to Turkestan, only to die of a fever in Samarkand. Having lost his prime candidate, Alexei Khludov was in a quandary over who should inherit the millions he had built up. He decided to bet on Mikhail. This was not an easy decision to make: this son was a daredevil and hell-raiser. The adjutant of General Skobelev, he participated in the capture of Tashkent and Kokand. Mikhail Khludov liked to throw his money about and led a fairly eccentric life. Another son, Vasily, was the exact opposite. He graduated from the natural science and medical faculties of Moscow University, attended a course of lectures in chemistry at Heidelberg University, spoke three foreign languages, travelled the length and breadth of Europe, played the piano admirably, and improvised on an organ ordered from Germany (which was subsequently donated to the Moscow Conservatory). Vasily had broad interests, and studied metallurgy, experimental medicine, biology, endocrinology, horticulture, theoretical mechanics and astronomy. And yet, despite his dazzling education, he was hopeless at business. This enraged his successful father, who considered him wholly unsuitable to inherit his business empire. Eventually, however, no longer able to condone the drunken revelry and general misconduct of Mikhail, Alexei Khludov changed his will in favour of the hapless Vasily, cursed Mikhail and threw him out of the family home. At this point Mikhail
Khludov's sister decided to intercede for her favourite brother, promising her father that, if he forgave Mikhail, she would marry Abram Morozov, who had long been vainly seeking her hand in marriage. It is far from clear that Mikhail was deserving of such a sacrifice. He forged his father's signature on promissory notes, but that was the least of it: he killed his beautiful wife, admittedly by accident, when she drank the poisoned coffee he had readied for his brother Vasily. The blustering Khlynov in Ostrovsky's The Ardent Heart is Khludov down to a tee, and he was indeed the prototype for the wheeler-dealer in the play: 'Khlynov has a lot of money and he finds life boring, because he hasn't a clue how to spend it enjoyably... He lives in a country dacha now, out in his woods, and has just about everything anyone could have! He's put numerous arbours and fountains in the park and spends his time sitting on the balcony. He's drinking champagne from first thing in the morning. There are throngs of people around the house, all of them just gawping at him. And when he gives orders for them to be allowed into the park to see all the weird things he's been up to there, he has the paths watered with champagne. It's not life on this earth, it's paradise!'

One of Mikhail's relatives gave this description of him: 'Mikhail Khludov was a pathological individual. No matter where he lived, he left behind legends of derring-do on an epic scale. In spite of his insane drinking sprees and the outrages he perpetrated, something gleamed through that people found attractive... His limitless courage and immoderate physical strength, which he employed solely for his own gratification, astounded everyone.'

Mikhail was quite likely to appear in front of his guests 'blacked up', or as a semi-naked Roman gladiator. He did possess a tiger. At night he would tether the animal to an iron ring in an arbour because, when the worse for wear, he liked to sleep in the open. The Khludovs had an extensive garden, so they did not even have to retreat to the countryside in the summer.

In the hope that her Papa, despite his manifest arbitrariness, might nevertheless give in to her request, Varvara Khludova became engaged to Abram Morozov. 'I have resolved to sacrifice myself, but will I have sufficient strength of will and stamina to endure the dreadful fate awaiting me?... Farewell to my youth, farewell to my happiness! Soon I shall cease to live for myself and will embark on a life for others... Papa wants this marriage. Well, I consent. Shall I be happy with A.A.? Hardly, I think! I shall try, nevertheless, to be a good and honest woman,' she writes in her diary.

Very soon, however, she began to repent her high-mindedness. 'When everyone had departed, I became quite despondent. I saw clearly that the sacrifice was more than I could bear, and indeed I doubt if anyone is possessed of the strength it would call for... There have been times when I have been tempted to fling myself out of the window.' Varvara hurriedly wrote to her fiancé to say she had changed her mind. Somebody witnessed Abram Morozov reading the letter twice over and turning as white as a sheet: he truly was head over heels in love with her. Varvara, for her part, had few illusions about Abram Morozov: compared with her, he was a complete dunce. She did her best to be charitable. 'A.A. said this time that he sympathizes with the poor, and that he has read something. That cheered me.' She herself was reading a lot, playing the piano, studying French, going to the theatre, and visiting exhibitions. The only redeeming feature she could find in Morozov was his wealth. 'Does it really make any difference...
whom you marry? This one is at least rich, so I won't have to plead to get some sad little house for myself, or tremble for the fate of my children,' she reflects. Behind all her agonizing and sacrifices, her consents and refusals, loomed the figure of her ruthless Papa who was eager, in the furtherance of his business interests, to intermarry at all costs with the Morozovs. Money to money. One of his relatives said bluntly, 'They want to get a good price for the girl.' After her father, Varvara's uncle started trying to talk her round, but she told him she would prefer to become a nun than to marry. 'I have found this saga morally beneficial . . . I have seen that I am a better fighter than I had supposed. I have seen clearly that I behave with greater courage and nobility than others,' she notes proudly in her diary. Her displeased father, meanwhile, sought to humiliate his recalcitrant daughter in every way possible, forbidding her to order dresses, or indeed to buy anything at all without his permission. 'He has sometimes been on the verge of striking me, and I have decided that if he continues in this way, or if he does hit me, then I shall leave his house and earn a living by my own efforts,' Varvara wrote, noting that she had cried at dinner, then gone up to her room and read a book on public education by Laboulaye. She wondered how she could earn a livelihood and was attracted by the notion of becoming an actress, as she seemed to be unqualified for anything else. After several months of being locked up, however, Varvara was assailed by doubts and wondered if she was making a mistake. 'Sitting locked in here with a father whose primary ambition is to sell his daughter as profitably as he possibly can, while spending as little time as possible at home – or to live . . . with a brother who, they say, captures cities and then cries about how servile and shameful everything is, while not lifting a finger to bring about change?' Perhaps marriage would be a better option than living such a life. At the theatre she encountered Abram Morozov who was a shadow of his former self and who went pale at the mere sight of her. 'From the looks he kept giving me I could tell that he has not yet completely ceased to care about me.' At a dance party Morozov was constantly gazing passionately at the beautiful Mademoiselle Khludova. 'While I was dancing, A.A. was following me about like a shadow and kept watching and looking at me.' Three days later, at a ball at her uncle's, the same thing occurred. 'A.A. kept ogling me. He is repulsive . . . he stood in the doorway the whole time devouring me with his eyes. I made a point of flirting . . .' Varvara Khludova chose the lesser of two evils. 'I even think it would be better to be married to A.A. than to continue leading such an abominable existence . . . I think I am going to do it!! Well, so be it!' She did decide to do it but then, three days before the wedding, locked herself in her room and cried and cried. She agonized up to the last minute. On the way to the ceremony she flung her engagement ring from the carriage, overlooking the detail that a wedding ring awaited her at the church. What conditions did twenty-one-year-old Varvara Khludova impose on her husband-to-be? We know that because, in her diary, she ponders the role of woman. 'I shall give him my consent, but warn him about my views, about which I care a great deal . . . No, a woman can do a lot of things besides being married. She can support the poor not only materially, but also morally. She is better able to give them guidance, help them to see reason. Men are too crass for that. A woman is much gentler and more patient!!!! But will I be able to do all that while fulfilling
the duties of a woman? It is hard to know that. At present I am not yet living. My present life is no more than a prelude to real life.'

In 1869 Varvara Khludova married Abram Morozov. Next year she gave birth to a son, who was named in honour of the brother who had been cursed by her father and whose nephew, the newborn Mikhail Abramovich Morozov, was, incidentally, to resemble him remarkably in character. In 1871 a second son, Ivan, was born, and Abram Abramovich became chairman of the board of directors of the Tver Textile Mill Company. In 1874 Arseny was born, and her husband gave Varvara shares in the company. For the moment she had only five shares, but within ten years she had 594. In 1881 Varvara's husband was taken seriously ill and, at his wife's request, was certified as having dementia and diagnosed as 'suffering from progressive paralysis'. Abram had an agonizing death. His brain was affected (as a result of syphilis) and he completely lost his mental faculties. One person claims that he had been ill for five years, another says the illness lasted for two. He had a difficult personality, possibly owing to the onset of disease, but he idolized his wife and wrote her touching, tender letters, albeit with atrocious spelling. Mindful of how important her charitable work was to his wife, he left her a full half million rubles in his will. Varvara never was able to truly love her husband, but stayed with him to his last breath because she regarded marriage as a sacrament. 'My husband has a fixed abode in Moscow and that is where he presently resides and will reside, surrounded by his family, with me and in my care,' Varvara Morozova wrote in a submission to the Moscow Family Court. Abram Morozov died on 25 February 1882, in the forty-third year of his life.'Matrimony', the first act of her drama, ends on a tragic note. The second, main act begins: the real life of Varvara Morozova, owner of the factories of the Tver Textile Mill Company, where thousands of workers weave muslin, chintz and velvet. Abram Morozov had been treated by Sergei Korsakov, a doctor at the Preobrazhensky Psychiatric Hospital who was later to found the Moscow school of psychiatry. Korsakov was opposed to the contemporary harsh regime of psychiatric hospitals and supported non-compulsion in the treatment of the mentally ill. He advocated that people unfortunate enough to suffer from mental illness should be kept under supervision at home. Varvara Morozova wholly concurred with his approach and, upon the death of her husband, notified the rector of Moscow University that she proposed to build a clinic for the mentally ill. She allocated 150,000 rubles for the purpose from the half million bequeathed by her husband, 'for the welfare of the poor, the arrangement and maintenance of schools, almshouses and care institutions and for donations to the church'. The A.A. Morozov Psychiatric Clinic for the Mentally Ill opened in 1887. Needless to say, when the Bolsheviks came to power it was renamed, like everything that had been built with the Morozovs' money, and became the Korsakov Clinic.3 Abram Abramovich Morozov, 1870. Half a million rubles for charitable purposes proved not to go all that far: there was the 150,000 rubles for the psychiatric clinic on Malaya Pirogov Street, the same amount for a vocational school for the poor, and the rest went on minor works. Ten thousand was donated to the Rogozha Primary School for Girls, 50,000 to the Ivan Turgenev Reading Room, to Zemstvo and village schools, an asylum for those suffering from nervous ailments and, finally, the Morozov Cancer Institute on
Devichie Field, charitable institutions in Tver, and a tuberculosis sanatorium for workers. ‘She was a good woman. She helped people suffering hardship and tried to do good. She was the richest person in the parish and everyone turned to her for help, either directly or through the priest. She would give money, or cloth for a dowry for poor girls. Or a cow if there was an outbreak of cattle disease,’ a peasant from the village next to her estate at Popovka recalled.

People looked forward to the mistress’s visits, hastening to open the village gate for the landowner’s horse and trap in return for a coin or a sweet from the hands of her ladyship. Varvara Morozova was every inch the liberal philanthropist and, in accordance with long-standing merchant tradition, donated solely to the healing or instruction of the common people. She belonged to every conceivable society, and was a member of various institutions, from the Association of Governesses and Schoolmistresses to the Society for the Relief of Minors Released from Places of Detention. Elementary education classes and vocational schools, hospitals, charitable maternity units and almshouses were named after her. ‘Madame V. A. Morozova’ was incised on the pediment of one of the buildings of the Shanyavsky People’s University, and she gave 50,000 rubles to the Institute of Chemistry. She also donated 2,000 rubles to the three-storey building of the Prechistenka Workers’ Courses in Kursovoy Lane, which opened in 1897. The philanthropic millionairess can hardly have been aware that the college her funds were paying for (and which in 1919 was renamed the Nikolai Bukharin Workers’ Faculty) was an illegal Bolshevik headquarters. The Craft Museum was awarded 3,000 rubles. A substantial sum was donated to assist the emigration to Canada of the Dukhobor Christians. Leo Tolstoy was a sympathizer and Varvara visited him in his house in Moscow. People seeking financial assistance for purely cultural initiatives remote from the needs of the common people were invariably disappointed. For example, ‘with a cold, amiable smile’ she refused Stanislavsky point blank when he came seeking money for his new theatre. The founders of the Moscow Art Theatre held that against her for many years. The situation was saved by her late husband’s uncle, Savva Morozov the Second. Varvara Morozova did, however, offer the City Duma a public reading room in Moscow in honour of Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev was not only the author of fashionable novels, but also drew up the programme of the Society for the Advancement of Literacy and Education. Varvara initially financed the building of the first free library and reading room in Russia, and then paid for it to be stocked with books. It opened its doors on Myasnitsky Gate Square in 1885. Varvara realized the dreams of her youth in full measure. The final chord was her will. Factory-owning Madame Morozova, who was represented in Soviet history books as the epitome of a money-grubbing capitalist, gave instructions that all her assets were to be converted into securities, deposited in the bank, and that the income from the operation was to be distributed among the workers of her factory. The new owners of the Tver Textile Mill Company were unable to benefit from her act of unprecedented generosity. Varvara Morozova died just one month before the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, and their legacy was turned into the nationalized Proletarian Labour factory. Back at the time of her husband’s death, however, the wealthy young widow had not been focused solely on the
advancement of public education. His demise did not strip her of her feminine charm or her desire to be thought attractive. She wanted to be a socialite, to receive guests, to travel: in a word, to enjoy all the blessings that came with being an unattached, thirty-five-year-old millionairess. Varvara's first priority was to shake off the memories of twelve years of forced marriage, spent in a merchant quarter on the wrong side of the River Yauza. For all its elegant six-pillar portico, Varvara felt no regrets about leaving the villa she had inherited from her husband. She would have wanted to leave if only because of the name of the nearby street: Durnoy [Evil] Lane. Before that it had even been known as Devil's Lane. She moved well away from Taganka, to the other side of the Moscow River. A widow with three children, she bought a property previously owned by the princely Dolgoruky family on Vozdvizhenka Street, a stone's throw from the Kremlin, and began building. The fashionable architect Roman Klein, famed for his design of the Museum of Fine Arts on Volkhonka Street, built her a classical mansion with pillars, gryphons, stylized lilies and a fountain in the garden. It was a capacious house, with twenty-three rooms with marble fireplaces and a further nineteen rooms in the socle storey, which the commonality might have called a basement. The proprietress clearly had large-scale receptions in mind: an enormous hall, with frescoes in the style of Pompeii, could accommodate 300 guests with ease.

Every woman, not only the heroines of American soap operas, has an image of the man of her dreams. The embodiment of Varvara Morozova's ideal was Professor Vasily Sobolevsky. Varvara was the widow of a merchant, Sobolevsky was a highly educated nobleman. He fell in love with her just as Abram Morozov had all those years before and, just like Morozov, was to adore her until the day he died. Except that now all the money was hers. Everything she dreamed of in her youth had come true. 'A majestic, beautiful wife, a sharp-witted factory owner and yet, at the same time, the elegant, educated hostess of one of the most intellectual salons in Moscow; in the morning she is clicking away at the office abacus keeping the accounts in order, yet in the evening those same fingers are eliciting the magnificent melodies of Chopin, she is discussing the theory of Karl Marx, and reading her fill of the most up-to-the-minute philosophers and journalists.' Such is one characterization of Varvara Morozova, to whose cultural oasis on Vozdvizhenka Street the elite of the literary and art worlds flocked. It attracted also the academic elite, and those whom Petr Boborykin felicitously dubbed 'the intelligentsia'. She hosted Ilya Mechnikov, who in 1908 was to win the Nobel Prize for Medicine; the writers Vladimir Korolenko, and Gleb Uspensky after whom she named her son by Sobolevsky. Varvara effortlessly met up in Nice with Chekhov, and wrote to Tolstoy. Sobolevsky was on friendly terms with the writers Dmitry Mamin-Sibiryak and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and was a celebrity in his own right as the editor of the 'professorial' Russkie vedomosti [the Russian Gazette], a widely read newspaper to which leading academics gladly contributed. Vasily Mikhailovich Sobolevsky, a prominent Russian economist and journalist, and Varvara's civil husband, 1890s. The liberal spirit of Russkie vedomosti suited Varvara down to the ground, and she lived her life in accordance with its noble aspirations. Indeed, she proved more radical in her liberalism than many of those who assembled at her gatherings. She had so
much in common with Sobolevsky, and did her utmost to fit into his unfamiliar circle. Her wealth enabled her to propagate all that was good, rational and eternal, while he advocated a renewal of Russia, believing that widespread dissemination of education and culture would save the country. ‘Education for all!’ – such was their joint motto. There were persistent rumours that Varvara was the newspaper’s financial mainstay, so that Sobolevsky was not only the editor-in-chief but also co-owner of the printing press. Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko in his play The Price of Life was clearly alluding to the couple: his protagonist, the writer Solonchakov, is presented with a publishing house by Klavdiya Rybnitsyna in return for the bonds of marriage. This was all a complete fantasy. Russkie vedomosti was a joint stock company and Varvara paid only for the sustenance of its family-based editorial office. V .N. Aseev has meticulously researched the accounts in the Morozov archive and discovered that the ‘marriage partners’ hardly lived in the same house at all. 21 Fifteen years after they met, Sobolevsky, by then the father of Varvara Morozova’s son and daughter, was still residing in the nearby publishing house. Then, for a full ten years, he rented an apartment, and it was only in the four years before his death that he moved to a house Varvara bought in his name adjacent to her own mansion. Their children, Gleb and Natalya, bore the Morozov surname, but their patronymic was Vasilevich/Vasilevna, indicating that Sobolevsky was their father. They were considered illegitimate. Gleb was legally adopted by his father only many years later. In the next generation Varvara’s middle son, Ivan, was to adopt and give his surname to a daughter born out of wedlock. This situation created, to say the least, many difficulties. To be known as illegitimate was unimaginably humiliating in those times, and few people with such a blemish in their birth certificate would have been able to free themselves of a shaming inferiority complex.
What people say about this book

Christian Schlect, “From Paris to Moscow. If you have a shelve devoted to great art collectors, this is a book to buy and enjoy. In many ways this is a companion volume to the author’s previous work centered on another highly significant Russian art collector, Sergi Shchukin. In the absence of a diary or much other direct information from Morozov himself, the author sometimes labors to explain all the buying decisions and other motivations driving her subject. I found the material relating to how the new Soviet government, in 1917 and afterwards, handled this priceless art collection to be most interesting and sad.”

Wendy S, “Important for art lovers. This is an interesting and well researched history of the energetic Morozov family. Wealthy industrialists who are only a couple of generations free of serfdom, the Morozov brothers collected an amazing amount of French and Russian art spanning many genres.”

Ashley Fallon, “Good for those with an interest in art history. This is a generally quite interesting account of one of the more famous Russian art collections and the family that founded it. The author is a Russian art historian, and while the translation is good, the text in many ways remains clearly intended for a Russian audience. I don’t mind this, but some readers may find it occasionally odd in style or content. Although the book is at some level presented as a biography specifically of Ivan Abramovich Morozov, it’s in many ways an overview of art collecting in late 19th/early 20th century Russia (mainly Moscow) with an emphasis on the Morozov family as a whole. As an accompaniment to an exhibition, it would undoubtedly be fascinating. Unfortunately, without most of the paintings being featured in the book’s illustrations, I don’t recognize many of them by title alone. A significant portion of the book is a fairly detailed account of what was purchased and when, presumably reconstructed from the apparently very meticulous record of receipts left by Ivan Morozov, and I’m not really enough of an art aficionado to fully appreciate this. Nevertheless, it’s a really interesting look at the changing fortunes of a family of Old Believer peasants turned giants of the textile industry, and how they came to make a permanent mark on the Russian art world through their activity as collectors. While the collection was nationalized after the Revolution and later dispersed, the book very strongly demonstrates its overall importance. The notes and bibliography are extensive, and I think it would be of interest to many people who enjoy art history regardless of whether they are primarily interested in Russian or Western European artists. I do wish the cover design hadn’t gone for pseudo-Cyrillic, though. I received a digital copy of this book for free via NetGalley.”