Russian painters of the second half of the nineteenth century produced a coherent set of works, unified by both theme and manner of expression. These artists, while embracing the social and political views of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, and the artistic program of Stasov, turned their art into an instrument of social criticism expressing the progressive values of the radical Russian intelligentsia of the period. The most active and prominent group among these painters – a group that due to the historical circumstance had exerted a lasting influence on Russian and Soviet art – were known as the Itinerants or Wanderers (Peredvizhniki). The traditional approach to the works of these and like-minded artists is to interpret their paintings as realistic works reflecting the life and tribulations of the lower classes on the one hand, and the corruption of the authorities, on the other.

No one doubts that these critical realists – as they are sometimes called – have presented a vivid panorama of Russia’s social, economic, and political ills. Yet, I would like to focus on a particular undercurrent of their criticism, and one which is rarely discussed. These artists – I would argue – have participated in and proved to be important players in the generational conflict that embraced Russia in the 1860s in the aftermath of Crimean War and the Great Reforms. It is this – not always obvious – generational dimension in the critical art of these painters that I want to explore in this essay. Itinerants did not simply start as rebellious youths, breaking away from their teachers and superiors in the Academy of Arts; their oeuvre itself reflects the dominant generational conflicts of the period.

In other words, the artistic expression of these painters was part of a broader intellectual and literary milieu with its highly pronounced generational tensions. Before turning to the manifestation of these tensions in the
specific artists and works of art, I would like to discuss briefly the very context of generational strife that gave rise to these painters.

Indeed, the generational conflict that embraced Russia as the result of Crimean fiasco and found its classic expression in Turgenev's novel, \textit{Fathers and Sons}, manifested itself in all spheres of social and cultural life. The spectacular failures of Nicholas I's regime (highlighted by the defeat in the Crimean War), resulted in the decisive and pronounced clash of generations that occurred in the 1860s. The blunders of the government became obvious to all, exposed as they were by Russia's military defeat. These failures reinforced the public's suspicion of the government and its competence. One of the radical thinkers of that period, Nikolai Shelgunov observed: "People of the sixties were direct descendants of the intellectual atmosphere that was ushered in by the fall of Sevastopol." The state and everything connected with it lost its authority for a great number of people, especially the younger ones. As the result of this de-legitimization the representatives of the older generation began to be summarily blamed for their involvement with the old and discredited regime. The disillusioned public, young students in particular, became easily convinced that all the members of the ruling elite were corrupt and selfish; consequently, such diverse people of the older generation as, say, Herzen and conservative ministers alike became the subject of criticism, dismissal or ridicule.

Once the young generation began to question the old, their questioning, and ultimately rejection of their fathers' heritage, was extended to all types of cultural traditions and all types of authority, which were frequently associated with fathers: priest-the-father, landowner-the-father, general-the-father, tsar-the-father or God-the-Father. In Turgenev's novel we encounter the following emblematic exchange between the representatives of different generations, an exchange that immediately reveals political, cultural, and religious ramifications of the generational conflict:

"I've told you already, uncle, that we don't recognize any authorities," put in Arkady.

"We act by virtue of what we recognize as useful," - observed Bazarov.

"At the present time, negation is the most useful of all - and we deny -
- Everything?
- Everything!
- What, not only art and poetry . . . but even . . . horrible to say . . .
- Everything," - repeated Bazarov with indescribable composure.