

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Also translated by Michael R. Katz:
Alexander Herzen, *Who Is to Blame?*
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Nikolai Chernyshevsky

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**FOR
REBECCA AND KATY**

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M. R. K. and W. G. W.

Translator's Note

Chernyshevsky's novel was first published in the journal *Sovremennik* [*Contemporary*] in 1863 (nos. 3–5). This text was reprinted in an authoritative edition by T. I. Ornatskaya and S. A. Reiser in the Literary Monument Series published by Nauka (Leningrad, 1975). The Soviet editors collated the text with Chernyshevsky's manuscripts housed in the Central Government Archive of Literature and Art in Moscow; they corrected all obvious misprints and errors. It is this text we have chosen to translate.

The system of transliteration is that used in the Oxford Slavonic Papers with the following exceptions: hard and soft signs have been omitted and conventional spellings of names have been retained.

M. R. K.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

INTRODUCTION

Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* and the Russian Intelligentsia

Michael R. Katz and William G. Wagner

If one were to ask for the title of the nineteenth-century Russian novel that has had the greatest influence on Russian society, it is likely that a non-Russian would choose among the books of the mighty triumvirate—Turgenev, Tolstoy, or Dostoyevsky. *Fathers and Sons? War and Peace? Crime and Punishment?* These would certainly be among the suggested answers; but . . . the novel that can claim this honor with most justice is N. G. Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, a book few Western readers have ever heard of and fewer still have read. Yet no work in modern literature, with the possible exception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, can compete with *What Is to Be Done?* in its effect on human lives and its power to make history. For Chernyshevsky's novel, far more than Marx's *Capital*, supplied the emotional dynamic that eventually went to make the Russian Revolution.¹

From the moment of its first appearance in 1863, *What Is to Be Done?* provoked bitter controversy. Its author, Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky (1828–1889), had already achieved considerable influence and notoriety as one of Russia's earliest advocates of materialist philosophy, socialist political economy, and women's liberation. The novel's extraordinary impact, however, derived chiefly from the solutions it proposed for Russia's social ills and for the problems that agitated the intelligentsia from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Condemning the patriarchal and authoritarian nature of family, social, and political relations as the principal source of Russia's social inequality, oppressiveness, and economic backwardness, Chernyshevsky rejected moderate reform as an ineffectual and morally bankrupt means of overcoming these problems. In the more radical program he offered, intellectuals would play an active role in social development

1. J. Frank, "N. G. Chernyshevsky: A Russian Utopia," *Southern Review*, 3 (1967), 68.

and moral regeneration. Blending traditional Russian values and institutions with ideas derived from Western European social and political critics, he argued forcefully that individual self-realization, sexual liberation, and an economy that combined prosperity with social justice could be achieved only through the reorganization of the family, society, and means of production in accordance with cooperative principles. Armed with scientific education, “new people”—socially aware and morally strong individuals—would lead this process of reorganization, particularly by enlightening others and providing models for emulation.

State, Society, and the Intelligentsia

This call to action appealed particularly to the younger generation of the intelligentsia, a small but articulate group of critics of the existing regime who strongly influenced both late imperial Russian and early Soviet history. Attempts to define the intelligentsia have varied widely; some have emphasized the sociological process of education, others the formulation of ideological beliefs antipathetic to autocracy, and still others the psychological experience of alienation as the critical element in the formation of this group.² While none of these approaches by itself can explain such a complex phenomenon, each illuminates an important aspect of the intelligentsia. For these educated—often highly educated—individuals who believed in the transformative power of knowledge and ideas saw themselves, and were perceived by their opponents, as a distinct social group dedicated to fundamental changes in both the tsarist political system and the structure of Russian society.

This sense of mission as well as of alienation from the state and the rest of society arose from several important social and cultural changes that occurred in Russia from the early nineteenth century. Chief among them was the growth of an educated elite, which by 1860 still numbered only about 20,000 in a total population of over 60 million.³ To meet the need for technically more proficient and more

2. See, for example, V. R. Leikina-Svirskaya, *Intelligentsiya v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka* (Moscow, 1971), esp. chap. 1; N. Riasanovsky, “Notes on the Emergence and Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia,” in *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, ed. T. Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 3–25; M. Malia, “What Is the Intelligentsia?” in *The Russian Intelligentsia*, ed. R. Pipes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 1–18; P. Pomper, *The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM, 1970); and M. Raeff, *The Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966).

3. Leikina-Svirskaya, *Intelligentsiya*, p. 70.

effective officials, the state steadily expanded the system of secondary and higher education, drew heavily on Western European specialized literature in revising academic curricula, and gradually increased access to higher education for people outside the nobility. But this educational process produced not only more professional and loyal, albeit often reform-minded, bureaucrats; it also expanded Russia's tiny literary elite and fostered a professional elite whose members frequently sought to work independently of the state toward an avowed goal of social progress. Encouraged by their training as well as by the state to employ their expertise to solve society's problems, members of these elites used their knowledge of Western European institutions, conditions, and ideas to decry both the injustices, oppressiveness, and backwardness of Russian society and the inability or refusal of the tsarist regime to ameliorate this situation.⁴

Many members of Russia's emerging educated elite thus found themselves alienated from the tsarist state as well as separated from most of Russian society by their education and their disdain for traditional values and relationships. The anomalous social position occupied by the intelligentsia, and indeed by the educated elite in general, intensified this dual alienation. As long as the intellectual and socio-political elites had coincided roughly in the nobility, the problem of defining the status of intellectuals within the traditional social order remained muted. But once educated Russians began to identify themselves more as intellectuals or professionals than as members of a traditional social estate, they needed to redefine their social role and status in different terms. This need grew stronger as the access of nonnobles to higher education increased after the 1850s and as many nobles left their estates for the cities after the emancipation of their serfs in 1861.⁵ In an important sense, the various ideologies, programs, utopias, and conspiratorial groups devised by the intelligentsia represented attempts to fulfill this need. By formulating programs for social development which enabled them to play an integral part in overcom-

4. On tsarist educational policies and their impact during this period see P. Alston, *Education and the State in Tsarist Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); D. Brower, *Training the Nihilists: Education and Radicalism in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); J. McClelland, *Autocrats and Academics: Education, Culture, and Society in Tsarist Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); A. Sinel, *The Classroom and the Chancellery: State Educational Reform under Count Dmītry Tolstoi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); R. Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

5. On the problem of defining social identity in late imperial Russia, see G. Freeze, "The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," *American Historical Review*, 91/1 (1986), 11–36; and D. Brower, *Estate, Class, and Community: Urbanization and Revolution in Late Tsarist Russia* (Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies no. 302 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1983).

ing Russia's poverty, oppressiveness, and backwardness, the intelligentsia provided itself with a social role that seemed to reintegrate it into society as spokesman, conscience, or guide. While drawing heavily on Western European social, political-economic, and philosophical ideas in formulating these programs, the intelligentsia assimilated them into a Russian cultural context that emphasized paternalistic control on the one hand and personal fulfillment through service to the community, especially to its weaker members, on the other.⁶ Personal interest, social idealism, intellect, and cultural experience thus combined to produce in the intelligentsia a fervid, often self-sacrificing, and potentially authoritarian commitment to social transformation in accordance with an idea frequently carried to its logical extreme.

The sociopolitical order that Chernyshevsky and his fellow *intelligenty* hoped to transform consisted in 1860 of an overwhelmingly illiterate and poor peasant agrarian society dominated socially by a thin layer of self-owning noblemen and ruled politically by a legally unlimited autocrat. Though the nobles provided the majority of state officials, they remained divided socially, ethnically, and regionally and depended on the autocracy for income, status, and the preservation of their principal economic asset, the serfs who worked their lands. The rest of society was divided into a variety of legal estates—merchants, clergy, taxed urban groups, cossacks, foreign settlers, state peasants, and so on—defined by their relative privileges and obligations, either to each other or, primarily, to the state. Reinforcing and reflecting this hierarchical sociolegal order were the unequal relations based on generation and gender which predominated within families, peasant communities, and most other social groups. Women were subordinated legally and usually factually to men at every social level and were excluded from most occupations outside of the home, the family's farm, or certain menial trades. Religious beliefs, strong especially among groups other than the culturally Westernized nobility, reinforced these hierarchical relations and patriarchal values, despite the institutional weakness of the Orthodox church. To people engaged by ideas and committed to an ideal of social progress that often included mobility for themselves, the tsarist order seemed stifling and stagnant.

6. On the theme of self-sacrificing service in the ideas and self-perception of the intelligentsia, see N. Rzhevsky, *Russian Literature and Ideology: Herzen, Dostoevsky, Leontiev, Tolsty, Fadeyev* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); B. Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); I. Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). The autobiographies of women revolutionaries in B. Engel, *Five Sisters: Women against the Tsar* (New York: Knopf, 1975), provide excellent examples of this phenomenon.

But despite this perception of stagnation, pressures for change were building throughout the early nineteenth century, not least within the government itself. The educational and ministerial systems created by the sometime avowedly reformist emperor Alexander I (r. 1801–1825) and extended by his successor, the professedly ultraconservative Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855), produced a growing coterie of officials committed to enhancing Russian power and security through measures intended to expand the economy, improve society's welfare, and increase the bureaucracy's effectiveness.⁷ With the expansion of education and the development of publishing, some of these measures contributed to the process of professionalization and the growth of a culture of literacy which spawned the intelligentsia. Despite the deadening effects of state censorship and an official ideology that stressed autocratic power, Orthodox religious values, and conservative nationalism, the activities of both statist bureaucrats and critical intellectuals extended and strengthened the belief in human reason that had gnawed steadily at traditional institutions and values since the time of Peter the Great. Other measures helped stimulate a modest yet structurally significant development of industries employing free rather than bound labor and the growth of trade and certain areas of agriculture. As a result of these developments, the populations of several cities expanded dramatically; those of St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Kharkov, Odessa, Saratov, Minsk, and some others more than doubled from the beginning of the century.⁸ Yet despite these changes, the overwhelming majority of Russians in 1860 remained illiterate and still lived in impoverished peasant villages, the backwater gentry estates described so gracefully by Turgenev, or the sleepy provincial towns satirized so brilliantly by Gogol. Over a third of the population suffered under the constraints and indignities of serfdom. But where capital resources were scarce, communications poor, regional trade fairs a principal means of distribution, and even such major cities as Kharkov rendered impassable by mud each spring, serfdom represented more a symptom than a cause of social and economic backwardness.

Serfdom nonetheless provided the most visible and vexing symbol of all Russia's ills for state reformers and critical intelligentsia alike. Its

7. On this process, see W. Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825–1861* (De Kalb, Ill.: University of Northern Illinois Press, 1982); W. Pintner and D. Roney, eds., *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); D. Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Imperial Russia, 1802–1881* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

8. B. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics, 1750–1970*, abr. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 12–14.

elimination, both hoped—too optimistically—would open the way for rapid development while establishing the basis for a more just society, or at least a more tranquil one. Thus when, spurred by Russia's humiliating defeat in the Crimean War, Alexander II (r. 1855–1881) placed emancipation of the serfs at the center of an extensive program of reform that also affected the judicial system, local government, education, state finance, press censorship, and military service, one of the regime's strongest critics, Alexander Herzen, could proclaim approvingly from exile in London, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!"⁹ Chernyshevsky himself declared enthusiastically that "in comparison with the Tsar's program . . . all the reforms and improvements carried out since the time of Peter seem of little importance. . . . The new life now beginning for us will be as much more beautiful, harmonious, brilliant, and happy than the former one as the last 150 years have been superior to the seventeenth century in Russia."¹⁰ For a moment it seemed as if the shared goal of emancipation and the process of state reform might reconcile the intelligentsia with the autocracy.

This concord proved short-lived, however, and Alexander's efforts to strengthen his empire through reform paradoxically deepened the intelligentsia's alienation from his regime. To build support for emancipation, Alexander had relaxed the severe censorship controls that had oppressed writers, editors, and intellectuals during his father's reign. A lively public debate ensued in which support for reform predominated. But when this debate seemed to the regime to threaten public order and the radical press began to demand changes that went well beyond Alexander's limited objectives, the government once again tightened censorship restrictions, thereby angering the intelligentsia. Radical *intelligenty* denounced the terms of emancipation announced in March 1861 as simply the perpetuation of serfdom in a new guise, and they reacted equally negatively to the government's heavy-handed response to university students' demands for greater autonomy later in the same year. Many, like Chernyshevsky, saw in the government's actions vindication of their belief that the autocracy was too imbued with patriarchal values and too closely bound to the priv-

9. M. Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965), p. 414. The illegitimate son of a wealthy nobleman, Alexander Herzen (1812–1870) became a prominent spokesman for liberal and, later, moderate socialist views in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. Herzen left Russia in 1847 and settled eventually in London, where he published *Kolokol* (*The Bell*), a periodical that served as a focal point for radical criticism of the tsarist regime. See also E. Acton, *Alexander Herzen and the Role of the Intellectual Revolutionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

10. N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Izbrannye ekonomicheskie proizvedeniya* (Moscow, 1948), 1:423.

ileged elements in society ever to become an agency for progress and satisfactory social reform. Frustrated and embittered, by early 1862 radicalized intellectuals and students were calling for revolutionary upheaval as the only way to effect the great changes in social, sexual, economic, and political relations that they believed were necessary and possible, if only sufficient will and the right means could be found. In their minds, the autocracy had replaced serfdom as the preeminent symbol and source of Russia's oppressiveness and backwardness.

But while dissatisfaction with Alexander's reforms intensified the radicalization of the intelligentsia, this process had actually begun several years earlier with increasingly acrimonious disputes within the intelligentsia over a series of philosophical, aesthetic, and political questions. Initially occasioned by the conflict between youthful proponents of materialist and scientific views and older adherents of idealist, chiefly left-Hegelian beliefs, these disputes helped to precipitate a fundamental split in the intelligentsia between advocates of evolutionary reform and those who believed that fundamental change could be achieved only by revolutionary means. In these conflicts, Chernyshevsky and *What Is to Be Done?* played a central role in both popularizing materialist, positivist, and rational utilitarian ideas among the intelligentsia and persuading many of its younger members that radical action was possible as well as necessary.

The Development of a Revolutionary Utopian

Chernyshevsky's background eminently suited him for this role. His upbringing, education, and relations with his parents fostered in him the intellectual vigor, commitment to ideas, stern moral integrity, ascetic habits, and concern for the welfare of others that marked both his personal character and his developed ideological beliefs. Although gifted and self-confident intellectually, however, Chernyshevsky felt insecure personally and behaved awkwardly in social situations. To overcome his diffidence and shyness, he used his superior intellectual abilities to gain recognition, acceptance, and a sense of self-worth. Thus from an early age he used his knowledge to help others—his schoolmates at the Saratov seminary, the members of the Vvedensky circle in St. Petersburg, his students at the Saratov gymnasium, the few women with whom he became involved, the readers of his essays and articles. Yet his altruism was tinged with paternalism. Convinced of the correctness of his views, Chernyshevsky often advanced them self-righteously and remained intolerant of criticism. Didactic journalism

proved to be an ideal *métier* for the brilliant yet insecure son of an Orthodox priest who in his life and writings tried to reconcile the conflicting tensions between egoism and altruism, Western individualism and Russian collectivism, scientific discovery and moral certainty, and technological change and agrarian harmony.

Chernyshevsky was born on July 12, 1828, in Saratov, a large provincial town and trading center of about 50,000 people on the middle Volga.¹¹ In typical fashion, his father, Gavriil Ivanovich, had acquired his position as priest at the Sergievsky Church on condition that he marry his predecessor's daughter, Evgeniya Egorovna Golubeva. Untypically, the match proved successful, and by all accounts the Chernyshevskys provided a warm, caring, and secure environment for Nikolai, their only child to survive into adolescence. Indeed, his mother's solicitousness and overprotectiveness may have contributed to the extreme self-confidence with which Chernyshevsky later expressed his views, even when faced with severe tsarist persecution. His father's approach to his early education undoubtedly also bolstered Chernyshevsky's self-confidence while developing his intellectual skill. Unusually well read in secular as well as religious literature for a provincial priest, Gavriil Ivanovich taught his son several languages and encouraged him to read widely in the family's extensive library. This process of self-education fostered in Chernyshevsky both an independent mind and a voracious appetite for reading, particularly works of or about literature. The family's modest yet comfortable means reinforced his love of reading, as few resources remained for other diversions, while the example of his father, a highly capable, hard-working, and well-respected cleric, shaped Chernyshevsky's serious and diligent approach to his studies. But while this family environment clearly nurtured many positive characteristics in Chernyshevsky, its extreme closeness and insularity may also have contributed to the social awkwardness and personal insecurity that he exhibited throughout his life.

Chernyshevsky entered the Saratov seminary in 1842, at the age of fourteen. He was already more widely read than most of his teachers,

11. For works in English on Chernyshevsky's life, see the Bibliography, below, esp. the books by Lampert, Pereira, Randall, and Woehrlin. Soviet scholarship, which generally portrays Chernyshevsky as a precursor to Bolshevism and exaggerates his revolutionary activities, can be sampled in such works as Iu. M. Steklov, *N. G. Chernyshevsky, ego zhizn' i deyatel'nost'*, 2 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1928), and M. V. Nechkina, *Vstrecha dvukh pokolenii. Iz istorii russkogo revolyutsionnogo dvizheniya kontsa 50-kh-nachala 60-kh godov XIX veka* (Moscow, 1980). Chernyshevsky's diaries, letters, notes for an autobiography, and other writings are available in N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 16 vols. (Moscow, 1939–1953), esp. vols. 1 and 14–16 (hereafter *PSS*).

let alone his peers, and proved to be a brilliant student. The resulting adulation of his instructors and admiration of his schoolmates undoubtedly strengthened his intellectual self-confidence and sense of self-worth, thereby compensating somewhat for his shyness and lack of social skills. Chernyshevsky won the respect of his fellow students, moreover, by helping many of the less able among them to get through their lessons and exams. This altruism toward his peers derived partly from his father's own kindness and teachings on Christian charity and partly from Chernyshevsky's sympathy for his less fortunate fellow students, many of whom came from impoverished backgrounds. But while the sight of poverty, brutality, and social inequality so evident throughout Saratov may have incited his compassion, particularly when filtered through his father's Christian ideals and the vague notions gleaned from such left-Hegelian social critics as Belinsky and Herzen in *Otechestvennye zapiski* (Notes of the fatherland), Chernyshevsky still had not moved very far beyond the orbit of his parents' beliefs.

This situation changed dramatically with the young man's departure from Saratov in the summer of 1846. He was now eighteen. Believing that their son's scholarly talents would enable him to attain a more exalted position than was possible within the clergy, and spurred by a dispute between Gavriil Ivanovich and his superiors, Chernyshevsky's parents decided to send him to St. Petersburg University. The move coincided with Chernyshevsky's own growing interest in secular ideas and in the relationship between literature and society. Moreover, the prospect of an academic career excited him. In a letter to his cousin A. N. Pypin written shortly after his arrival in St. Petersburg he declared:

We firmly resolve, with all the strength of our soul, to help end this period in which learning has been foreign to our spiritual life, so that it may cease to be like a strange coat, a sorrowful, impersonal aping for us. Let Russia also contribute what it should to the spiritual life of the world, as it has contributed and contributes to political life, emerging powerfully, distinctively, redemptively for humanity, in another great field of life—learning—as it has already done in one—state and political life. And let this great event be achieved, even if only in part, through us! Then we will not have lived in this world in vain; then we may view our earthly life with tranquillity and tranquilly pass on to life beyond the grave. To help work for the glory, not fleeting but eternal, of one's fatherland and for the good of mankind—what can be higher and more desired than that? We pray to God He will grant this as our destiny.¹²

12. *Ibid.*, 14:48.

Clearly, Chernyshevsky saw in the intellect and ideas powerful means by which to serve society and, in so doing, to achieve social prominence as well as personal satisfaction.

Chernyshevsky's five years at St. Petersburg University proved pivotal in shaping the ideas with which he would later attempt to change Russian society. Following a pattern typical among university students, he soon grew disillusioned with what he considered to be the formalism, intellectual torpor, and, at best, mild reformism of the majority of his instructors.¹³ Though officially a student of literature and philology, he devoted most of his time to questions of philosophy, political economy, and the social role of literature. With a small and changing circle of friends, chosen primarily for their ideas and intellectual abilities, he followed the exploits of such republicans as Louis Blanc during the revolution in France in 1848–1849, explored the works of French utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier and his disciple Victor Considérant, and debated Ludwig Feuerbach's materialist critique of religion.¹⁴ The vibrancy, dynamism, and optimism of these ideas could not fail to appeal to idealistic young intellectuals such as Chernyshevsky, especially when contrasted with the seemingly stagnant ultraconservatism promoted even more intensively by the Russian government in reaction to the revolutionary events in Western Europe.¹⁵ Resolving the conflict between atheistic materialism and religion proved to be particularly agonizing for Chernyshevsky, not least because of its serious implications for his relationship with his parents. But attracted by the potential for effective individual as well as social action which he saw implicit in Feuerbach's emphasis on man's creative capacity, Chernyshevsky abandoned Orthodoxy for an equally holistic materialist world view. His acceptance of the tsarist sociopolitical order dissolved along with his faith in God. Henceforward he advanced, ardently and often intolerantly, the most extreme views among the small circle of radical intellectuals gathered around I. I. Vvedensky, an older ex-seminarian from Saratov who taught literature at two military academies in St. Petersburg. But while ruthless in debate, Chernyshevsky remained personally compassionate. For several years he helped to support a fellow student whose ideas he admired, despite his own meager resources.¹⁶

13. See Brower, *Training the Nihilists*.

14. On these influences, see pp. 16–19 below and text nn. 39–41, 84, 94, and 267. A good discussion of these ideas can be found in G. Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970).

15. For a perceptive discussion of the impact of the revolutions of 1848 on Russian intellectuals, see I. Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), pp. 1–21.

16. In *What Is to Be Done?* Chernyshevsky's superhero, Rakhmetov, likewise supports several radical students.

Chernyshevsky returned to Saratov in March 1851 a materialist, atheist, and proponent of socialism. Although profoundly alienated from the tsarist state and the beliefs of most Russians, however, he had yet to challenge the established order openly. Indeed, he had returned to his native town partly in response to his mother's urging but primarily in the hope of finding more time to complete the master's thesis that he needed for entrée to an academic career, hardly a revolutionary pursuit. And while testing the boundaries of the politically acceptable in his literature classes at the Saratov gymnasium, Chernyshevsky remained carefully within them. Nor apparently did he form close ties with the few political exiles living in Saratov at this time. Presaging his later journalistic career, Chernyshevsky limited his revolutionary activities to teaching his students to think critically, especially about tsarist society.

At the end of his brief return to Saratov, Chernyshevsky married Olga Sokratovna Vasileva, an event that dramatically affected his life. The match at first glance seems an odd one, since Olga Sokratovna's character and interests clashed sharply with those of Chernyshevsky. The free-spirited, frivolous, and coquettish daughter of a provincial doctor, she proved largely indifferent to Chernyshevsky's political views and social concerns. Materialistic rather than materialist, she seemed to gain appreciation of her husband only with his ability to provide for her comforts. Not surprisingly, Chernyshevsky's parents opposed the marriage. Yet it satisfied many of their son's deepest needs. Though he sincerely loved Olga Sokratovna, Chernyshevsky also saw in their marriage an important rite of passage that promised to dispel his social awkwardness. "I must marry," he confided to his diary at this time, "also because I will then become a man, rather than the child I am now. Then my timidity, shyness, etc. will disappear."¹⁷ Moreover, the marriage provided Chernyshevsky with both an excuse to break with his parents on an issue other than his religious apostasy and a reason to return to St. Petersburg: he had to obtain a position that could support a wife and family. Finally, his relationship with Olga Sokratovna enabled Chernyshevsky to substantiate many of his ideas, particularly in regard to the emancipation of women. Influenced strongly by the romantic feminist views of the French author George Sand¹⁸ and generally treating people as the reflections of abstract ideas, he pictured himself as liberating his wife from a confining family situation, a view apparently not shared by Olga Sokratovna. He promised and gave Olga Sokratovna complete independence and ascendancy in their

17. *PSS*, 1:483.

18. On this influence, see pp. 23–24 below.

marriage, to the point of living in separate rooms and indulging her whims while he himself still adhered to his former ascetic habits. Despite his solicitousness, evidence suggests that his wife's preference for material comfort over freedom strained their relationship, especially during the early years of the marriage. But even this need to satisfy his wife's desires provided Chernyshevsky with a justification for his intense journalistic activity and the consequent neglect of his family.

As if to emphasize his rejection of his parents' beliefs, Chernyshevsky defied social convention by marrying Olga Sokratovna only ten days after his mother's sudden death, in April 1853, and quickly departed for St. Petersburg. Unable to decide between an academic and a journalistic career, he barely supported himself and his wife by teaching, translating popular English novels, and penning literary reviews while endeavoring to finish his master's thesis on the aesthetic relations between art and reality. Unexpected talent as a literary critic, philosophical and personal clashes with his thesis adviser, and chance pushed as well as drew Chernyshevsky toward journalism. The popularity of his reviews in *Otechestvennye zapiski* and *Sovremennik* (The contemporary) attracted the attention of the latter's editor and publisher, Nikolai Nekrasov, a radically inclined romantic poet who also possessed remarkably good business sense.¹⁹ Nekrasov soon offered Chernyshevsky a permanent position on the staff of his journal, despite the intense disagreements between the radical young critic and the older, more moderate, and philosophically idealist contributors to *Sovremennik* on nearly every subject, from aesthetic values to political views. The same disagreements led Chernyshevsky's thesis adviser, the moderate literary scholar and state censor A. V. Nikitenko, first to delay the public defense of the thesis until 1855 and then to conspire to block conferment of the degree until 1858. Thus effectively barred from an academic career, Chernyshevsky had little choice but to devote his energies to journalism. His timing proved propitious. The death of Nicholas I in 1855, Russia's humiliating defeat in the Crimean War, and the conflict emerging within the intelligentsia over philosophical orientation, aesthetic values, and sociopolitical ideals together provoked an unprecedented outburst of vigorous and often acrimonious journalistic debate that offered Chernyshevsky ample opportunity to fulfill the ambitions revealed earlier to his cousin.

The ensuing decade proved to be the most intellectually productive and socially active period in Chernyshevsky's life. Indeed, journalism suited his temperament, talents, and needs perfectly. While awkward and unimpressive in public, in print Chernyshevsky deployed his

19. On Nekrasov, see text nn. 106, 218, and 295.

sharp intellect, a biting polemical style laced with moral fervor, and wide familiarity with Western European as well as Russian literature and sociopolitical ideas with devastating effect. As a contributor to, and then editor of, one of mid-nineteenth-century Russia's most prominent "thick journals"—the monthly literary and political periodicals that provided the main medium for public discourse at this time—he became an influential critic of the injustices and deficiencies of the existing order as well as a preeminent spokesman for radical social and political change. As Chernyshevsky's popularity grew, subscriptions to *Sovremennik* soared, thereby extending the reach of his ideas.

Two principal conflicts, pitting him against both political moderates and the tsarist state, shaped most of Chernyshevsky's writing during these years. Concentrating initially on literary criticism, he sought to formulate a theory of aesthetics that both embodied his materialist and positivistic beliefs and transformed art into a weapon for radical social transformation. In thus linking art with social action, Chernyshevsky reflected a view common among the intelligentsia at this time, that literature and literary criticism could serve as powerful forces of historical progress. But his extreme assertion—expounded most comprehensively in his master's thesis—that literature should be judged solely on the basis of its fidelity to reality and its social utility challenged the idealism and aesthetic values of even moderate critics of the regime, to say nothing of their aristocratic sensibilities. In the ensuing conflict over the nature of art, Chernyshevsky and his youthful allies suggested that their critics' moderation and commitment to idealism derived largely from a self-interested desire not to upset the status quo, while their opponents imputed Chernyshevsky's ideas in part to the lack of culture allegedly resulting from his social origin and upbringing. Ivan Turgenev, for example, a moderate who at the time was the most renowned contributor to *Sovremennik*, remarked that Chernyshevsky and his supporters "are resentful that they were brought up on vegetable oil, and so they arrogantly strive to wipe poetry off the face of the earth . . . and establish their coarse seminarian principles."²⁰ Clearly social differences as much as philosophical and aesthetic disagreements shaped the response to Chernyshevsky's ideas and exacerbated the conflict that was pushing moderate and radical intelligentsia apart.

The adoption of a program of reform by Alexander II only widened this gulf. Turning from the later 1850s almost exclusively to questions

20. A. I. Panaeva (Golovacheva), *Vospominaniya* (Moscow, 1956), p. 265, quoted in N. Pereira, *The Thought and Teaching of N. G. Chernyshevsky* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 60.

of political economy and social theory, Chernyshevsky quickly concluded that Russia's social injustices and lack of development could not be overcome through evolutionary means, especially reforms undertaken by the tsarist state. In his view, the relationship of mutual dependence between the autocracy and privileged social groups precluded meaningful state action until a social revolution had restructured political power. Chernyshevsky believed, moreover, that if this revolution was to succeed, it would need to overturn the patriarchal relations that existed within the family as well as between social groups and between the state and society. Thus he became an ardent advocate of women's rights as a means to pursue social revolution generally, and thereby helped to raise the "woman's question" in mid-nineteenth-century Russia.²¹ But Chernyshevsky condemned not only the inadequacy of the government's proposals. He also harshly criticized the moderate intelligentsia who supported these proposals and again questioned their integrity as well as their intelligence. Moderates countered that Chernyshevsky's radicalism not only was impractical but also threatened to frighten the government away from the more realistic path of gradual reform and to unleash the destructive passions of the still ignorant masses. The break between moderates and radicals within the intelligentsia was complete.

While calling for radical social action over state reform, however, Chernyshevsky took care to remain within the boundaries set by state censorship and to avoid personal involvement in revolutionary activities. Nonetheless, the government blamed the upsurge of revolutionary and student activism in the early 1860s on the subversive influence of *Sovremennik* and its radical editor. Therefore when Chernyshevsky ignored warnings to moderate the journal's political line, the government reacted to student protests at St. Petersburg University and a series of suspicious fires in the northern capital in early 1862 by closing *Sovremennik* in June and arresting Chernyshevsky on largely fabricated charges the following month. While imprisoned and awaiting trial in the Peter-Paul Fortress, Chernyshevsky produced his last significant and most influential work, the novel *What Is to Be Done?* In early 1864 he was convicted of subversion, largely on the basis of false evidence, and sentenced to fourteen years at hard labor (later reduced to seven), to be followed by permanent exile.

Chernyshevsky spent the next eighteen years in prison or in exile in eastern Siberia, far from his family, friends, or sources of intellectual

21. On the "woman's question" in nineteenth-century Russia, see Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*; R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); G. A. Tishkin, *Zhenskii vopros v Rossii v 50–60 gg. XIX v.* (Leningrad, 1984).

stimulation. Isolation, poverty, frustrated hopes, and anxiety over his family's welfare broke his spirit as well as his health. Although he continued to write, most of what he produced lacked the sharpness and focus of his earlier works. Only the autobiographical novel *Prologue*, published in London in 1877, had much literary merit. Olga Sokratovna visited him once. But the journey proved so exhausting for her that Chernyshevsky forbade her to repeat it and even urged her to divorce him in order to find a husband who could offer her more security.²² In 1883, having subdued the revolutionary movement of the 1870s, the government allowed Chernyshevsky to move to the more populous and less remote port of Astrakhan, on the Caspian Sea, where he lived a relatively lonely existence with his wife for the next six years. He was permitted to return to Saratov only in June 1889, four months before his death. While the government's harsh treatment of Chernyshevsky ended his active career, it also transformed him into a martyr and thereby undoubtedly enhanced the appeal of *What Is to Be Done?* It is perhaps fitting that a man who valued the intellect so highly and tended to treat people as personifications of ideas became himself the mythicized symbol of Russian radicalism.

The Ideology of a Revolutionary Utopian

Chernyshevsky's chief intellectual accomplishment lay in synthesizing the ideas of contemporary Western European social critics, political economists, and philosophers into an ideology of radicalism that appealed to angry young *intelligenty* caught in the backward conditions of mid-nineteenth-century Russia.²³ The appeal of his ideas derived both from their successful melding of *au courant* European theories with Russian cultural, especially Orthodox religious, values and from the crucial role that they assigned to déclassé intellectuals in the effort to overcome Russia's problems. Though he condemned both the European capitalist present and the patriarchal tsarist past, Cher-

22. Prerevolutionary Russian law treated marriage as a religious institution and therefore assigned jurisdiction over cases of divorce to appropriate ecclesiastical bodies. Although severely restricting divorce, the Orthodox church did allow it in the event that a spouse was exiled to Siberia for conviction of a serious criminal offense. See also text n. 66. On Russian divorce law and the controversies surrounding it from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, see W. G. Wagner, "The Trojan Mare: Women's Rights and Civil Rights in Prerevolutionary Russia," in *Civil Rights in Prerevolutionary Russia*, ed. I. Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

23. Works in English on Chernyshevsky's ideas are listed in the Bibliography. For a sampling of Soviet scholarship on various aspects of Chernyshevsky's thought, see the recent collection of essays edited by M. T. Iovchuk, *N. G. Chernyshevsky i sovremennost'* (Moscow, 1980).

nyshevsky combined secular ideas with religious values, Western European democratic individualism with Russian collectivism and paternalism in a way that promised intellectuals self-fulfillment and social prominence while still binding them closely to the community. Materialist philosophy, utilitarian ethics, science, and technology became the means through which an educated elite would transform traditional social institutions into a prosperous agrarian utopia where both the material welfare of the masses and the creative needs of intellectuals would be satisfied. Chernyshevsky thus offered an ideological vision that promised to resolve the tensions produced by educational reform, Western European competition and cultural intrusion, and the advent of secularization and impact of science in a still predominantly agrarian Christian community.

Philosophical materialism provided the foundation for both Chernyshevsky's critique of the tsarist sociopolitical order and his optimistic belief in the possibility of transforming that order through action informed by scientific knowledge.²⁴ Influenced strongly by the German materialists Ludwig Büchner and especially Ludwig Feuerbach,²⁵ Chernyshevsky claimed that body, mind, and spirit represented merely different aspects of a single, unitary human organism that was an integral part of nature. Action, thought, and emotion thus were nothing more than sensual responses to external stimuli and therefore were governed by natural laws. Chernyshevsky argued that these laws could be discovered by rigorous application to human society of the methodology and concepts developed in the natural sciences by such pioneers as the French physiologist Claude Bernard.²⁶ Human beings would then be able to reshape their social as well as natural environment in accordance with their needs. Religious belief and philosophical idealism impeded progress toward this end, Chernyshevsky asserted, by projecting a false image of human nature which obscured knowledge of reality. Social, political, and religious institutions likewise tended to preserve distorted images of reality in order to protect the power and privileges of the social groups that benefited from these institutions. For Chernyshevsky, then, human progress required both the constant advance of scientific understanding and the elimination of those institutions that perpetuated ignorance.

24. Chernyshevsky's fullest statement of this position may be found in "The Anthropological Principle in History," in N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Selected Philosophical Essays* (Moscow, 1953), pp. 49–135.

25. In his book *Kraft und Stoff* (Force and matter) (1855), the German physician and philosopher Ludwig Büchner provided a materialist interpretation of the universe which rejected God and explained both mind and thought as physical states of the brain produced by matter in motion. On Feuerbach, see text n. 41.

26. On Bernard, see text n. 119.

Chernyshevsky's theory of aesthetics, which so enraged his moderate opponents, followed logically from his materialist epistemology.²⁷ For him, art represented a medium for revealing, vicariously experiencing, and thereby better understanding reality. Reality itself could not be transcended, only comprehended. Idealist notions of pure art or beauty therefore were not simply false but dangerous, because they obscured reality and subordinated it to an unrealizable ideal. Chernyshevsky concluded that art should therefore be judged on the basis of its fidelity to reality and its ability to expand human knowledge. Hence his theory of aesthetics essentially endeavored to transform art into an instrument of education. Taking this principle a step further in *What Is to Be Done?*, Chernyshevsky sought not only to explain reality but also to change it by providing radical youth with guidelines for social behavior and political action. By thus emphasizing in his fictional as well as his critical writing the need to understand and affect the present, Chernyshevsky contributed significantly to the development of aesthetic realism in mid-nineteenth-century Russia despite the extremeness of his views.

In addition to materialism, Chernyshevsky also drew heavily on British utilitarianism to explain human behavior and to refute idealist conceptions of morality.²⁸ The resulting theory of rational egoism enabled him to reconcile the individual's need for personal self-fulfillment with the collective interests of the community. Put simply, Chernyshevsky argued that all human behavior was motivated by the desire to maximize personal pleasure and to avoid pain. Since human motivation thus was both constant and universal, differences in the behavior of people could be explained only by the different ways in which their socioeconomic environment led them to act in pursuit of their self-interest. Crime and courage, avarice and charity, all emanated from the same egoistical impulse. Chernyshevsky concluded that religious and philosophical idealist concepts of free will and morality therefore could neither explain nor alter human action. "Good" and "evil" became relative terms, their use based on whether people perceived the actions of others as beneficial or harmful to them; the conflict between good and evil simply reflected the clash of interests between competing individuals or social groups. We should resolve such conflicts by maximizing the pleasure of the largest number of people, asserted Chernyshevsky, since that would bring the greatest benefit to society. Building on this idea, he added that enlightened individuals recognized that the maximization of society's interests

27. Chernyshevsky gives his fullest statement of this theory in "The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality," in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, pp. 281–422.

28. See especially his essay "Anthropological Principle."

also best served their personal interests because their welfare depended directly on society's general level of prosperity. Self-interest, he contended, therefore led such "rational egoists" to work toward the creation of socioeconomic and political institutions that ensured that personally pleasurable and socially desirable action coincided for each individual. As Christian charity had provided the way to personal salvation for his father, service to the community became the way to personal self-fulfillment for the secularized son.

Chernyshevsky based his defense of cooperative socialism as well as his critique of capitalist individualism and tsarist patriarchy on this theory of rational egoism. Drawing heavily on the work of French utopian socialists and British political economists,²⁹ he argued that a political economy based on cooperative labor and collective ownership could satisfy the needs of the individual and society more effectively than either capitalism or the tsarist order because it would channel the pursuit of self-interest toward improving the welfare of the group as well as of the self. Economic output expanded more rapidly as a result, Chernyshevsky contended, because individuals worked more efficiently as a group than they did separately and because they worked more productively when they retained the fruits of their labor. Indeed, believing that the value of a good derived from the amount of labor embodied in it, Chernyshevsky idealized manual labor and asserted that it provided the chief source of personal pleasure. He therefore denounced both capitalism and the patriarchal serf economy as exploitive as well as inefficient because they promoted a competitive pursuit of self-interest that deprived especially workers and peasants of the product, and thus the value, of their labor. Economic productivity consequently suffered because laborers expended less effort in their work while the idle rich had to invent unproductive pastimes in order to satisfy their need for sensual stimulation. Both the capitalist and the tsarist patriarchal systems thus depressed a society's overall welfare by preventing the majority of its members from achieving their full productive potential. This was particularly the case in regard to women, who were prevented under both systems from pursuing socially productive and personally fulfilling occupations even when their intelligence surpassed that of men.

In Chernyshevsky's view, then, the source of Russia's economic backwardness and social oppressiveness lay in its patriarchal socioeconomic and political structures. Socialist transformation of these structures promised growth and prosperity as well as personal libera-

29. See n. 14 above, text nn. 148 and 187, and Lichtheim, *Short History of Socialism*. For Chernyshevsky's writings on social, political, and economic questions, see PSS, vols. 4–9.

tion. Following the ideas of his fellow social critics Alexander Herzen and Mikhail Bakunin,³⁰ Chernyshevsky believed that the existence of the peasant commune provided Russia with a unique opportunity to undertake this transformation directly, without first having to experience the evils of capitalism.³¹ While not idealizing the commune, he argued that it could be transformed through advanced European technology and science, and through the ideas of such thinkers as Fourier, Considérant, and Robert Owen,³² into a highly productive cooperative agricultural community. Initially hoping that the state might direct this process, Chernyshevsky concluded from the course of emancipation that the tsarist regime was imbued too deeply with patriarchal values and bound too closely to the landed nobility to promote such change. Referring also to the abandonment by French liberals of their ideals when faced with the demands of the masses in 1848–1852, Chernyshevsky began to assert that political structures in general emerged historically as the means by which dominant social groups preserved their power and privileges. Since these groups would never voluntarily surrender their power, significant social or political change could not be achieved through gradual reform, whether promoted by the state or by liberals. Hence only a social revolution that destroyed patriarchal relations within the family and society and thereby undermined the autocratic political system could clear the way for socialist transformation and economic growth. Considering moderates to have been too thoroughly seduced by the comforts of the old regime to risk real change, Chernyshevsky declared that only the younger, radical members of the intelligentsia could lead this revolution and guide the subsequent transformation of society.

The growing influence of natural science and scientific methodology among European intellectuals generally during the latter half of the nineteenth century gave Chernyshevsky's ideas an important ad-

30. On Herzen, see pp. 25–26 below and n. 9 above. Descended from a wealthy aristocratic family, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876) became a leading exponent of anarchism in nineteenth-century Europe and participated in revolutionary movements in France and Saxony in 1848–1849. Exiled to Siberia for his political activities, he escaped in 1861 to London, where his quarrel with Marx helped split the international socialist movement. Perhaps his most famous work is his treatise *God and the State* (1882). On Bakunin, see A. Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); J. Joll, *The Anarchists*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 67–96.

31. On this argument and Chernyshevsky's views on it, see T. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "The Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); A. Gerschenkron, "Economic Development in Russian Intellectual History of the Nineteenth Century," in *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1966), pp. 169–77.

32. See nn. 14 and 29 above. These thinkers may also have reinforced the Christian values that Chernyshevsky received originally from his father.

vantage in the ideological conflict that erupted within Russia's educated elite at this time. The apparent objectivity of materialism and utilitarianism enabled him to deny the legitimacy of both idealist ethics and the values underlying existing political, social, and religious institutions while simultaneously providing legitimacy to his own ideals in the guise of scientific fact. Yet despite his sincere profession of materialism and his pretensions to scientific objectivity, Chernyshevsky remained essentially an idealist. Following the earlier radical Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky,³³ for example, he argued that an accurate depiction of social reality entailed a critique of its injustices and an indication of how they could be overcome. Such a critique implied an ideal of justice against which to measure reality. Nor did Chernyshevsky simply explain or describe actions and relationships in terms of socioeconomic utility; he also judged them in terms of moral categories. Failure to work toward the goals that he defined was not merely illogical or inexpedient but also immoral. His utopian vision projected a harmonious community where egalitarian and just social relations remained unaffected by constant technological change. Indeed, this vision appealed to educated young Russians precisely because it combined familiar Orthodox Christian ideals with new utopian socialist and democratic models and invested the amalgam with scientific certainty, thereby providing youthful *intelligenty* with firm moral guidelines during a period of social and ideological dislocation. The very fact that Chernyshevsky concentrated his efforts so single-mindedly on educating this intellectual elite testifies to his belief that history was moved at least as much by ideas as by material forces. Armed with the proper ideas, these "new people" could reshape rather than simply react to the Russian environment, in the process creating a society that was more just as well as more productive.

This combination of moral and scientific certainty helps explain the stridency, intolerance, and self-righteousness with which Chernyshevsky promoted his ideas. It also explains the blend of democratic collectivism and elitist paternalism that characterized these ideas. For while extolling service to the community as the path to personal self-fulfillment, Chernyshevsky portrayed an elite that served society largely by shaping it in accordance with the elite's own view of social justice. As a result, much like the Christian precepts from which he drew sustenance, Chernyshevsky's ideas contained the potential for

33. A commoner like Chernyshevsky, Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848) was an outspoken advocate of radical views as well as Russia's most prominent literary critic during the late 1830s and 1840s. Denouncing the idea of "art for art's sake," he argued that literature should comment critically on social and political reality, but without sacrificing its aesthetic qualities. For a perceptive essay on Belinsky, see Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, pp. 150–85.

authoritarianism as well as for liberation. The tension between egoism and altruism, evident in his life and explored in his fictional characters, thus remained unresolved.

But if Chernyshevsky was a paternalistic elitist, he was no more so than either apologists of the tsarist regime or his moderate opponents within the intelligentsia. Indeed, his arguments effectively exposed the dilemma confronting Russian moderates, whose ideals also were incompatible with autocracy and alien to the majority of the Russian people. Moderates no less than radicals had to destroy the old regime and impose their values on the rest of society in order to realize their goals. Facing the Scylla of political disorder and the Charybdis of social upheaval, they tended to opt for order at the expense of social change.³⁴ In pursuing his ideals, Chernyshevsky at least focused directly on the poverty, hunger, and oppression that afflicted the majority of the population. By doing so from a materialist and scientific perspective, he helped provoke a more sophisticated debate over Russia's economic backwardness by calling attention to the sociological and technological sources of this problem. Perhaps most impressive, however, Chernyshevsky persuaded the younger generation of the intelligentsia of the possibility as well as the nobility of acting to overcome Russia's social and economic problems. He thereby provided déclassé intellectuals with a social role that gave them considerable self-esteem regardless of the success or failure of their actions. The bible for these radical intellectuals became the novel *What Is to Be Done?*

The Genesis of a Utopian Novel: The Writing of *What Is to Be Done?*

What Is to Be Done? represents the best-known and most comprehensive statement of Chernyshevsky's ideas. Through it he exerted extraordinary influence on generations of Russian radicals. The actions of these radicals and the reactions of their opponents cannot be fully understood without reference to the source that inspired or enraged them. Rakhmetov, the totally rational revolutionary ascetic and superhero, makes both Lenin and Dostoevsky more comprehensible; Vera Pavlovna, the emancipated woman who tears asunder the conventional family and the institution of marriage, helps explain both

34. D. Offord, *Portraits of Early Russian Liberals: A Study of the Thought of T. N. Granovsky, V. P. Botkin, P. V. Annenkov, A. V. Druzhinin, and K. D. Kavelin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); W. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917–1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

Sofya Perovskaya and Konstantin Pobedonostsev.³⁵ Moreover, Chernyshevsky both followed and contributed to a rich Russian literary tradition by presenting the major statement of his ideas in the form of a novel. Written as a response to Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, *What Is to Be Done?* in turn provoked Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. The book thus represents a major work of Russian literature as well as one of the key documents for understanding nineteenth-century Russian social and political thought, revolutionary activity, and social conflict.

Chernyshevsky produced *What Is to Be Done?* while incarcerated in the Peter-Paul Fortress, where he sat awaiting trial as his case was laboriously investigated. Prevented from writing any further essays or articles, he turned to fiction as a medium for expressing his ideas. The novel was not meant as a diversion or as a substitute for more important work. Chernyshevsky explained subsequently to the official Commission of Inquiry, "For a long time I have planned . . . to apply myself to literature. But I am convinced that people of my character must do this only in their later years. . . . A novel is destined for the great mass of the public. It is a writer's most serious undertaking, and so it belongs to old age. *The frivolity of the form must be compensated for by the solidity of the thought.*"³⁶ Indeed, the protestations of the narrator in the novel notwithstanding, Chernyshevsky meant his work to stand in the great tradition of Russian literature represented by Gogol and Turgenev.

In late 1862 Chernyshevsky asked the prison commandant for permission to begin work on a novel. His request granted, he set to work and produced the entire novel within four months, between December 14, 1862, and April 4, 1863. The first part of the manuscript was then submitted to the prison censor, who, whether carelessly or for devious purposes, passed it and forwarded the manuscript to the censor of the journal *Sovremennik*. Passed again, the novel was sent to

35. Daughter of a nobleman who had been governor of St. Petersburg, Sofya Perovskaya (1853–1881) became a revolutionary activist in the 1870s and helped to orchestrate the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, for which she was executed the same year. An outstanding scholar of civil law as well as a leading exponent of ultraconservative views in late-nineteenth-century Russia, Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1827–1907) exerted a strong influence on state policy as an adviser to Alexander III (r. 1881–1894) and Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) and as oberprocurator of the Holy Synod (i.e., the chief lay administrator of the Orthodox church). On Perovskaya, see Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, and D. Footman, *Red Prelude: A Biography of Zhelyabov* (London: Cresset Press, 1944); on Pobedonostsev, see R. Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

36. Quoted in F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), p. 178; emphasis added.

the journal's editor, Nekrasov, who promptly lost it in a cab. He managed to recover the manuscript only after advertising in the official gazette of the St. Petersburg police. With what is perhaps the greatest irony of Russian letters, the novel that the police helped to retrieve turned out to be the most subversive and revolutionary work of nineteenth-century Russian literature. Its publication has aptly been called "the most spectacular example of bureaucratic bungling in the cultural realm during the reign of Alexander II."³⁷

What Is to Be Done? appeared in numbers 3, 4, and 5 of *Sovremennik* for 1863, and was published subsequently as a separate volume. A rough draft, lacking sections 19–23 of Chapter 5 and all of Chapter 6, was discovered much later in the archive of the Peter-Paul Fortress and published in 1929. An authoritative version of the novel edited by T. I. Ornatskaya and S. A. Reiser appeared in the Academy of Sciences Literary Monument Series in 1975. Their text is basically a reprint of the original journal version, which was carefully collated with manuscripts housed in the Central Government Archive of Literature and Art in Moscow. We have used this edition in preparing the present translation.

Although a number of Western European literary texts exerted a significant influence on Chernyshevsky's novel, the works of three authors, all mentioned specifically in the text of the novel, merit special attention. First among these writers is the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose novel *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) served as one of Chernyshevsky's most important sources.³⁸ Rousseau's *Julie d'Étange* provided a model for Chernyshevsky's *Julie Letellier*, the semiliberated French courtesan who acts as a foil for his heroine, Vera Pavlovna. And like Rousseau's *Saint-Preux*, Chernyshevsky's *Lopukhov* is a man of strong character and absolute rationality. Most important, Chernyshevsky's *Vera Pavlovna* is meant to be perceived as a new, "improved" version of Rousseau's *Julie*. Through her character Chernyshevsky sought to show how the ideal of women's equality articulated by Rousseau could be realized in practice. This lineage is stated explicitly in *Vera Pavlovna's* fourth dream, where Chernyshevsky describes Rousseau as the figure who inaugurated the "modern phase" of feminism by providing the first model of an intelligent and independent heroine.

The novels of the French author George Sand, particularly *Jacques*

37. J. Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860–1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 285.

38. See J. Scanlan, "Chernyshevsky and Rousseau," in *Western Philosophical Systems in Russian Literature: A Collection of Critical Studies*, ed. A. Mlikotin (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1979), pp. 103–20, and text n. 252.

(1834, translated 1844), also strongly influenced the feminist theme as well as the plot of *What Is to Be Done?*³⁹ Throughout her works Sand emphasizes the primacy of love and the absolute right of a woman to achieve romantic fulfillment—if not with her legal husband, then with her heart's desire. Thus at the end of *Jacques*, Sand's hero chooses to sacrifice his love for Fernande in order to set her free to love Octave. He makes his own suicide appear to be an accident and "quits the scene" without remorse. It is particularly notable for our purposes that the hero's sister, Sylvia, tries to dissuade Jacques from his chosen course by arguing that there really should be something else to life besides love. She even suggests to the hero that he start all over again, perhaps in the New World.

While Sand's heroine may achieve personal fulfillment, however, she contributes little to society. So just as Chernyshevsky's Vera Pavlovna is a new version of Rousseau's Julie, she also represents an advance over Sand's Fernande. Living not for love alone, Vera Pavlovna pursues her own course of spiritual and intellectual development. She has her own work (organizing sewing cooperatives), which she finally abandons only to pursue an even nobler calling, the study of medicine—as many "new men" do—in order to achieve complete independence and equality. In Chernyshevsky's view, then, the emancipation of women requires both freedom in love and involvement in socially useful labor, especially of the type favored by male intellectuals. Indeed, Chernyshevsky considered love and labor to be complementary, with the sensual stimulation of the former yielding greater creativity and productivity in the latter.

By the same token, Chernyshevsky's Lopukhov represents an advance over Sand's hero. Seeking to extricate himself more rationally than Jacques from his own love triangle, Lopukhov stages a *fictitious* suicide. Then heeding Sylvia's advice to Jacques, as it were, he chooses to start life afresh in the New World. He later returns to Russia, finds a suitable mate, and ultimately settles down to live in complete harmony with her alongside Vera Pavlovna and Kirsanov.

Finally, Chernyshevsky was also influenced by the English novelist Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), which he had reviewed in *Sovremennik*.⁴⁰ While appreciating Dickens' hardheaded realism and biting social criticism, however, Chernyshevsky took issue with what he described as the English author's "deviations" from that admirable path: his fondness for plots centering on love and sentiment and his reliance on conventional morality and happy endings. Similarities in

39. See A. P. Skaftymov, "Chernyshevsky i Zhorzh Sand," in *Stat'i o russkoi literature* (Saratov, 1958), pp. 161–83; text n. 30; and *PSS*, 3:340–45.

40. *PSS*, 16:147–49. See also text n. 31.

characters and themes abound between *Hard Times* and *What Is to Be Done?* Bounderby's "rugged individualism" has been transformed into the "new men's" "rational egoism"; Gradgrind's "heartless utilitarianism" has been revised, particularly to accommodate emotions; Dickens' industrial institutions (coal mine, factory, trade union) find their counterpart in Vera Pavlovna's sewing cooperative and commune. Sleary's circus and the values of imagination and recreation it represents have become the picnics and gala balls of Chernyshevsky's emerging utopia. And Dickens' solidly liberal criticism of all the major institutions of mid-nineteenth-century England—economic, political, social, religious, educational, and domestic—has become, in Chernyshevsky's novel, a radical critique of mid-nineteenth-century Russia, with the ultimate goal of revolutionary transformation replacing that of gradual reform.

While Rousseau, Sand, and Dickens proved to be the three most important Western authors whose novels influenced Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, within the Russian literary tradition it was Herzen's *Who Is to Blame?* (1841–1846) and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) that exerted the greatest impact.⁴¹ Like Chernyshevsky subsequently, Herzen began where Sand's *Jacques* left off. In his novel he too created a romantic triangle that develops into a short-lived ménage à trois until the conflict is resolved.⁴² In Herzen's novel, however, it is the rival, not the husband, who departs and resigns himself to a life of aimless wandering. Yet Beltov's decision brings no relief to the principal players: Lyubov's health declines while her husband sinks deeper into drink. The tragic unhappiness resulting for all those involved offered little hope for either the emancipation of women or the personal fulfillment of critical intellectuals in mid-nineteenth-century Russia.

Herzen's novel thus represents more than a love story. *Who Is to Blame?* is a novel of ideas and issues given artistic form through vivid characterization. In particular, Herzen was concerned with the same basic questions that agitated Chernyshevsky: defining the social role of intellectuals and determining their ability to affect Russia's future. Yet Herzen offered more pessimistic answers than his successor. His chief male character, the aristocratic Vladimir Beltov, is an "ideological hero," a man of noble soul but weak character, who fails to find a way to translate his lofty ideals into effective action and thereby relieve Russia's oppressiveness. The reader is left to wonder whether the fault

41. One might also want to consider Druzhinin's *Polin'ka Saks* (1847) and Avdeev's *Podvodnyi kamen'* (1860).

42. See the introduction to A. Herzen, *Who Is to Blame?* trans. M. R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 15–39.

lies with the man, the constraints of his environment, or the rigidity of his ideals. Beltov's tragedy thus is not merely personal-psychological but also sociopolitical, and Herzen managed to combine these two levels in a compelling work of fiction. But the question posed by Herzen's title—the responsibility for his characters' ineffectuality and for Russia's oppressiveness—remained unanswered because the author had no answer. Chernyshevsky, ascribing blame to both the patriarchal tsarist system and Beltov's misplaced idealism, would pose a different, more practical question in the title of his novel. In doing so, he too would present both a romantic triangle and ideological hero(es) in his book.

Between Herzen's *Who Is to Blame?* and Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* stands (both chronologically and ideologically) Turgenev's controversial novel *Fathers and Sons*. In it the author treats as his central problem the relationship between ideology and romantic love, or, more generally, between reason and emotion. The young hero, the *raznochinets*⁴³ Bazarov, an ideological "nihilist" who exalts reason and denies the significance of emotion or poetry, encounters love and passion in the form of Odintsova (and to a lesser extent Fenechka), and consequently discovers the "abyss of romanticism" within himself. The discovery undermines both his ideology and his sense of self. Forced to confront his own mortality, he "quits the scene" by what can be interpreted as a senseless, self-destructive act. Reason without idealism, Turgenev seems to say, can provide neither a guide to action for the intelligentsia nor a solution to Russia's ills.

While Turgenev's hero articulates a much more explicit ideology than Herzen's Beltov, Bazarov's nihilism still remains destructive at best. He aims only "to clear the ground" and has absolutely no positive program in mind. One can also argue that the objects of Bazarov's romantic love are themselves unworthy of him: on the one hand, a spoiled and cautious aristocrat; on the other, a sweet and innocent peasant maiden. In terms of neither his ideology nor his love could Bazarov be perceived as a flattering portrait of the "new man." In contrast, the hero's weak-willed liberal friend, the nobleman Arkady Kirsanov, manages to achieve a measure of happiness as well as modest economic progress by combining his reason with idealism and an acceptance of such traditional values as love of family, nature, and the land.

Chernyshevsky considered *Fathers and Sons* to be a dastardly cari-

43. A term (lit., "person of diverse ranks") used in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia to indicate someone, usually an intellectual or professional, who was not of noble birth and who had left his or her original social estate without having been ascribed a new one.

cature of his close friend and fellow radical critic Nikolai Dobrolyubov.⁴⁴ In his own novel he sought to refute Turgenev's portrayal of the "new men" (and women) and to present a more "accurate" image that would demonstrate the possibility of reconciling "rational egoism" and romantic love in a single ideology that allowed for effective action. Chernyshevsky consequently borrowed names from Turgenev's work (Kirsanov and Lopukhov),⁴⁵ selected his heroes from the same class (the *raznochintsy*), and gave them the same noble academic calling (medicine). But he transformed Bazarov's negative, ill-conceived, and easily abandoned nihilism into "rational egoism," Bazarov's "abyss of romanticism" into mature, "rational" love, and his self-destructive urge into a revolutionary movement. Even Turgenev's caricature of a "liberated woman" (Kukshina) was replaced by the genuinely emancipated Vera Pavlovna. Chernyshevsky's novel must thus be seen as part of an ongoing debate in Russian literature, with each author developing, refuting, recasting, and transforming the characters, plot, and themes of his predecessors' work.

The Structure of *What Is to Be Done?*

The first Soviet commissar of education, A. V. Lunacharsky, once suggested that the key to the structure of *What Is to Be Done?* lies in its "vulgar people, new people, superior people, and dreams."⁴⁶ This remark suggests a hierarchy of characterization; in fact, there are two, one for heroes and the other for heroines, with opportunity for comparison and contrasts both within and between the two groups.

Among males, the three most important "vulgar" characters (all from the nobility) are Misha Storeshnikov, dominated by a desire for Vera Pavlovna's respectability; Jean Solovtsov, passionately in love with Katya Polozova's wealth; and Serge, absolutely devoted to Julie Letellier's will. The first two, both ultimately unsuccessful suitors, demonstrate no possibility whatever of improvement, thereby apparently contradicting Chernyshevsky's own theory of environmental determinism. Serge appears minimally acceptable and, with Julie's prompting, even manages to act nobly on a few occasions.

The main heroes of the novel, Lopukhov and Kirsanov, occupy the

44. On Dobrolyubov, see text n. 11; E. Lampert, *Sons against Fathers: Studies in Russian Radicalism and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 226–61; Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, pp. 187–203.

45. The name Lopukhov probably is derived from the *lopukh* (burdock) that grows on gentry estates in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.

46. A. V. Lunacharsky, *Russkaya literatura: Izbrannye stat'i* (Moscow, 1947), p. 164.

next level up. Both of these “new men” emerge from the midst of the *raznochintsy*, both pursue medical studies, and both are strong proponents as well as exponents of Chernyshevsky’s central tenet of “rational egoism.”

On the highest level in the masculine hierarchy stands Rakhmetov, the “superior person,” an “extraordinary man.” A descendant of an old Russian family of wealthy aristocrats, he manages to overcome this handicap to become a revolutionary ascetic, a prodigy of self-discipline, a virtuous and incorruptible militant, devoted to the cause of revolution. His life story has been shown to bear a close resemblance to the Russian hagiographic tradition, particularly to the *Life of Aleksei, Man of God*,⁴⁷ while both his teachings and his deeds reveal a multitude of religious (specifically Christian) themes and motifs.⁴⁸ Chernyshevsky’s one attempt to humanize his superhero—he gives him a penchant for fine cigars—does little to bring Rakhmetov down to earth. He remains an artificial creation, a model for emulation, placed in the novel both to humiliate mere mortals and to inspire them to become at least “new men,” if not “superior” ones.

A similar hierarchy of characters exists on the female side. On the lowest level stands Marya Aleksevna, Vera’s greedy and deceitful mother; Julie Letellier, the French courtesan; Nastya Kryukova, the “fallen woman”; and Katya Polozova, the mistaken woman. But Chernyshevsky displays much greater generosity toward these “vulgar” women than he does toward his men. Actually eulogized before being dismissed, Marya Aleksevna is explained as the product of her environment. Circumstances also account for the behavior of Julie, who sympathizes with Vera’s plight and assists her on several occasions. Rescued from her life of prostitution by Kirsanov, Nastya becomes a productive member of the sewing cooperative. Kirsanov also rescues Katya from the error of her ways; she becomes a virtuous character and falls in love with Lopukhov-Beaumont. Thus although apparently more capable of redemption than men, women still have to depend on their male counterparts for liberation.

Vera Pavlovna, of course, represents the outstanding model of the “new woman.” From Rousseau’s Julie and George Sand’s heroines she has inherited a belief in the centrality of love. But like her Russian predecessors, in particular Herzen’s Lyubov, she is a full participant in the debate over the “woman question” in Russian letters. In one sense the entire novel can be said to describe the development of Vera Pavlovna’s consciousness both as a human being and as a woman. Here

47. See K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 49–50.

48. Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, pp. 206–18.

Chernyshevsky's humanizing touches, including the heroine's fondness for fine boots in her wardrobe and fresh cream in her tea, prove more successful in tempering the idealized aspects of her character.

But Chernyshevsky's heroine has a long way to go before she becomes an emancipated woman. The process requires self-reflection, study, and engagement in cooperative labor. Three times during the course of the action Vera Pavlovna too must be aided by men who appear just in the nick of time. Lopukhov rescues her from the oppressive environment of her family; Kirsanov frees her from a loveless marriage and from her ultimately unfulfilling work in the sewing cooperative; and finally, Rakhmetov releases her from her guilt and her intellectual error by explaining the true meaning of all her thoughts, feelings, and desires. Thus although Vera Pavlovna represents a significant advance over Herzen's pathetic Lyubov and Turgenev's isolated Odintsova and ridiculous Kukshina, she still must be seen as a "new woman" in the making. But then again, she also must be perceived as representing attainable qualities.

At the highest level in Chernyshevsky's female hierarchy stands the mysterious spirit who appears to Vera Pavlovna in each of her four dreams. This goddess identifies herself as "Love for Humanity," but is also called by the tautological sobriquets "Bride of Her Bridegrooms" and "Sister of Her Sisters." She represents dispassionate wisdom, omniscience, and virtue, and leads Vera Pavlovna through a process of self-discovery and self-realization toward ultimate emancipation. When Vera asks in her fourth dream for a glimpse of the goddess's face, there occurs what has been called a "reverse transfiguration"⁴⁹ as the spirit reveals that she possesses none other than Vera Pavlovna's own face and form, since Chernyshevsky's heroine represents the highest form of female virtue attainable at that time. Like Rakhmetov, the mysterious goddess appears as a model for emulation, to humiliate and inspire mortals to reach and attain at least the earth, if not yet the stars.

The literary technique employed by Chernyshevsky in expressing his ideas through these hierarchies of characters has aroused considerable controversy. F. B. Randall acknowledges that the novel is not modern in any formal sense and that it does not depend in any way on the beauty of its language. But he cites its elaborate plot, serious conversation, detailed characterization, and Victorian sense of humor as well as the author's didacticism as hallmarks of Chernyshevsky's novelistic technique.⁵⁰

49. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

50. F. B. Randall, *N. G. Chernyshevskii* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 130.

William Woehrlin and N. G. O. Pereira, both historians, come closer to articulating the popular view of Chernyshevsky as a writer. Woehrlin repeatedly uses such terms as "artistic failing," "incapacity as a writer," and "literary failure" to describe the author and his work.⁵¹ Pereira declares that by any artistic standards *What Is to Be Done?* is "simply a bad novel" and that its author's forte was clearly "not literary talent."⁵²

Two recent works in English have shed new light on Chernyshevsky's technique and should occasion a major reconsideration of his reputation as a writer. In a book devoted primarily to a study of Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*, Gary Saul Morson includes some extremely insightful remarks about Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*⁵³ He analyzes it as a literary utopia that makes extensive and effective use of metaliterary techniques to implicate its readers. He draws attention to the author's strategy of alternating narrative and metanarrative: the interruptions, inquisitions, essays, and so on all form part of what Morson describes as Chernyshevsky's "didactic framebreaking." Thus, for a contemporary audience, reading the novel became a form of complicity with the author as he engaged in a political act designed to implicate his readers. The author's Aesopian language should thus be viewed not merely as a literary technique employed to evade tsarist censorship but as one of the work's principal themes.

In the first comprehensive study of Chernyshevsky's novel, Irina Paperno argues that the basic structural principle of the novel consists in the organization of the narrative world in terms of the opposition of contrasting qualities, concepts, and characters. She identifies a mechanism for the resolution of these oppositions through which, after a series of formal operations, a quality is identified with its opposite. She studies this "reconciliation of oppositions" in all its variations and at every level of structure in the novel.

In addition Paperno interprets *What Is to Be Done?* as a "new Gospel." Moving beyond Chernyshevsky's obvious allusions to the Bible and the Christian tradition, she explores the implications of title, subtitle, structural patterns, and motifs (wedding, death and resurrection, sainthood, martyrdom). She concludes that the novel represents nothing less than the "New Testament of the late nineteenth century—a true positivistic Gospel," one that fulfilled its role in Russian letters not in spite of its artistic faults but rather because of them. Paperno pro-

51. W. Woehrlin, *Chernyshevskii: The Man and the Journalist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 314, 316, 317.

52. Pereira, *Chernyshevsky*, p. 85.

53. G. Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 99–104.

vides a convincing argument both for the tremendous emotional appeal that the novel had for Russian readers of the 1860s and for its impact on Russian society and politics.

Responses to *What Is to Be Done?*

The response to *What Is to Be Done?* was immediate and passionate. Radical young *intelligenty* found in the novel an appealing solution to what they considered to be the problems plaguing mid-nineteenth century Russia as well as to their own sense of alienation, uncertainty, and helplessness. On the one hand, the novel offered the vision of a future in which Russia was prosperous, socially just, and on a par with Europe as a member of a new world community. Indeed, through the application of science and technology to the peasant commune, Russia could move from last to first in the march of human progress. On the other hand, *What Is to Be Done?* exalted the current status of the intelligentsia by stressing its members' nobility of character and their central role in the process of social and economic development. Through knowledge and their own rational actions, they too could fulfill Christ's prophecy that the last shall be first.⁵⁴ It might be added that this social inversion also overcame Chernyshevsky's personal inadequacies and problems. In the novel, the socially graceless and shy Chernyshevsky is transformed into the accomplished Lopukhov, skilled in conversation, dancing, business, and cards; as Vera Pavlovna, the frivolous and materialistic Olga Sokratovna comes to share her husband's ideals and concerns. But while "new Russia" had been transfigured by industrial technology, the elimination of all patriarchal relations, and sexual as well as intellectual freedom, it remained primarily a rural society where the individual found meaning and self-fulfillment through his or her contribution to an agrarian community. Chernyshevsky's utopia thus retained a comforting anchor in the this-worldly present while projecting a transcendental other-worldly vision of the future.⁵⁵ The combination proved inspirational.

By convincing educated young Russians of the need for radical action, *What Is to Be Done?* widened the rift between reformers and revolutionaries within the intelligentsia beyond repair. Denouncing the Alexandrine reforms as inadequate, radical intellectuals, disaffected women, and idealistic youths immediately accepted the novel as a

54. Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, p. 217.

55. F. Manuel and F. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979), pp. 1, 16–20, 759.

creed of personal morality and a program for social action. The failure of their efforts to liberate themselves and transform society through scientific study, defiance of social conventions, and the organization of cooperative enterprises frequently owed as much to their impracticality as to tsarist suppression, but the suppression was real enough to convince many of them that Chernyshevsky was right to reject liberal methods. Propelled toward more violent means, they and later Russian revolutionaries were still inspired by the author's idealized image of dedicated and self-sacrificing intellectuals, capable of transforming society through knowledge and action.⁵⁶

This spiritual message inspired not only the populist youths and terrorists who willingly endured personal hardship and risked imprisonment or execution to proselytize among the people or to kill tsarist officials, and even Alexander II himself in 1881, in the people's name. It also stirred Russian Marxists, who otherwise rejected Chernyshevsky's ideas as idealistic and therefore unrealistic. Declared Georgi Plekhanov, an erstwhile populist considered to be the father of Russian Marxism:

Who has not read and reread this famous work? Who has not been charmed by it, who has not become cleaner, better, braver, and bolder under its philanthropic influence? Who has not imitated the purity of the principal characters? Who, after reading this novel, has not reflected on his personal life, has not subjected his personal striving and tendencies to a severe examination? We all draw from it moral strength and faith in a better future.⁵⁷

And defending *What Is to Be Done?* against a critic in a Swiss café, Lenin called Chernyshevsky

the greatest and most talented representative of socialism before Marx. . . . Under his influence hundreds of people became revolutionaries. . . . He plowed me up more profoundly than anyone else. . . . After my brother's execution, knowing that Chernyshevsky's novel was one of his favorite books, I really undertook to read it, and I sat over it not for several days but for several weeks. Only then did I understand its depth. . . . It's a thing that supplies energy for a whole lifetime.⁵⁸

56. See Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, pp. 96–121; Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 72–80; Woehrlin, *Chernyshevsky*, pp. 317–19; Venturi, *Roots of Revolution, passim*.

57. Quoted in R. Mathewson, Jr., *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, 2d ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 81.

58. Quoted in N. Valentinov, "Chernyshevsky i Lenin," *Novyi zhurnal*, no. 27 (1951), pp. 193–94.

Indeed, paying tribute to Chernyshevsky's influence on him, Lenin named his own seminal pamphlet of 1902 on the role and organization of the revolutionary party *What Is to Be Done?* The novel's enduring legacy, then, lay in the provision of an idealized model for emulation and a moral creed for Russian social revolutionaries. It was a strange legacy for a professed materialist to leave behind, but not one that Chernyshevsky would have disavowed.

Moderates, in contrast, resented the novel's harsh criticism of their beliefs and moral character, while conservatives were incensed by its condemnation of traditional values and institutions. Both denounced it as the progeny as well as the generator of moral decay, spiritual degeneration, and social collapse. For conservatives, however, Chernyshevsky's radicalism was simply the inevitable outcome of liberal reformism. Thus the novel helped to harden the attitude of conservatives against further reform of Russian social and political institutions.

The literary response to *What Is to Be Done?* proved equally strong. The novel spawned a special genre of antinihilist literature, including such works as Tolstoy's play *The Infected Family* (1863-1864), Aleksei Pisemsky's *Troubled Sea* (1863), and Nikolai Leskov's *No Way Out* (1864), and culminated in the greatest anti-nihilist novel of the nineteenth century, Dostoevsky's *Possessed* (1872).⁵⁹ In addition, the figure of Chernyshevsky appeared unflatteringly as a fictional character in a number of works, ranging from Dmitry Grigorovich's *School of Hospitality* (1865) to Vladimir Nabokov's novel *The Gift* (1937).⁶⁰

But by far the most fascinating literary response provoked by *What Is to Be Done?* appeared shortly after the novel was published—Dostoevsky's brilliant *Notes from Underground* (1865). A discussion of the complicated relationship between these two works can be found in Joseph Frank's cultural biography of Dostoevsky.⁶¹ There Frank combines the insight of two Soviet critics, V. L. Komarovich, who demonstrated that Dostoevsky's work was structurally dependent on Chernyshevsky's novel, and A. P. Skaftymov, who explored the role of the underground man as his creator's spokesman. Frank argues that the underground man is really a parodistic persona whose life exemplifies the tragicomic impasses resulting from his acceptance of all the implications of reason in its then-current Russian incarnation, especially those that Chernyshevsky chose to disregard.

59. See C. Moser, *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), pp. 74–80, 118–19.

60. See S. Davydov, "The Gift: Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevskii," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 19 (1985), 357–74.

61. Frank, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 310–47.

Soviet and Western Criticism of What is to be Done?

By and large, Soviet criticism of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* has been ideological and reductionist. Typical is the statement made by Piotr Nikolayev in the introduction to the recent Soviet translation of the novel into English:

Characteristic of Russian prose in general, and *What Is to Be Done?* in particular, is its noble social sentiment aspiring to conscious service in the people's name towards a better life on this earth. It is a rare example of a work of fiction consummating the social and economic thought of its country and its time. In the fullest sense, it became a weapon in the hands of its author, a revolutionary scholar and man of letters. For it was conceived in the thick and consecrated to the cause of battle.⁶²

There are a few exceptions. Grigory Tamarchenko's monograph *Chernyshevsky-romanist* (Chernyshevsky the novelist) and his introduction to the authoritative edition in the Literary Monument Series represent valuable contributions to our understanding of the work, as does S. A. Reiser's article in the same volume.⁶³ Otherwise, one falls back on the earlier studies by M. P. Alekseev and A. P. Skaftymov, which explore Chernyshevsky's relations to Western European literature; T. A. Bogdanovich's monograph on the private lives of men of the 1860s; and a few articles by Yu. K. Rudenko, including one on characterization.⁶⁴ Two volumes of Soviet commentary on the novel, one by N. L. Brodsky and N. P. Sidorov (1933), the other by M. T. Pinaev (1963), also contain a few valuable insights.⁶⁵

Western criticism has served Chernyshevsky somewhat better, but it was not until Irina Paperno's penetrating study of the author's life and work that a really first-rate monograph has been available. Books by Randall (1967), Woehrlin (1971), and Pereira (1975) have been referred to earlier. The first emphasizes Chernyshevsky as a writer and argues that he constitutes a major figure in Russian letters whose novel deserves to be read as literature. Woehrlin concentrates on the role of *What Is to Be Done?* in public debate and its impact on Russian youth.

62. N. G. Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* trans. L. Beraha (Moscow, 1983), Introduction, pp. 10–11.

63. N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Chto delat'?* ed. T. I. Ornatskaya and S. A. Reiser (Leningrad, 1975), pp. 747–81, 782–833.

64. M. P. Alekseev, "N. G. Chernyshevsky v zapadno-evropeiskikh literaturakh," in *N. G. Chernyshevsky*, ed. V. E. Evgen'eva-Maksimova (Leningrad, 1941), pp. 242–69; Skaftymov, "Chernyshevsky: Zhorzh Sand"; T. A. Bogdanovich, *Lyubov' lyudei shestidesyatikh godov* (Leningrad, 1929), pp. 1–64; Yu. K. Rudenko, "Obrazy 'novykh lyudei' i vopros o printsipakh," *Russkaya literatura*, no. 3 (1977), pp. 16–32.

65. N. L. Brodsky and N. P. Sidorov, *Kommentarii k romanu N. G. Chernyshevsky "Chto delat'?"* (Moscow, 1933); M. T. Pinaev, *Kommentarii k romanu N. G. Chernyshevsky "Chto delat'?"* (Moscow, 1963).

Pereira describes Chernyshevsky neither as the thoroughgoing revolutionary that his Soviet admirers assert him to be nor as the gravedigger of liberal humanism his anti-Soviet detractors portray, but rather as the first full-fledged theorist of democratic socialism in Russia.

English Translations of *What is to be Done?*

While Western criticism may have served Chernyshevsky somewhat better than its Soviet counterpart, Western translators have done the novel a distinct disservice.⁶⁶ Until now only two American translations of the novel have appeared, both in 1886, both woefully inadequate. They are flawed by numerous inaccuracies and infelicities, and their English is now antiquated. The first was published by Benjamin R. Tucker, a famous American anarchist who knew no Russian and probably based his translation on a French version. Tucker's version was "revised and abridged" (i.e., censored and truncated) by Ludmilla Turkevich and published by the Vintage Russian Library in 1961. When this volume went out of print it was reissued by Virago Books in 1983 in a so-called expanded form by Cathy Porter with only a small portion of the omitted material reinstated.

The second American translation was published by Nathan Haskell Dole, an American man of letters, and S. S. Skidelsky. Although Dole knew Russian, his translation also suffers from numerous blunders, literalisms, awkward phrases, and infelicitous expressions. After having been out of print for many years, his version was recently reissued by Ardis Publishers in a facsimile edition with a new introduction by Kathryn Feuer. Although Feuer claims that her volume provides a complete translation of Chernyshevsky's novel, in fact the reprint contains all the omissions of Dole's Victorian version, including a number of erotic passages.

In addition to these American translations, a Soviet edition of *What Is to Be Done?* translated by Laura Beraha was published by Raduga in 1983. Though it is at least complete, one scholar has characterized it accurately as "mutilated by the translator's determined use of outdated and confused British (especially Cockney) and U.S. (Western cowboy) slang."⁶⁷

The publication of this new translation is intended to make the complete text of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* readily available to English and American readers for the first time. The text is accom-

66. See M. R. Katz, "English Translations of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*" *Slavic Review*, 46/1 (1987), 125–31.

67. Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* Introduction by K. Feuer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), p. xxxv.