

The Commune On Znamenskaia Street:
Or What Happens When An Actor Makes Tea

Eric Johnson

Summer 2011

Eric Johnson is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History at the University of California,
Berkeley.

In March of 1864 the police chief of St. Petersburg, I. V. Annenkov, sent a report to the Governor General of the city, Prince A. A. Suslov:

“I regard it as my duty to inform Your Eminence that in Petersburg there has formed in recent times a circle of young people of very immoral and also dangerous tendencies; although the group seems now to be doing nothing political, one cannot be certain that in time it will not take on a different character. At the present time, the men and women who make up this circle are attracting general attention by trying to apply their nonsensical and ridiculous ideas to practice in their daily activities and way of life. The immoral side of their teaching consists in the fact that they *do not recognize marriage by the church*, replacing it, as they themselves explain, with common-law marriage—that is, they allow sensual pleasure without any limits and make the women and girls of their circle the common property of all the members of the society. The dangerous side of their teaching consists in the fact that they reject the fundamental rules of the social order, do not acknowledge the importance of familial relations, the reciprocal duties of parents and children, and preach the commonality of property, social labor, and social ideas, with which our journals have in recent times been so filled, namely ‘The Russian Word’ and ‘The Contemporary’ and the incoherent novels of *Chernyshevskiy*.”¹

Soon after its founding in 1863, the Znamenskaia commune described above became a symbol of the socialist project for Russian radicals—those “nihilists” who subscribed to some combination of materialism and socialism—along with reactionary journalists and state police agents. It touched a political nerve and galvanized swaths of the educated public because it represented something larger than itself. The commune’s life and subsequent collapse less than a year after its founding thus became a fruitful field for polemics on the nature of socialism.

While this identification with a greater cause is what made the commune so compelling, later Soviet scholars fell into the trap of seeing the enterprise as a miniature Soviet Union that failed to take root in the not-yet-ripe soil of the 1860s. Kornei Chukovskii argues in his “Istoriia Slepsovskoi kommuny,” which has become the definitive work on the subject, that the commune collapsed because of an ideological divide between those communists who were willing to do whatever was necessary to put their ideals into practice and those who wavered in the face of difficulties. Doubtless his story of an insidious class struggle that threatened a

socialist project resonated with his Soviet readers when it was published in 1931. While later Western scholars such as Charles Moser have elaborated on Chukovskii's simple ideological explanation, bringing in other causes as secondary factors, they have remained true to the Soviet writer's vision of the commune's dynamic. After Chukovskii, the only scholar to devote real attention to the enterprise was William C. Brumfield. But as his dissertation and subsequent article focus on the commune's founder, the writer Vasiliï Sleptsov, he treats the commune project as an episode in the latter's biography, rather than an event of intrinsic significance, and does not depart from Chukovskii's basic conceptual framework. I hope to show in this essay that there is more to the story.

A Home in a Book

In the fall of 1863 seven individuals moved into a newly leased apartment on Znamenskaia street in the center of the capital of the Russian Empire. They lived together communally, pooling resources and labor, in an attempt to put into practice the socialist ideas that fascinated Russia at the time. They shared a home for the better part of a year, and then went their separate ways. The experiment had failed. And yet, something happened in that place, at that time, that captured the imaginations of contemporaries. While St. Petersburg's radically-minded litterateurs took a keen interest in the commune's progressive activities, less sympathetic observers swapped rumors about the immoral behavior of the single men and women living under the same roof. The commune even inspired two novels, Nikolai Leskov's *No Way Out* and Vsevolod Krestovsky's *Panurge's Herd*. In memoirs and articles written decades later, debates about the "Znamenskaia commune" remained very much alive. The enterprise was described alternately as a comic farce or a tragic failure of high ideals; in either case it was something human, all too human.

But what was the "Znamenskaia commune," far less what happened there? Was it even a commune? Some observers and former members have insisted that it was not a *kommuna* at all but a simple *obshchezhitie*—a word, in other contexts often translated as "dormitory," for a place of communal living that lacks the ideological associations of "commune".² And what is in the name "Znamenskaia?" Seemingly simply enough, it was taken from the name of the street where the apartment was located. But the street was named after the Znamenskaia square where it began, which was in turn named after the Znamenskaia church that overlooked it, the "Church in the Name of Our Lord's Entry into Jerusalem" (*Tserkov' vo imia Vkhoda Gospodnia vo*

Ierusalim), which took its name from its prize icon: Our Lady of the Sign (*ikona Bozhiei Materi "Znamenie"*), a depiction of the Annunciation and reference to Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."³ The commune took its name from just such an auspicious sign (*znamenie*) of new beginnings. Of course to many casual observers "Znamenskaia" may well have recalled the Russian *znamia*, a "banner" or "standard;" and it was over just such an ideological battle-standard that radicals and reactionaries clashed. But not everyone called the commune "Znamenskaia." Many others anchored its identity in a person rather than a place, referring to it as the *Sleptsovskaiia kommuna*, "Sleptsov's commune." Indeed, its ideological significance is inseparable from the flesh and blood individuals who made it their home.

Who were the men and women who moved into the apartment on Znamenskaia street?⁴ The commune was founded by Vasilii Sleptsov, a prominent realist writer of the 1860s best known for his sketches of peasant life and his 1865 novel *Hard Times*. Well educated and of noble background, he dedicated himself to the progressive causes of the time, particularly women's emancipation. He was accompanied by two liberal noblemen from Tver province: Vladimir Iazykov, a lawyer and Sleptsov's brother-in-law, and Apollon Golovachev, who worked for the radical journal *Sovremennik* ("The Contemporary") and was also related to Sleptsov. Of the commune's four women, Aleksandra Markelova made her living from

«ЗНАМЕНСКАЯ КОММУНА»

ДОМ БЕЖАНА НА ЗНАМЕН-
СКОЙ УЛИЦЕ В ПЕТЕРБУРГЕ
(ТЕПЕРЬ УЛИЦА ВОССТАНИЯ
№ 7). ЗДЕСЬ В 1863—1864 гг.
ПОМЕЩАЛАСЬ «КОММУНА»
СЛЕНЦОВА

Фотография 1961 г.
Музей истории Ленинграда



translations and also wrote children's stories; she had a young son born out of wedlock, the product of an affair with an artist that she would never afterwards discuss. She was also partially deaf.⁵ Her radical sympathies were shared by Ekaterina Makulova, of low birth and fiery temperament, ironically referred to as “the princess.” Mariia Kopteva and Ekaterina Tsenina, on the other hand, were from noble families and had been educated in finishing schools, the Institutes for Young Ladies of Noble Birth (*instituty blagorodnykh devits*). The latter's memoir is our richest source of information on what happened in the commune, the only account from one of the seven members aside from a short fragment by Markelova. But here, as with the commune itself, names become a problem. While living in the commune Ekaterina Tsenina bore the name of her husband, from whom she was separated. She later married the litterateur Zhukovskii and published her memoir under her second married name. To emphasize the

retrospective nature of her account of the commune, Tsenina will be referred to here as Zhukovskaia, with the understanding that she took on that name later.

If the place took its significance from the people who inhabited it, those people attracted attention because they represented a cause that fascinated and terrified 1860s Russia, a cause nearly synonymous with an explosive book. Only months before the commune came into existence, Nikolai Chernyshevsky published the first parts of his novel *What Is To Be Done?*. The book electrified radical circles with its depiction of the emerging “new people,” like the heroine Vera Pavlovna, who sought to reorder their lives around purely rational principles. In the story, Vera escapes from her tyrannical family by marrying a young medical student guided by the new ideas, Lopukhov. The two then live together as independent equals, not as traditional husband and wife. Inspired by the potentialities of a more equitable distribution of labor and profit, Vera founds a sewing workshop that is communally owned and operated by the seamstresses. It turns out to be so successful that she opens branches throughout the city, which help rescue fallen women, spread rational principles rooted in equitable social relations, and otherwise improve the lives of the women who join them. Lopukhov, who by this time has consummated his marriage with Vera, realizes that his wife and best friend Kirsanov have fallen in love with each other, despite their attempts to hide their feelings from each other. To allow the two to make a life together, Lopukhov fakes his own suicide and flees abroad in the novel’s most dramatic instance of the “enlightened egoism” (i.e., rationalist, utilitarian ethics) practiced by the “new people.” Vera and Kirsanov settle down together, and years later Lopukhov returns from America, marries a certain Katia Polozova, and moves into an apartment adjoining Vera and Kirsanov’s. The two couples live together amicably and cheerfully.⁶

Chernyshevsky's masterwork is famed for being one of the worst written, yet most important and influential novels in all of Russian literature. Abbott Gleason notes that *What Is To Be Done?* was "the Bible of Russian radicals," who studied the novel and attempted to live out its prescriptions.⁷ The critic Aleksandr Skabichevskii recalled that

The novel's influence was colossal on our whole society. It played a great role in Russian life, directing the entire progressive intelligentsia onto the path of socialism, bringing it down from transcendental dreams to the contemporary evil of the day, pointing it out as the main goal towards which each should strive. In this way socialism became obligatory in prosaic, everyday life, not excepting food, clothing, housing, etc.⁸

As Skabichevsky suggests, the work's popularity stemmed not from philosophical originality so much as from its vivid picture of the "new people" that invited emulation in the real world. In this way, Vera Pavlovna, Lopukhin, and the others showed how Chernyshevsky's ideas on rational egoism could be applied in everyday life, which is just what the Znamenskaia commune members set out to do.

What Is To Be Done? provided a blueprint for social relations based on rationalistic ethics. Since everyone acts in the way that gives him or her the most pleasure, the way to happiness is simply to comprehend that one's own interest is identical to the interest of the group.⁹ In his descriptions of Vera and Lopukhov's household and the sewing cooperative, Chernyshevsky shows how rationalist ethics lead to a restructuring of space and time. Domestic space is to be divided into private and communal areas that are linked to social barriers. As Vera explains to Lopukhov as they plan their new life together:

First, we'll have two rooms, one for you and one for me, as well as a third room where we'll have tea and dinner, and receive those guests who come to see both of us, not you or me exclusively. Second, I'll never dare to enter your room so as not to pester you: Kirsanov doesn't either, and that's why you never quarrel... And so, third: I won't have the right to question you about anything, my dear. If you want to or have to tell me something about your affairs, then you'll tell me yourself. And the opposite is also true. These are our three rules.¹⁰

And this is what they in fact do. Vera and Lopukhov's landlady, spying on the couple through the partition, is amazed at the formality of their interactions; not only do husband and wife always sleep in their separate rooms, each elaborately dresses and composes themselves before approaching the other's door, as if approaching a stranger. When confronted about this unusual state of affairs, Vera explains: "If, she says, 'I don't want strangers to see me in disarray, and if I love my husband more than anyone else, then I should never show myself to him without washing my face first.'"¹¹ In the novel this restructuring of domestic space, with its social implications, does lead to more harmonious relations.

But Chernyshevsky's prescription is not only intended for husbands and wives. Vera's seamstresses institute a similar order in their cooperative. Inspired by the success of their workshop, the seamstresses decide that it would be more profitable to live and work together in a commune, which allows them to embrace a very decent, if not luxurious, standard of living. After expressing her initial surprise at the well-to-do surroundings, the character Polozova describes the commune's layout, more complex than the basic three-room model:

The whole establishment consists of three apartments opening onto one landing; these have been converted into one apartment by the addition of connecting doors. ... There are twenty-one rooms in the entire workshop, including two very large ones with four windows each, one of which serves as the reception room, the other as the dining room. Two other large rooms serve as the workrooms; all the others are residential.¹²

While Chernyshevsky attributes the workshop's prosperity to the economic logic of the communal principle, the spatial division into common and private areas makes the arrangement livable.

A close reading of *What Is To Be Done?* suggests that a successful communal life is also based on a shared sense of time. While Chernyshevsky does not provide instructions as concrete as having private and common rooms, he hints at the benefits of a communal routine. The

women in Vera's workshop are able to educate themselves as well as make dresses because they take it in turn to read aloud during their sewing—a practice only made possible by the harmonious integration of the seamstresses into a common routine. The same principle is at work in Vera Pavlovna's fourth dream, a vision of an idyllic future where social life has been successfully reordered along rational lines. Chernyshevsky portrays the communal enterprises of the novel's present as necessarily limited precursors to the dream's steel and glass mansion, inspired by the Crystal Palace in London's 1851 Great Exhibition. Vera's vision of the ideal commune shows how happy people will be when they are able to, as a group, integrate times of work and play. In the morning the people work in the fields, singing as they gather in the grain, while in the evening they dance and make merry. "What sort of event is it? A ball? Surely it's not just an ordinary weekday evening?" Vera asks her dream-guide—the answer: "Of course."¹³ But the communal routine seen in the dream does not preclude time away from the group. For many, the balls culminate in romantic rendezvous in private rooms whose lack of transparency sharply contrasts with the general openness of the Crystal Palace. Here as elsewhere in the novel communal and private space and time blend together harmoniously.

In his depictions of Vera's household, her workshop, and the Crystal Palace of her dream, Chernyshevsky shows how the enlightened "new people" who embrace rational egoism restructure space and time. Rational behavior is a prerequisite for the new domestic order, but that order helps keep one's behavior rational. Although *What Is To Be Done?* is of necessity vague on the point, Chernyshevsky drops numerous hints that the idyllic world of the Crystal Palace can only be achieved through revolution. While scholars have disagreed to what extent Chernyshevsky was himself connected to revolutionary circles, the basic Soviet line being that he was a full-fledged revolutionary, the novel points to revolutionary change through characters

like the heroic, ascetic Rakhmetov. But the starting point for this massive political change is the reorganization of the most intimate social relations in the domestic sphere.

A Book in a Home

Returning to the identity of the Znamenskaia commune, we are faced with a question. Was Sleptsov's project an ideological attempt to implement socialist principles like those presented by Chernyshevsky, or was it a purely pragmatic money-saving arrangement? Contemporaries who mentioned the commune in their memoirs sharply disagree on this point. The writer Avdot'ia Panaeva saw the enterprise's purpose as twofold: to avoid the unpleasantness of rented rooms and to save money.¹⁴ In her fragment on the commune, Markelova also claimed that profit was paramount: "The commune," she says, "was founded on purely economic principles."¹⁵ Zhukovskaia, however, disagrees. Sleptsov's project was ideological; he wanted to create "a Fourierist phalanstery," she says, "but realizing that it was impossible to eliminate the old forms of communal living right away, he decided to do it gradually, with individuals who he would succeed in convincing of the convenience of communist principles."¹⁶

While Zhukovskaia references Fourier a number of times, she neglects to mention the more immediate inspiration for the commune, Chernyshevsky—an omission that can only be intentional given his fame in the radical circles of the time. After rumors spread and the police investigated a potentially subversive organization it would be only natural for former members to downplay any vaguely revolutionary connections, which would explain Markelova's insistence on the purely economic nature of the commune as well as Zhukovskaia's skirting the Chernyshevsky issue. In fact, Zhukovskaia's account depicts Markelova as the most ideologically-minded of the communists besides Sleptsov himself. Aside from these dissenting voices, it seems clear that the commune was an ideological project. The writer and critic Kornei

Chukovskii, whose article on the Znamenskaia commune has become the authoritative account, supports this view: “A true disciple of Chernyshevsky, [Sleptsov] organized [the commune] in order to lay the foundation for a socialist organization of labor.”¹⁷ Other scholars agree with Chukovskii that Sleptsov’s project was inspired by Chernyshevsky’s novel; indeed, they cite the commune as evidence of the latter’s influence.¹⁸

The arrangement of space, for one thing, recalled Chernyshevsky’s principle in *What Is To Be Done?*. The distinction between private and communal spheres in the home influenced the communists’ policy on visitors. Markelova describes the set-up:

Each of us had a separate room, and then [there was] the common hall, which also served as dining room, where there stood a piano belonging to one of us. Each could receive whomever they wished in their own room, but by unspoken agreement only those on good terms with everyone were invited into the common hall, or at the very least those to whom the others were indifferent.¹⁹

The writer and memoirist Elizaveta Vodovozova, who received Sleptsov and others in her own salon and visited the commune herself a number of times, corroborates this story. “Each had their own room,” she recalls, “which they had to clean up themselves: the servant was kept only for washing and cooking. . . . When acquaintances of all the tenants came to the commune [*obshchezhitie*] they were invited into the common drawing-room; each received their personal acquaintances in their own rooms.”²⁰ The link with Chernyshevsky would have been obvious to a Russian intellectual of their generation. Indeed, it was no accident that the commune was founded only months after the novel’s release, in the first wave of enthusiasm over Chernyshevsky’s vision of the “new people.”

If the accounts of commune life do not mention any major problems stemming from this arrangement of domestic space, efforts to develop a sense of communal time did lead to difficulties. Of course every household has some sort of daily routine, and Zhukovskaia

describes an average day: some of the commune members left for work in the morning, some worked at home (Kopteva) or just laid about the house (Sleptsov). They tended to gather together for dinner and evening tea.²¹ But the communists' attempt to more rigidly synchronize their schedules created a less harmonious order than that seen in Chernyshevsky's vision of the Crystal Palace.

After some servants were let go to save on expenses, each of the commune members took on an additional household chore. Markelova's job was to clean the common room and the men's rooms, and because she left for work earlier than the others she "got up at cock's crow [*s petukhami*] and proceeded to knock on the men's doors, demanding that they quickly vacate" so she could sweep their rooms.²² Sleptsov, annoyed but now awake, went about his assigned task of lighting the fires and tending the lamps, which involved waking up Kopteva and Zhukovskaia. Each of the disgruntled communists "began secretly trying to think up a way to avoid the unpleasantness of early rising."²³ At Markelova's knock the following day, the men shouted back that they preferred sleep to clean rooms. While this situation was solved by Markelova swapping some of her duties with "princess" Makulova, who was around during the day, the new domestic regime would cause additional problems, as we will see below.

While it may come as no surprise that the Znamenskaia commune did not turn out as well as Vera Pavlovna's workshop, far less the Crystal Palace, the way in which it failed to live up to Chernyshevsky's ideal may shed light on the struggle to put socialist ideas into practice in everyday life. Attempts to reorder space and time along communal lines clashed with the centrifugal force of individual priorities insufficiently dedicated to the common cause, a topic that will be returned to below. Communal space and time were both violated when Markelova had to go to work early and the men wanted to sleep in.

Tables, Samovars, and Bread

The Znamenskaia commune which opened in fall 1863 existed for just under a year. In summer 1864 the members went their separate ways—Zhukovskaia and Kopteva were the first to leave, moving into separate housing but remaining in touch with the commune, while Sleptsov himself left for Moscow on July 1st, presumably deeply disappointed at the failure of what Chukovskii called “the most serious enterprise of his life.”²⁴ Contemporaries and later scholars have speculated on the causes of the commune’s collapse. Was the socialist project doomed from the start, collapsing under the structural contradictions of its own principles? Were the individuals involved simply unsuited to such an endeavor? Or was an otherwise valid experiment overcome by external forces? Each of the explanations offered is based on an interpretation of the physical objects, routine practices, and interpersonal dynamics that lay at the heart of commune life. And each returns again and again to the individual at the center of this communal enterprise: Vasilii Alekseevich Sleptsov.

As Zhukovskaia’s memoir is our most detailed source of information on the day-to-day workings of the commune, any assessment of the commune’s collapse will have to come to terms with her perspective. Zhukovskaia stresses that the commune had difficulties controlling its expenditures and struggled along on the brink of insolvency—a significant judgment of an institution whose *raison d’etre*, at least for Zhukovskaia, was economic efficiency. The profitability of communal living had been illustrated in Chernyshevsky’s portrayal of Vera Pavlovna’s sewing cooperative, where the twenty five seamstresses saved money on umbrellas while buying higher-quality products because few of them tended to go out at the same time on rainy days.²⁵ So why did communal living not work out so well in the Znamenskaia commune,

and who was to blame? Much of the answer is to be found in the practice of hosting Tuesday dinners, an activity in which both Zhukovskaia and Sleptsov took leading roles. In her discussions of the commune's finances Zhukovskaia implicitly argues that she was not responsible for the less than ideal situation, while implying that Sleptsov was.

The deficit was primarily due to the Tuesday night dinners, open to all comers, which the communists had instituted to propagandize their project. The whole affair began, recounts Zhukovskaia, when Sleptsov sought the permission of the others to bring a group of interested society ladies to visit. He sought to dispel rumors of "immorality" then current, which threatened to besmirch individual reputations and the honor of their collective "cause" (a word that Zhukovskaia puts in Sleptsov's mouth with a hint of irony, as she repeatedly denies her own allegiance to an ideological agenda beyond the simple practicality of communal living). Sleptsov put Zhukovskaia in charge of the management (*khoziaistvo*) of the dinner, and between them they bought appetizers, dessert, cookies, wine, and English porter to supplement their usual, more modest victuals. Though Zhukovskaia relates that the first dinners went well, and more and more people began to attend the now weekly gatherings, the prospect of free food and drink soon attracted certain dubious characters whom no one seemed to know, who would sit silently, "enlivening only towards dinnertime, hurrying to take a seat closer to the snacks and vodka."²⁶ In calculating the finances at the end of the month, the commune members discovered to their chagrin that the agreed upon contribution of fifty rubles per person would not cover their expenses, and each would have to pay eighty. "Who can pay that kind of money?" wondered Makulova.²⁷ This PR campaign, besides taking a toll on the communal coffers, did raise the commune's profile, but seems to have encouraged rather than halted the spread of malicious rumors, as we will see below.

Tension over money matters and luxury was closely linked to the second proposed reason for the break-up of the commune: the failure of the communists, in the most literal sense, to keep their house in order. Markelova and Vodovozova ascribe the failure of the commune in large part to the lack of a *khoziaika*, a difficult-to-translate female noun which can mean “mistress,” “proprietress,” “hostess,” or “landlady,” and is often a wife or mother who runs the household. The *khoziaika* is in charge of the domestic sphere of *khoziaistvo*, which in this sense can refer to anything from managing the household economy to doing the mundane chores of washing, cooking, and cleaning. Vodovozova writes that the commune failed because of

the novelty of the enterprise, the lack of any practical sense among the Russians of the intelligentsia, but more than anything because the women of that time discovered their aversion to *khoziaistvo* and to simple labor, which they so idolized in theory. No one in the commune wanted to take charge of *khoziaistvo*, although the majority were women—Sleptsov often did it alone, though he was burdened with all sorts of other work. All of this caused great disorder in the commune, and life for many turned out in the end to be no cheaper than in traditional rented rooms [*meblirovannii komnaty*].²⁸

Markelova was the only commune member aside from Zhukovskaia to record her memories of the commune, although they are regrettably brief in comparison with the latter’s work, a mere digression in her 1899 reminiscences of the writer Khvoshchinskaia. Along with Vodovozova, Markelova blames the commune’s fate on neglect of the domestic realm: “And if we had had a bit more practicality, had had a good *khoziaika* in our midst, perhaps the enterprise would have held out and developed. It is true that a good *khoziaika* would likely have taken charge of us and given our commune an undesirable character, and we nevertheless wanted to live ‘in a new way’ [*po-novomu*]...”²⁹ This last comment reveals the problem of *khoziaistvo* for those who took the commune’s ideological foundations seriously: while a lack of domestic authority threatened the survival of the commune, its firm presence would have undermined the socialist nature of the enterprise.

After firing the servants for lack of the necessary funds, the commune members instituted a new order of *khoziaistvo*. Sleptsov would be in charge of cleaning the lamps and lighting the fires, Golovachev and Iazykov would set the table and carry in the dishes, Markelova would clean the main hall and the men's rooms, Kopteva would pour the tea, Makulova would, besides her kitchen duties, prepare the samovar, and Zhukovskaia would continue on as hostess at the Tuesday dinners and begin paying visits to society ladies interested in the commune (a duty she says the others saw as "the most burdensome and dull").³⁰

Just as the debates over finances revolved around the Tuesday dinners, a particular time when the commune opened up to the outside world, the difficulties of *khoziaistvo* found a symbolic center in an object that drew the commune in on itself: the samovar. The redistribution of household chores changed the daily practice of getting tea at the samovar. For one thing, after samovar duty was assigned to "princess" Makulova, the number of times a day the samovar could be heated was limited to three, a decision that immediately created conflict among communists with very different schedules. As we saw above, instituting a common morning routine proved problematic, since Markelova was an early riser, Zhukovskaia and Kopteva rose later, and Sleptsov was known to sleep till noon. But cleaning the men's rooms was not the only issue. As Zhukovskaia relates, Makulova began knocking on doors at 9am, announcing that tea was served and the samovar would not be heated again. Not surprisingly, when Zhukovskaia approached the samovar at 1:30, she found it cold; after Makulova refused to light it again, Zhukovskaia turned to the washer-woman, who in exchange for a tip was more than happy to make some tea. Makulova then demanded that Zhukovskaia iron the laundry in place of the washer-woman, and accused her of "unconscionable and obvious exploitation" before storming off.³¹

СЛЕПЦОВ
Фотография, 1860-е гг.
Литературный музей, Москва



But the samovar proved to be a fault line for other tensions, as well. As the quote from Vodovozova suggests, *khoziaistvo* was seen as a woman's sphere, even in the progressive, nihilist circles surrounding journals like *Sovremennik* in the 1860s. It was thus the women's fault that the household was not properly run. "The women of that time," says Vodovozova, "discovered their aversion to *khoziaistvo* and to simple labor, which they so idolized in theory. No one in the commune wanted to take charge of *khoziaistvo*, although the majority were women—Sleptsov often did it alone..."³² It is perhaps not entirely a coincidence that one of the clearest images of Sleptsov trespassing onto the female sphere involves the samovar itself: on her first visit to the commune, Panaeva is told that Sleptsov "is in the kitchen lighting the samovar, because the old servant had left and the new one had not yet arrived." "It was humorous," she remarks, "to see Sleptsov with his elegant appearance when he appeared in the room with a boiling samovar." Sleptsov then even began pouring the tea because, says Panaeva, the ladies

found doing it “too boring.”³³ Taking a new attitude toward *khoziaistvo* was not only essential to implementing socialist economic relations in the commune; it was a way of restructuring gender relations, a core goal of Chernyshevsky and Sleptsov. But by all accounts this attempt met with resistance among the supposedly progressive individuals involved, both inside the commune and in the literary circles that made up its broader social world.

We have seen how financial arguments and squabbles over *khoziaistvo* divided the commune members. In the third main explanation for the dissolution of the commune, Kornei Chukovskii posits a stable social divide and interprets it in terms of ideology. There were, he says, two camps among the nihilists of the 1860s, the “salon nihilists” who subscribed to socialist ideas but hesitated to put them into practice and the “stormy nihilists” who are fully committed to realizing their ideals. Chukovskii typologizes the Znamenskaia communists along these lines: the dedicated, “stormy” camp included Sleptsov himself, Markelova, and Makulova, while Kopteva and Zhukovskaia were “salon” nihilists. After equivocating a bit over Iazykov and Golovachev, Chukovskii assigns them to the salon party; in any event, these two men seem to hold themselves aloof from the conflicts between the two groups centered around Markelova and Zhukovskaia. This ideological divide is Chukovskii’s interpretive framework for understanding the skirmishes over money, luxuries, housework, and even terminology that flare up in Zhukovskaia’s account of commune life. The core thesis of his essay on “The History of the Sleptsov Commune” is that the conflict between these two groups caused the downfall of the commune project—“sooner or later their unnatural union must have ended in failure.”³⁴

The complexities involved in Chukovskii’s ideological interpretation of commune life are brought to the surface by an object combining the most prosaic ubiquity with the loftiest symbolic associations: bread. Soon after Markelova took over the commune’s *khoziaistvo* and

sought to reduce expenditures, she replaced the usual Tuesday dinner loaf with *sitnik*, a cheap bread associated with the lower classes. Only the hungriest reached for the tray piled high with thick slices.³⁵ The following morning Zhukovskaia and Iazykov, who breakfasted together, discovered that Markelova had replaced the usual bread with *sitnik* and forbidden the servant to buy any more bread until the plebeian loaf had been eaten. “I’m not a cabby, and won’t eat this dry, sour rot [*sukhuuu kisliatinu*],” protested Zhukovskaia when Markelova appeared on the scene, “No one can force me to eat filth.”³⁶ The latter replied that thousands of people would be happy to have such bread with their tea, to which Zhukovskaia gave the apparently universal answer: “Then make those thousands happy. I don’t want it.” The clash ended when Zhukovskaia sent out the servant to buy white bread with her own money, and Markelova backed down and reimbursed her with communal funds. Iazykov congratulated her for taking a stand for “our daily bread.”³⁷

The ideological side of the dispute here seems less important than the simple interpersonal dynamic of two uncompromising individuals with aspirations to household leadership. The problem is, of course, as Markelova exclaimed when Zhukovskaia countermanded her order to the servant, that “There’s no room for two mistresses [*dvukh khoziaiek byt’ ne dolzhno*]!”³⁸ Although ideology and *khosiaistvo* are interrelated, Chukovskii’s exclusive emphasis on the former leads to an oversimplified social picture of the commune. When housekeeping is taken into account, the commune looks less like two neatly opposed camps than two core groups of women—Zhukovskaia and Kopteva on the one hand, and Markelova and Makulova on the other—around which Iazykov and Golovachev float more or less neutrally and unobtrusively. Sleptsov is the wildcard here; his ideas were closer to the “stormy ones,” but his aristocratic habits and preferences allied him at times with the “salon

nihilists.” In fact, Zhukovskaia assumes that Sleptsov will be just as dissatisfied with the *sitnik* as she is.

The three explanations for the breakup of the commune discussed so far, based on interpretations of economics, *khoziaistvo*, and ideology, all posit an internal reason for the project’s failure. By contrast, the Soviet scholar M. L. Semanova argues that outside pressure is to blame, and hence the failure is not due to any flaw in the socialist ideas themselves or the individuals who sought to put them into practice. In her article for the *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* volume on Sleptsov, published in 1963, she attributes the commune’s dissolution to the police attention attracted by the potentially subversive communist enterprise. “Not for nothing” she says, “did this ‘society, founded on communist principles’ so disturb the organs of the political police. It was put under street surveillance [*perekrestnyi nadzor*] by the Third Section and the Petersburg Chief of Police [*ober-politseimeistera*]. ... These documents thus disprove the version of events in which the commune fell apart because of quarrels between its members or considerations of an economic character.”³⁹ Semanova is referring in particular to a passage in one of the Third Section’s reports which states that the members, realizing their danger, decided to dissolve the enterprise before the police took action: “According to recently gathered information and as a result of [surveillance] set up to monitor certain personages involved in the aforementioned affair, it has turned out that the commune, located on Znamenskaia street in the house of *Bekman*, has been abolished as a result of its members finding out that they were being watched...”⁴⁰ In fact, the police had been interested in the commune for months before the actual breakup in summer 1864 (the first report is dated January 15),⁴¹ and Sleptsov appears to have been tipped off by his landlord, Bekman, with whom he was on friendly terms.

The tsar's Third Section was interested in the rumors of sexual immorality in the Znamenskaia commune. To them it was hardly irrelevant that Sleptsov no longer lived with his legal wife, or that a number of the communists were said to have entered into "common-law marriage" (*grazhdanskii brak*) with each other.⁴² This perceived threat to the institution of marriage is seen in what is certainly the strangest of the police documents published in the volume, a report based on an article printed in the reactionary journal *Domashnaia beseda* in November 1863. The article describes a group of apparently disrespectful nihilists present at an Orthodox marriage ceremony. It is not at all clear what the problem is, if the episode ever took place, or what connection it might have to the Znamenskaia commune. The report's author argues that the article must be true, because "the editor of *Domashnaia beseda*, Askochenskii, is not the sort of person who would publish such an article without being sure of its truthfulness [*pravdopodobie*]." Although the conservative article seems to be unconnected to the commune, the police official argues that the disrespectful nihilists' behavior "had an obviously atheistic character, possible only among the members of the communist society which has been gathering... around the notorious Sleptsov."⁴³ While this document tells us little about Sleptsov and the commune, it shows the government's sensitivity to any threat to the institution of marriage. The secret police understood as well as Chernyshevsky that domestic relations between men and women were closely tied to the political order.

The Play's the Thing

Sleptsov himself, like the commune he founded, fascinated and puzzled his contemporaries. He is chiefly remembered for being forgotten—his works enjoyed phenomenal popularity in his own day only to later gather dust. His zealous social activism culminated in a commune that turned out to be a colossal failure, yet succeeded in capturing the imagination of the public of his time. Sleptsov has been described as the prototypical Russian intellectual of the 1860s, a man who reflected the essence of his age; yet he “burned, and burned out too early,” succumbing to exhaustion, sickness, and finally death at the age of 41.⁴⁴ Perhaps a look at the man can illuminate the commune's collapse more effectively than the four possible reasons examined above.

Vasilii Alekseevich Sleptsov was born in Voronezh on July 17, 1836.⁴⁵ Unlike many prominent radicals of his generation, he was of good aristocratic stock: his father served in the Novorossisk Dragoons and had a number of highly-placed relatives in Moscow, while his mother was descended from Polish and Baltic nobility. As a child Sleptsov displayed precocious intellectual ability as well as a certain attraction to religion—he expressed the desire to enter a monastery. He was educated, per usual for his class, first by tutors at home, then in the First Moscow Gymnasium and later the Penza Noblemen's Institute. The young man's religious fervor—he went through an ascetic phase involving fasting and wearing rusty chains under his shirt—eventually resulted in his dramatic renunciation of Christianity in an act of blasphemy during an Institute church service. While Chukovskii interprets this as a simple heroic act by a budding radical, V. S. Markov sees the episode as anything but straightforward. In his account,

based on conversations with the writer's brother Nikolai, Sleptsov was anxious to skip his last year at the Institute and proceed immediately to Moscow University. To this end, he feigned madness by persistently muddling his duties as an altar boy, including switching the priest's and deacon's vestments. Dispatched to the infirmary, he continued to play the madman so convincingly that he terrified his brother Nikolai, whom he then let in on the secret. After being sent home and sufficiently "convalescing," Sleptsov began studying for his entrance examinations and succeeded in matriculating in the medical faculty.⁴⁶

At this point in the narrative, perhaps after a remark about university or his subsequent travels through the Russian countryside, biographies of Sleptsov focus on his careers as a writer and social activist. As Sleptsov's twin claims to fame, this approach is sensible enough. But if his performance as a madman has any significance, perhaps we should pause to consider Sleptsov the actor. In childhood he had been taken to the theater by his mother, and at Moscow University Sleptsov fell in with a circle of students who shared his passion for the stage.

He skips class, zealously visits the Malyi Theater," writes Markov, "tirelessly applauds his favorite, Shchepkin, and on coming home raves about the monologues and only speaks in dramatic excerpts and phrases from the current repertoire. All these monologues and excerpts spilled out [*vykhodili*] of him entertainingly and youthfully passionately, thanks to his talent and refined sense for imitation, so that his comrades applauded and assured him over and over of his artistic talent."⁴⁷

Also encouraged by his idol Shchepkin, Sleptsov dropped out of university to pursue a career in acting. Although little is known about this chapter in his life, he did debut with a theater company in Yaroslavl, where he played the lead role of Khlestakov in "The Inspector General" during the 1854-5 season. While Sleptsov then returned to Moscow for reasons unknown, his love for the theater would stay with him for life and he would periodically return to the stage.

Some who knew him grasped that Sleptsov's penchant for acting was not limited to the stage in Yaroslavl. With her literary sensibility and eye for detail Vodovozova saw more clearly

than most that acting was an integral part of his personality; again and again in her memoir she draws attention to the writer's "mask." In a description of one of her dinners, Pavel Iakushkin makes a joke and casts a sidelong glance at Sleptsov to see his reaction. "But not a muscle moved on the writer's marble face," says Vodovozova. "Sleptsov, pampered by fate, generously endowed with intellectual and physical gifts, was amazingly able to control himself: when he wanted to hide his laughing eyes, he lowered his thick, long eyelashes—and then no one could catch his mocking gaze."⁴⁸ In another passage, a certain Olga Ochkovskaia asked Vodovozova her opinion of Sleptsov. She replied that "He is handsome, very handsome... but his face is something immobile [*kakoe-to nepodvizhnoe*], quite a mask [*tochno maska*]..." Olga then gave her view: "In spite of his remarkable handsomeness, I was put off for a long time by the immobility [*nepodvishnost'*] of his face, but I am beginning to be convinced that he puts on that mask intentionally to hide the greatness of his soul."⁴⁹ This is, as we see in other points in her memoir, Vodovozova's own view.⁵⁰

Other observers noticed this trait in Sleptsov but interpreted it less flatteringly. When Zhukovskaia describes the writer's attempts to recruit her into the commune, she is suspicious of his self-assurance and announces her distrust. When Sleptsov presses her to be more straightforward, she replies: "I don't like your very lack of that same straightforwardness: you're



В ТЕАТРЕ

Граюра, 1870-е гг.

Публичная библиотека им. М. Е. Салтыкова-Щедрина, Ленинград

«...если бы сидеть беспрестанно кавалером, сидишь в первом ряду кресла, или иным изукрашенным образом, прилежанием к театру для того, чтобы похвалиться свои белее кресла, что сидишь—это дельная и что, слушая пьесу, они могли бы получить просветительную пользу, но, конечно, все эти баллы и баллоны делаются бы в дико...» (Из спичек Слепцова о театре)

always shifting around [vy vse s kakimi-to izvorotami].” Sleptsov’s affectedness is a recurring theme in Zhukovskaia’s memoir. She could only get along with him was “when he spoke simply.” While Zhukovskaia’s antipathy to Sleptsov warns one against accepting her interpretation of his personality unreservedly, she no doubt recognized one of its major traits.

If Sleptsov was an actor, onstage and off, he also had an interest in directing. In one of his journalistic travel sketches published in *Sovremennik* as the “Letters on Ostashkov,” Sleptsov describes his visit to the provincial town’s theater. After a powerful performance by simple tradespeople who acted “purely from the love of art,” Sleptsov, the guest of honor, mingled with the actors and offered his words of advice.⁵¹ Referring to this episode in her introduction to an essay of Sleptsov’s on the theater in the *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* volume, L. A. Evstigneeva states that Sleptsov “brilliantly managed the duties of a director.” In his 1862 visit to the town

he “helped the actors of the Ostashkov theater sort out their roles and told them in detail how they perform Potekhin’s drama in other theaters.”⁵² When the post of director of the Aleksandrinskii Theater opened up in 1868, Sleptsov applied for the position. Nikolai Nekrasov wrote to Aleksandr Ostrovsky: “As it has become known that the administration does not wish to hire a director from among the actors and is looking for one among the litterateurs, we have come to the conclusion that the position could be successfully filled by Vasilii Alekseevich Sleptsov.”⁵³ Although Sleptsov did not get the job, he did arrange amateur theatrical performances during his years in Petersburg.⁵⁴

My digression into Sleptsov’s theatrical life is of more than just biographical interest. While scholars have cursorily noted Sleptsov’s dabbling in acting, they have not recognized just how intimately that sphere of his life was linked with his writing and social activism. Evstigneeva, to her credit, points out the literary connection: Sleptsov’s writings are particularly “visual” in their conveyance of characters’ gestures—not for nothing are so many of his stories entitled “scenes.”⁵⁵ The social utility of acting is the subject of his fragmentary essay on the nature of theater. Though written in a different hand, Evstigneeva makes a convincing case that the document was written by Sleptsov (during his sickness he often dictated) sometime in the late 1860s or early 1870s.⁵⁶

In the (untitled) essay, Sleptsov points out that one can see the theater as a source of entertainment or as a “school of morality” (*shkolu npravstvennosti*). In fact it combines both functions. States have long recognized the theater’s ability to influence the masses, and in this pedagogical potential the theater is not unlike a university. For Sleptsov “The stage is the rostrum, the auditorium is the lecture hall, the theatrical performance is the lecture in human form [*propoved’ v litsakh*], the play is also the lecture, only expressed not in words but in images

and actions.”⁵⁷ But the masses are unaware that they are being taught. He points out that “If you were to say to the brilliant cavaliers sitting in the first row, or the ladies who come to the theater to show off their white shoulders, that the performance is a lecture and that listening to the play they could gain a moral benefit [*poluchat’ npravstvennuiu pol’zu*], then, of course, all these ladies and cavaliers would start laughing in your face.” This ability to instruct without the knowledge of the audience is the “enchancing significance” of the theater.⁵⁸

But this is precisely what Sleptsov hoped to do in the Znamenskaia commune: teach others how to live. He believed that the commune’s success would not only benefit its present membership, but would cause imitative enterprises to take root and spread the good work until the communes could develop into genuine Fourierist phalansteries.⁵⁹ In this he followed Chernyshevsky’s model:

Černyševskij had looked upon the commune described in *What Is To Be Done?* as a stepping-stone to a world-wide upheaval introducing the future utopia, when re-educated mankind would perceive the advantages of communal living and embrace this form of existence enthusiastically. Slepcov, sharing these ideas with Fourier and Černyševskij, also wanted something of more widespread significance to emerge from his experiment, and in this his commune differed from others founded at that time simply to reduce living expenses.⁶⁰

In order to further “the cause,” Sleptsov sought to spread the good news through visiting salons and explaining the benefits of his enterprise. When Markelova reproached him for going out every evening to visit “society ladies,” he justified himself by saying that his visits were motivated by “the propaganda of communist principles and the necessity of maintaining external links for the sake of ‘the cause,’ as only by this route, and not through insularity [*zamknutost’iu*], can the commune gain followers.”⁶¹ Although this was mainly Sleptsov’s department, he also brought Golovachev, later Zhukovskaia, and perhaps others with him on these visits.

Even more importantly, Sleptsov instituted the Tuesday dinners to showcase the prosperity, harmony, and—against rumors of immorality—propriety of the Znamenskaia commune. Along with sending out emissaries to society, the group brought society into their midst. The pedagogical nature of this effort was twofold: in the first place, the dinners encompassed cultural and educational events like musical performances and lectures on scientific subjects. In fact, Aleksandr Skabichevskii’s clearest memory of his visit to a “literary-musical concert” at the commune was a four hands piano performance by the composer Serov and his wife of the overture to the opera “Robespierre.”⁶² The second, even more important pedagogical goal was to show the harmonious, equitable, and decent relations between the communists themselves, particularly between men and women. Just as the idea of reordering domestic relations between the sexes was for Chernyshevsky the prerequisite for broader social and political change, Sleptsov wanted to show that the progressive commune members could live together in rational concord as well as run a financially profitable enterprise.⁶³ In this way, the commune sought to give an impression of domestic harmony not unlike that produced by Serov’s piano performance with his wife.

For Sleptsov the commune was a kind of theater, and thus also a “school of morality.” But in order to transform his enterprise into a living theater of socialist ideas he would need fellow players as well as an audience. Like any other theatrical performance the commune needed the coordinated functioning of its members to successfully communicate its message. The problem with this, as we have seen, was that the members had very different conceptions of what the commune meant, and the opposing camps centered around Zhukovskaia and Markelova were performing conflicting dramas on the same stage. But as Sleptsov wrote in his essay, the actors as well as the audience can be blissfully unaware of the theater’s pedagogical function—

they still teach. “The amazing, almost enchanting significance of the theater,” he wrote, “[is that] the actors, in no way suspecting, and not at all thinking to teach, teach nevertheless...”⁶⁴

The trick, of course, is to correctly manage the actors, which Sleptsov partially succeeded in doing. Without wading into ideologically dangerous waters he harnessed Zhukovskaia’s proclivity for socializing to use the woman who refused to accept his ideological agenda as an effective companion in the salons and hostess of the Tuesday dinners. While Chukovskii’s theory of an ideological division in the commune highlights a very real divide (that was nevertheless not purely ideological in origin), it does not of itself explain the experiment’s failure. If the commune had not been so prominent, if it had not drawn attention to itself in an effort to propagate socialist ideas, it could very well have survived much longer than it did. Markelova suggests that this was the problem when she notes that “In all probability, our commune [*obshchezhitie*] would have passed entirely unnoticed had V. A. Sleptsov not been in our midst...”⁶⁵ Without Sleptsov the commune would not have become a theater, and would no doubt have been forgotten along with the other purely economic cooperatives founded around that time.⁶⁶ Perhaps it still would have failed, but it would not have failed for the same reasons. But did the commune succeed in teaching its audience the correct lesson? What sort of message did people receive about gender relations on Znamenskaia street?

The Woman Question

When Nikolai Uspenskii stepped into the Znamenskaia commune, he entered a palace of earthly delights. After ascending a flight of stairs past exotic potted plants and statues of Greek gods, Uspenskii found himself in a luxurious apartment lit by chandeliers and filled with melodious piano music. He was greeted by the handsome and well-dressed figure of Sleptsov, surrounded by beautiful women, who offered him a selection of fine wines. Uspenskii and his convivial friend Aleksandr Levitov, whose decision to visit the commune had been fueled by rumors and a heavy dose of vodka, opted for more of the simple Russian beverage and took their seats. But their conversation was constantly interrupted by the attractive women who earnestly asked Sleptsov for advice and submissively hung on his every word. After the visitors took their leave, Levitov concluded that Sleptsov lived in a “Mohammedan paradise” surrounded by “houris.”⁶⁷

So runs Uspenskii’s suspiciously entertaining account of the commune. If the general tenor of the story was not enough to make the reader suspect its complete veracity, Uspenskii makes factual errors and conflates two distinct periods of Sleptsov’s life. Nevertheless, his picture of the commune highlights the fact that relations between the sexes were at the core of how the commune was perceived. Extravagant rumors of sexual immorality were met with vehement denials, such as Zhukovskaia’s assertion that “We have a monastery here, a pure monastery!”⁶⁸ (Zhukovskaia, of course, had a personal stake in maintaining the commune’s reputation.) This controversy begs a question: how did a project meant to spread Chernyshevsky’s vision of rational and egalitarian gender relations produce the opposite effect? Why did the theater fail to enlighten its audience with the appropriate message—was the public

not fit to receive it or did the production go awry? While the rumors of immorality were partly caused, no doubt, by the simple fact that nihilist men and women were living together under one roof, it would be a mistake to underestimate the role of Sleptsov's idiosyncratic attitude towards women.

Sleptsov proved himself a zealous social activist devoted to improving the condition of women in the Russian Empire. The so-called "woman question" (*zhenskii vopros*) emerged in the years following Nicholas I's death and Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, and would be at the core of the nihilist social agenda in the 1860s.⁶⁹ While Alexander II enacted his "great reforms" from above, radicals sought to help individual women at a grassroots level, emancipating many through sham marriages not unlike Vera Pavlovna's in *What Is To Be Done?*. At the heart of this movement, Sleptsov arranged popular-scientific lectures for women, organized literary evenings and concerts, founded a book-binding workshop, and worked to create an office for translations from foreign languages.⁷⁰ His efforts to enlighten women through education and raise their material condition through employment were in line with the radical ideas of the time.⁷¹ And of course his Znamenskaia commune was in large part an effort to provide adequate housing for single women.

While Sleptsov's professional activities focused on alleviating the plight of women, it is his personal relations with the opposite sex that provided the grounds for Uspenskii's tale and other rumors about the Znamenskaia commune. While contemporaries seem to have relished the opportunity to record their anecdotes about Sleptsov "the ladykiller" (*serdtseed*), scholars have no more than hinted at the writer's "inclinations."⁷² As the one exception, Brumfield devotes a few pages of his dissertation to the subject, but does not explore the rich memoir material in any depth or probe its implications for Sleptov's biography or our understanding of the commune.⁷³

While Sleptsov became known for his extramarital affairs, he married twice, neither time successfully. In 1856 he married a dancer at the Moscow Theater, Ekaterina Tsukanova, who died less than a year later. Then in 1858 he met and married Ekaterina Iazykova, the daughter of a Tver landowner. Although they had children—a son who died at birth and a daughter named Valentina—Sleptsov did not settle down to a peaceful domestic existence. Their married life was disrupted by Sleptsov’s inability to keep away from other women, and he left her behind in Moscow when he moved to St. Petersburg. Though Iazykova travelled a few times to St. Petersburg to try to win back her husband, apparently employing all of her charms to attract her husband’s attention—and she was said to have been a beautiful woman—Sleptsov never lived with her again. During his commune days Iazykova arrived unexpectedly from Moscow, in an episode related by Zhukovskaia, and Sleptsov settled her and his daughter in an apartment elsewhere in the city. But after a time she gave up her efforts and left him entirely.⁷⁴ Sleptsov was unable to establish a lasting home with his wife, in large part because he was unable to resist the attention of other women.

Almost no memoirist who mentioned Sleptsov refrained from commenting on his exceeding handsomeness. Petr Bykov describes the impression he made: “A tall, slender brunette with a luxuriously thick beard and coiffure, with unusually fine, straight lines of the face, he created an effect, a charming impression with his amazing handsomeness. From portraits it is impossible to imagine how handsome Sleptsov was, one smile from whom, revealing his even and strikingly white teeth, disposed one to him at first glance.”⁷⁵ It seems that Sleptsov’s attraction for women became almost legendary in the radical literary circles of the time. “Women were crazy about him [*ot nego bez uma*] and ran in droves to hear him; they tried in every possible way to win his favor and incline him to love.”⁷⁶ Indeed, Bykov recalls that

when a group of ladies discovered that Sleptsov was in the building—he was observing court proceedings in Moscow and taking notes for a possible literary work—they packed into the courtroom to strike up an acquaintance with the writer.⁷⁷ Not surprisingly given this attention, Sleptsov was notorious for his many affairs, all of which were “short-lived...”⁷⁸

When Panaeva and some of her friends visited Sleptsov’s dacha at Chernaia Rechka, for instance, they found the writer gluing on wallpaper, sleeves rolled up, amid piles of furniture that completed the scene of domestic chaos. After Sleptsov cleaned himself up, the group was served tea by a girl he introduced as “Min’ona of Chernaia Rechka.” As it turned out, the girl had been orphaned, then sold by her alcoholic uncle to an organ-grinder who made her sing songs and perform acrobatic feats in the streets of St. Petersburg. Sleptsov was in the process of freeing her from her uncle, to whom she had returned, and sending her to a good family he knew in the city. Sleptsov never capitalized on Panaeva’s suggestion to write a story based on her life, but he did free the girl. Another summer at Chernaia Rechka, an unknown young woman knocked on Sleptsov’s door one evening. One of many to turn to Sleptsov for advice on family matters after the publication of *Hard Times*, she said that she did not love her husband and asked what she should do. They saw each other often that summer, then went their separate ways. In St. Petersburg Sleptsov met her again; she had left her husband and married a prominent general,



СЛЕПЦОВ
Фотографин 1860-е гг.
Литературный музей, Москва

who she reported was under her thumb—she was now a millionaire. In both cases Sleptsov sought to free women from difficult domestic situations while, it can be inferred, having affairs with them. But the results were very different. Years later, during Sleptsov’s sickness, he asked Panaeva to guess who had given him a bouquet of flowers and box of candy that stood by his bedside. While the poor clerk’s wife who became a millionaire had forgotten about her one-time benefactor to become a diamond-bedecked bribe-taker, Min’ona of Chernaia Rechka had reconnected with Sleptsov, continually visiting and buying him gifts out of her meager salary to express her gratitude for his touching her life.⁷⁹

At one of Vodovozova’s evening gatherings, Olga Nikolaevna Ochkovskaia performed her famous gypsy dance, donning a red scarf and improvising a tambourine from a box full of spoons. After the ecstatic applause died down, she pulled up a chair to Sleptsov and engaged him in a conversation to which he responded coldly—“Oh, Sleptsov’s caught Ochkovskaia’s

little heart, he's caught it..." commented an onlooker.⁸⁰ At another evening event over a year later, Vodovozova met Ochkovskaia again after a long separation and almost did not recognize her. The young lady had lost weight, and her lively energy had been replaced by "some secret grief."⁸¹ When she ran into Sleptsov, both became flustered. Vodovozova notes that Ochkovskaia had been madly in love with Sleptsov, delicately commenting that when she had last seen the pair they had been "on friendly terms"—evidently no longer. "Was it that rupture," she queries, "that stamped Ochkovskaia's beautiful face with suffering?"⁸² When the literary readings by Iakushkin, Sleptsov, and others were over, well after midnight, Ochkovskaia prepared for another gypsy dance.

When Ochkovskaia appeared in a red gypsy shawl embroidered with a thick fringe, head, neck, and arms generously adorned with beads, foil, and jingling coins, her entrance alone delighted everyone, calling forth a veritable storm of applause, exclamations, and stamping of feet, which became impossible to stop. The dance began, and Ochkovskaia herself became more and more carried away and intoxicated by the audience's ecstasy and the tempo of the music, which grew faster and faster, and by the whoops and gypsy cries that seemingly involuntarily burst from her lips. She had no chance to catch her breath before they cried "encore" and she repeated the same dance over and over. A string of beads on her neck burst, and everyone threw themselves down to snatch them up, crying 'For me, and for me, as a souvenir!' A few people clapped in a sort of frenzy, crying out with all their voice 'Encore, you angel [*bozhestvennaia*]! Encore, enchanting Ochkovskaia!' Finally she exhausted the last of her strength and ran off.⁸³

Sleptsov's reaction to the dance is not recorded.

Sleptsov's personal relations with women were never more closely intertwined with his professional involvement in the woman question as after he published *Hard Times*. Many of his female readers turned to the novel's author for help with their domestic troubles. Many even followed in the footsteps of the heroine Mar'ia Shchetinina and abandoned everything to go to St. Petersburg, straight to Sleptsov, who they viewed as "some sort of prophet who could clarify everything."⁸⁴ Taneev claims that his living room was always filled with eight to nine women, sitting as if in a doctor's waiting room. "Each of them asked him what she was to do. One of

them had disagreements with her husband, another had troubles with her parents.”⁸⁵ When their mutual friend Ivaniukov visited Sleptsov, he reportedly found the writer hiding in his bedroom, besieged by ladies. In an ironic twist, the despairing Sleptsov was muttering to himself, “What am I to do? What am I to do? This is every day. ... Their pestering is unbearable.”⁸⁶ While Sleptsov may at times have been overwhelmed by the number of visitors, there is reason to believe that his discontent went considerably deeper.

Vodovozova once found Sleptsov in a similar situation. Visiting him one morning, she was led in by his maid Petrovna, with whom, it is implied, he was on intimate terms. When the conversation turned towards the maid’s dissatisfactions, Petrovna began complaining jealously yet jovially about the many women who constantly visited Sleptsov. About to describe what she saw when she once opened the door without knocking, Sleptsov interrupted: “Bring in the cutlets, Petrovna, bring in the cutlets.”⁸⁷ After an intervening discussion, Sleptsov began lamenting the “despotism of women.” A woman is “unable to look at her chosen one as anything other than her object, her complete and inalienable property.”⁸⁸ When Vodovozova noticed the heaps of letters on his desk, Sleptsov explained that they were all from women asking him for advice on their domestic troubles. “And to my great misfortune, I must answer all of them: should a girl abandon her parents’ house, should a married woman leave her husband, should one leave the children in the care of an old woman and go to the capital to study? In a word, they are calling me to be judge and deciding fate in the most intimate, delicate spheres of human life.”⁸⁹

Psychologically perspicacious as ever, Vodovozova hit on the power relations that enmeshed Sleptsov: he lamented his despotism over women as much as theirs over him. While we have seen that Sleptsov hoped to change society through reordering domestic relations, Vodovozova’s anecdote highlights his converse desire: to transform personal relations by

changing society. But whatever his motives, one cannot help but be struck by the disconnect in consciousness of a man who devoted his life to improving the condition of women while engaging in personal behavior that, whatever his intentions, exploited women who were emotionally and financially needy (many had left their families and were relying on Sleptsov to find them work).

While Sleptsov's relations with women help clarify who he was as an individual, they also shed light on the Znamenskaia commune. On the simplest level, commentators have followed Chukovskii in maintaining that the rumors of immorality in the commune were baseless or, as Moser qualifies in good scholarly fashion, "probably not true."⁹⁰ When Sleptsov's seemingly constant affairs are taken into account, it seems unlikely that the period of the writer's residence in the commune would be the one time in his life that he kept away from women.

There are some reports that Sleptsov had relationships with women in the commune. While avoiding rushing to Uspensky-esque conclusions, we cannot understand what is likely to have happened in the commune, and we certainly cannot understand how that theater's act was perceived, without taking this evidence into account. As documents from the Third Section attest, the police's belief that the commune threatened the institution of marriage was based in part on their undercover agent's conversations with the poet Dmitrii Minaev, who frequently visited the commune. According to a report dated February 12, 1864, Minaev defended Sleptsov's not living with his wife, arguing that the real immorality was living with a wife you did not love. Minaev himself, the agent attests, had a "common-law marriage" with another woman while still legally married to his wife. This was reportedly common practice in the commune: "It is known from Minaev, as well as through other channels, that *Sleptsov*... left his wife and entered into a "common-law marriage" with Ekaterina Ivanovna Tsenina

[Zhukovskaia], the wife of a provincial secretary who was living with him.”⁹¹ The agent also claims that Golovachev was in a relationship with Markelova and Iazykov was in a relationship with Makulova.

There were also reports that Sleptsov was on intimate terms with another of the women in the commune. In his account, Taneev repudiates the rumors that Sleptsov was sleeping with all the commune’s women, as a sort of harem. Instead, he maintains that the writer was in a common-law marriage: “Sleptsov lived with one of the women, with the ugliest, and when people asked him what it meant, he expressed amazement and said: ‘Well, she’s deaf.’”⁹² The woman referred to is of course Markelova, an ideological socialist like Sleptsov himself. Zhukovskaia’s account portrays Sleptsov and Markelova as being on good terms, although there is no suggestion of their having an affair. The above passage from Taneev is curious—what could it mean that he calls Markelova the “ugliest,” why emphasize deafness? Is he trying to show Sleptsov in a better light, or is he just stating the fact of the matter? Zhukovskaia describes her as “ugly,” but this is no surprise as she describes nearly every other woman in the narrative as ugly while dropping hints about her own attractiveness.⁹³ In any event, if Taneev is correct it may explain why Sleptsov chose to dedicate his story “The Foster Daughter” (*Pitomka*), published just before the commune opened, in July 1863, to Markelova.⁹⁴ Taneev’s statement is also corroborated by another source. A Third Section report dated to December 1, 1864 states that “the daughter of the retired collegiate councilor, the woman Markelova, who lives on the 11th line of V. island in house 22, gave birth two months ago to a son, begotten by her, as she says, with *Sleptsov*.”⁹⁵ If this was the case, the commune would have produced at least one lasting result.

We can, of course, only speculate on whether the rumors about the commune had any basis in fact. For most Russian nihilists of the 1860s, common-law marriages would not have been particularly scandalous. The commune may in fact have been “a pure monastery,” or Sleptsov may have had a relationship with either or both Zhukovskaia and Markelova. If the latter were the case, it would help explain the antipathy between the two dominant women in the commune and their battle over who was the real *khoziaika*. This would in turn further discredit Chukovskii’s thesis that the commune’s social split was ideological. But in the end, of course, we cannot really know what happened. What is certain is that at some point in the process of communicating its vision of a socialist order based on harmonious, egalitarian gender relations, the commune failed to control its message. The act went awry. In large part this was due to the personal idiosyncrasies of Vasilii Sleptsov, whose reputation with women influenced how the commune as a whole was perceived. In this as in other ways, the individual and the communal, the real and the ideal, did not quite match up.

The Sleptsovkaia Kommuna?

What are we to make of the individual at the heart of the communal experiment that captured the attention of Russians in the 1860s and after? While the success or failure of the Znamenskaia commune depended on all of its members, Sleptsov guided it with his vision and raised it to prominence through his efforts—he was the playwright and the director. Understanding the man is necessary to discern his imprint on the commune.

Markov saw a symptom and a symbol of the essence of Sleptsov’s personality in the writer’s perpetual wandering. He “continued up to the very end of his life to remain a person who never entirely settled down [*ne vpolne ustanovivshimsia chelovekom*], and even his literary

activity never wholly absorbed him... This instability and constant search for something new was thrown into relief by his eternal wandering from one place to another, from one pursuit to the next..."⁹⁶ The peripatetic writer who had explored provincial Russia in his youth, gathering material for his early stories and articles, continued moving from place to place till his death. During Sleptsov's last two years of sickness—he apparently died of cancer—Markov records that he travelled about nearly constantly, stopping a while to take the waters or visit family or friends; he arrived in Kiev province, later set out for the Caucasian mineral waters, travelled to Saratov, next went to the town of Serdobsk, again left for the Caucasus to take the waters, after which he wintered in Taganrog, returned to the town of Kurakino, and then went back to Serdobsk.⁹⁷ In her account of Sleptsov's last days, his mother Zhozefina Sleptsova records that one of her son's last requests was to be moved from the couch to the bed. Vasilii Sleptsov died on March 23, 1878, at the age of 41; his mother wrote that, "When the agony began, we sat down next to him. And his soul flew off so softly, it was as if angels had borne it away."⁹⁸

Sleptsov the wanderer could not perform a drama that was firmly rooted in one place. His affairs with women overcame his efforts to manage the commune-theater—in the perception of much of his audience, if not in actual fact. While explanations of the commune's failure that emphasize an ideological divide, outside pressure, or selfishness in its various forms illuminate aspects of its operation—cracks in the edifice, so to speak—they miss the fact that the commune's central purpose was propagandistic, and the resulting pressure exacerbated all the other ills. But the commune was propagandistic in the highest sense of the term. Sleptsov sought to lead others to the good life by inspiring them with an example, and when that example proved less than ideal, he tried to bridge the gap between reality and appearance as best he could as an actor. Although in the end he failed, Sleptsov's attempt to build a commune was the

attempt of a wanderer to create a home for himself and for others, a home that would serve as the model for all other homes.

The story of the commune on Znamenskaia street is a story about Sleptsov. But it is also the story of the space between individuals unable to effectively unite in a common enterprise. Sleptsov had mixed results when he tried to bridge that gap through words—by trying, for example, to persuade Zhukovskaia of the project’s advantages or inspire his fellows by talk of a common “cause.” We know all too little, though, of the other communists’ attempts to bridge the gap and create a common home, or the ways in which they reached out beyond words. Perhaps the best way to understand the experiment and its failure is to step outside of the commune itself, leaving the ideological project behind, and remember the dumb, expressive intensity of Olga Ochkovskaia’s gypsy dance. She whirled for a moment in a crowded room, was applauded, and left the stage. But she communicated something that remained a powerful and complex memory years and decades later.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bykov, P. V. *Silueti dalekogo proshlogo*. Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1930.

Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953.

———. *What Is to Be Done?* Translated by Michael R. Katz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

“K.” “V. A. Sleptsov,” *Russkaia mysl'* (April 1903): 154-7.

Leskov, N. S. *Nekuda*. Vol. 2 of *Sobraniiie sochinenii*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1956.

Markelova, A. G. “Iz vospominanii A. G. Markelovoi.” In *Vasilii Sleptsov: Neizvestnye stranitsy*, vol. 71 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, edited by I. I. Anisimov et al, 443-6. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963.

Markov, V. S. “Biografiia V. A. Sleptsova,” *Istoricheskii Vestnik* 91 (January-March 1903): 957-76.

Panaeva, Avdot'ia. *Vospominaniia*. Moscow: Zakharov, 2002.

Skabichevskii, A. M. *Literaturnye vospominaniia*. Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1928.

Sleptsov, V. A. “K teatru mozhno otnosit'sia razlichnym obrazom...” In *Vasilii Sleptsov: Neizvestnye stranitsy*, vol. 71 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, edited by I. I. Anisimov et al, 148-50. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963.

———. *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*. 2 vols. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1957.

Sleptsova, Zhozefina. “Vasilii Alekseevich Sleptsov v vospominaniiaakh ego materi,” *Russkaia starina* 65 (January 1890): 233-41.

Taneev, V. I. “Sleptsov.” In *Vasilii Sleptsov: Neizvestnye stranitsy*, vol. 71 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, edited by I. I. Anisimov et al, 521-6. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963.

Uspenskii, N. V. *Iz Proshlogo*. Moscow: F. Ioganson, 1889.

Vodovozova, E. N. *Na zare zhizni*. 2 vols. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1987.

Zhukovskaia, E. I. *Zapiski: Vospominaniia*. Moscow: Agraf, 2001.

Secondary Sources

Broitman, Larissa, and Arsenii Dubin. *Ulitsa Vosstaniia*. Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2005.

Brumfield, William C. "Sleptsov Redivivus." In *California Slavic Studies*, volume 9, edited by Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Gleb Struve, and Thomas Eekman, 27-70. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

———. *Sotsial'nyi proekt v russkoi literature XIX veka*. Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2009.

———. "Vasilij Slepcov." PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1973.

Chukovskii, Kornei. *Liudi i knigi*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960.

Evstigneeva, L. A. "Iz vospominanii V. I. Taneeva." In *Vasilii Sleptsov: Neizvestnye stranitsy*, vol. 71 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, edited by I. I. Anisimov et al, 513-21. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963.

Gleason, Abbott. *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s*. New York: The Viking Press, 1980.

Gorbachevich, K., and E. Khablo. *Pochemu tak nazvany?*. St. Petersburg: Norint, 1996.

Lampert, E. *Sons against Fathers: Studies in Russian Radicalism and Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Lotman, Jurij M. "The Theater and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth-Century Culture." Translated by G. S. Smith. In *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, edited by Ann Shukman, 141-64. Ann Arbor: Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1984.

Moser, Charles A. *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860s*. The Hague: Mouton, 1964.

Paperno, Irina. *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Semanova, M. L. "Znamenskaia kommuna." In *Vasilii Sleptsov: Neizvestnye stranitsy*, vol. 71 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, edited by I. I. Anisimov et al, 439-42. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963.

Stites, Richard. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and*

Bolshevism 1860-1930. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Terras, Victor. *A History of Russian Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Venturi, Franco. *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*. Translated by Francis Haskell. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960.

Walicki, Andrej. *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Translated by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979.

¹ “Donesenie o kommune Sleptsova Peterburgskogo ober-politseimeistera I. V. Annenkova general-gubernatoru Peterburga kn. A. A. Suvorovu” in *Vasilii Sleptsov: Neizvestnye stranitsy*, vol. 71 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, ed. I. I. Anisimov et al (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963), 449-50 (hereafter referred to as *LN* v. 71). The emphasis is in the original.

² E. I. Zhukovskaia, *Zapiski: Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Agraf, 2001), 190; Avdot'ia Panaeva, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002), 367. Panaeva claims that the term “commune” was used as a joke.

³ K. Gorbachevich and E. Khablo, *Pochemu tak nazvany?* (St. Petersburg: Norint, 1996), 53-4; Larissa Broitman and Arsenii Dubin, *Ulitsa Vosstaniia* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2005), 5-10. The street and square were renamed *ulitsa* and *ploshchad' Vosstaniia* by the Soviets to commemorate events in the February Revolution. Znamenskaia church was torn down in 1941 and replaced in the 1950s by the metro station “Ploshchad' Vosstaniia,” which remains on the spot to this day.

⁴ For lists and brief descriptions of the commune members, see William C. Brumfield, “Vasilij Slepcov” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1973), 32-3; Kornei Chukovskii, “Istoriia Sleptsovskoi kommuny” in *Liudi i knigi* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960) 244-5; “Donesenie o kommune Sleptsova,” 452.

⁵ Zhukovskaia, 190-1.

⁶ Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁷ Abbott Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), 295.

⁸ A. M. Skabichevskii, *Literaturnye vospominaniia* (Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1928), 249.

⁹ See Nikolai Chernyshevsky, “The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy,” in *Selected Philosophical Essays* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953).

¹⁰ Chernyshevsky, *What Is To Be Done?*, 146.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹² *Ibid.*, 381.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 376.

¹⁴ Avdot'ia Panaeva, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002), 365-6.

¹⁵ A. G. Markelova, “Iz vospominanii A. G. Markelovoi,” in *LN* v. 71, 443.

¹⁶ Zhukovskaia, 193.

¹⁷ Chukovskii, 241.

¹⁸ See William C. Brumfield, “Sleptsov Redivivus” in *California Slavic Studies*, vol. 9, ed. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Gleb Struve, and Thomas Eekman (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976), 37-8; Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 109; Charles A. Moser, *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860s* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), 41.

¹⁹ Markelova, 443.

²⁰ E. N. Vodovozova, *Na zare zhizni*, 2 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1987), 2:439.

²¹ See Zhukovskaia, 208-10.

²² *Ibid.*, 238-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁴ Zhukovskaia, 277-8; “Zapiska III Otdeleniia o samorospuske kommuny Sleptsova,” in *LN* v. 71, 454; Chukovskii, 256.

- ²⁵ Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 383. Chernyshevsky goes far beyond umbrellas in his description, calculating the cooperative's total budget and financial superiority over a non-cooperative enterprise.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 211, 214, 223.
- ²⁷ Zhukovskaia, 223. Much of the commune's chronology is unclear. This episode took place at the end of the first month when the Tuesday night dinners began to regularly take place, which probably was not the first month of the commune's existence.
- ²⁸ Vodovozova, 2:439-40.
- ²⁹ Markelova, 444. For "commune" Markelova uses the word *obshchezhitie*, which is a general term for a communal living situation and is often translated as "dormitory," to downplay associations with socialist principles.
- ³⁰ Zhukovskaia, 238.
- ³¹ See *ibid.*, 239-40.
- ³² Vodovozova, 2:439-40.
- ³³ Panaeva, 367-8.
- ³⁴ Chukovskii, 251; for his schematization of the communists, see 244-5.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 231, 233.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.
- ³⁹ M. L. Semanova, "Znamenskaia kommuna," in *LN* v. 71, 440.
- ⁴⁰ "Zapiska III otdeleniia o samorospuske kommuny Sleptsova" in *LN* v. 71, 454. The report itself is dated to December 1, 1864, but it describes events which it dates to the summer of 1864. The word "surveillance" (*nadzor*) is bracketed in the *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* text, presumably to indicate a flaw or illegibility in the archive manuscript.
- ⁴¹ "Zapiska III otdeleniia o deiatelnosti tainogo obshchestva kommunistov v Peterburge" in *LN* v. 71, 446.
- ⁴² "Zapiska III otdeleniia ob uchastnikakh kommuny, ustroennoi Sleptsovym" in *LN* v. 71, 447.
- ⁴³ "Zapiska III otdeleniia ob izobrazhenii kommuny Sleptsova d stat'e 'Bleski i izgar'" in *LN* v. 71, 449.
- ⁴⁴ Brumfield, "Sleptsov Redivivus," 27; Brumfield, "Vasilij Slepcov," 2-3; K. "V. A. Sleptsov," *Russkaia mysl'* (April 1903): 155. Chukovskii tentatively identifies "K." as V. V. Kallash; see his note in "Zhizn' i tvorcestvo Vasiliia Sleptsova," in *Liudi i knigi*, 197.
- ⁴⁵ I follow the two main scholarly accounts of Sleptsov's life, Brumfield, "Sleptsov Redivivus," based on his PhD dissertation "Vasilij Slepcov" (which has been published in Russian translation as part 2 of his *Sotsial'nyi proekt v russkoi literature XIX veka*, (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2009)), and Chukovskii, "Zhizn' i tvorcestvo Vasiliia Sleptsova." There are three main primary accounts. The first is by his mother: Zhozefina Sleptsova, "Vasilii Alekseevich Sleptsov v vospominaniakh ego materi," *Russkaia starina* 65 (January 1890): 233-41. The second is based on conversations with his brother Nikolai: V. S. Markov, "Biografiia V. A. Sleptsova," *Istoricheskii Vestnik* 91 (January-March 1903): 957-76. The third is a semi-biographical novel by Sleptsov's second wife, which is unpublished and I have not been able to consult.
- ⁴⁶ See Markov, 966.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 967.
- ⁴⁸ Vodovozova, 2:41.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:51-2.
- ⁵⁰ See *Ibid.*, 2:69, 2:434.
- ⁵¹ V. A. Sleptsov, "Pis'ma ob Ostashkove: Obrazets gorodskogo ustroistva v Rossii" in *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1957), 2:270.
- ⁵² L. A. Evstigneeva, "Nabrosk stat'i o teatre" in *LN* v. 71, 145.
- ⁵³ Quoted in *ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ Markov, 968.
- ⁵⁵ Evstigneeva, 145.
- ⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, 146-7.
- ⁵⁷ V. A. Sleptsov, "K teatru možno otносит'sia razlichnym obrazom..." in *LN* v. 71, 148.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-9.
- ⁵⁹ Zhukovskaia, 198.
- ⁶⁰ Moser, 41.

-
- ⁶¹ Zhukovskaia, 209.
- ⁶² Skabichevsky, 227-8.
- ⁶³ On *What Is To Be Done?*'s ideas and effect on women's liberation, see Stites, 89-114.
- ⁶⁴ Sleptsov, "K teatru," 148-9.
- ⁶⁵ Markelova, 443.
- ⁶⁶ See Chukovskii, 236-41.
- ⁶⁷ N. V. Uspenskii, *Iz Proshlogo* (Moscow: F. Ioganson, 1889), 128. For the whole episode, see 115-28.
- ⁶⁸ Zhukovskaia, 217.
- ⁶⁹ See Stites, 29. On the nihilist approach to the "woman question," see 89-114.
- ⁷⁰ On aspects of Sleptsov's social activism, see Chukovskii, 169; Vodovozova, 2:439; Panaeva, 362-5.
- ⁷¹ See Moser, 45-6; 42-6 on nihilist feminism generally.
- ⁷² Chukovskii, "Istoriia Sleptsovskoi kommuny," 249.
- ⁷³ Brumfield, "Vasilij Slepcov," 83-6.
- ⁷⁴ See Brumfield, "Sleptsov Redivivus," 33; Taneev, 522; and Markov, 968.
- ⁷⁵ P. V. Bykov, *Siluety dalekogo proshlogo* (Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1930), 181.
- ⁷⁶ V. I. Taneev, "Sleptsov," in *LN* v. 71, 522.
- ⁷⁷ Bykov, 181-2.
- ⁷⁸ Panaeva, 376.
- ⁷⁹ Panaeva, 377-85.
- ⁸⁰ Vodovozova, 2:70.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2:191.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 2:193.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2:194.
- ⁸⁴ Taneev, 523.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 524.
- ⁸⁷ Vodovozova, 2:442.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:443.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:444.
- ⁹⁰ Chukovskii, 249; Moser, 42.
- ⁹¹ "Zapiska III Otdeleniia ob uchastnikakh kommuny, ustroennoi Sleptsovym," in *LN* v. 71, 447. The emphasis is in the original. The assertion that Sleptsov was in a common-law marriage with Zhukovskaia is repeated in "Zapiska III Otdeleniia o kommune Sleptsova," in *LN* v. 71, 453.
- ⁹² Taneev, 523.
- ⁹³ Zhukovskaia, 190.
- ⁹⁴ See Sleptsov, *Sochineniia*, note on 1:377.
- ⁹⁵ "Zapiska III Otdeleniia o samorospuske kommuny Sleptsova," in *LN* v. 71, 454. The emphasis is in the original.
- ⁹⁶ Markov, 967.
- ⁹⁷ Markov, 972-3.
- ⁹⁸ Zhozefina Sleptsova, "Vasilii Alekseevich Sleptsov v vospominaniakh ego materi," *Russkaia starina* 65 (January 1890): 240.