AD LITTERAM

В рубрике «Ad litteram» (лат. — «дословно») публикуются присланные журналу «Знание. Понимание. Умение» работы на языках оригинала. В этом номере представлено исследование в области русской литературы видного американского филолога и искусствоведа Уильяма К. Брумфилда, члена редакционного совета журнала «Знание. Понимание. Умение».

Sleptsov Redivivus[1]

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Статья посвящена творчеству писателя Василия Слепцова (1836–1878). Слепцов был важной фигурой в российских литературных и революционно-демократических кругах 1860-х — начала 1970-х годов. В первой части статьи приводится краткий обзор биографии Слепцова, включая его активное участие в движении за «освобождение женщин» и в «слепцовской коммуне», вызвавшей в свое время яростные споры. Слепцов был близким соратником Н. А. Некрасова и коллегой по редакции журнала «Современник». Вторая часть статьи представляет собой «пристальное чтение» основного труда Слепцова — романа «Трудное время», в котором рассмотрены социальные и личные конфликты периода Великих реформ. Труды Слепцова высоко оценил Л. Н. Толстой, но по стилю и духу к Слепцову ближе всех подошел А. П. Чехов. Автор предполагает, что Слепцову удалось уловить специфику российского общества в годы глубоких перемен.

Ключевые слова: В. А. Слепцов, И. С. Тургенев, А. П. Чехов, Великие реформы, движение за освобождение женщин, «Современник».

Russian critics have often referred to Vasily Sleptsov, with some exaggeration, as a «forgotten writer». Although his popularity did experience a temporary decline after his period of greatest activity (the 1860s), Sleptsov was never really forgotten in Russia — as the articles of these same critics attest. Outside of Russia, Sleptsov can hardly be considered forgotten, since his existence has yet to be acknowledged.

This neglect of the writer whom Tolstoy ranked with Gogol and Chekhov as one of Russia's three greatest humorists (Semenov, 1960, 1: 413), the man who, in his person as well as in his works, epitomized the intellectual atmosphere of the 1860s is unfortunate not only because it deprives one of a valuable insight into that era, but also because it overlooks a significant figure in Russian literature. It is hoped that the study which follows will, in remedying this neglect, prove it to have been unwarranted.

Of course to give a detailed account of Sleptsov's life and works would be impossible within the present limits, and a considerable amount of material has been omitted or mentioned only in passing. The biographical sketch (Part I) is just that — a sketch, with extensive lacunae. As for an analysis of his works, even greater economy seemed necessary in order to spare the reader a diluted, meaningless survey of «everything» Sleptsov wrote. Therefore, it was decided to dispense with a treatment of his few short stories — considered by many to be his greatest legacy to Russian literature — and focus an Sleptsov's most prominent work, the novella *Hard Times (Trudnoe vremia)*. The fact that this work has yet to be translated provides additional justification for the detailed analysis in Part II.

PART I

The biography of Vasily Alekseevich Sleptsov is both rewarding and frustrating as a picture of a typical Russian *intelligent* of the l860s — rewarding in that it touches upon and brings into focus so many facets of Russian intellectual life during one of its most tumultuous periods; frustrating in that the very political, partisan nature of the era colors practically every judgment made regarding Sleptsov, both the man and his work. Today, no less than in the past, Sleptsov is evaluated primarily in terms of the commentator's own political or ideological bias — a practice which has led to a misrepresentation of Sleptsov as a proto-revolutionary. Nonetheless, the labels «radical» and «nihilist» (if not the Soviets' vague *democrat*) are undeniably valid for the founder of Russia's most famous commune and the author of *Hard Times*. Indeed, Sleptsov seems to have participated in or commented on practically every radical cause to appear during Russia's «radical decade». And although he was unable to develop beyond the sixties, as their representative, as a *shestidesiatnik*, Sleptsov reflects the era more accurately than his better-known contemporaries, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev, who with their broader outlook and universal appeal were able to transcend the limits of a decade.

Unfortunately, contemporary accounts of minor writers tend to leave considerable gaps, frustrating anyone who would attempt to form a coherent biographical pattern. Such is the case with Sleptsov. For example, information on his early life is limited to three basic sources: a short and often inaccurate biographical sketch published under the signature of his mother, Josephine Adamovna Sleptsova (Russkaja Starina, 1890: 231–241); a somewhat fuller sketch by Vladimir Markov (a neighbor of Sleptsov's brother Nikolay, who in fact furnished Markov with most of the sketch's information) (Istoriceskij Vestnik, 1903)[2]; and an unpublished novel by Sleptsov's second common-law wife, Lidiya Fillipovna Koroleva-Lamovskaya (pseud. Nelidova). Although the work is not available outside of CGALI, L. A. Evstigneeva has devoted an extensive article to the novel (Nelidova, 1963: 495–512) [hereinafter cited as *LN*]), in which she explores the work's background and its reliability as a biographical source. Her conclusion is that the «novel» is actually little more than a thinly fictionalized biography with Sleptsov as the prototype for the character Sviridov. Nelidova (1851–1936), well-known at one time for her story «Devocka Lida», was acquainted with Sleptsov for approximately three years at the end of his life. She was not, however, his only common-law wife. Varvara Inostrantseva, a radical feminist and Sleptsov's companion at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, has been identified as his first grazdanskaja zena. After Sleptsov's death Nelidova married again, this time Aleksey Maklakov, a prominent Moscow doctor. (Her first husband, Lamovsky, shot himself soon after their marriage.) Nelidova's stepson, Vasily Maklakov — a well known lawyer and politician, member of the Dumas and the last Russian ambassador to France — devotes several pages to Nelidova in his book *Iz vospominanij* (Maklakov, 1954), but does not mention Sleptsov.

The last source is the most interesting, for, although it purports to be a novel, evidence suggests that much of the material dealing with the protagonist Sviridov's early years actually derives from Sleptsov's own reminiscences of childhood. However, Nelidova's novel — begun in l880 (two years after Sleptsov's death) and finished only in the early l930s — cannot be accepted as an absolutely reliable source of information since there is no way of determining how much of the work's content is due to the author's imagination. Nevertheless, without relying too heavily on specific details, one can use certain passages from the novel to infer tendencies in Sleptsov's development. This places a heavy (perhaps too heavy)

burden of dependence on the novel's veracity, but it is the only source available with a detailed account of his childhood.

One can state with reasonable certainty that Sleptsov was born July 17, 1836, in Voronezh (where his father was stationed with the Novorossisk Dragoons), and that both his parents had respectable nobility credentials, a fact which separates him from his fellow *pisateli-šestidesjatniki* Alexander Levitov, Nikolay Uspensky, Fyodor Reshetnikov, and Nikolay Pomyalovsky — all solid raznocincy. His mother, née Volbutovich-Paplonskaya, was descended from Polish and Baltic nobility, while the father, Aleksey Vasilyevich, was of Russian nobility and apparently had a number of highly placed relatives in Moscow. A year after the birth of Vasily (the first of six children), Aleksey Vasilyevich retired from the army and moved his family to Moscow where he assumed a position with the Moscow commissariat commission.

During the next eleven years Sleptsov was to grow up in a tense and unpleasant family atmosphere due, according to Nelidova, to his paternal grandmother's enmity toward Josephine Adamovna. Although a general's daughter of noble ancestry, she was given in marriage without a dowry, was plain, a Catholic, and spoke Russian poorly. In short, Sleptsov's ne'er-do-well father had married against parental opposition, and the fact that they all lived together in the same house did not improve the situation.

To make matters worse, the father was something of an invalid, unable to devote any attention to his children. Under such circumstances Nelidova's portrait of the young Sviridov-Sleptsov as reserved and sensitive seems quite believable. But however unpleasant the family situation may have been, Sleptsov was not a neglected child; quite the contrary, he was the favorite of his mother (her «idol» she called him), who frequently took the child to concerts and plays. (Sleptsov was especially fond of the Maly Theater, and it is not unlikely that his visits there formed the basis of a lifelong attraction to the theater.) In addition, he had free reign in his grandfather's sizable library.

Sleptsov revealed early signs of intellectual ability, practically taught himself to read at the age of five, and — according to his mother's hagiographic account — soon expressed the desire to enter a monastery. At the age of eight he began his formal education (with a tutor), and by his eleventh year (1847) studies had progressed rapidly enough for him to be admitted to the second class of the First Moscow Gymnasium. In the meantime he studied French with his mother and German with his maternal grandmother.

Sleptsov was unable to finish his schooling in Moscow, for in 1849 his father was given his share of the Sleptsov estate and moved the family to their new home at the village of Aleksandrovo (Serdobsk District, Saratov Province). Conditions were primitive — at first there was no house on the estate for the family to live in — and Sleptsov's father was by then completely bedridden. The nearest center of any importance was Penza, ninety versts away, and it was here, in the Noblemen's Institute, that Sleptsov resumed his education. *Penzenskij dvorjanskij institut* must have been another of central Russia's spawning grounds for radicals. Its alumni included members of the Ishutin circle (one of whose was the liberation of Chernyshevsky from his exile) and Dmitry Karakozov (also affiliated with the Ishutin circle), whose attempted assassination of Alexander II was to result in Sleptsov's imprisonment in 1866.

He did well in his studies but seems to have had trouble associating with the other students — so much so that he did not return to school for the spring term of 1851, the ostensible reason being that he was needed on the family estate after his father's death. Yet, having returned home he was more often to be found wandering about, ruminating on life's problems than engaged in any constructive work on the estate.

This early preoccupation with the meaning of it all led to a religious experience of almost maniacal fervor during which Sleptsov became a self-styled ascetic, fasting and wearing rusty chains under his shirt, disregarding the sores inflicted by his strange regimen. Upon his return to the Institute (in the fall of 1852) he voluntarily assumed altar service and succeeded in impressing the school's religious director with his piety.

However, there are indications that Sleptsov's acceptance of Christianity was not total, that he had begun to have doubts as to the validity of a religion based upon suffering. Indeed, many of Russia's radical intellectuals (Dobrolyubov, Chernyshevsky, Pisarev) went through similar periods of religious devotion only to shed their beliefs after prolonged self-analysis and contact with the intellectual milieu of Petersburg; but in Sleptsov's case the break was more dramatic, more scandalous. Although accounts differ as to the details, all agree that he committed an act of blasphemy during one of the most solemn moments of a church service at the Institute. For soviet scholars such as Korney Chukovsky, the implications of this act are clear: his «I do not believe» was nothing less than a conscious defiance of the established order, a first step toward radical commitment (?ukovskij, l933, 2: 11)[3].

Sleptsov's brother Nikolay (via Markov) gives another interpretation: being confident of his ability to pass the entrance examinations, Sleptsov wanted to enroll in Moscow University without completing his final year at the Institute. His mother refused, and in order to escape the narrow world of Penza he feigned madness by means of certain minor improprieties such as switching the deacon's and priest's robes during investment. Markov alludes to other improprieties which eventually landed Sleptsov in the Institute's infirmary, but does not explain what they were (perhaps out of fear of censorial difficulties) (Markov, 1954: 966). He adds that Sleptsov way so successful in simulating madness (a comment on his ability as an actor) that even his brother Nikolay was duped, as were the attending doctor and school officials.

Just which motive took precedence in Sleptsov's «unprecedented, impudent deed» (Chukovsky) — the valiant protest suggested by Chukovsky or the somewhat more practical desire to leave Penza — is difficult to determine. One is left with an unresolved ambiguity between Sleptsov the idealist and Sleptsov the actor.

Whatever the motive, Sleptsov did leave — or was expelled from—the Institute in the beginning of 1853. For a time there was thought of his joining the army (relations between Turkey and Russia were very tense and fighting between the two was to begin in October 1853); but eventually he opted for the university in Moscow. Having passed the entrance examinations in August, he matriculated in the medical faculty — a starting point for so many «men of the sixties».

However, his ardor for a university education cooled rather quickly if one can believe the memoirs of his friend Vladimir Taneev[4]:

He [Sleptsov] led the typical student life of that time, was proud of his uniform with its blue collar, spent time in the taverns, and constantly played billiards. He loved the theater, and played in various amateur productions. He was very handsome. Women loved him. He, in his own words, occasionally made his way to the convents at night (LN, 71: 521)[5].

It comes as no surprise that he soon lost interest in medicine, dropped his studies, and set out on what was to become a life of wandering from one place and occupation to another. Markov gives a curious explanation of what he calls Sleptsov's «mental and physical roaming [*šatanie*]»: «This instability and constant searching for something new was clearly reflected in his eternal wandering from one place to another, from one occupation to another. His parents [?] [According to Nelidova, his father died at the beginning of the 1850s]

tried to explain it as a special feature of his character, a striving to restrain himself in everything and to tear himself from any burgeoning habit. But that, it seems to me, is far from the truth; it can be explained not as strength of character but rather the absence of such, that is, a purely Slavic lack of discipline» (Markov, 1954: 967).

Whether or not Sleptsov's wanderlust can be ascribed to his Slavic background is open to question, but it was certainly typical of many in his generation — including writers such as Nikolay Uspensky, Reshetnikov, and Levitov as well as the many ethnographers and folklorists who had begun to «rediscover» the Russian countryside.

In time Sleptsov too would participate in this rediscovery, but the immediate object of his attraction after losing interest in his studies was the theater, which provided an outlet for his apparently considerable talents as an actor. According to Markov: «Having joined a circle of his student comrades, bearing the nickname "the theater nuts", he [Sleptsov] drops his lectures, earnestly attends the Maly Theater, ceaselessly applauds his favorite, Shchepkin, and returning home raves about the monologs and speaks only in dramatic excerpts and in phrases from the current repertoire. His comrades would applaud and enthusiastically assure him of his artistic talent» (Markov, 1954: 967).

In addition to encouragement from friends, an acquaintance with his idol Mikhail Shchepkin (famous for his portrayal of the mayor in *The Inspector General*) and the latter's favorable reaction finally convinced Sleptsov to go on stage. Little is known of his success during the 1854–1855 season in Yaroslavl, but it is known that he debuted as Khlestakov and remained with the company (under the pseudonym Lunin) for an entire season.

He then abandoned this venture (although his involvement with the theatre was not to end with one season in Yaroslavl) and returned to Moscow, this time to be fascinated by the ballet — or, perhaps more accurately, ballet dancers, since he married one in 1856; Ekaterina Pukanova's death less than a year after her marriage to Sleptsov symbolizes the instability of his entire life: nothing he did seemed to last longer than a year.

However, during 1857 he did find steady employment. In the records of his interrogation (June 8, 1866, after his arrest in connection with the Karakozov assassination attempt), he mentions accepting a government position in Moscow: «I served in the office of the Governor of Moscow [Moskovskij grazdanskij gubernator], entered service in 1857, retired for domestic reasons in 1862» (LN, 71: 467). This should not lead one to believe that Sleptsov put in his eight hours a day as a bureaucrat. Indeed, it often seems that he was rarely in Moscow between 1857 and 1862 (the year he moved to Petersburg).

In 1858 he was married a second time, to Ekaterina Yazykova, the daughter of a Tver landowner. As usual, Sleptsov entered this affair impetuously, with the result that his second marriage lasted only slightly longer than the first. His wife was older than he by several years, and she was constantly jealous of the attention aroused by his good looks (attention not discouraged by Sleptsov). In short, their life together was «Far from tranquil» (Markov, 1954: 969). The marriage did produce two children — a son who died soon after birth and a daughter, Valentina; but this apparently had little influence on the father. In 1860 he took his wife to the Saratov estate which he had inherited with his brother after the death of their father, settled her there (at that time divorce was a practical impossibility), and returned to Moscow, where he was to launch his career as a writer.

As early as the beginning of 1860, Sleptsov had associated with a number of fashionable Moscow «radicals» grouped around the salon of Countess Elizabeth Salias de Tournemir, a publisher and minor writer (whose works held a strange fascination for Konstantin Leontyev) known under the pseudonym of Evgeniya Tur. Sleptsov was to form a lasting friend-

ship with her son, Evgeny (the author of popular, second-rate historical novels); and the acquaintance with Countess Salias herself proved to be of considerable practical value since it was in her journal, *Russkaia Rec*, that Sleptsov's first major work appeared.

Although it is not the purpose of this sketch to examine Sleptsov's literary works, it is appropriate to deal with the genesis of *Vladimirka i Kljaz'ma* inasmuch as it reflects a typical phenomenon of the fifties and sixties—the collection of ethnographic material. Sleptsov's interest in this area dates back to his acquaintance with Vladimir Dahl, whom he met during his year at the university. Evidence suggests that Sleptsov was aware of Dahl's work on the *Tolkovyj slovar'* and *Poslovicy russkogo naroda* before their publication; and it was Dahl who urged Sleptsov to accept a commission from the Ethnographic Section of the Geographic Society[6]. As a result, in November, 1860, he set out on foot to gather folk sayings, songs, and tales of the Vladimir region, thus joining Yakushkin, Rybnikov, Otto, Levitov and others (the *kaliki perekhozie* as they were dubbed by the satirical journal *Iskra*[7]) in a general intellectual movement to examine long-neglected examples of folk creativity.

The experience was to prove very productive, for not only did it furnish Sleptsov with the material for *Vladimirka i Kljaz'ma*, it also honed his technique for gathering and utilizing such material in future stories and sketches, most of which are based on his knowledge of peasant life and — above all — the peasant vernacular. However, the significance of *Vladimirka i Kljaz'ma* is not limited to its qualities as an ethnographic sketch; as the work progresses, it becomes abundantly clear that Sleptsov is not interested merely in portraying quaint peasant customs and forgotten folk songs. The effects of industrialization on the countryside, inefficiency and corruption in the construction of the Moscow-Nizhny Novgorod railway, and the intolerable conditions under which Russian workers building this line were forced to live—all of these topics are approached and dealt with in terms reminiscent of what today would be called «investigative reporting,» but which at the time came under the general term oblicenie[8]. In short, it would not be unwarranted to include *Vladimirka i Kljaz'ma* with Radishchev's *Putešestvie* and Chekhov's *Ostrov Sakhalin* in the tradition of Russian literature's committed travelogue.

Upon returning to Moscow, Sleptsov not only published *Vladimirka i Kljaz'ma* in *Russkaja Rec*[9] but also assumed certain editorial duties for the journal. (It was during this period that he made the acquaintance of another member of the *Russkaja Rec'* staff — Nikolay Leskov. Their relationship soon developed into one of the bitterest and, in many ways, strangest of Russia's radical-anti-radical literary feuds.) However, in the course of 1861 Sleptsov seems to have felt that Petersburg had more to offer as a cultural and intellectual center than did Moscow, and as a result he left Moscow for Petersburg late in the summer of 1861. Once there, he became acquainted with Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and others associated with the journal *Sovremennik*, who soon had cause to welcome him as a new addition to their arsenal of polemical weapons.

Evidently Nekrasov had already been impressed by Sleptsov's expos? (in *Vladimirka i Kliaz'ma*) of construction methods on the Moscow — Nizhny Novgorod railroad, and it was decided that he should do a similar piece of muckraking for *Sovremennik*. Thus, toward the end of 186l (October, November) Sleptsov visited the town of Ostashkov (in Tver Province) widely touted as a showcase of progress and liberal reform. His task was to look behind the facade to determine whether Ostashkov really was a «Russian El Dorado» (Sleptsov's words) or just an updated Potemkin village.

At this point the chronology of events in Sleptsov's biography becomes unclear (as it often does), but the Soviet scholar A. L. Korkin has given a plausible reconstruction of his

activities from the fall of 1861 until his move to Petersburg in 1862[10]. According to Korkin, after his visit to Ostashkov Sleptsov returned to Moscow at the end of 1861 in order to complete his new work for *Sovremennik* and settle various personal affairs. It is at this time that he retired from his government position and made what he thought would be a final separation with his wife (who was now living in Moscow). He then returned to Petersburg early in 1862.

With him he had the manuscript of a work which was to become a landmark in his literary career. For not only did *Letters on Ostashkov (Pis'ma ob Ostashkove)* signal a successful debut in one of Russia's leading journals[11], it also represented the beginning of Sleptsov's uncompromising anti-liberalism, his belief that the reforms proposed by liberals were incapable of dealing with the Russian situation. In the nine «letters» which comprise the work, Sleptsov subjects Ostashkov, its public institutions, its society, its politics to an analysis which, although unabashedly subjective, is based upon powers of observation capable of revealing and satirizing the town's pretensions as a model of progress.

His conclusion (stated in the introduction) is that Russia has no reason to imitate Ostashkov's innovations, since they offer no solution to the real problems facing Russia (от Ostashkov itself). Rather, the town is of interest as a study in deception, an example of what Pisarev would call *igrušecnyi liberalizm* (sandbox liberalism)[12]. Ostashkov, according to Sleptsov, is nothing more than a cleverly designed toy, set in motion and controlled for the profit of its benefactors, the Savin merchant dynasty. Sleptsov's deflating of the Ostashkov legend more than fulfilled his assignment — it estabiished him as one of *Sovremennik's* most promising new talents.

Yet Sleptsov's commitment to *Sovremennik* was not total. Even as he began to publish the Letters (May 1862), he was at work again in the company of Leskov — for the resurrected Severnaja Pcela (under the editorship of Pavel Usov), in which he published some of his early scenes and sketches.

However, as the journal began to adopt a tone reminiscent of its earlier namesake, Sleptsov found himself increasingly attracted to the idea of working exclusively for *Sovremennik*. But there was little he could do in this regard after the authorities suspended publication of *Sovremenik* (June, 1862), so he continued to publish in *Severnaja Pcela*.

Upon *Sovremennik*'s revival at the beginning of 1863, Sleptsov became one of its most frequent contributors. Publication of *Letters on Ostashkov* was resumed, and in numbers four and six his feuilleton «Petersburg Notes» («Peterburgskie zametki») was published — albeit with extensive censorial cuts. In addition to feuilletons and articles, he published various «scenes» and three works which can be classified as short stories: «Pitomka» (1863, No. 7), «Nocleg» (1863, No. 11), and «Svin'i» (1864, No. 2).

These stories, along with an earlier one, «Spevka» published in *Otecestvennye Zapiski* (1862, No. 9), have been praised by practically every major practitioner of realism in Russian literature — Turgenev; Shchedrin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky. One of them, «Pitomka» has been acclaimed as one of the most powerful works written in Russian; and all of them deserve attention not only for what they say about Sleptsov's creativity but also for possible connections with the stories of Chekhov, who knew and valued Sleptsov's work.

At present, however, only the most general remarks are in order. These stories, which exhibited a decidedly unsentimental attitude toward the peasant, were written in the ironic tone adopted by Nikolay Uspensky and praised by Chernyshevsky (in his article «Ne nacalo li peremeny?», *Sovremennik*, 1861, No. 11) as an example of a healthy realism in the portrayal of the peasant. Chernyshevsky's article signaled the end of Grigorovich's long-suffer-

ing but noble muzhik (epitomized by Anton Goremyka); and it is possible that the trend toward greater naturalism was dictated as much by literary fashion as by Chernyshevsky's social pronouncements. But for many critics the new irony was a cruel jest at the expense of an oppressed class, subjected to superstition and the whims of petty Russian officialdom. For Sleptsov, however, realizing the extent of the disease was the first step toward its cure. (It is interesting to note that almost thirty years after Sleptsov's stories first appeared, Chekhov was accused — by one of the same critics, A. M. Skabichevsky — of a similar «indifference» toward the plight of the peasantry in his stories).

Quite apart from their implied social comment, the stories, with the partial exception of «Pitomka» exhibit Sleptsov's abilities as one of Russia's best humorists, a writer who was able to use his knowledge of the peasant vernacular to create a vivid comic portrait. Although he later rejected his role as author of short stories, these compositions remind one of the talents he had at his disposal — when he chose to use it.

While continuing to publish in *Sovremennik*, Sleptsov collaborated with Grigory Eliseev in the radical newspaper Ocerki until its closure in April 1863; corresponded with the writer of Ukrainian tales and stories, Maria Markovich (pseud. Marko-Vovchok), whose business he conducted during her exile in Paris; and in June and July served as editorial secretary for Sovremennik. Yet his most interesting and undoubtedly most controversial activity in 1863 was the founding of what was subsequently known as the Znamenskaya or Sleptsov commune.

In and of itself a commune was not a very unusual phenomenon in Petersburg or Moscow during the 1860s. Most of them were quite practical in their outlook and modest in their aims, to provide an economical means of living for a small group of people (Chukovskij, 1931: 212–218). And according to several witnesses this was the true purpose of Sleptsov's commune. Indeed, it often seems that the most remarkable feature of the *Znamenskaja kommuna* (so named because of its location on Znamenskaya Street in Petersburg) was the very fact that it received so much attention, from the police as well as the public. Nevertheless, it did have an impact, one far greater than a sober examination of its activities would lead one to believe.

The ideas behind the project are relatively easy to trace: Sleptsov was certainly familiar with Chernyshevsky's recent novel *What Is to Be Done*? And its description of Vera Pavlovna's model commune for working women. Furthermore, he himself was very much involved in various efforts to provide employment for women with no means to support themselves, and a communal living arrangement à la Chernyshevsky would be the logical extension of these efforts. Finally, it is known that Sleptsov was at least superficially familiar with the theories of Fourier and was especially interested in practical ideas on the formation of a phalanstery. However, he apparently had no illusions as to the difficulties which would arise from any attempt to implement such a radical scheme, and consequently he adopted a cautious, evolutionary approach (not that it helped). In the words of one of the commune's participants: «[Sleptsov] decided to begin with a simple urban dormitory and then gradually turn it into a genuine phalanstery» (Zukovskaja, 1930: 155–156).

He began organizing in August, 1863; by September the nucleus of participants had been formed; and in October, the group moved to an apartment on Znamenskaya Street. The apartment, for which Sleptsov was to pay the not inconsiderable sum of 1,200 rubles a year, consisted of an entire floor containing eleven rooms. According to police archives the apartment was divided so that each member had his or her own room. In addition there was a common dining room, two rooms for receiving guests, and a kitchen — not exactly a Spar-

tan arrangement, but then neither was Vera Pavlovna's commune. Furthermore, it is logical to assume that Sleptsov would hardly wish to prove the superiority of communal life by making it as colorless and dreary as possible. Nevertheless, there were charges (both from within the commune as well as from without) that the participants' mode of existence was unbecomingly extravagant, that their limited resources were being squandered and mismanaged with no thought for the future. Indeed, Sleptsov was notoriously inept at managing his own financial affairs, and that he should have had any control over the commune's purse strings must be considered a serious error.

There was another problem as well — the selection of members. Although there were only six (four women and two men) in addition to Sleptsov, they soon found themselves split into two, often hostile, factions: the *salonnye* and the *burye*» (Chukovskij, 1931: 282–283). The former seem to have felt that the commune should be little more than a pleasant living cooperative for a group of independent individuals; the latter seriously believed in the idea of a radical phalanstery based on self-abnegation and devotion to the idea of a new social order. Where Sleptsov, with his idea of the commune's gradual evolution into a *nastoiaščij* falanster, stood is difficult to determine. In any event the group was something less than a determined, militant cadre of revolutionaries. Elements of divisiveness were present from the beginning and no amount of effort from Sleptsov could keep the patchwork of ideas, goals, and personalities from disintegrating.

However, the commune did have its successes: it was here that Sleptsov was able to continue a series of popular science lectures for women, as well as sponsor a number of literary and musical evenings (usually with a charitable purpose). In addition the commune held open house for various Petersburg literati at least one night a week. A list of those visiting the commune or participating in its activities would include Saltykov-Shchedrin, Nikolay Uspensky, Alexander Levitov, Nikolay Kurochkin, Ivan Gorbunov, the composer Alexander Serov, and the noted physiologist Ivan Sechenov.

Ironically, the commune's greatest success — its fame as an attempt to implement a new form of social organization — was due in large measure to its enemies. For no matter how sarcastic or vitriolic their portrayal (cf. Leskov's novel *Nekuda*), they gave the commune the wide publicity which otherwise seems unwarranted in view of its rather limited range of action. Indeed, if one dismisses the egregious assumption that the commune was little more than Sleptsov's harem (admittedly, the source of much of the commune's notoriety), what was there about it which would give rise to a play, four novels, and a short story?[13]

Perhaps it was simply an easy target for the antinihilists; perhaps it really was interpreted as a dangerous threat to established society. (In light of their extensive surveillance, agents of the Third Section certainly seem to have thought so; but secret police have always had a vested interest in uncovering and exaggerating the importance of such «threats»). The most likely explanation lies in the nature of the times. In an intensely partisan era (such as the 1860s in Russia), it is only too convenient to seize upon such a phenomenon as representative of attitudes one admires or detests. And in this respect, whatever its other accomplishments, Sleptsov's commune served very well indeed[14].

Sleptsov does not seem to have been disheartened by the commune's failure, despite the fact that he had spent a good deal of time and money (much of which was not his) on the project. The memoirs of Avdotya Panaeva, a frequent visitor to the commune, portray him as accepting the turn of events with philosophic resignation, confident in the eventual success of such attempts to transform society. In a passage which reveals the crux of his attitude toward social activism, he is quoted as saying: «It's not worth getting upset over failu-

res in useful social causes, because most of society is given over to the assimilation of empty, routine habits in social life, and as soon as something new arises — even if it's useful the routinists are thrown into a panic. There's no need to lose heart at this, otherwise there would be no progress in social life. Progress is possible only when people act against the routine» (Panaeva, 1890: 395).

The commune's collapse certainly had little effect on Sleptsov's public activities, which continued to center around lectures, literary evenings, and meetings; and it was during this period (from 1863 to 1866) that he enjoyed his greatest popularity in radical circles. Yet the reserve which, according to acquaintances, was so much a part of his character prevented his wholesale embrace of certain aspects of the movement (if it can be called such), in particular certain excesses in dress and behavior. According to E. N. Vodovozova:

He [Sleptsov] held a very skeptical attitude toward the striving which swept an enormous part of educated society and consisted in unswervingly fulfilling prescribed rules for practical life. The codex of these rules was ascetically severe, one-sided, and with punctual accuracy designated what dress to wear and what color it should be, what sort of furnishings one should have in the apartment, etc. Hair styles with a part behind the head for men and high, fluffed hair for women were considered a sign of vulgarity. No one was to wear gold watch chains, bracelets, colored dresses with trim, on top hats; it was considered reprehensible to have expensive furnishings in one's apartment. These rules were not set forth in writing, but since one could be subjected to censure and ridicule for not obeying them, anyone who did not wish to be labeled a hard-boiled conservative had them firmly committed to memory. Sleptsov did not adhere to this prescribed order, and as a result he was condemned by many (Na zare zizni, 1934: 325, 326).

Nevertheless, Sleptsov retained his standing as one of the «new people,» not because he followed the dictates of radical fashion but because he was genuinely involved in a number of social causes. Unfortunately, this social activism could not but take its toll on Sleptsov's literary output, and when one surveys a list of his published work, the toll becomes strikingly evident. After a relatively productive year in 1863, he was able to publish only one story (albeit one of his masterpieces, «Svin'i») in 1864. There were in addition at least two articles — both rejected by the censor — written that year, but even these add little to what must be considered a very meager period.

By the end of 1864, however, he managed to begin work on what was to become his magnum opus, *Hard Times (Trudnoe vremja)*. His friends, Panaeva among them, had been puzzled by the lack of his stories in Sovremennik, and when she attempted to raise the issue he replied that he was no longer interested in writing stories. Instead, he had an idea for a novel based on contemporary social mores (although as it turned out the work's theme was much broader, with a decidedly political emphasis). When Panaeva quipped that the novel would be ready in ten years, Sleptsov countered with a bet that it would soon be completed (Panaeva, 1890: 397).

Sleptsov won his bet. The novel, or *povest'*, as it is usually called in Russian, was announced in the December issue of *Sovremennik*, and appeared in numbers 4, 5, 1, and 8 the following year (1865). It was to catapult Sleptsov to the height of his brief literary career; and it remains a monument not only to the writer but also to the decade it reflects, for few works from that era provoked such a storm of partisan reaction. (Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, frequently mentioned in discussions of *Hard Times*, would be a contender in this respect). As might be expected, critical response rarely concerned itself with the work's artistic merits or defects, but concentrated on its political and social implications.

Both the novel and the comment it elicited will be examined in the second part of this study; but at this point one might wonder just why the work aroused such controversy. Quite simply, it dealt with the fundamental issue confronting pre-Revolutionary Russian society; that is, what approach does one adopt toward a system faced with massive, perhaps insurmountable, social problems — a course of work and reform within the system, or one of rejection and, eventually, revolution? In no other major work of Russian fiction, not even in *Fathers and Sons*, are these alternatives so fully embodied in the principal characters.

In discussing the book, critics quite naturally focused their attention and based their evaluation on the social concepts represented by the characters.

Ryazanov — the protagonist — was presented both as a stoic, intelligent (if somewhat despondent) radical and as an irresponsible, cynical nihilist; Shchetinin — a liberal landowner — as a concerned, conscientious citizen and as a hypocritical do-gooder; Marya — Shchetinin's wife — as a brave young woman seeking liberation and self-fulfillment and as a flighty neurotic conceded only with her own caprice. Serving as an all important background for this domestic drama is the confusion of rural post-Reform Russia. All of the necessary ingredients were present.

In short, Sleptsov hit the mark; and just as the commune, despite its failure, was to represent the height of his social activism, so *Hard Times* was to represent the apex of his literary achievement. After the commune's disintegration there was no decrease in Sleptsov's concern with social issues; but when one views his activity over the course of a decade, it becomes apparent that there was a decline in his prominence as a public figure. The descent from *Hard Times* was not dramatic or immediate: he continued to publish and occupy responsible positions in some of Russia's most important journals. But from the vantage point of a literary historian, it was a descent nonetheless. Although it would be incorrect to consider Sleptsov a man of one work, nothing he wrote after *Hard Times* was to have such an impact or enjoy such success.

As prominent as *Hard Times* is in the corpus of Sleptsov's writings, it was not the only work of his to appear in 1865. He had firmly established his position as a feuilletonist for *Sovremennik*, and although a number of his articles were rejected by the censor, one series — «Modest Exercises» («Skromnye upraznenija») — was allowed in the ninth issue, while another cycle, «Provincial Chronicle» («Provincial'naja khronika») appeared the same year in numbers 16, 20, and 28 of the satirical journal *Iskra*. Both articles continued Sleptsov's attack on «small deeds» liberalism and ineffectual reforms, an attack similar to that mounted by Saltykov-Shchedrin in *Sovremennik*. Indeed, their views were so similar that Shchedrin, wishing to conceal his authorship of «Pis'ma o provincii», asked Nekrasov if it might not be possible to have the work appear under Sleptsov's name» (Saltykov-Ščedrin, 1937: 203).

This period of journalistic activity soon came to an end, for *Sovremennik* as well as for Sleptsov. On April 4, 1866, Dmitry Karakozov — a former student and member of an extreme faction of the Ishutin circle — made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Alexander II. The reaction which followed not only crushed the remnants of the Ishutin circle (virtually the only clandestine political group still functioning in, Russia at the time), but also had a considerable effect on Russian intellectual life. Not surprisingly, this effect was a calculated part of the campaign instituted by Count Mikhail Muravyev, «the Hangman», who in Franco Venturi's words, «organized a system of repression which aimed to root out the forces of revolution by striking the intellectual tendencies which had given them birth» (Venturi, 1966: 347). In connection with the above quotation from Venturi, it is interesting

to note that on April 30, 1866 (the day of Sleptsov's arrest), Minister of Internal Affairs Valuev wrote the following: «With a view to a more successful investigation of the personality of the criminal who made an attempt on the life of His Majesty the Emperor, it would not be unwarranted to turn to an investigation of that socio-literary milieu in which the thought of regicide is capable of developing» (Quoted in LN, 7l: 461).

In practice this meant the suppression of certain journals (including *Sovremennik*) and wholesale arrests of those considered hostile to the regime. Sleptsov, who already had an extensive police dossier in connection with his activities in the commune, had no trouble qualifying as a «harmful individual», and consequently, on April 30, 1866, he was arrested at his apartment and taken to the Peter-Paul Fortress. He was not alone: included in the sweep were Grigory Eliseev (then the editor of Iskra), Dmitry Minaev, the Kurochkins, Varfolomey Zaytsev (from *Russkoe Slovo*) as well as a number of *nigilistki* («Iz Peterburga» // Kolokol, 1866: 1806).

Most of those arrested were released after a few weeks (seven in Sleptsov's case), but even such a relatively short confinement was not without its ill effects, In her description of the ordeal, Sleptsov's mother is quite firm on this point: «it was his arrest which led him to a premature grave." (Institut russkoj literatury (IRLI), f. 265, op.2, 1.7. From a manuscript of Josephine Sleptsova's biography of her son. These lines were part of a section deleted by the censor when the biography was published in *Russkaia Starina*, 1890. See above, fn. 2. Sleptsova's efforts on behalf of her son remind one of similar efforts by Pisarev's mother. Pisarev, however, was incarcerated for a much longer period). Sleptsov himself wrote his mother from prison to complain about the state of his health and the delay in obtaining a formal hearing. Eventually Josephine Adamovna was able to gain the intercession of certain influential relatives who had him released, on June 18, to the custody of his mother. He was placed under a police surveillance which was to last until his death.

Whatever effect the arrest may have had on Sleptsov's mental and physical state, it seems to have had little immediate effect on his activity. The first edition of his collected works appeared under the auspices of Nekrasov and Ippolit Panaev; and in June, 1866 (the month of his release), he was at work organizing a journal for women, *Zenskii Vestnik*. For the journal's first issue (September, 1866) he wrote the lead article, «The Women's Cause» — a necessarily vague statement on the need to find certain general goals for the feminist movement and let tactics take care of themselves.

Sleptsov's involvement in the cause of greater social freedom for women deserves a separate article, but it can be noted here that this involvement took a number of forms, public as well as private. For example, from l863 to 1865 he was active in various, largely unsuccessful, projects to provide employment for women (bookbinderies, translation projects, etc.); in lectures to further the education of those unable to enter Russia's universities; and in charitable performances designed to give financial aid to women who had recently arrived in Petersburg and had no means to support themselves. (On a more personal level Sleptsov served as something of a counselor — by mail or by interview — for women who felt the need to be liberated, usually from an unpleasant domestic situation. Sleptsov's novel *Hard Times* deals with just such a situation and may have had something to do with his reputation as an expert in these matters).

None of these efforts lasted for longer than a few months, nor, under the circumstances, could they have been expected to enjoy any widespread practical success. Indeed, it becomes increasingly clear that after 1866 — if not earlier — Sleptsov had relegated this type of enterprise to the realm of small deeds activism. In a typical radical formulation he seems

to have felt that the overriding concern was to effect a general social change, of which women's emancipation would be one component. Nevertheless, in the feuilleton cycle «Modest Notes» («Novosti peterburgskoj Zizni: Skromnye zametki»), appearing in *Zenskij Vestnik* between May and September, 1867, he returned to the issue of greater independence for women and focused on the indignities which, in his opinion, their inequality forced them to accept.

After «Modest Notes» Sleptsov wrote very little about the woman question — or any other question, for that matter. There were a few short pieces for *Iskra* and *Delo* in 1867; and early in 1868 he published two substantial articles in *Otecestvennye Zapiski* — «Zapiski metafizika», which dealt with the 1867 famine, and «Tip novejšej dramy», a critical review of recent productions at the Aleksandrinsky Theater in Petersburg. A promising beginning, but no more than that. From the second issue of *Otecestyennye Zapiski* in 1868 until the second issue in 1871 there is no known published work by Sleptsov. Nor is he known to have published anything other than three short scenes («Sceny v mirovom sude», *Remeslennaja Gazeta*, l876) in the more than six years between 1871 and his death.

This is not to say that Sleptsov was inactive for the last ten years of his life. In January, 1868, he was invited by Nekrasov to serve as secretary for *Otecestvennye Zapiski* (a post which he held until January, 1872), and between 1869 and 1874 he served as director for various amateur theatrical groups in Petersburg and Tiflis. In Petersburg, for example, he had considerable success directing theatrical productions and organizing literary evenings at the Artists' Club *(Klub khudoznikov)* — eventually dubbed «Sleptsov's theater».

Yet, the fact remains that after 1868 Sleptsov had virtually ceased to publish. Why? In the first place, the more one examines the evidence the closer one comes to the conclusion that Sleptsov did not like the process of writing. Indeed, one possible explanation for the frenetic round of activities which occupied him in the mid-sixties (much to the dismay of those following his literary career) was precisely a desire — conscious or unconscious—to avoid putting pen to paper. In attempting to explain Sleptsov's low level of productivity, Avdotya Panaeva notes this sharp contrast between his exertions in the social sphere and his «laziness» in regard to writing: «Of course, a not insignificant role was played by Sleptsov's laziness — directed, unfortunately, only toward writing, because in other respects he was unusually active» (Panaeva, 1890: 401).

It seems that anything was capable of separating Sleptsov from the desk: his involvement in social causes, his literary evenings, his affairs with women, his fascination with crafts (bookbinding, carpentry, cobbling, tailoring), or simply a quarrel in the corridor outside his apartment. However, this is not sufficient to explain his literary decline after 1867, since even with distractions and his «laziness toward writing» he managed to produce more or less consistently between 1861 and 1868. Furthermore, it would seem that after his arrest the activities which impinged upon his ability to concentrate had decreased somewhat. Perhaps a more plausible explanation can be found in Sleptsov's attitude toward his creativity, his reasons for writing.

It has been noted above that as early as the mid-sixties Sleptsov had become dissatisfied with his reputation as an author of short stories and feuilletons. When asked by Panaeva why his stories were no longer appearing in *Sovremennik*, he replied that he was not interested in writing stories; rather, he had an idea for a more complex work, a novel based on «contemporary relations between husband and wife, cultured people [*ljudi razvitye*]" (Panaeva, 1890: 397). Having succeeded at this venture *(Hard Times)*, he returned to writing short fiction and articles; but the desire to produce a full-length work based on «cul-

tured people» (as opposed to the peasants and urban poor depicted in most of his short stories) did not leave him, and toward the end of 1867 he began another novel, *Khorošij celovek*.

The work, a portrait of a young gentry *intelligent* with the usual complex of guilt feelings toward the narod, was not a success. The first and only chapters to be published (in *Sovremennik*, 1867 1, No. 2) were poorly received, but Sleptsov did not need the critics to tell him that *Khorošij celovek* was a failure. In his own words: «nothing of mine is turning out [*ne vytancovyvaetsja*], and my illness has also interfered» (Panaeva, 1890: 410). To what extent his illness actually interfered is impossible to determine; but he apparently felt himself incapable of doing what he wanted (to create an involved fictional work requiring extensive psychological treatment of its characters), and he was demanding enough as an artist to realize his limitations.

In a conversation with Panaeva a few months before his death, Sleptsov makes his dedication to the craft of writing quite clear: «I didn't have the strength to create something really good, and I had no desire to write mediocre works» (Panaeva, 1890: 409). Such dedication made it impossible to violate one's artistic standards simply in order to publish, and perhaps it is here that one finds a partial answer to the riddle of Sleptsov's literary demise. Like Chekhov's Trigorin, Sleptsov was neither a Tolstoy nor a Turgenev; but unlike Trigorin, Sleptsov was unable to write if he felt that he could not produce «something really good».

Of course, Sleptsov had written some of the best short stories in Russian literature, but, unsatisfied by this accomplishment, he became enthralled by the idea of creating a work which would somehow explain the Russian experience. It was not enough to write well; one had to be «relevant»: «If you're going to write, then write something real, the sort of thing which would inescapably, organically arise from the present situation of things, which would reproduce it, and thus explain it. So that everyone who reads it would say: Yes, that's it, that's true, and that absolutely, without doubt, must be written, Otherwise it's not worth it» (Remarks to Nelidova; quoted in her biographical sketch «V. A. Slepcov» *LN*, 71: 492).

The final years of Sleptsov's life were devoted in large measure to an attempt to restore his failing health. According to Nelidova's biographical sketch: «The illness from which he suffered with slight intervals for five years, beginning in [18]73, forced him to leave Petersburg and travel for a long time through Russia and the Caucasus» (Ibid: 492). It is true that in 1873 he began traveling extensively — usually to the Caucasus — in search of a cure for whatever ailment he may have had, and it is possible that the symptoms sharpened at that time. (The exact nature of his illness was never firmly diagnosed, despite an exploratory operation. It is generally assumed to have been intestinal cancer.) However, it would be misleading to suggest that before 1873 (or 1812, according to some accounts) Sleptsov had no serious problems with his health. As mentioned earlier in connection with his literary decline, he had been plagued with chronic ill health since his arrest, and throughout the late sixties his letters contain references to medical consultations, illness, and a general physical collapse.

What is unclear is the nature of his problem between 1867 and 1872, as well as its relation to the terminal illness which is so persistently said to have begun in 1872 or 1873. Judging from the scant evidence available, one might assume that in the late sixties Sleptsov suffered primarily from emotional and physical exhaustion, and then, once the general state of his health had deteriorated, a more serious ailment (or ailments) took root.

Whatever the progression of events, Sleptsov was now forced to take serious measures in order to cope with his illness. As might be expected, his medical treatment, his travels to the

Caucasus, and prolonged periods of rest at the spas demanded a substantial amount of money—money very difficult to obtain since he had no work and had published practically nothing since 1871. What support he did receive came primarily from his mother and from Nekrasov, who continued to help him both personally and through his intercession with the Literary Fund; but the state of Nekrasov's own health in l877 and 1878 (the year of his death) hampered his efforts. By this time Sleptsov had turned to Saltykov-Shchedrin for help, but there was little that either Nekrasov or Shchedrin could have done.

During his stay in the Caucasus the summer of 1877, Nelidova (whom he had met in 1875) returned to Moscow to attempt raising the money on her own. Her lack of success was unfortunate not only for whatever effect it might have had on Sleptsov's treatment, but also because it meant that a great many of his personal belongings and manuscripts had to be abandoned. According to one account: «A large part of his literary legacy perished. The material he had collected in the Caucasus was lost: his friends did not have the money to redeem his things, including a trunk with his manuscripts, from the pawnshop» (Popov, 1956)[15].

On March 6, 1878, Sleptsov returned, in seriously weakened condition, to his mother's estate near Serdobsk (in present-day Penza oblast). Two weeks later (March 23) he was dead. It was the end of a long period of agony — illness, want, exhaustion — but Sleptsov was spared the utter poverty which marked the deaths of his contemporaries Pomyalovsky, Reshetnikov, Levitov, and Nikolay Uspensky, this strange, tragic generation of writers from the sixties.

Sleptsov died peacefully, in gentry surroundings, and in the company of the one person who, throughout his life never failed to consider him her «idol». According to Nelidova, there were plans to bury him in the cemetery of Moscow's Novodevichy Monastery, or at Petersburg's Volkovo Cemetery (the site of Turgenev's grave); but, as was so often the case during Sleptsov's life, there was not enough money to realize the project. He was buried March 26, in the Serdobsk cemetery — a very Aksakovian setting, a small country church surrounded by the steppe.

PART II

Much of Sleptsov's literary fame rests on a small group of short stories dealing with the degradation of Russia's lower classes; for although the stories were frequently criticized as being excessively bleak, the skill with which Sleptsov used them to present his mixture of bitter humor and pathos established him as a master of the short fictional genre. Yet, there is another Sleptsov — the observer of his own social and intellectual milieu; and in this respect *Hard Times* (*Trudnoe vremja*, published in *Sovremennik*, 1865, Nos. 4, 5, 7, 8) is by far his most significant work. It insured his reputation as a critical realist, while touching off a polemic which was to last until the Revolution.

Indeed, few works in the long history of Russian literature's social and ideological orientation have been the subject of such heated debate; few works have had their characters so endlessly discussed, analyzed, dissected, and then reassembled in the political image of the commentator. (Criticism of *Hard Times* serves admirably as a touchstone for the political views of an entire range of late nineteenth-century publications.) That such a reaction should have occurred is no mystery when one considers the then prevailing attitudes toward the function and duty of literary criticism — to serve as a vehicle for social and political comment.

Hard Times is certainly well-suited to such attitudes, since it deals with the most volatile issue confronting educated Russian society after the Emancipation: should Russia follow the

path of liberal reformism or that of radical change? Furthermore, in the figure of the novel's protagonist, Ryazanov, Sleptsov presents a portrait of the radical intelligentsia during one of its most turbulent and crucial states of development. Nowhere is the politicized, radical intellectual depicted with greater sympathy and yet with so little idealization; nowhere are the attitudes of the «thinking proletariat» (Pisarev) displayed more cogently. Sleptsov's nihilist is as important and as controversial — as Bazarov for any attempt to recapture the spirit of the sixties. Both represent the Russian intelligentsia's groping search for «the real day».

Since *Hard Times* is so deeply rooted in the issues and events of the 1860s, it would be well to review the situation which existed at that time before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the work. The action takes place in the summer of 1863 (that is, some two years after the Emancipation Proclamation); and the success (or failure) of the Emancipation, as well as the reforms connected with it, had already Become the focus of much debate, Liberals (a difficult term to define, especially in Russia) such as Chicherin, Kavelin and Vernadsky welcomed the reforms and felt that the only path to progress lay in gradual change, supervised by a strong centralized government.

On the radical side, Chernyshevsky, in particular, was quite vocal in his opposition to the terms of the serfs' liberation. As early as 1858 and 1859, during the formative stages of Emancipation policy, he had consistently argued for a reduction of redemption payments (e. g., «Ustrojstvo byta pomeščici'kh krest'jan, truden li vykup zemli?», 1859) and for a redistribution of land within the framework of the obščina («O pozemel'noj sobstvennosti,» 1857, and «Kritika filosofskix predubezdenij protiv obščinnogo vladenija», 1858). It has been stated that the peasant commune was preserved largely as a result of Chernyshevsky's polemic with Vernadsky (in the article «O pozemel'noj sobstvennosti»), However, as E. Lampert points out in his book *Sons Against Fathers* (Lampert, 1965: 376), the government had its own interests in the commune as an effective method of controlling the peasant. Many radicals suspected this to be the case, and Sleptsov exhibits just such suspicions in his portrayal of the *mir* in *Hard Times*.

As it stood, the land reform of 1861 was for Chernyshevsky, as for Sleptsov, simply a deal between landowners and the state, a deal which protected the rights and many of the privileges of the *dvorjane* while leaving the peasant to fend for himself under extremely unfavorable conditions. Thus, despite an initial euphoria (even among certain radicals) connected with the concept of emancipation and its possibilities, the eventual formulation of Emancipation policy was seen as faulty, impractical, and unjust.

Corollary to a criticism of basic principles and orientation was the dissatisfaction expressed over practical implementation of the land settlement. This dissatisfaction was not limited to such obvious displays of discontent as the widespread peasant disorders between 1861 and 1863 (including the famous Bezdna massacre of April, l861). Indeed, these events can be rationalized as «misunderstandings» stemming from the peasants ignorance of the terms of their new freedom.

Rather, criticism was directed at the day-to-day administration of the new order, at the bureaucratic apparatus which enforced it. In addition to the fundamental administrative problems of land apportionment and the level of redemption payments, there were innumerable disputes over such issues as water rights, and access to grazing and forest lands. In all these matters it seemed to the radicals — and, no doubt, to the peasants as well — that the landowner would continue to retain his prerogatives by means of a chain of officials which began with the official arbiter *(mirovoj posrednik)* and ended at the bayonet. This

was certainly a one-sided view, but it contained more than enough truth to make it valid for polemical purposes. It should be noted that the landowners gained very little from their supposedly favorable position. In actual fact gentry criticism of reform institutions (such as the *mirovoj posrednik*) was often as harsh as that of the radicals, although for different reasons. For a more objective view of the gently and Emancipation policies, see Terence Emmons *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861* (Emmons, 1968).

In «Pis'ma bez adresa» Chernyshevsky gives his summary of the reasons for the reform's difficulties: The authorities did not notice that they were taking on a project they themselves had not conceived, and they wanted to remain the complete master of its implementation. Under such a manner of implementation, the project's realization was to be influenced by two basic habits of the authorities. The first habit consists of a bureaucratic character of action; the second — a partiality to the gentry.

The project was begun with a desire to demand as little sacrifice as possible from the gently, while the bureaucracy, by its very nature, occupied itself more than ever with formalistics. Therefore the result was that the formal relations between landowner and serf were changed, but with a very slight, barely perceptible change in the substance of their previous relations. In this way it was thought that the gently would be satisfied. (Chernyshevsky, 1939–1953, 10: 99). Obviously addressed to Alexander II, «Pis'ma bez adresa» is quite favorably disposed to certain segments of liberal opinion, in particular gentry liberals proposing constitutional reform in 1862, This does not mean, however, that Chernyshevsky had made any lasting peace with liberalism – as was to be amply demonstrated in the coming years (cf. his novel *Prolog*).

Despite such obvious disparities between ideal and practice, the reforms continued to come: fiscal reforms, reforms in schools, reforms in universities, and, eventually, the *zemstvo* and judicial reforms.

But if the period from l861 to 1865 was an era of reform, it was also an era of repression (although not as seveIe as that which was to follow the assassination attempt of Karakozov). Mikhail Mikhailov was exiled in 1861, Afanasy Shchapov in 1862. Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, and Nikolay Serno-Solovyevich were all arrested in July, 1862. Publication of both *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe Slovo* was suspended in 1862, and in 1863 the same fate befell Dostoevsky's *Vremja* (ironic, but nonetheless symptomatic of the general repression).

The ephemeral hopes of certain radicals for a general revolution, based on peasant disturbances after the Emancipation, failed to materialize; and a series of mysterious fires in Petersburg and various towns along the Volga during 1862 only served to strengthen the government's policy of repression, as did the Polish rebellion of 1863. The «liberal» Katkov had turned into a mouthpiece for Russian nationalism, oppositional tendencies among the liberal gentry simply evaporated (largely as a result of the Polish crisis), and the radicals — lacking any coherent organization — were feuding among themselves. Nekrasov could well write of *Hard Times* in his «Rycar' na cas» (1862): «Zakhvatilo vas trudnoe vremja / Negotovymi k trudnoj bor'be».

It is precisely these «hard times» which form the historical background of *Trudnoe vremia*; but there are other issues, less directly related to historical events, which play an equally important role in establishing the work's milieu. Primary among these is the previously mentioned ideological clash between liberalism and radicalism for the direction of Russia's future development. In addition, the issue of women's emancipation — psychological, mental, and (to a lesser degree) physical — also occupies a prominent position in

determining the relations between Sleptsov's characters. As has been noted earlier, Sleptsov displayed considerable interest in the «woman question», and he uses it in *Hard Times* to form a thematic line rivaling in importance the contest between liberal (Shchetinin) and radical (Ryazanov).

Such is the work's base, the events and issues which comprise its theme and motivate its action. Its artistic implementation is deceptively simple: there is little plot development, and, despite the possibility for a *ménage à trois*, the love interest is purposely suppressed (or, more accurately, redirected). Instead, the work is oriented toward development of its two major themes, the *razoblacenie* of liberal gradualism and the right of a woman to determine her own future; and to this end it is heavily dependent on dialog «confrontations» between its three leading characters. Sleptsov is very much at home in this type of situation. Indeed, it is only by virtue of his ability to render conversational speech in a natural yet dramatic form that *Hard Times* avoids falling under the weight of leaden tendentiousness, so characteristic of the *roman a thése*.

The novel opens with the arrival of Ryazanov (the protagonist) at the country estate of one of his university acquaintances Shchetinin. From the beginning, Ryazanov is presented as an enigmatic sort, little inclined to superfluous conversation, to the coachman's queries as to his line of work and background, he merely answers that he is not employed («ne sluzu») and that he is the son of a priest. However, to anyone at all familiar with Russia of the 1860s, Ryazanov's sardonic replies are quite sufficient to identify him as a *raznocinec* and, most likely, a radical.

It is just such a familiarity with the course of events (*kurs dela*, «delo» being a frequently used euphemism for the radical cause) that Sleptsov relies on throughout *Hard Times* in his attempt to run ideological contraband through the censorial blockade. And in this particular case it is just as well that such a blockade existed, for it serves Sleptsov's artistic purpo-ses. Since both author and fictional creation exist under the same circumstances of repression, Sleptsov's Aesopian language is perfectly suited to Ryazanov's thinly veiled political remarks. Korney Chukovsky has devoted an extensive article to the *ezopovskaja rec'* used in *Hard Times*, («Tajnopis' 'Trudnogo vremeni'». Of all the sources in which this article appears, Chukovsky, 1958: 228–271) and it would be superfluous to repeat his skillful, if occasionally forced, deductions. However, Chukovsky omits certain important allusions (some in favor of his political bias, others not), and it is to these we now turn our attention.

Among the first of the allusions are passages which establish the ideological «physiognomy» of the liberal *pomeščik Shchetinin*. Presented before the reader is introduced to Shchetinin, these passages are unobtrusively integrated into the natural course of Ryazanov's observations of his new surroundings. But beneath this seemingly innocent narrative purpose is an unequivocal political message.

The most notable example is contained in a description of Shchetinin's manor: «The house was in the old style, one-story, with a belvedere; but it had been redone and rebuilt. Various incongruities and inconveniences peculiar to old country homes had been removed, where practical, with the help of various additions and alterations, which, although they accomplished their goal, deprived the structure of its typicality and apparently completely disfigured its former physiognomy. Inside the house, even more than outside, fresh traces of the recent reform were evident. But despite all this, despite the obviousness of the improvements that had been carried out, everything — absolutely everything — still bore another, ineradicable stamp: low ceilings, wide tile stoves, and even the dimensions and arrangement

of the rooms — all clearly proved that one can burn houses of this sort, but they can't be done over» (Slepcov, 1957, 2: 8)[16].

This is political allegory of the purest sort; and if the reader is at first unable to grasp its meaning (even with the use of the word «reform»), it will become more than obvious as the work progresses. No amount of alteration (reform) can change the basic structure (of the existing order). «Doma takogo roda szec' mozno, no peresozdat' nel'zja».

Yet, the fact that such alterations have been attempted indicates that the owner is convinced of their usefulness. Such is indeed the case with Shchetinin; and as Ryazanov wandels through Shchetinin's study he comes across further evidence of his classmate's enthusiasm for the fashionable trappings of progress: several European newspapers and certain jour-nals — also European — devoted to agriculture (including one entitled — ironically, as it turns out — *Journal d'agiculture pratique*). Of course, the fact that these symbols of enlightenment, many of them with their pages uncut, are strewn about the room in no apparent order casts doubts on the depth of their reader's commitment to the new ways.

One has the feeling that in more sympathetic hands Shchetinin would have taken his place in the tradition of Russia's well-meaning but ineffectual gentry reformers — another Tentetnikov or Nekhlyudov. And in a sense he does. However, Sleptsov is not prepared to let his liberal squire off that easily. These are *Hard Times*, and good intentions are worth no more than the breath it takes to express them. As a matter of fact, they are (according to Sleptsov) positively harmful, for they mask a desperate situation with the illusion that, given time, things will get better.

The first indication that all is not well «v dome Ščetininyx» comes from the estate clerk, Ivan Stepanych one of the work's cleverly-drawn secondary characters. A born reactionary, supremely confident in the efficacy of the fist, Ivan Stepanych avidly devours newspaper accounts of wars and rumors of wars all over the world (in America, Poland, Italy), and is known to mumble the word «Maryland» (a reference to Lee's 1863 summer campaign) in his sleep. His consuming ambition is to participate in the suppression of the Polish rebellion, particularly since Russia had begun a program of pacification by replacing Polish officials with Russians. He understandably has little patience with his employer's *gumannost'* or with the new reforms, which he sees as so much liberal wishy-washiness:

[Ivan Stepanych:] «Self-government, he sez... They write in these here newspapers: the common sense of the people... The devils! That's right... All these schools... To hell with 'em... Here's your towel. I sez to Alexander Vasilyich [Shchetinin]... Want some tea?»

[Ryazanov:] «No, not now, I'll wait for them».

«All right, wait! I sez to Alexander Vasilyich: Give 'em the stick!»

«And what does Alexander Vasilyich say?»

«What's he say? Always the same line — humaneness, from the newspapers»[17]. [pp. 9–10]

As strange as it might seem at first, Ryazanov and Ivan Stepanych get along rather well together. Not that there is any chumminess, for Ivan Stepanych observes all the boundaries of class distinction; nor is there any possibility that Ryazanov sympathizes with Ivan Stepanych's reactionary mentality. But at least there is no dissimulation in his views; one knows exactly where he stands. And, curiously enough, these views coincide with Ryazanov's in their contempt toward the institution of Emancipation reforms. Whether intentional or unintentional, it is quite appropriate that Sleptsov should have radical and reactionary rooming next to each other, separated only by a thin partition.

When Shchetinin finally enters, he showers Ryazanov with the usual conversational trivialities of reunion between classmates who have not seen each other for several years. However, Ryazanov is in no mood to encourage Shchetinin's effusions of *Brüderschaft*. His response to Shchetinin's chatter — with its jovial tone of curiosity about certain (revolutionary) events in Petersburg — contains a barely concealed sarcasm.

While both were apparently *idealists à la* Herzen and Ogarev during their university years, it is obvious that the two are now divided by a totally different approach to social and political issues. Ryazanov has become a hardened proponent of radicalism; Shchetinin, a zealous supporter of progress through reform. The radical is exhausted by the political defeats of recent years — a condition reflected by his physical state («Khud-to ty kak!») — while the liberal is ebullient with projects for the future. It is Ryazanov's irony opposed to Shchetinin's enthusiasm.

After the initial half-joking, half-serious sparring, Shchetinin launches into a description of his goals for the future, goals reminiscent of Tolstoy's «family happiness» philosophy: one must build for the future, for one's family. Ryazanov's bemused reaction is illustrated in the following passage:

[Ryazanov:] «Do you have any children?»

[Shchetinin:] «Are you serious? No, my friend, no children, and thank God I don't have any yet. First you have to prepare something for them, you have to build a nest».

«What more of a nest do you want?» asked the guest, pointing to the room around him. «Or maybe you plan to build each one of them a henhouse?»

«No, but I'm of the general opinion that parents are obligated to save for theiu children, you know, education and all that... You have to think of everything ahead of time».

«Yes», said the guest, as if considering something. He continued to pace the room. «Yes, that's commendable. Well, and how are the preparations going?»

«Not bad. A little at a time. You can't do it all at once».

«Of course not. And what about these...» asked the guest, standing in front of Shchetinin and pointing, «these reserves? Are they in separate chests: this one for Mashenka and this one for Nicky, or are they all together?»

«What's the matter with you!» Shchetinin shouted jokingly, «Did you come here to laugh at me?» [p. 14]

A dangerous question; and at this point Ryazanov makes a tactical retreat. He relates how his mother actually put his sisters' dowries in separate trunks—a system rendered supelfluous when father spent them all on drink. Ryazanov's moral: «Odnomu nel'zja ne kopit', a drugomu nel'zja ne propit'».

Shchetinin then strikes the pose of a generous landlord, harried and misunderstood by both the peasants (cf. Tolstoy's «Utro pomeščika», Chekhov's «Novaja daca») and his fellow pomeščiki. He had tried to give the peasants an allotment of land (which in their opinion they already owned), and was met with resistance: «'We don't want it; we'll wait and see what else comes'». The peasants' suspicion draws a favorable response from Ryazanov (as it did from Sleptsov in his article «Popytki narodnoj zurnalistiki» (Sovremennik, 1863): «'Very good! That's why I love the Russian people: they don't know Latin, but they're afraid of *dona ferentes* just the same'» [p. 16]. Shchetinin's reply — one which Sleptsov loves to attribute to liberals — is: «The peasants don't know their own good». The affair is finally settled by the arbiter, but not before Shchetinin has incurred the wrath of neighboring landlords for his «red» practices (cf. the elder Kirsanov's complaints of a similar plight in *Fathers and Sons*). Ryazanov's reaction is one of mock surprise and de-

liberate, sarcastic exaggeration of Shchetinin's «radical» tendencies. There is clearly a difference in outlook.

The following morning Ryazanov accompanies Ivan Stepanych on a trip to the village. This is the first of several interludes (passages with no direct relation to developments between the three major characters) which Sleptsov uses to illustrate the reality behind his characters' «theoretical» dialog. The message is always the same: things are bad in the country. Through a series of scenes Sleptsov gives a picture of the filth, squalor, and poverty which surround the peasant, while at the same time Ryazanov is shown expensive English agricultural equipment, lying unused because of its unsuitability to local conditions (another echo of *Fathers ond Sons*).

At the end of his tour Ryazanov returns to find Shchetinin's wife, Marya Nikolaevna, involved in her version of small deeds philanthropy— «healing» the peasants. When he makes a sarcastic aside, questioning the seriousness of one particular peasant's complaint (and, by implication, her own usefulness), she is forced to smile. Nothing, it seems, is immune from Ryazanov's irony. Once inside, he continues in the same tone with Shchetinin, who is finally driven to exasperation: «'What's this with you people from Petersburg, that you never talk about anything seriously?'» [p. 27]. Ryazanov replies, almost to himself, that there are certain matters they take quite seriously.

It is doubtful that Shchetinin realizes the meaning of Ryazanov's remark, for he continues by accusing the Petersburg intellectuals of having lost contact with reality: «'Live here a while, friend. Take a look at how we fieldhands work with the raw material. Maybe your views will change'». Shchetinin then returns to his familiar lament: the peasants are too stupid and obstinate to see their own good. «'Then you'll see that it's not enough to help these people; you have to persuade and beg them to let you be useful to them.'» [p. 28] To this bit of self-justification Ryazanov replies with a paraphrase of *Hamlet* (Act III, scene iv): «'Yes. What's that Hamlet says? «Now virtue must humbly beg vice for leave to...'».

It soon becomes clear just what Shchetinin means when he talks of working with «raw material». A peasant comes to plead for the return of his calf, impounded by Shchetinin for trespassing *(potrava)*, Following an old custom the peasant falls on his knees; but this only provokes an outburst from Shchetinin, whose liberal sentiments are offended by such servility. Instead, he expounds on the «real» reason for the peasant's fine: «'Listen! Understand, I don't need your money, I won't get rich from it. I'm fining you for your own good, so from now on you'll be more careful, so you won't let your cattle loose. You'll thank me yourself for teaching you reason'» [pp. 28–29]. The peasant meekly agrees to all that Shchetinin says, but when he stammers something about overlookng the matter this time, Shchetinin insists that it is entirely in the hands of the law (similar to Alexander I's reputed evasion «The law is stronger than I am»). The peasant then throws himself on his knees to beg for mercy. Shchetinin walks away in disgust from this pathetic demonstration only to face Ryazanov's quip: «'No, I see you still don't know how to beg vice for leave to fine himself'» [p. 30].

Ryazanov has caught Shchetinin in a basic disparity between one aspect of his liberal rhetoric (to inculcate understanding and respect for the new laws governing relations between landlord and peasant) and the level on which this rhetoric is applied. Shchetinin sees himself as a progressive and is exasperated by the fact that the peasants do not appreciate his humaneness. But for Ryazanov, Shchetinin is simply trying to persuade the peasants to accept essentially the same old system of landlord domination under a new guise[18].

(Indeed, one has the feeling that the peasants would prefer the old system of complete subservience to the landlord — subservience tempered by personal relations, as opposed to purely legal ones — rather than face this strange new type with his talk of law and the peasants' interests.)

Yet, somewhat later Ryazanov shocks both Shchetinin and his wife with the ironic suggestion that they should take legal action against some workmen guilty of negligence. They consider this little short of cruelty, but to Ryazanov it is only a logical extension of Shchetinin's dealings with the peasants:

Now that customs have considerably softened and village inhabitants have fully recognized the value of enlightenment, forceful measures have also become more delicate, spiritual so to speak; things like admonitions and fines. So we dance around in this manner and we'll continue to dance around for quite a while, until the measure of our transgressions is fulfilled. Only why stand on ceremony? It's a very simple deal, and the only question is who's going to give it to whom [*kto kogo*]" [p. 37]

Through all the grappling between Ryazanov and Shchetinin, Marya Nikolaevna — assuming her husband right in all respects — has kept silent, intervening only rarely. However, in preparation for the decisive role she will eventually play, Sleptsov makes it clear that she is following their arguments with no little interest. Although annoyed by Ryazanov's irreverent attitude toward her husband's views, she is intrigued with the novelty (for her) of his iconoclasm. At first unable to elicit a response from Ryazanov — she even tries a bit of coquetry; «'You probably despise women, don't you?'» — she finally succeeds in putting the question which has disturbed her since Ryazanov's arrival:

«Tell me, please, you... you don't consider my husband a stupid man, do you?»

«No, I don't».

«Then why do you two never agree on anything?»

«Because it's not in our interests» [p. 47].

Unsatisfied by Ryazanov's answer, she decides to ask her husband what all these quarrels mean. When she does, Shchetinin — underestimating the seriousness of her question — laughingly dismisses the whole affair as so much nonsense. This reaction leads to an emotional scene in which Marya, angry at his inability to get the better of Ryazanov, accuses her husband of deception: «Do you really think that from all these arguments I didn't understand that you're trying to deceive me and others? Me you could, of course, but Ryazanov catches you on every word, at every step he shows that you say one thing and do another. What? That's not true, you say? Well, say something! Aha! so it's true! You see! It's true!» [p. 49]

She then hurls the ultimate reproach: «'you wanted to make me into a housekeeper'» (one suspects that Sleptsov might have drawn on his own marital experience for the intense realism of such scenes.)

Completely beside herself with anger, Shchetinina continues with a tirade which develops into one of the fundamental passages of *Hard Times*; and as such, it deserves extensive quotation: «You told me we would work together, we would do some great deed which might destroy us, and not only us, but those around us, But I wasn't afraid. If you feel strong enough, we'll go together. And I did. Of course I was stupid then, I didn't really understand what you were telling me, I only felt, I guessed. And I would have gone to the end of the world. You saw how much I loved my mother, and I left her. She almost died from grief, and yet I left her all the same, because I thought, I believed we would do something really valuable. And how did it end? You swear at the peasants for every kopeck, while I pickle cucum-

bers and hear about peasants beating their wives, and just stand there with a dumb look on my face. I listen and listen, and then go back to pickling cucumbers, If I'd wanted to be what you made of me, I would have married some Shishkin and maybe I would have three children by now. At least then I would know that I'm sacrificing myself for the children; but now, How disgusting!» [pp. 49–50].

Although this outburst illustrates a deeply felt emotional crisis, it contains an element of almost childish petulance. But then Shchetinina is no Vera Pavlovna (if one can admit the possibility of comparing Sleptsov's heroine with Chernyshevsky's cardboard moralist). No doubt of provincial background, with a limited education, somewhat naive in her demands on her husband, she is simply a young, idealistic woman in a genuine quandary as to the meaning of her existence (a situation similar to that in which the heroine of Chekhov's «Nevesta» finds herself). Searching for a sense of direction, a purpose to which she can devote herself, she now sees the difference between Shchetinin's rhetoric and its practice — so evident in his dealings with the peasants — as applicable to her own life.

Furthermore, the remark about Shishkin and those three hypothetical children — a remark at once artless and calculating — raises another, more intimate question. Although Shchetinin is obviously devoted to his wife, and, in his own way, affectionate toward her, his pallid rationalizations («saving for the future» — saving what?) lead to doubts as to his ability to satisfy his wife in any sense.

Having brought the reader through the first (and in many respects the most important) of the work's crises, Sleptsov «decompresses», returns to the world beyond his characters' interrelationships. Shchetinin, completely dumbfounded By the scene with his wife, decides to quit the premises by going to a district meeting of the *mirovoj s'ezd* (ostensibly a gathering of the official arbiters and representatives of various social classes). He invites Ryazanov to accompany him, but in this, as in the other interludes, Ryazanov remains little more than a passive onlooker, an observational device for Sleptsov's portrayal (or expos?) of the meeting.

The portrait is not a flattering one, but it does have moments of burlesque humor reminiscent of Sleptsov's stories. The meeting and its attendant festivities are presented as nothing other than a pIetext for a drinking spree (a situation Sleptsov is quite adept at rendering), while the peasants who bring complaints for arbitration are treated like cattle. The concluding banquet — supposedly held to unite the classes at one table — consists of gentry and one «token» merchant, who, emboldened by drink, creates a scandal by swearing and threatening to buy out his noble companions («'Vsekh vas kuplju, prodam i opjat' vykuplju'» — perhaps more prophetic than he realizes). As the banquet continues with drunkenness, obscenity, and even an elaborate blasphemy, Shchetinin — sickened by the spectacle — and Ryazanov—his cynicism vindicated — take their leave.

Meanwhile, back at the estate, Marya Nikolaevna has recovered her composure and effects a tenuous reconciliation with her husband; but there can be no question of her going back to the old ways («'I can't pickle cucumbers anymore'»). The spell has been broken. However, she does make what proves to be one last attempt at liberal philanthropy: she decides to open a school for the peasant children.

Reaction to her proposal is less than overwhelming. (The mother of her first prospect — a little girl from whose ear she pulls a sprouting pea — is totally unable to comprehend the sense of the mistress' offer. She thinks Shchetinina wants to take her daughter from her and — judging from her fearful reaction — obviously misinterprets ucit' to mean corporal punishment.) The village priest — another of the work's excellent secondary characters —

is equally suspicious, although for different reasons: he assumes it is some scheme concocted by Ryazanov to deprive the local deacon of his job.

But Ryazanov himself is anything but encouraging. In his continuing course on political awareness, he explains to Shchetinina that all the articles she intends to read on new principles of education and various other reforms are merely attempts to preserve the status quo. In a passage which illustrates Ryazanov at his most nihilistic, he states: «You see, it's all the same. You have these signs, and on them it's written 'Russian Truth' or 'White Swan'. So you go looking for a white swan — but it's a tavern. In order to read these books and understand them, you have to have a lot of practice», continued Ryazanov, getting up. «If you have a fresh mind and you pick up one of these books, then you really will see white swans: schools, and courts, and constitutions, and prostitutions, and Magna Chartas, and the devil knows what else... But if you look into the matter, you'll see that it's nothing but a carry-out joint» [p. 83].

In the interval, Sleptsov again sends Ryazanov into the «real world», this time as he accompanies the *miroyoj posrednik* on his rounds. Entrusted with the task of mediating disputes between landowner and peasant (and among peasants themselves), the arbiter's position was not an enviable one–as Tolstoy found out in l861. However, in keeping with Sleptsov's debunking of all institutions connected with reform, the arbiter in *Hard Times* is portrayed as a sort of gendarme responsible for enforcing the landlords' interests. Whether or not such a portrait was representative is certainly open to question; and Sleptsov's treatment is not entirely negative. Like Ivan Stepanych, the mediator is firmly set in his views on the peasant (lazy, shiftless, prone to drink), and he merely acts in accordance with these views (as opposed to Shchetinin, who holds the same opinions, but tries to disguise them). However, Ryazanov eventually tires of the mediator's bullying, and after a number of episodic scenes showing the latter at work (scenes which allow Sleptsov to display his talents as a humorist and a recorder of colloquial speech), he abruptly returns to the Shchetinin estate.

Shchetinin and Ryazanov, thoroughly alienated from one another, are no longer arguing (their conversation is limited to coldly polite formalities), and an atmosphere of tedium settles over the estate. Symbolized by the stifling, debilitating summer heat, the characters' ennui is presented in a manner one associates with Chekhov's plays — meaningless attempts at conversation, sighs, and indefinable longings, all laced with the consumption of an immense quantity of tea. (The most frequently repeated phrase seems to be caju khotite?)

Then the break occurs. During a particularly depressing stroll through the village, Shchetinina happens to witness the flogging of two peasants for arrears in payment of their assessments to the commune. In a bitter letter to her husband she writes that she can no longer stand her existence with him: «'I've stopped loving you because you (consciously or unconsciously it doesn't matter) forced me to play a stupid role in your stupid comedy'» [p. 138]. She concludes by stating her intention to leave; any further argument is pointless.

Having disposed of Shchetinin, she now turns to Ryazanov; but he is no more capable of offering her what she desires than Shchetinin. In a conversation which, more than any other, reveals Ryazanov's character and the motives behind his behavior, he confronts Shchetinina's search for moral support with his cold rationalism. Combining a Hegelian view of history (as an inexorable dialectical process) with a materialistic, social Darwinian explanation of man's actions, Ryazanov asserts that the events and practices which so upset her are quite natural and will continue to exist until a new order is established: «'All that's left is to think up, to create a new life; but until then 'he waved his hand» [p. 148].

Not content with Ryazanov's prevarication, Shchetinina timidly suggests that the two of them could work together for some useful purpose; but Ryazanov promptly quashes her proposal by characterizing his life as so much rubbish. He taunts her vision of a radical paradise in Petersburg: «'What beckons you *dahin*, *dahin*? Do you seriously think that lemons grow there?'» (a then common expression, taken from Mignon's song in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*). Calling contemporary radical activists, with their communes and artels, «small fry» (very likely a critical allusion to Sleptsov's own activity), he nevertheless advises her to go to Petersburg and decide for herself. Perhaps she will, after all, find something useful there.

As for himself, Ryazanov has no definite plans. Exhausted, devoid of enthusiasm, he sees himself as one who understands life all too clearly, and yet is unable to act:

«Life is a curious thing, I'll tell you. You think you see life inside out, and you understand man backwards and forwards; so what else would you need? But no, that's not enough. You need something else. You need passion, you need to be able simply to go in and take» [p. 151].

The knowledge he has gained from his (political) experience, a knowledge which admits no grand revolutionary illusions, seems to be accompanied by a decline in revolutionary enthusiasm.

Indeed, although professing to believe in the need for radical social change, he is perceptive enouph to realize the possible dangers in its implementation. One evening he hears Shchetinina enthusiastically playing the *Marseillaise* (after her «conversion») and cracks that the march reminds him of military drills from his university days. When Shchetinina objects that the *Marseillaise* is not the same as the Darmstadt March — one symbolizing revolution, the other reaction — he replies: «'But no matter which one it is, it's a march all the same; therefore, sooner or later you'll hear «Halt! Form up!» and «Attennshun!» Don't ever forget that'» [p. 118]. (A prophetic reference to 'barracks socialism» which seems to have been overlooked by recent studies of Sleptsov.)

In sum, Ryazanov — like Sleptsov himself after 1866 — is reduced to the passive role of waiting for the storm (a metaphor frequently used in radical Aesopian language to signify «reaction») to pass. Until then he can only pay lip service to some nebulous future, of which he has no real concept, while adopting a determinedly nihilistic stance toward all attempts at reforming the present system.

At the conclusion of their rendezvous, Shchetinina makes a final attempt to convince Ryazanov of her devotion to him. In the middle of what appears to be a declaration of love on her part, he abruptly interrupts to inform her, quite coldly, that he intends to leave not for Petersburg, but for the south. Until this point one feels that Shchetinina's actions have been governed as much by an emotional attraction to Ryazanov as by any idealistic motives. (It is for precisely this reason that Sleptsov must make a point of negating the traditional *ménage à trois*.) Now the ambiguity has been resolved; there can be no possibility of a personal relationship. Having recovered her composure, she informs Ryazanov, equally coldly, that she is determined to carry out her intention. It is a scene as old as *Eugene Onegin*; and, true to form, the once-naive woman emerges not only stronger as a person, but also morally superior to her male preceptor. Sleptsov shows Ryazanov not completely devoid of human emotions. When Shchetinina leaves the room he expresses his frustration by throwing a book on the floor, and rushes to catch her. However, rationalism prevails: he restrains himself (and smiles).

In the final Scene Ryazanov takes leave of Shchetinin who, upset by the turn of events, accuses Ryazanov of having deprived him of his «family happiness». Ryazanov answers, in

a frank admission of his own superfluity, that it would have happened all the same sooner or later: «The reason, friend, is life. The woman wants to live; and you and I take part in all this only as benign onlookers' with the emptiest of roles: you were necessary in order to free her from her mother; I freed her from you; and as for me, she freed herself. Now she doesn't need anybody — she's her own mistress» [pp. 156–157]. This turn of events (as explained by Ryazanov) bears an interesting resemblance to the plot of Chekhov's «Nevesta».

Somewhat consoled by the fact that at least Ryazanov is not abducting his wife, shchetinin begins describing his new plans for the future: to make as much money as possible in order to carry out all his philanthropic projects. Ryazanov, unconvinced, warns him that after he gets through amassing money, there may not be anyone left to receive his good deeds–assuming the unlikely event that he, by then, still intended to part with his fortune.

Ryazanov's farewell with Marya Nikolaevna is short and rather formal: she thanks him for his advice; he exhorts her to follow her own judgement. As Ryazanov prepares to leave, Ivan Stepanych — as garrulous and friendly as ever — proposes that the two of them go to Poland (Russian carpetbaggers, as it were). Ryazanov finally departs with his one «trophy» — a deacon's son who, against his father's wishes, intends to enroll in a provincial school (another razno?inec activist in the making). Marya Nikolaevna, with a sigh at Ryazanov's departure, returns to her room to pack.

Thus the novel ends in a stand-off: Shchetinin takes refuge in plans for practical activity on the estate; Ryazanov is left with his belief in some distant revolution; and Marya goes to Petersburg to face an uncertain future. All three have an equal chance of success. Only time will prove which of them, if any, has chosen correctly.

What is the literary significance of *Hard Times*? Although the work has traditionally been discussed in social or political terms, it contains artistic qualities which have made it a minor classic, as interesting today for its portrait of a society in change as it was one hundred years ago. This accomplishment is due not only to the work's issues, but also to Sleptsov's skill in rendering the — a skill which has frequently been overlooked.

In plot the work's structure is sparse and devoid of complexity, with an exposition subordinate to the demands of thematic development. Indeed, the plot structure — limited to the events which produce an estrangement between Shchetinina and her husband — is almost too light to support the rather considerable thematic load Sleptsov places upon it. As mentioned earlier, it is only by virtue of his ability to create dialog which is at once substantive and «conversational» that the work is sustained. The language itself is colloquial and informal in tone (not to mention the passages in which peasant speech is used) with a frequent use of particles, verbs without subjects, and numerous colloquial expressions.

Furthermore, the dialog is presented so that the characters never seem to lose themselves in weighty, ponderous discussions (the exegetic type which makes one wish that the author would dispense with his characters altogether). Frequent off-the-cuff remarks, humorous or sarcastic interjections, flashes of anger, an abrupt shift from one scene to the next — these devices vary the pace and propel the dialog forward, while narrative intrusions are at times so rare that the work reads like a play. It is not surprising that Stanislavsky, in a letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, suggested that with certain modifications *Hard Times* would be suitable for staging (Stanislavskij, 1960, 7: 302–303). As a result Sleptsov succeeds, as well as anyone could, in creating the illusion that his characters are quite naturally speaking the lines he writes for them. It is no mean achievement.

In broader terms, the work is organized around two interconnecting thematic strands — one dealing with the ideological conflict between Shchetinin and Ryazanov (liberalism ver-

sus radical nihilism), the other centered around the development and eventual «liberation» of Marya Shchetinina. The former predominates in the first part of the book, but the latter gains in importance as the plot develops. Interspersed between these two motifs are the scenes and interludes which compose the novel's immediate background, which inform it with a sense of reality (as interpreted by Sleptsov) and serve as a counterpoint to the verbal duel between Ryazanov and Shchetinin. (One of these scenes — the flogging of the peasants — also plays an important role in the plot development.) Finally, the work is suffused with the presence of nature — not Turgenev's lyrical nature with its symbolism of reconciliation and continuity, but a harsher, more elemental force. Through it, yet another, less obtrusive, background is formed, one which reflects the atmosphere of ennui and tension so prevalent in *Hard Times*.

As for the characters, they are treated with an admirable equanimity. Despite Sleptsov's obvious sympathy with Ryazanov's political views and Shchetinina's break with her past, neither is portrayed without shortcomings; nor are Shchetinin's faults exaggerated to the point of caricature. His emotions, if not his views, are often portrayed just as sympathetically as those of the other characters. Indeed, it is a measure of Sleptsov's success that each of his three personages was in turn designated by critics as the central, positive figure (the desipation depending on the critic's political bias). By the same token, each took his (or her) share of abuse. In sum, the characters are neither heroes nor villains, but the positions they represent are developed with a clarity sufficient to make their conflicts believable.

Any treatment of the literary significance of *Hard Times* must eventually lead to a discussion of Ryazanov. For within this, Sleptsov's greatest creation, one sees a complex mingling of two seemingly contradictory images of the Russian literary hero — the superfluous man and the man of action. Ryazanov the superfluous represents a revolution defeated, an activist transformed into a cynic (or a realist), drained of emotion and unwilling to respond to the feelings of a woman who loves him (and to whom he, in turn, is attracted). There is a bit of the Onegin-Pechorin strain in this aspect of Ryazanov's character, as well as a certain affinity with Rudin.

Furthermore, there is an interesting parallel with Bazarov (who also–at least toward the end of *Fathers and Sons* — manifests a combination of the superfluous and the active) and in particular with the relation between Bazarov and Odintsova. Of course, there are obvious differences: Odintsova is far more complex a character than Shchetinina, and Bazarov pursues a more active role in his relation with her than does Ryazanov with Shchetinina. Nevertheless, both relations have their beginnings in the woman's fascination for the hero's unorthodox political and social views as well as his ruthless manner of expressing them; and both fail because of an intellectual realization that the relation is senseless.

As for Ryazanov the active, he represents an odd variation on Russian literature's search for a positive hero during the mid-nineteenth century. Connected with the rise to prominence of a new class, the raznocincy, this search is as much a quest for identity as for a literary role. In the fifties and early sixties it often took the form of the novel of ambition — Pisemsky's *A Thousand Souls*, Pomyalovsky's *Mešcanckoe scast' e* and *Molotov*–with protagonists such as Kalinovich and Molotov seekng to make their way in the establishment, to gain a sense of power and independence.

However, their attempts to confront the system always end either in defeat (Kalinovich) or in assimilation (Molotov, Zhadov from Ostrovsky's *Dokhodnoe mesto*). Zhadov's capitulation is the subject of a satirical article by Sleptsov («O teatre», suppressed by the censor). It was finally published in *LN*, v.71, and has now been translated (in part) into English.

Cf. Andrew Field's *The Complection of Russian Literature* (Field, 1971). And in their collaboration they are mocked by a new variant of the superfluous man — the willfully superfluous, or «underground», man. The best example of this conflict can Be found in Cherevanin's relation to Molotov (in the novel *Molotov*), but it is reflected to some degree by Raskolnikov's attitude to Razumikhin, and, paradoxically, by Ryazanov's to Shchetinin.

Rising to replace the proponents of *cestnaja cicikovščina* (a term from Pomyalovsky's Molotov) was a new breed — the radical hero — less interested in personal advancement and more in the general «cause.» Modeled partly on Chernyshevsky's Rakhmetov and partly on Pisarev's concept of the «thinking proletariat» (the novelists seem to have been little affected by the polemics between *Russkoe Slovo* and *Sovremennik*), these «new men» devoted themselves entirely to a negation of the existing order and to a preparation for its overthrow. Writers such as Nikolay Bazhin (1843–1908), Nikolay Blagoveshchensky (1837–1889), Ivan Kushchevsky (1847–1876), and Innokenty Fedorov-Omulevsky (1836–1883) produced an entire gallery of radicals and nihilists, relics of an attempt to fuse politics and the novel. Bazarov (the first of them all) and Ryazanov remain somewhat to the side of this trend, if only because of the greater depth — and ambiguity — of their literary representation; but they too must be included.

Both Bazarov and Ryazanov fit into the category of the «thinking proletariat» (Pisarev's term, which in 1870 would be superseded by Lavrov's «critically-thinking individual»); and, quite naturally, both were enthusiastically received by Pisarev in the articles «Bazarov» and «Podrastajuščaja gumannost'». Both are skeptical in their attitudes toward the gentry milieu in which they find themselves (a skepticism applied to society and its institutions in general), both speak of the need to wipe the slate clean, to destroy and build anew, without dreams of liberal reform. Finally, both carry a sense of pessimism as to their ability to change the present situation (although Bazarov is initially endowed with great expectations).

But if there are striking resemblances between the two, there are also substantial differences. Bazarov is a scientist and his political views, with their quasi-scientific materialism, are — as presented by Turgenev—obviously conditioned by the methods he uses in his research (symbolized by the dissection of frogs). Emotions and principles are worthless, man's needs and desires can, with proper study, be explained in physiological terms; by the same token, once society is understood and rationally organized, there will be no problems.

Ryazanov, on the other hand, is something of a professional radical, a writer (probably a political essayist), and his views — also materialistic—are conditioned by a socio-political view of history. Devoid of Bazarov's breezy self-confidence, less inclined to the rhetoric of nihilism, he takes a more sober view of the difficulties involved in a reconstruction ofthe social order. When compared with Bazarov's initial enthusiasm, Ryazanov's pessimism seems to be the product of an entirely different point of view — as, indeed, it is. Ryazanov's outlook is the result of experience with the realities of political life in Russia, realities of which Bazarov has no firm conception; and if Ryazanov lacks the youthful vigor of Turgenev's «nihilist», he gains in the unromantic, down-to-earth sense of one who realizes the terms of battle.

In the final analysis, both Ryazanov and Bazarov are presented as defeated activists (although Sleptsov implies that Ryazanov's defeat may be only temporary). But one feels that Turgenev's *Don Quixote* is destroyed primarily from an inability of the author to conceive of his positive hero in action. Sleptsov's *Hamlet*, on the other hand, is merely biding his time.

Critical reaction to *Hard Times* was predictably diverse, and since Korney Chukovsky has devoted an extensive article to this diversity, there is no need to retrace the details ofhis

survey here. In general, the critics took sides along a liberal-radical Boundary. Foremost among the reviews of a radical persuasion is Pisarev's «Podrastajuščaja gumannost'» (*Russkoe Slovo*, 1865, No.12). Characterizing Ryazanov as «one of the brilliant representatives my beloved Bazarov type», Pisarev actually devotes most of the article to a running polemic with the proponent of *igrušecnyj liberalism* — Shchetinin.

Other radicals' essays developed a similar pro-Ryazanov, anti-Shchetinin appraisal, although some critics were disturbed by Ryazanov's pessimism and resignation in the face of reaction. Tkachev, for example, was quite hostile to Ryazanov («Podrastajuščie sily»' *Delo*, 1868, No. 9), calling him a «parasite», «philistine», and «windbag»; but he was little short of ecstatic in his praise of Marya Shchetinina as a model for the «new woman». N. K. Mikhaylovsky took an equally elevated view of Shchetinina in his «Raznocincy i kajuščiesja dvorjane» (*Otecestvennye Zapiski*, 1874, No. 4), as did certain other populist-oriented critics. In an interesting «economic» interpretation Vera Zasulich takes Shchetinin to task as worse than the former serf-owners in his exploitation of the peasant under the pretense of enlightened liberalism («Krepostnaja podkladka 'progressivnyx recej'», *Novoe Slovo*, 1897, No. 9). In a post-Revolutionary extension of the radical perspective, early Soviet critics (e. g., Gorky and N. Iordansky in their respective prefaces to the 1922 and 1923 editions of *Hard Times*) focused on Ryazanov. They admitted his failure as a revolutionary activist, but emphasized his belief in the necessity of revolution.

The liberal critics were unable to muster such an impressive roster in the ideological battle over *Hard Times* (sociological criticism seems to be a radical province); nor were their opinions as diverse — at least not on the issue of the characters' relative moral hierarchy». Quite simply, Ryazanov was the villain; Shchetinin the hero (albeit a bit too inarticulate as a spokesman for reformism); and Marya Nikolaevna a silly, ungrateful scatterbrain. M. Protopopov provides a typical example of this approach in his «Po povodu odnoj povesti» (*Severnyj Vestnik*, 1888, No. 6).

The «left» liberal M. Avdeev, in his book *Naše obščestvo v gerojakh i geroinjakh literatury* (l874), gives a more sympathetic portrait of Ryazanov: «the most remarkable and successful personality which our recent literature has shown us». Presenting Ryazanov as an honest sort who is unafraid to «look things right in the face and admit that his cause was lost» (a misinterpretation of Ryazanov's pessimism), Avdeev places the blame for Ryazanov's nihilistic attitudes on his «economic and social situation». Other liberal critics, however, continued to attack Ryazanov's lack of faith in progress through reform, and accused Sleptsov of deliberately making Shchetinin seem foolish and inept, thus depriving the novel of objectivity (e. g., Golovin, 1904).

Hard Times has survived its critical comment, from proponents and detractors alike. Well-executed, strict in pursuit of its thematic objectives, it will continue to present an artistically successful picture of many of the most important issues facing Russian society during the 1860s (and later) — the Emancipation reforms political repression, radicalism, and women's rights. In connection with these issues as presented in Hard Times, Tolstoy (who, judging from his diary, read *Hard Times* with great interest) wrote: «Yes, demands were different in the sixties. And because these demands were connected with the murder of March 1 [Alexander II's assassination], people imagined that these demands were not valid. In vain. They will be until such time as they are fulfilled» (December l9, 1889) (Tolstoy, 1928–1964, 51: 194). It is perhaps more than a coincidence that one week after reading *Trudnoe vremia* Tolstoy began work on Resurrection. One of the novel's secondary characters is a young radical named Marya Shchetinina. M. Shchetinina, perfectly rendered in her naively idealis-

tic striving for the nastojaščee delo, will remain perhaps the best sympathetic portrait of women's emancipation in Russian literature. Shchetinin will continue to symbolize the quest for a scheme which will somehow make an intolerable situation tolerable. As for Ryazanov, with all the complexities and ambiguities of his character, one can only assume that it was he whom Chekhov had in mind when he said: «Sleptsov taught me, better than most, to understand the Russian intelligent — and my own self, as well" (Gorky, 1934, 3: 146).

CONCLUSION

Sleptsov is a unique phenomenon in Russian literature — a social activist who was able to translate the issues which concerned him into works of genuine literary value. As such, he was able, as no other writer, to infuse his writings with a sense of the social and political realities peculiar to that most politicized of Russian decades — the 1860s.

Thus, when one compares *Hard Times* with two other works oriented toward the political atmosphere of the sixties — Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* — one sees that for all Bazarov's importance as a symbol (albeit a disputed one) of the radical intelligentsia, and for all Dostoevsky's prophetic insight into the ruthlessness and amorality underlying revolutionary activity, these works remain psychological character portraits, highly colored by the authors, who had no direct experience with the movements supposedly embodied in Bazarov and Petr Verkhovensky. Although it may be true that Dostoevsky drew on his personal knowledge of Petrashevsky for the portrait of Petr Verkhovensky, the very fact that he resorted to such an anachronism only further demonstrates his lack of contact with the radicals of the sixties. One is reminded old Mirsky's statement: «The Possessed is no more a true picture of the terrorists [?] of the sixties than Gogol's Plyushkin is the true picture of a typical miser». Sleptsov — at least in *Hard Times* — was able to bring a personal knowledge of the radical movement into his fictional world, and in so doing avoided both Turgenev's romanticism and Dostoevsky's caricature. It is to Sleptsov's work — both as a reflection of the mentality which produced it and as an illustration of a highly significant ideological trend — that one must turn for a more sober appraisal of the sixties.

Another, closely related, aspect of Sleptsov's combination of literature and social activism is his treatment of the movement for women's emancipation; for no other Russian writer, Chernyshevsky not excepted, portrayed the issues of feminism, the background of frustration, the restraints of convention as cogently as Sleptsov. In *Hard Times* as well as in his feuilletons — which, with their specific reference to social issues, often served as a bridge between social concern and fictional representation — Sleptsov repeatedly chanrpioned the cause of equality for women. (In this respect he has much in common with the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, certain of whose plays — *A Doll's House* — in particular bear a close resemblance to *Hard Times* in their portrayal of the heroine's revolt against her bourgeois, or gentry, milieu).

Yet, just what sort of radical was Sleptsov? Soviet commentary has presented him as a convinced foe of the established order, a believer in the coming revolution. He certainly was an opponent of what he saw as ineffectual attempts to patch a leaky ship of state, and he was consistent in exposing (as far as censorship would allow) the many abuses and grave social problems confronting Russia during the 1860s.

However, Sleptsov was anything but a narrow ideologue; nor was he, by any stretch of the imagination, an active revolutionary. In fact, the radical movement as a whole during the sixties had not yet reached the stage of advocating and implementing a concrete

plan for political revolution. With the disenchantment of hopes for a transformation of Russian so-ciety immediately after the Emancipation, few «critically-thinking individuals» of that era were able to visualize a specific method by which meaningful social and political change would occur. Populism was an unacceptable alternative for Sleptsov, who had no illusions as to the level of revolutionary «consciousness» among the broad mass of the peasantry.

Therefore, Sleptsov — and others of radical persuasion could only work for a change in social attitudes and continue to reject the possibility of reform within the existing regime. This approach can best be characterized as «classic» nihilism — a term which, in its political and social meaning, originated from and was particularly well-suited to the 1860s. It is only in this sense that Sleptsov, a true child of the age, can be defined as a radical.

Artistically, such a nihilistic approach served Sleptsov well in *Hard Times* and in many of his other works; but his eventual (and perhaps inevitable) search for a positive alternative led only to disillusionment, frustration, and literary paralysis. In this respect it is perhaps Sleptsov's misfortune that he was so preoccupied with the political situation in Russia, for he was unable to accept literature as an occupation in and of itself. Not content with minor genres or anything less than a «significant» treatment of the issues of his day, he turned his back on an exceptional ability to portray Russia's lower classes within the framework of the story, sketch, or scene. Perhaps it is just as well that he did not inundate us with peasant stories a la Uspensky (either one). But having rejected this aspect of his talent, he found very little (beyond *Hard Times*) to take its place.

What remains of Sleptsov's literary endeavor bears the imprint of his dual role as artist and activist. His works can be, and usually have been, interpreted as comments on the Russian social order during the 1860s — as, indeed, they were. When applied to a writer who saw his craft as part of a general social and political struggle, such an interpretation, done objectively, has a definite value.

However, to limit one's appraisal to this aspect of Sleptsov's creativity is to do it less than justice. The author of «the most refined of all 'short stories' of the pre-Chekhov period» (Chukovskij, 1933, 1: 5), one of Russia's greatest humorists, the creator of a political novel par excellence, Sleptsov is entitled to a far more important position in Russian literature than his small corpus of writings might lead one to believe. His firm control over the «raw material» of his works set a standard which, although unnoticed by most critics, anticipated Chekhov's own artistic mastery (and may have had an influence on it).

One could assume that under better, less repressive conditions, Sleptsov would have written more. But it is useless to characterize Sleptsov as a might-have-been or should-have-become. What he has left is sufficient to establish him as one of the best (best, not greatest) Russian writers of the mid-nineteenth century.

NOTES

[1] This paper is drawn from chapters of my dissertation, «Vasilij Slepcov» (University of California, Berkeley, 1973). I would like to express my gratitude to Professors Simon Karlinsky, Hugh Mclean, and Martin Malia for their suggestions. I am also indebted to the International Research and Exchanges Board for a grant which enabled me to do research in the Soviet Union. Soviet scholars have done much to clarify aspects of Sleptsov's biography and works (particularly in volume 71 of *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, devoted primarily to unpublished material by or about Sleptsov), and it was my pleasure to meet one of the most prominent investigators in this field, Mariya Semanova of the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute. The material discovered by Semanova and her colleagues did much to expedite my own work.

[2] According to Vladimir Markov (see below), the sketch was actually written by the editor of *Russkaia Starina*, Semevsky, who visited Josephine Adamovna at her home in Serdobsk and recorded the sketch from her words." Markov attributes the sketch's errors to old age (Sleptsova was 84 at the time) and a desire to suppress the unpleasant. What seems to be a rough draft of her account (replete with spelling mistakes) is introduced by K. Chukovsky (Chukovsky, 1931: 306–308).

[3] Chukovsky, in a 1957 reworking of the just-mentioned biographical sketch, identifies the source of his version as L. F. Maklakova (i. e., Nelidova), who, he claims, was told of the incident by Sleptsov's mother. (Yet Nelidova's presentation in *Na maloj zemle* differs from that given by Chukovsky.) In fairness to Chukovsky it should be noted that in his later article he himself admits doubts as to the believability of the incident (Chukovsky, 1958: 186, nn. 1–2).

[4] Taneev, the brother of the composer Sergey Taneev, was a noted radical lawyer (he defended those involved in the Nechaev affair), a political economist, and a proponent of utopian socialism. His association with Sleptsov apparently arose from Sleptsov's request that he read a paper on political economy at one of Sleptsov's lecture series for women (see Evstigneeva's introduction to Taneev's memoirs: LN, 71: 513).

[5] Taneev's acquaintance with Sleptsov dates from 1865; i. e., close to a decade after the events described in this quote. Nevertheless, one can assume that Sleptsov himself related the details of this «typical student life».

[6] Cf. Evstigneeva's article comparing the work of Dahl with Sleptsov's «Spiski poslovic i pogovorok», LN, 71: 430–431.

[7] Iskra (1864) No. 9 (cover).

8 Strictly speaking, Sleptsov, like other radical literati of the period, held the oblicitel'nyi ocerk in great disdain. Its practice of revealing minor abuses and its belief that the system would be sound if such abuses were corrected ran counter to the radicals' concept of total change. *Oblicenie* is used here in the broadest sense of an exposé.

[9] There has been some difficulty in reconstructing the text of *Vladimirka i Kljaz'ma* since parts of the work were published under various titles in a number of different journals. As now established, the text is taken from numbers of *Russkaia Rec'*, *Moskovskii Vestnik* (1861), and *Severnaia Pcela* (1862, No. 163).

[10] Peterburgskij period zizni i dejatel'nosti V. A, Slepcova (1957)// Uc. Zap. Pjatigorskogo Ped. In-ta., 15, 415–417.

[11] Published in Sovremennik (1862) No. 5; 1863, Nos. 1, 2, and 6.

[12] Cf. Pisarev's article (published under the pseudonym D. Ragodin) «Podrastajuščaja gumannost'," *Russkoe Slovo*, 1865, No. 12.

[13] Mikhail Chernyavsky's play «Grazdanskii brak," Leskov's *Nekuda* (the most famous of the lot), Vsevolod Krestovsky's *Panurgovo stado*, Vasily Ayenarius' Povetrie, Petr Boborykin's *Vecerniaia zarja*, and Evgeny Salias' story «12 casov, voskresen'e.» Yet another testimony to the commune's fame can be found in Aleksey Remizov's memoirs, *Podstrizennymi glazami*: «My mother at one time participated in a circle: this was one of the first circles of nihilists, very similar to the one described by Leskov in *Nekuda*... The name of Sleptsov, founder of the first Znamenskaya commune, was familiar to me from childhood» (Paris: YMCA Press, 1951), p. 90.

[14] For an insight into the workings of the Third Section, see the documents relating to Sleptsov's commune in LN, 71: 446–455.

[15] It is obviously impossible to know whether the lost material actually represented a «large part of his literary legacy», but the loss is unfortunate nonetheless.

[16] All subsequent quotations from *Hard Times* will be identified in the text by page number (from volume two of this edition). The translations are my own.

[17] Sleptsov's technique of inserting incidental remarks into a conversation is well-illustrated in this passage. The device is occasionally used to vary the pace of the work's extended «ideological» dialog.

[18] Tolstoy also continued to be concerned with this issue, as is evident from a conversation between Levin and his brother Nikolay: «I am trying to find means of working productively for myself and

for the laborers. I want to organize» – he [Levin] answered hotly. «You don't want to organize anything: it's simply just as you've been all your life, that you want to be original, to show that you are not simply exploiting the peasants but have some idea in view.'' (*Anna Karenina*, Part III, Chapter 32; Gamett translation).

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