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Russian Literary Conflicts over the Antinihilist Novel, 1861-1881

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of nihilism in antinihilist and radical novels written in post-emancipation Tsarist Russia, between 1861 and 1881. During this period, nihilism emerged as a social and political phenomenon and contributed not only to the emerging differences between the generation of the “superfluous men” (1840s) and of the prominent literary critics (1860s), but also to the radicalization of a segment of society. As a result, it was actively discussed and debated in most of the literature produced in this period. I have limited my analysis to three of the major works written during this time: Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?*, and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons*. Through my analysis of literary conflicts within these novels, I have explicated connections between the novels, identified influences over the authors and explored how representations of nihilism evolved within Russian society during the 1860s and the 1870s.
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Chapter One

1 Introduction

1.1 Nihilism in the Russian Context

*Nihilism* comes from the Latin root *nihil*, which means “nothing.” By this definition, it would “signify a doctrine advocating intellectual negation and the sheer destruction of whatever may in fact exist, be it material or spiritual.”¹ *Nihilists* called for the destruction of the "existing order," because they believed it was evil. The underlying assumption was that what will come about as a replacement will be better, although that was not their concern. In the Russian context, nihilism did not imply universal negation. Not only did the Russian radicals of the 1860s have "unbounded faith in themselves and their convictions,"² but politically, they aspired towards a socialist system. Alexander Herzen, widely regarded as the father of Russian socialism, traced the roots of nihilism to the last seven years of Nicholas I's reign, between 1848 and 1855, and defined nihilism as:

Nihilism ... is logic without structure, it is science without dogmas, it is the unconditional submission to experience and the resigned acceptance of all consequences, whatever they may be, if they follow from observation, or are required by reason. Nihilism does not transform something into nothing, but shows that a nothing which has been taken for a something is an optical illusion, and that every truth, however it contradicts our fantastic imaginings, is more wholesome than they are, and is in any case what we are in duty bound to accept.³

Herzen thus positioned nihilism as a positive doctrine and, by doing so, echoed Mikhail Bakunin’s pronouncement that “the passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!”⁴

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² Ibid., 19.
also asserted that he, Turgenev, Belinsky, and Bakunin, have all been Russian nihilists in this sense of the word. While nihilism was generally understood in its philosophical context, Turgenev’s novel Fathers and Sons added a social and political dimension to it, which evoked “pejorative connotations.” Much to the radical camp's chagrin, the pejorative usage dominated the discourse on nihilism and associated a stigma with the term nihilist. We can see this referenced in one of the statements issued by the Third Section (secret police):

Being one of the main Russian talents and enjoying popularity among the educated part of society, Turgenev, with his novel, quite unexpectedly for the younger generation that not so long ago applauded him, placed a stigma on our under-age revolutionaries in the form of a sarcastic name, "nihilists," and, thus, shook the authority of the doctrine of materialism and its representatives.

In his later years, Turgenev himself would come to regret his contribution in formulating such an association.

It is worth noting that literature assumed a much broader role in the Russian context and did not just include "the novel, poetry, and short stories, but also political and philosophical commentary." Literature and art were two channels that censorship had not completely shut off and thus became the battleground on which social and political issues were actively debated. Consequently, literary or aesthetic questions, such as one on the social function of art, confined to academics in their places of origin— France or Germany—became a major political and moral issue in Russia. In 1861, comparing the role of literature in Russia with that in the West, Dmitry Pisarev wrote:

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7 Ibid., 7.
8 Ibid., 7-8.
10 Dmitry Ivanovich Pisarev (1840-1868) was a radical Russian critic and social thinker.
[Russian realistic novels] have for us not only an aesthetic but also a social interest. The English have Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot, but they also have John Stuart Mill; The French have journalists and socialists as well as novelists. But in Russia, the whole sum of ideas about society and family relations is concentrated in belles lettres and in the criticism of belles lettres; we do not have an independent moral philosophy, we do not have a social science, and so we must look for all of this in literary works.¹¹

Thus, unlike Western Europe, in Russia, the literary critics and writers, and not professional academics, served as “society’s original and influential thinkers.” In the words of Sir Isaiah Berlin,¹² “no society demanded more of its authors than Russia, then or now.”¹³

1.2 Russian Intelligentsia and the Great Reforms of 1861

One of the most significant developments of the nineteenth century, especially for discussions of Russia's fate, was the emergence of the Russian intelligentsia. The key period in which the intelligentsia took shape as an organized movement of exceptionally gifted intellectuals is referred to as Russia's “marvelous decade” (1838-1848). During this period, its members passionately debated on a wide range of issues, from the legal status of women to the destiny of Russia. They were strongly influenced by German Romantic philosophers and were united in their criticism of serfdom and political oppression, but the kind of solutions they looked up to eventually led to an irreconcilable split into two competing camps, “Slavophiles” and “Westernizers.”¹⁴ The Slavophiles drew on what they perceived as Russia’s peculiar strengths, “the social solidarity expressed in both the Orthodox faith and the traditional peasant

¹² Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) was a British philosopher, political theorist, and public intellectual.
commune.”15 The Westernizers were concerned above all with the individual’s rights and dignity in society.

The intelligentsia’s role became even more significant in the period of the Great Reforms of the 1860s. The period referred to as the "1860s" in Russia actually began with the death of Tsar Nicholas I in 1855.16 Nicholas had ruled as a “true autocrat,” attempting to enforce adherence to the “tripartite official slogan ‘Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality.’” The most oppressive period of his reign was from the European revolution of 1848 until his death, during which strict censorship was imposed to prevent the revolutionary ferment of Europe from spilling into Russia.17 After Tsar Alexander II inherited the throne in 1855, he set out on a course of major reform. The government first eased censorship restrictions to allow open discussion on reforms in the press. Alexander II signed the Emancipation Act on February 19, 1861, which abolished serfdom and granted over 50 million serfs freedom. The university statute was passed in 1863, limiting government oversight of universities, and giving them increased autonomy. These reforms helped significantly increase student enrollment in universities, many of whom came from outside the nobility. While these reforms were revolutionary, Alexander II's policies also displayed a great deal of ambivalence. In his attempt to maintain control, he frequently introduced measures that served to limit the effect of his reforms, resulting in widespread confusion and dissent.

The freedom granted to universities led not only to increased student enrollment but also allowed students to organize themselves, making the universities "centers of organized rebellion." Students exercised their power in many ways, including organizing street

15 Ibid., 64.
16 Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's. 13.
17 Ibid.
demonstrations and strikes, mobilizing against teachers they did not like, and even engaging in violent clashes with the police. During the fall of 1861, student riots broke out at Petersburg university in protest of "governmental interference" in some student projects. Troops were called in to put down the disturbances, and the university was closed down between 1861 and 1863. In the spring of 1862, a series of mysterious fires erupted in Petersburg, for which the authorities ruled out the possibility of coincidence. Eventually, suspicion fell upon the radical students, but no arsonist was caught in the act. The revolutionaries tried to take advantage of these circumstances and issued "inflammatory proclamations" throughout Petersburg. The most radical of these was "Young Russia," which emphasized "the need to destroy existing political and social relations in Russia," and alienated even the "liberal society." In the government crackdown that followed, two radical journals, the Contemporary and the Russian Word, were forced to suspend publication, and the leading radical critics, Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Dmitry Pisarev were arrested. With the outbreak of the Polish rebellion in 1863, public opinion rallied to the government’s side, which eased the government’s “oppressive measures,” and allowed the radical journals to resume publication after eight months. Under these circumstances, a small number of students resorted to terrorism, and they hoped to inspire a revolution by assassinating government officials. One of these students, Dmitry Karakozov, a member of the Petersburg-based organization called “Hell,” made a failed assassination attempt on Alexander II on April 4, 1866. In the aftermath of the shooting, “the few remaining traces of collaboration between the Emperor and the liberal intelligentsia in the direction of reforms” was brought to an abrupt end.

18 Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860’s. 53.
20 Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860’s. 54.
21 Venturi, Roots of Revolution. 347.
The most influential of the voices heard in Russian public life during this period was of the Raznochintsy. Literally, Raznochintsy means “people of varied ranks,” and refers to the new younger generation of intelligentsia writers and critics who fell outside the old societal ranking system of royalty, the church, landowners, and peasants. Since these people existed on the margin of social structure, they did not have much stake in the existing system and were more readily willing to experiment with newer ideas. For these young men (and women), the Emancipation Act of Alexander II served both as a disappointment and a hope: a disappointment because it failed to address the country’s basic inequities and as hope because it allowed Russians from various classes to see that in the absence of the government’s willingness to make substantial changes, a revolution was the only viable alternative.

The Russian literary critic, Nikolai Strakhov (1828-1896), who wrote extensively about the nihilist movement, made a penetrating statement “on the intellectual foundations of the radical attitude,” describing the “guiding thread” in their thought to be, “I don’t understand it, so it must be nonsense.”\(^{22}\) The American literary scholar, Charles Moser, cited an example of Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s intellectual intolerance in this regard. Chernyshevsky had formulated his “scientific” outlook of the world based on science as it existed in 1860 and was unwilling to accept any newer scientific claims unless they were compatible with his “preconceived notions.” When Chernyshevsky read an essay by the German physicist and leading nineteenth-century materialist intellectual, Hermann von Helmholtz, on the subject of non-Euclidean geometries, he wrote about it to his followers, attacking Helmholtz and his ideas in an “extremely intemperate language,” calling him an “ignoramus,” and “country bumpkin of the male sex.”\(^{23}\) This

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 28.
intellectual intolerance also contributed to the radical censorship of the writers, which emerged in parallel to the tsarist censorship.

1.3 The Antinihilist Novel

From a historical perspective, antinihilist novels were written during the two decades between February 19, 1861, and March 1, 1881. Here, the starting point is marked as the Emancipation Proclamation announcement and the endpoint as the assassination of Alexander II. While many terms are used to describe the novels written during these two decades, broadly speaking, there are two categories of novels: antinihilist and radical novels. The antinihilist genre includes “novels written in the 1860s and 1870s that are perceived to be hostile to contemporary nihilist and radical movements.” The “tendentiousness,” of these novels reflected in “the ideological or political bias of their authors, … [in] the abundance of caricatural descriptions, the creation of ‘flat’ characters and, on a bigger scale, [in] the transformation of a novel into roman à clef, a pamphlet, where the prototypes of its characters are easily identified.” Yury Sorokin, the Soviet scholar and historian, defined the antinihilist novel as one which is “‘political’ in its content, and reactionary and conservative in its ideology.” For Nikolai Strakhov, the “epoch of nihilism” in Russia stretched “from the Paris Peace Treaty up until the war for Bulgaria.” Superimposing life directly onto art, Strakhov lamented that "no matter how it might upset us, it seems that we will have to refer to [this] whole epoch in our literature as nihilist…for more than twenty years…nihilism was the reigning feature of our

24 Other terms used for these categories include reactionary, polemical, and tendentious for antinihilist novels and democratic, and nihilist for radical novels.
25 Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 22.
26 Ibid., 19-20.
27 Ibid., 23.
28 This refers to the period between the Paris Treaty of 1856 that put an end to the Crimean War and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.
literature." He observed that "with small exceptions, all the writers of that period portrayed nihilists, often focusing on them for the overall meaning of their works."\(^{29}\)

Mikhail Saltkov-Shchedrin (1826-1889), who was a major Russian writer and critic, wrote the following after noticing the disturbing trend of writing polemical works:

There appeared a whole new literature, the purpose of which is to study the qualities of poisons pouring out of the younger generation – or, better to say, not to study these qualities but to represent in living (to a different degree) images the fact that the younger generation is worthless, that it does not have a future, and that its only talent is to spread around the gangrene of destruction. The meaningless word “nihilists” travels from mouth to mouth, from one periodical to another and from one literary work to the next. Writers clearly can’t have enough of this word. Everybody seems to want to snatch a piece from the meager meal of the new phenomenon of nihilism.\(^{30}\)

In his seminal study of the antinihilist literature of the 1860s, Charles Moser divided the antinihilist writers into three generations based on the extent the writer may have had direct contact with the revolutionaries. In the first generation, he placed just one author, Avdotya Glinka (1795-1863). The second generation consisted of authors who had direct experience with the radical movements in the 1840s, and “because of their age, they could possess only less immediately relevant information on the radical generation of the 1860s.”\(^{31}\) Moser placed both Turgenev and Dostoevsky in the second generation. The third generation of authors included those who “began their literary careers in the 1860s,” and had found the revolutionary movement worthy of opposition after knowing it as “contemporaries.” For this study, the second generation of antinihilist authors is more relevant, which Moser describes as follows:

They could not know the rising radicals as contemporaries because they were already in the position of “fathers.” As a loose generalization, it may be said that these writers devoted more attention to the intellectual antecedents of the

\(^{29}\) Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 132.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 29-30.
\(^{31}\) Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860’s. 74.
contemporary radical generation and to the conflicts between the “fathers” and the “sons.”

The eminent English historian and scholar, Ronald Hingley, noted that the antinihilist writers enjoyed greater freedom from the censorship board since they were better aligned with the official government policy: “They could roundly denounce revolution, while the revolutionaries could barely hint at the existence of such a thing.”

1.4 Methods and Goals

My primary method of analysis is historical, and the period I have focused on for my analysis is between 1855 and 1874. For this study, I chose three major novels, each of which either includes a substantive critique of the prevailing nihilist trends or was written in response to the ideas presented in other novels. Two of these are antinihilist novels: Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1872). The third one, Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* (1863), is the only democratic novel of note written during these two decades. In each case, I have tried to explore the author's degree of familiarity with the nihilist milieu, how each of the novels represented the nihilists, and how accurate or stereotypical their portrayals were. To better understand how the works of their contemporaries may have influenced these writers, I looked into the English translation of their letters to friends, family members, editors, and even adversaries; such collections of letters were available for Turgenev and Dostoevsky but not for Chernyshevsky. Moreover, when using these letters, it was sometimes difficult to make sense of what they were written in response to because the original letters' translations were not available. In such cases, I tried to rely on secondary sources to bridge the gap.

32 Ibid.
Chapter Two

2 Bazarov: Caricature of a Nihilist

Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (*Ottsy i deti*) was published in early 1862, but the story was set in 1859, which was, quite literally, on the eve of the emancipation reforms. The title of the novel, particularly its usage of the conjunction “and,” raises the question of what kind of relationship it implies. It could be read as evoking conflict between the two generations but also symbolizing continuity and “an abiding love” between fathers and sons.\(^3^4\) The literal translation of *Ottsy i deti* is *Fathers and Children* though most English translators have preferred to translate it as *Fathers and Sons*. Michael Katz, the editor and translator of several of Turgenev's novels, described his reason for using “sons” in the first edition of his English translation: “sons” in English “better implies the notion of spiritual and intellectual generations conveyed by the Russian *deti*.”\(^3^5\) While working on the second edition of his translation, however, Katz “had a change of heart,” and decided to use *Fathers and Children* instead.

2.1 Summary of *Fathers and Sons*

The story begins on May 20, 1859, when after graduating from the University of Petersburg, Arkady Kirsanov returns home to his father's provincial estate where his father, Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov, lives with his brother Pavel Petrovitch Kirsanov, his mistress, Fenechka, and his infant son from Fenechka, Mitya. Turgenev draws a biographical sketch presenting Nikolai Kirsanov as a loving husband and father who thought of his late wife as he awaited his son's arrival. His wife, Masha, died more than a decade earlier. She had been a

“progressive woman” who read “serious journal articles” in her youth but became “domestic” after her marriage to Nikolai. Following his father's footsteps, who graduated a generation ago, Arkady went to St. Petersburg for his studies. Here, through the description of Nikolai Kirsanov's earlier life and his parents, Turgenev emphasized family continuity. The father generation in the novel included Arkady's uncle, Pavel Kirsanov, who was the older of the two brothers. Pavel did not have any biological children of his own and lived a life of no practical value, simply observing strict adherence to what he referred to as "aristocratic principles." While outwardly “elegant and well-bred,” he was depicted as a “class snob” with exaggeratedly long fingernails.

When Arkady’s carriage finally arrived, accompanying him was his friend and mentor, Evgeny Vasilievich Bazarov, who was studying natural sciences to become a doctor. Turgenev presented Bazarov as a representative of the raznochintsy, who were notorious for their crude and “exaggerated bad manners.” The term “nihilist” was first used in the novel by Arkady in response to his uncle Pavel’s inquiry about his friend. Arkady defined a nihilist as one who “doesn’t accept even one principle on faith, no matter how much respect surrounds that principle.” 36 Describing Bazarov’s materialist philosophy, Dmitry Pisarev noted: “As an empiricist, Bazarov acknowledged only what can be felt with the hands, seen with the eyes, tasted by the tongue, in a word, only what can be examined with one of the five senses.” 37 Bazarov spent much of his time dissecting frogs and hunting for beetles: “I’ll cut the frogs open and look inside to see what’s going on; since you and I are just like frogs, except that we walk on two legs, I’ll find out what’s going on inside us as well,” 38 he said to the peasant boys who helped him hunt for frogs. Bazarov's claims that human beings are just like frogs may reflect

36 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 19.
38 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 15-16.
some awareness, if not influence, of Darwin’s theories, which became widely popular soon after
they were published in 1859. Consistent with his belief in the “primacy of science,” Bazarov was
dismissive of all forms of art, which he considered a waste of time. He declared, “A decent
chemist is twenty times more useful than any poet.”

Bazarov also ridiculed Nikolai for playing the cello “with feeling”: “Imagine! A forty four year old man, a pater familias, living in such-and-such district and plays the cello!”

We are told that one day as Nikolai was reading Pushkin’s The Gypsies, Arkady walked in
and, with an expression of "tender compassion," took Pushkin's book away, replacing it with
Ludwig Büchner's Stoff und Kraft. Nikolai could not immediately make sense of this gesture
and, later having read Büchner’s book, expressed his self-doubt to his brother Pavel, “Either I’m
stupid or it’s all rubbish. I must be stupid… clearly, it's time to order our coffins and lay our
arms across our chests,” he added, but Pavel Petrovich was determined not to give up: “We’ll
still have a skirmish with that doctor fellow. I feel it coming.” An argument with Bazarov
happened that very evening. When Bazarov trashed a provincial aristocrat, Pavel, visibly
offended, lectured him on aristocratic principles, highlighting their origin in respecting the rights
of others. Bazarov questioned the very utility of such principles when they did not motivate one
to act: “You'd be better off not respecting yourself, but doing something.”

When questioned on his nihilism, Bazarov insisted that his understanding was rooted in a utilitarian perspective,"aristocratism, liberalism, progress, principles, … A Russian has no need of them whatsoever. …

39 Ibid., 21.
40 Ibid., 35.
41 The actual title of Büchner’s book is Kraft und Stoff translated as Force and Matter. Turgenev reverses the title of
the book in Fathers and Sons. Through his analysis of Turgenev's first outline of the novel, Patrick Waddington
raised questions on Turgenev's familiarity with Büchner's work. He suggested that the title's reversal was an error on
the part of Turgenev and not Bazarov. See Waddington, Patrick. "Turgenev's Sketches for "Ottsy I Deti (Fathers and
42 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 37-38.
43 Ibid., 38.
We act on the basis of what we recognize as useful.”44 When Nikolai interjected, “You reject everything, or, to put it more precisely, you destroy everything… one must also build,” Bazarov responded, “That’s not for us to do … First, the ground must be cleared.”45 Responding to Bazarov’s challenge to name any Russian institution that "doesn't deserve absolute and merciless rejection," Pavel responded: "the family as it exists among our peasants!" He was immediately checked by Bazarov, who reminded Pavel that a father-in-law had sexual rights over his daughter-in-law according to local practices amongst peasants. The quarrel ended abruptly when Bazarov and Arkady left "to dissect frogs," leaving the two brothers behind recuperating. Nikolai Petrovich seemed more introspective after this bitter exchange. He recalled an incident from his youth where he had once quarreled with their late mother, who would not listen to him and kept yelling at him. In the end, Nikolai told her that she could never understand him since they were from two different generations: “She was terribly offended, and I thought to myself: what's to be done? It's a bitter pill—but one must swallow it. Well, now our turn's come,” he said to Pavel, “and our heirs can say to us: ‘We belong to a different generation; swallow that pill.’” Pavel dismissed his brother's conclusion saying, “You're being too generous and modest.”46 Later, Nikolai Petrovich sat pondering in his favorite pavilion and concluded that the younger generation had some sort of advantage over his own: “Perhaps their advantage consists in the fact that there are fewer traces of gentry mentality left in them than in us?” Nikolai’s reference to “gentry mentality” is significant since this reflected the “moral blight” of serfdom and class privilege enjoyed by the father generation. In a way, Nikolai’s statement can also be read in Darwinian terms, that the generation of the sons was more evolved than that of the fathers. But

44 Ibid., 39-40.  
46 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 44.
Nikolai could not fathom the utter disregard that the younger generation expressed towards art: “But to reject poetry? … to have no feeling for art, nature …?”

After spending a few weeks at the Kirsanov estate, Arkady and Bazarov left for town, where they met two other nihilist characters, namely, Viktor Sitnikov and Avdotya Kukshina. The former was a rich conceited sycophant who had been an “old friend” and disciple of Bazarov. The latter was introduced by Sitnikov as an “émancipée” and a “progressive woman.”

Turgenev portrayed Kukshina as a name-dropper; her house was filled with books, letters, and "thick Russian journals," whose pages were "uncut," indicating that they had not been read; this was unlike Arkady's mother, who did read thick journals. While at Kukshina’s, the two friends learned about Anna Sergeyevna Odintsova, a well-to-do widow who had inherited a sizeable provincial estate from her late husband. They met Odintsova at a ball, and after another brief meeting at her hotel, they received an invitation to visit her estate. Until now, Bazarov understood love primarily as a physiological response. In an earlier conversation with Arkady, after he shared his uncle Pavel Petrovich’s failed love life, Bazarov had remarked: “what about those mysterious relations between a man and a woman? We physiologists understand all that. You just study the anatomy of the eye: where does that enigmatic gaze come from that you talk about? It's all romanticism, nonsense, rubbish, artifice. Let's go have a look at that beetle.”

This claim for romantic love to be nonsense was part of newer attitudes that were developing among young radicals and which Turgenev captured in Bazarov’s portrait in the novel.

While at Odintsova’s estate, Bazarov was quick to spout his nihilism: “I can tell you it isn't worth the trouble to study separate individuals. All people resemble each other, in soul as well as

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47 Ibid., 45.
48 Ibid., 51.
50 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 27.
body; each one of us has a brain, spleen, heart, and lungs, all made similarly. So-called moral qualities are also shared by everyone: small variations don't mean a thing. A single human specimen's sufficient to make judgments about all the rest. People are like trees in a forest; no botanist would study each birch individually.” Odintsova, in turn, wanted him to teach her the Latin names of plants. Both Bazarov and Odintsova were similar in this respect since they treated nature as a workshop rather than a temple. By this time, the two were on the verge of falling for each other. Bazarov announced his departure after being informed by a visitor that his parents were expecting to see him. Before he could leave, however, Odintsova met with him in private and lured him into declaring his love for her. Bazarov sprung at her and passionately embraced her, but after a moment's hesitation, Odintsova broke away: “You’ve misunderstood me,” she said. After this unpleasant encounter, the action moved to the home of Bazarov’s parents. By now, Bazarov appeared defeated, and he said to Arkady: “here I lie under a haystack ... The tiny space I occupy is so small compared to the rest of space, where I am not and where things have nothing to do with me; and the amount of time in which I get to live my life is so insignificant compared to eternity, where I've never been and won't ever be ... Yet in this atom, this mathematical point blood circulates, a brain functions and desires something as well... How absurd! What nonsense!” Arkady reminded him that this was, in fact, the “human condition.” Later, as he witnessed an ant drag a half-dead fly, Bazarov cheered the ant on: “take advantage of the fact that as an animal you have the right not to feel any compassion, unlike us, self-destructive creatures that we are!” Bazarov was likely commenting on what had taken place

51 Ibid., 67.
53 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 83.
54 Ibid., 101.
55 Ibid., 102.
between him and Odintsova. He envied the ant for doing with the fly what it wanted regardless of the fly’s resistance. Here, Turgenev highlights the key difference between humans, who are capable of showing empathy, and other creatures, who are free of compassion. Perhaps humans are not just like frogs or beetles, and perhaps his capacity for pity is what prevented Bazarov from taking advantage of Odintsova.56

Bazarov felt bored at home and just three days later, he took leave of his parents and headed for the Kirsanov estate where he had left his scientific equipment. His parents were heartbroken. His father, Vasily Ivanovich, told his wife that he feels forsaken by his son, but she responded with folk wisdom: “What's to be done, Vasya? A son's a piece cut off. He's like a falcon: he comes and goes whenever he likes; while you and I are like mushrooms growing in the hollow of a log: we sit side by side and never budge. Except that I'll always be here for you, as you will for me.”57 Here, both parents showed great forbearance to their son, who was behaving like falcons, coming and going as he pleased.

Meanwhile, Bazarov had once again engaged himself with scientific experiments at the Kirsanovs, and Arkady soon realized that he was interested in Odintsova's younger sister, Katya. As a pretext to visit her, he left for the town, leaving Bazarov behind with his father and uncle. In his absence, Bazarov managed to “steal a kiss” from Fenechka, who pushed him away and reproached him for his amorous advances. Bazarov felt guilty but was quick to dismiss his regret, congratulating himself on his “formal admission into the ranks of womanizing Céladons.”58 Pavel Petrovich happened to witness this and subsequently challenged Bazarov to a duel. The two men fought the duel, and on his first shot, Bazarov wounded Pavel. Instead of

57 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 110.
58 Ibid., 119.
taking the second shot per the "arcane rules of dueling," Bazarov ended up dressing Pavel’s wounds. The duel ended up having some good effects. Bazarov stopped tormenting the elder Kirsanovs, but more importantly, Pavel Petrovich gave his blessing to the marriage of Nikolai Petrovich and Fenechka. Nikolai revealed that he would have married Fenechka sooner had he not feared Pavel’s opposition to it due to class prejudice. Pavel’s response was revealing: “You were wrong to respect me in this instance, … I'm beginning to think that Bazarov was right when he accused me of aristocratism. No, dear brother, we've spent enough time putting on airs and worrying about what other people think: we've already become old and tranquil folk; it's time for us to put aside all vanity. Let's do our duty, precisely as you say, and let's see if we can achieve happiness in the bargain.”59 Here, Turgenev seems to suggest that the fathers can adapt to changing times.

Meanwhile, Arkady courted Katya at the Odintsova’s estate. On his way back from the Kirsanov estate, Bazarov stopped by and received the news about Arkady’s engagement with Katya, with some resignation. Both Bazarov and Odintsova realized that love had passed them by, and they dismissed love as “a spurious feeling.”60 As Bazarov and Arkady bid farewell, Bazarov made a contemptuous remark about Arkady being only fit for the conventional happiness of a jackdaw, considered to be a "respectable family bird." Implicit in this was the suggestion that Arkady was not suited for the nobler, albeit lonelier life, of a true nihilist.

After returning to his parent's home, Bazarov began assisting his father with his medical practice. His father boasted about Bazarov’s medical abilities telling patients how they are being “treated with the most scientific, most up-to-date methods,” and claimed that Emperor Napoleon himself did not receive any better medical care. However, his parents noticed that Bazarov had

59 Ibid., 132.
60 Ibid., 139.
become increasingly “embittered and gloomy.” Bazarov also seemed to have lost his rapport with peasants, and they no longer understood him. Once while conducting the autopsy of a corpse of a patient who died from typhus, Bazarov made a pointless scientific error when he cut himself and then allowed too much time to pass before asking his father for a “strong caustic” to cauterize his cut with. Bazarov’s condition worsened over the next few days. As he lay dying in his bed, he requested Anna Sergeyevna Odintsova to be summoned. “The dead make no companions for the living,” he told Odintsova, “my father will tell you what a great man Russia's losing ... That's nonsense, but don't try to argue with the old man. Don't deny the child anything that comforts him ... And be kind to my mother. After all, you won't find people like them anywhere in the world, even if you search by daylight with a candle.” Bazarov’s nobility of character on his deathbed demonstrates how death can bring out the generosity of spirit even in a nihilist who may have responded selfishly over his disappointment over love.

2.2 Historical Context

Turgenev began his writing career in the 1840s when he wrote a series of short vignettes about his hunting expeditions in the Russian countryside. These stories were collected and published together in 1852 under the title Notes of a Hunter. Its publication caused a sensation not only for its beautiful prose but also for its portrayal of the miserable situation of the Russian serfs, who were still languishing in slavery. Turgenev's book brought him considerable fame and played a significant role in preparing Russian public opinion for the Grand Emancipation Act of 1861. Soon after the book's publication though, Turgenev was arrested, supposedly for an obituary he wrote for Nikolai Gogol. However, many suspected it was in retaliation for stirring

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61 Ibid., 148.
62 Ibid., 158.
63 Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1851) was a Russian novelist and playwright.
up sympathy for the abolitionist cause. Nevertheless, Turgenev was subsequently seen as an ally of those seeking to reform Tsarist Russia. By this time, Turgenev had inherited his family estate and could also afford to render monetary assistance.

Turgenev’s novels drew many elements from the historical life of the time. As Charles Moser observed, he dated the action in his novels very precisely, down to the day of the month. Turgenev sets *Fathers and Sons* (1862) in 1859, *Smoke* (1867) in 1862, and *Virgin Soil* (1877) in 1868, and the time for each accurately depicted the historical phenomenon he portrayed in the novel. Much of Turgenev’s fiction is associated with variations of the “superfluous men,” which represented “the quest of the young, educated Russian for a meaningful role in life.”

Turgenev’s protagonists experience failures in love as well as in other areas. The “genuine power of will,” in Turgenev’s novels, is almost always exercised by a woman. His male characters, or at least those who are Russian, are capable of wonderful, sometimes even powerful, speech, but something always goes amiss when it’s time for action. Turgenev’s critics, especially the radical ones, saw this as a negative representation of the Russian character. Two of his critics, Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nikolai Dobrolyubov, were both strong advocates for the aesthetic approach dubbed “Realism.” Realism assigned a social and political function to literature and dismissed any poetry or literature that did not correspond to the actual needs of the Russian society. Victor Ripp, the author of *Turgenev’s Russia*, argued that Turgenev’s novels have significantly altered the usual perspective on this question. He invites us to examine the relationship between abstract ideals and purposeful activity while also considering “the object of their curiosity.” Referencing *Rudin*’s protagonist, Ripp called into doubt the very concept of judgment:

> although by the end of the book Rudin stands condemned, his guilt is not absolute. He is no simple poseur; he has at least groped toward an ideal. Those

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who condemn him, on the other hand, only sit smugly by. Much of the time, *Rudin* breathes a sanctimonious air. In a world of fools and idlers, the man who most energetically tries to integrate value and action is most harshly judged.\(^66\)

In January 1860, Turgenev delivered a lecture titled “Hamlet and Don Quixote,” in which he contrasted the two classical characters in light of what he believed each represented. Don Quixote was generally believed to represent the "brave revolutionaries," while Hamlet represented the “superfluous men of the forties.”\(^67\) In his review of Turgenev’s *On the Eve*, P. Basistov, who was a critic from *The Notes of the Fatherland*, wrote:

> for us, the time of Hamlets has passed... we’ve talked enough about the fact that we need Don Quixotes, men of action, men who are able to sacrifice themselves, who would do everything that we have dreamt about. So far, we have had only Hamlets, self-defeaters, self-doubters, etc. Now we need real people, heroes, to fight internal enemies – not talkers and men of reflection, but practical and active men.\(^68\)

Turgenev advocated for a more nuanced understanding, claiming that Don Quixote and Hamlet represented two basic human types and that people were essentially a combination of these types in varying degrees. For Turgenev, Don Quixote typified faith, “a belief in something eternal, indestructible in a truth that is beyond the comprehension of the individual human being, which is to be achieved only through the medium of self-abnegation and undeviating worship.”\(^69\) In contrast, he identified Hamlet’s key traits as “analysis, scrutiny, egotism and consequently disbelief.”\(^70\) Turgenev concluded that the revolutionary fervor discernible in the younger generation did not have specifically Russian characteristics, and a contrast between Hamlet and

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\(^{68}\) Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 183.

\(^{69}\) Turgenev, Ivan; Spiegel, Moshe. 1965. "Hamlet and Don Quixote." 94.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 95-96.
Don Quixote, together with the experience of the failed European revolution of 1848, should be used to rein in the revolutionary zeal of the Don Quixotes.  

Turgenev's reaction to the emancipation act can be best expressed in his bitter exchange with Alexander Herzen. A decade earlier, both Herzen and Turgenev had been in Paris when the 1848 revolution broke out, and they had witnessed its defeat first-hand. But the politically active Herzen and the passive Turgenev differed significantly on how that experience of revolution should map out in the Russian context. Herzen claimed that emancipation without land grants will only lead to the “rule of the bourgeoisie” and insisted on developing social structures specific to Russia to take advantage of the peasant population. Turgenev disagreed and wrote back to Herzen, “we Russians belong by language and by species to the European family, genus Europaeum, and consequently according to the most inalterable laws of physiology we must follow the same path.” Turgenev was equally critical of Herzen’s proposed political strategy to engage the peasantry. In a letter dated November 8, 1862, he expressed his disappointment to Herzen: “You mystically worship the Russian sheepskin coat and see in it a great blessing and the novelty and originality of future societal forms…All your idols have been shattered…so you up and erect an altar to this unknown new god about whose blessings no one knows anything.”

Turgenev believed that not only were the peasants conservative and self-serving, they were also comparable to the bourgeoisie in their attitudes, and therefore, could not be relied upon to serve as an active force for change.

2.3 The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality

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72 Ripp, Turgenev’s Russia: From Notes of a Hunter to Fathers and Sons. 189.
73 Ibid., 189.
When Nikolai Chernyshevsky joined the staff of the *Contemporary* in 1855, his radical anti-aesthetic stance and his rhetoric against the “people of the 1840s” were perceived as a threat. While wavering in his attitude towards Chernyshevsky, Turgenev took issue with his views on aesthetics, as expressed in his university dissertation *The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*.\(^{75}\) Chernyshevsky maintained that art is “in all ways subordinate to life, that it is dependent on the external world for its substance, its form, its energy, its relevance to human affairs, and inasmuch as it is a concern of art at all, for its appeal to man’s sense of beauty.”\(^{76}\) He challenged the notion that “art improves on reality, or completes, or gives permanence to it,” and argued that the value of art is in how accurately it portrays and reflects the real world. Any embellishment of the original by “imposing artificial formal patterns,” according to Chernyshevsky, can only lead to the falsification of reality. In contrast to Chernyshevsky’s views on the purpose of art, Turgenev believed that the “artist’s vocation was a kind of priestcraft,” and the “imaginative ordering of experience was the indispensable means to its unique discoveries.”\(^{77}\) In a letter to Vasily Petrovich Botkin dated July 25, 1855, Turgenev wrote:

> As for Chernyshevsky’s book—here’s my main objection to it: in his eyes art, as he himself puts it, is only a surrogate for reality, for life—and in essence it is only appropriate for immature people. You can’t deny it—that idea is at the basis of everything he says. And that in my opinion is nonsense. Shakespeare’s Hamlet does not exist in reality—or perhaps he does—Shakespeare discovered him and made him our common property. Chernyshevsky is taking a lot upon himself if he imagines that on his own he can always get to that very heart of life…no, his book is false and harmful.\(^{78}\)

In an earlier letter to Panayev dated July 10, 1855, Turgenev wrote,\(^{79}\) “Chernyshevsky’s book, that vile rot, that spawn of spiteful stupidity and blindness, ought not to have been reviewed the

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\(^{75}\) Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 88.


\(^{77}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{78}\) Turgenev, *Letters.* 1:94.

\(^{79}\) Ivan Panayev (1812-1862) was a prominent Russian literary critic of the time.
way Mr. Pypin did it.\(^8^0\) Such a direction is disastrous—and the *Contemporary*, more than anyone else, ought to protest against it. Fortunately, the book is so dry and lifeless that it can’t do any harm.\(^8^1\) The review that Turgenev referred to had been written and published in the *Contemporary* by none other than Chernyshevsky himself under the initials N.P., which Turgenev mistakenly attributed to Alexander Pypin.

### 2.4 The Search for a Russian Hero

In 1859, Turgenev published his third novel, *On the Eve*, in which a self-sacrificing young Russian girl, Elena, falls in love with a Bulgarian patriot, Insarov, who is dedicated to the liberation of Bulgaria from the Turks. Nikolai Dobrolyubov published a review of Turgenev’s novel in the *Contemporary* under the title, “When Will the Real Day Come?” Acknowledging Turgenev’s talent to not only “anticipate the most important societal trends before they even fully emerge” but also his ability “to reflect and embody those trends in suitable types,”\(^8^2\) Dobrolyubov observed:

> Thus, we may boldly assert that if Mr. Turgenev touches upon any question in a story of his, if he has depicted any new aspect of social relationships, it can be taken as a guarantee that this question is rising, or soon will rise, in the mind of the educated section of society; that this new aspect is beginning to make itself felt and will soon stand out sharply and clearly before the eyes of all.\(^8^3\)

But Dobrolyubov questioned Turgenev, “why Insarov could not have been a Russian?”\(^8^4\)

Dobrolyubov’s question resonated with the readers since Insarov had not accomplished anything significant in the novel and simply embarked on a trip to his home country for participation in

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\(^8^0\) Alexander Pypin (1833-1904) was a Russian literary historian, journalist, and editor.

\(^8^1\) Ibid., 92.

\(^8^2\) Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 56.


\(^8^4\) Insarov was the Bulgarian hero of Turgenev’s novella, *On the Eve.*
Bulgaria's freedom struggle against Turkey, succumbing to an illness on the way. In allegorical terms, Dobrolyubov used Insarov and his “mission of liberation” to speak about Russia. The difference between the two was that Russians did not enjoy the same unity of purpose that had characterized Insarov’s struggle: “All Insarov’s charm lies in the grandeur and sacredness of the idea that permeates his whole being.”

Contrasting the situation in the Russian society with the Bulgarian, Dobrolyubov wrote:

Bulgaria is enslaved; she is groaning under the Turkish yoke. We, thank God, are not enslaved by anybody; we are free; we are a great people who more than once have decided with our arms the destinies of kingdoms and nations; we are the masters of others, but we have no masters…In Bulgaria there are no social rights and guarantees…Russia, on the contrary, is a well-ordered state; she has wise laws that protect the rights of citizens and define their duties; here justice reigns and beneficent publicity flourishes; Nobody is robbed of his church, and religion is not restricted in any way…far from anybody’s being robbed of rights and land, these are even granted to those who hitherto have not possessed them.

Dobrolyubov's description of Russia being a “well-ordered state” where “justice reigns” did not exactly reflect his opinion but was his strategy to “get around the censorship” as he once advised another writer: “You have to speak in facts and figures, not only without calling things by their names but even sometimes calling them by names that are opposite to their essential character.”

Despite his precautions, several of the passages where Dobrolyubov tried to situate Insarov’s struggle within the Russian society were censored, only to be included later in the 1862 edition of his works. In one such passage, Dobrolyubov wrote:

But don’t we have plenty of internal enemies? Don’t we need a struggle with them, and isn’t heroism needed for that struggle? But where are people capable of the deed? Where are people of integrity, gripped from childhood by a single idea, so accustomed to it that they have to either attain the victory of that idea or die? There are no such people because our social milieu up to this time has not favored their

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85 Dobrolyubov, "When Will the Real Day Come?" 205.
86 Ibid., 208.
development. And it is from it, from that milieu, from its vulgarity and pettiness, that we must be liberated by the new people whose appearance is so impatiently and passionately awaited by everything that is best and most fresh in our society.”

This veiled “call to revolution” infuriated Turgenev and contributed to his break from the Contemporary, as described in the following section.

2.5 Break with the Radicals

Between the years of 1857 and 1859, Nikolai Dobrolyubov published many articles, which implicitly and at times more openly, attacked the older generation of "superfluous men," calling them out for their inaction. He also made attempts to discredit Herzen's “journalism of exposure and denunciation,” and claimed that “unmasking particular abuses without criticizing the entire structure simply deflected attention from the main battle.” Herzen believed that the attacks on his journalism “served the interest of the most reactionary part of the Tsarist bureaucracy, and the young radicals might live to be decorated by the government.” In response to persistent attacks from the radical camp, Herzen wrote an article titled “Very Dangerous!!!” in which he called out the attacks as “empty buffoonery,” and misdirected: “it becomes repulsive and nasty when it hangs donkey bells not on a troika called Adlerberg, Timashev, and Mukhanov from the tsar's stables, but on one that—sweaty, exhausted, and occasionally falling back—is dragging our cart out of the mud!” Describing the characters from Russian literature (implying the older generation of the 1840s) as the embodiment of “the real grief and destructiveness of Russian life at that time,” he defended their inaction, attributing it to

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91 Members of an 1859-60 government censorship committee.
92 Herzen, A Herzen Reader. 94.
the prevailing circumstances: “even if you had the genius of Pestel and the mind of Muravyov—the ropes on which Nicholas hung people were stronger.” However, in the changing circumstances, Herzen sensed an opportunity: “The era of Onegins and Pechorins has passed. In Russia now there are no more superfluous people; now, to the contrary, there are not enough people for the work that is required. Anyone who cannot find something to do now has no one to blame—he is in fact an empty person, a piece of wood or a lazybones.” When Nekrasov came to know about Herzen’s attacks on the Contemporary, he and Dobrolyubov considered traveling to London to visit Herzen, demanding that he retract his earlier remarks. In the end, it was Chernyshevsky who traveled to London to meet with Herzen. Not many details are available for the two meetings they had. Still, Chernyshevsky was unable to mend bridges or win over his childhood inspiration to “his own more radical and implacable revolutionism.”

One of the major points of contention between the two factions within the Contemporary was on the claim to the legacy of Vissarion Belinsky. For Turgenev, this claim was also personal since Belinsky had been instrumental in promoting Turgenev’s early efforts as a poet. In 1860, he wrote an article titled “My Meeting with Belinsky.” However, by then, both Chernyshevsky and Dubrolyubov had published pieces featuring Belinsky and had convinced their young readership that they were the true heirs to “Belinsky’s line of criticism.” This was significant as

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93 Pavel Ivanovich Pestel (1793-1826) and Nikita Mikhailovich Muravyov (1796-1843) were ideologues and plotters of the Decembrist revolt of 1825.
94 Eugene Onegin was the hero of Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse Eugene Onegin (1833); Grigory Pechorin was the hero of Mikhail Lermontov’s novel A Hero of Our Time (1840). Both are considered representatives of “superfluous men.”
95 Herzen, A Herzen Reader. 93.
96 Nikolay Alexeyevich Nekrasov (1821-1878) was a Russian poet, critic, and writer. He assumed editorship of the Contemporary in 1847 and made it profitable by engaging top writers and publishing translations of best-selling foreign works.
97 Herzen, A Herzen Reader. 90.
99 Thorstensson, “The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s.” 95.
it allowed them to use Belinsky’s words “to validate their claims” for the higher role of the critic vis à vis the writer. In an article titled, “A Word about Literary Criticism,” published in 1842, Belinsky had asserted “the relative unimportance of the literary work compared with the critical reception of this work”:

Today the question “What will be said about a great literary work?” is no less important than the great work itself. What is said about the work, and how it is said – believe me – that will be read first of all; it will awaken the passions, minds, and conversations. It cannot be otherwise: it is not enough for us now to enjoy something; instead, we want to know. There is no enjoyment for us without knowledge.  

Nowhere did this become more evident than in the conflict between Turgenev and the Contemporary over his novel On the Eve. Dobrolyubov had reviewed this novel in an article titled, “When Will the Real Day Come?” and suggested that in the subtext, “On the Eve was a call to revolution.” Turgenev was appalled by Dobrolyubov's interpretation and in a letter to Nekrasov, he begged him not to publish the article: “all it can do is cause me trouble; it is inaccurate and shrill—I won't know what to do if it's published. Please respect my request.”

Nekrasov refused to remove the passages that Turgenev deemed to be offensive and misleading. Still, he wrote a conciliatory letter to Turgenev clarifying that as an editor, it was impossible for him “to refuse Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov the freedom to express themselves as they pleased.” Turgenev responded back stating that he will no longer contribute to the Contemporary. Soon after this exchange, the editors of the Contemporary “assured their subscribers that they had rejected Turgenev as a contributor due to his unwelcome views.” When Turgenev attempted to clarify that he himself had decided to break with the Contemporary, it raised a storm of protest against Turgenev from the young readership of the Contemporary for

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100 Ibid., 97.
101 Turgenev, Letters. 1:164.
102 Schapiro, Turgenev: His Life and Times. 162.
his attack on their idols. Turgenev never forgave Nekrasov for this humiliation. In 1877, after a brief visit to Nekrasov on his deathbed, the two old friends appeared to have reconciled. However, after Nekrasov's death, Turgenev declined an invitation to speak in his memory, saying, "I cannot speak the whole truth about Nekrasov, whom I knew very intimately; I do not wish to say what is untrue; to limit myself to banalities would be indecent."103

After his break with the Contemporary, Turgenev switched to a journal, The Russian Herald. The journal was edited by Mikhail Katkov, who had once been a liberal but had gravitated to the conservative camp. Turgenev had initially planned to publish Fathers and Sons in the fall of 1861, but when student protests broke out, fearing that the censorship board will strike anything that “implied radical thought,” Turgenev requested Katkov to delay publication till the following year. When Turgenev asked for Herzen’s opinion on his novel Fathers and Sons, he expressed disappointment over Turgenev's association with Katkov and attributed that to “a desire to settle scores” with Chernyshevsky. Furthermore, for Herzen, one of the glaring weaknesses of Turgenev's novel lay in its biased portrayal of the crude and arrogant nature of the radicals and its failure to reveal their inner life or the difficult experiences that had shaped those attitudes. Turgenev was much offended by Herzen's charge of “tendentiousness.”104 After publishing his novel Smoke in Katkov’s Russian Messenger, Turgenev defended his decision in a letter to Herzen dated May 22, 1867:

The only thing that bothers me are my relations with Katkov, even though they are superficial. But I can say the following: I do not publish my work in the Moscow Gazette - I hope that such a misfortune will never come upon me - but in the Russian Messenger, which is nothing more than a collection, having no political coloration, and at the present time the Russian Messenger is the only journal which is read by the public and can pay. I can't conceal the fact that this

103 Ibid., 292.
explanation is perhaps inadequate, but I have no other. *Notes of the Fatherland* is the *Russian Messengers'* only rival, and it cannot pay half the money.\(^{105}\)

### 2.6 Contemporary Reaction

When Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* was published in February 1862, the ambiguity surrounding the protagonist Bazarov led to a split between the fathers' and sons' generation. Turgenev had created Bazarov with a “striking combination” of good and bad traits: “he has in his makeup “coarseness,” “heartlessness,” “ruthless dryness and sharpness,” yet he is “strong,” “honorable, just, and a democrat to the tip of his toes.”\(^{106}\) Turgenev's objective portraits of characters from both the fathers'and sons' generations were not received well, and consequently, liberals, conservatives, and radicals alike found the novel "politically deficient.”\(^{107}\) Victor Ripp observed that Turgenev’s characters could be placed on “a recognizable political spectrum,” which is why “every one of their false steps seems an ideological judgment.”\(^{108}\) In a letter to Dostoevsky, Turgenev described his predicament: “Nobody, it seems, suspects that I tried to present … a tragic figure—and everybody comments: why is he so sinister? Or why is so good?”\(^{109}\) In the April 1863 edition of the satirical magazine, the *Wasp (Osa)*, published a cartoon of a bewildered Turgenev, shown standing between the "Fathers" and "Children." The cartoon was titled "The children and the fathers are both out of control!!"\(^{110}\)

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\(^{108}\) Ibid.


\(^{110}\) Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*. 328.
In his defense, Turgenev described his relationship with Bazarov in the Apropos of Fathers and Sons as personal: “I share almost all of Bazarov’s convictions with the exception of those on art.” Turgenev also mentioned that he actively maintained a diary in the name of Bazarov and would record “his fictional hero’s reactions to literary, political, and social events taking place in Russia at the time the novel was composed.”\footnote{Schapiro, Turgenev: His Life and Times. 185.} He protested against the critics who did not believe “that to reproduce the truth, the reality of life accurately and powerfully, is the literary man’s highest joy, even if the truth does not correspond to his sympathies.”\footnote{Turgenev, Ivan S. "Apropos of Fathers and Sons." Edited and Translated by Michael R. Katz. In Fathers and Children, New York: W. W. Norton, 2009. 169.} Referring to one of his earlier novels, A Nest of Noblemen, Turgenev described how, despite his
strong affiliation with the Westernizers, he had Lavretsky, who was a Slavophile character, utterly "destroy" the Westernizer Panshin, who represented “all the comical and vulgar aspects of Westernism.” 113 This "balance of attitudes" in Turgenev's depiction of the Russian society has distinguished his writings from those of other Russian authors, who were driven primarily by their own set of ideas. 114 In part, this commitment to truth reflects the influence of Vissarion Belinsky. Still, as Glyn Turton observed, Turgenev's own temperament may have significantly contributed to this as well since Turgenev only “cherished one ideal to the point of passion—that of dispassionateness.” 115

For Mikhail Katkov, Bazarov’s character was overpowering, and he pressured Turgenev to update Bazarov's character to make it appear less positive: “Even if Bazarov isn't raised to an apotheosis, one must still admit that somehow he accidentally landed on a very high pedestal. He really crushes everything around him. Everything before him is either tinsel or feeble and immature. Was that the impression that one would have wished? One feels in the tale that the author wanted to characterize a principle he was little sympathetic to, but he seemed to waver in his tone and unconsciously came under its sway.” Katkov also noted that “Bazarov’s negating stance and rejection of “phrases” was not motivated by concern for the truth but was itself a phrase and form of dogmatism.” 116 One of his recommendations was to have Anna Sergeyevna treat Bazarov more ironically during their discussions, but Turgenev resisted. In his response to Katkov, dated October 30, 1861, he wrote: “Neither should Odintsova be mocking, nor should the peasant stand above Bazarov, even if he himself is empty and sterile… Perhaps my view of

113 Ibid.
Russia is more misanthropic than you suppose: he—in my eye—is really a hero of our time.

‘What a hero and what a time,’ you’ll say…But that’s the way it is.”\textsuperscript{117}

Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov (1813-1887), who was a leading critic of the mid-nineteenth century and a close friend of Turgenev, read an early draft of \textit{Fathers and Sons} and wrote back to Turgenev suggesting several changes. His suggestions included modifications to the arguments between Pavel Petrovich and Bazarov, improved characterization of Odintsova as well as others to balance the image of Bazarov by adding references reflecting the prevailing “elitism of the 'nihilist' radicals of the sixties.”\textsuperscript{118} Annenkov was also responsible for first communicating Katkov’s impressions to Turgenev that he was appalled by the work and regarded it as the “apotheosis of the \textit{Contemporary}.” While Annenkov’s own opinion of the novel was favorable, he cautioned Turgenev that the depiction of Bazarov might lead to ambivalence on the part of the reader: “There are different opinions about him as a result of a single cause: the author himself is somewhat constrained about him and doesn’t know what to consider him—a productive force in the future or a stinking abscess of an empty culture…Bazarov cannot be both things at the same time, yet the author’s indecisiveness sways the reader’s thought too from one pole to the other.”\textsuperscript{119}

Turgenev’s \textit{Fathers and Sons} infuriated many radicals, but the most important responses came from Maksim Antonovich and Dmitry Pisarev. Antonovich's review, "The Asmodeus of our Time,” was published in the \textit{Contemporary} just weeks after the publication of the novel in which he “repudiated Bazarov for being a poor caricature of the younger generation.”\textsuperscript{120} For

\textsuperscript{118} Schapiro, Turgenev: His Life and Times. 183-84.  
\textsuperscript{119} Turgenev, \textit{Fathers and Children}. 175-76.  
Antonovich, not only was Turgenev’s treatment of Bazarov “hateful,” but he had “falsified the radical position” by accusing them of rejecting everything and denying all principles: “Young people recognized only one “authority,” namely themselves; they accepted only those principles that “satisfied” their individual “nature” and that cohered with the “inner motives” of their personality and level of development. Radicals’ principles followed naturally from their experiences.”

Antonovich’s thoughts were shared by other young radicals and led to rumors that Turgenev and Katkov had conspired to damage the reputation of their idols, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov. Turgenev scoffed at this accusation and, citing Katkov’s letters in his apropos to *Fathers and Sons*, wrote: “It is clear that one of the “conspirators” was not entirely satisfied with the work of the other.”

Antonovich also suggested that Bazarov’s character was drawn from Dobrolyubov, an accusation that Turgenev denied, but it nevertheless gained traction amongst the radicals. Turgenev personally loathed Dobrolyubov due to his demeaning behavior towards the generation of the 1840s. Describing an encounter between the two at one of Nekrasov’s literary dinners, Chernyshevsky related how Turgenev continued to engage Dobrolyubov in conversation despite repeated rebuffs from the latter. Eventually, Dobrolyubov blurted, “Ivan Sergeevich, your talk bores me, and if you don’t mind, we’d better stop talking to one another altogether.” As if responding to Turgenev’s portrayal of Dobrolyubov as Bazarov, Chernyshevsky duplicates this aspect of Dobrolyubov’s character in Rakhmetov, the revolutionary hero of his novel *What Is To Be Done?* Rakhmetov, Chernyshevsky wrote, was so conscious of his time that he rarely ever received any guests, and when he did, he did not allow them to stay longer than required: "We've

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121 Ibid.
122 Turgenev, “Apropos of Fathers and Sons.” 171.
now concluded our business. *Allow me to turn to other matters because I must guard my time;*” Rakhmetov would tell them without any hesitation.124

### 2.7 Dmitry Pisarev’s “Bazarov”

Dmitry Ivanovich Pisarev (1840-1868) was a radical Russian critic, social thinker and the primary contributor to the Russian journal, the *Russian Word (Russkoye Slovo)*. In his widely acclaimed review of *Fathers and Sons*, Pisarev argued that Turgenev's description of the “ideas and aspirations” of the young radicals were evidently biased portrayals since they were cast through Turgenev's eyes: the novel illuminated “not so much the phenomena depicted by the author but as his own attitudes toward these phenomena.”125 Turgenev had introduced Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons* without supplying any information about his background. The reader is given “no entry into Bazarov's thoughts processes, nor are we able to account for his nihilism in terms of his life”; this “inward life” of Bazarov is provided to us by Pisarev. Herzen acknowledged this in his essay titled “Bazarov Once More,” which he wrote a few years later in 1868: “Whether Pisarev has correctly grasped the character of Bazarov as Turgenev meant it, does not concern me. What does matter is that he has recognised himself and his comrades in Bazarov, and has added to the portrait what was lacking in the book.”126 Edward Brown saw in this an interesting case of the relationship that existed between a writer and a critic: “The artist works under a compulsion to reveal the truth about life, though he may not quite understand what he may be doing. The critic then steps in and explains to him and to his readers the full significance of the events that he has recorded in his novel.”127

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127 Brown, “Pisarev and the Transformation of Two Russian Novels.” 162.
Pisarev admitted that Bazarov could sometimes utter “nonsense,” especially in his repudiation of what he does not understand: “poetry, in his opinion, is rubbish; reading Pushkin is a waste of time; to be interested in music is ludicrous; to enjoy nature is absurd.”

Bazarov also has a “tendency to deny ruthlessly and with complete conviction everything which others consider exalted and beautiful.” While others blamed this on Bazarov’s bad upbringing, Pisarev attributed it to “the drab condition of a life of labor.” Admitting that a life of labor may deprive one of developing “the capacity to enjoy the pleasant stimulation of the visual and auditory nerves,” he points out that Bazarov—in his persecution of “romanticism”—even sought “it in places where it has never existed.” In this regard, Pisarev refers to a dialog when Arkady, “looking pensively at the bright-colored fields in the distance, in the beautiful soft light of the sun,” asked Bazarov about nature and in response, was told, “nature's nonsense too in the sense you understand it. Nature's not a temple, but a workshop where man's the laborer.”

Pisarev notes that for any “unprejudiced reader,” the admiration of nature and its beauty will appear more natural than its baseless denial by Bazarov.

Over the next few years, Pisarev’s position on aesthetics drastically changed. In 1865, he wrote an essay titled “The Destruction of Aesthetics,” in which he declared that “the results of scientific labour were of greater importance than any work by Shakespeare or Pushkin, that writers would be best employed in popularizing scientific propositions, and that he himself ‘would rather be a Russian shoemaker than a Russian Raphael.’” As Lampert observed, having made such a claim, this “neither prevented him from continuing to read Shakespeare or

129 Ibid., 199.
130 Ibid., 204-205.
Pushkin nor led him to any visible inclination to make shoes.” I believe what Pisarev wrote about Bazarov—“in the depths of his soul Bazarov acknowledges much of what he repudiates aloud”—equally holds true for himself, at least in matters related to aesthetics.132

Pisarev also revisited the polemical review of Maksim Antonovich in an article he wrote in 1865, “The Thinking Proletariat” (also published as “The New Type”):

Turgenev is the one who thought most of new people in our fiction. Insarov was an unsuccessful attempt in this direction. Bazarov was a brilliant representative of a new type, but Turgenev obviously did not have material enough to give a full picture of his hero from various aspects. And, besides, because of his age and certain peculiarities of his character Turgenev could not completely sympathize with the new type; flat notes managed to get into his last novel and evoked a severe and unjust review from Antonovich in Sovremennik. This review was an error.133

2.8 Caricature of the Fake Nihilist

Among the many accusations leveled against Turgenev, one was of caricaturing the radicals through two other nihilist characters, namely, Viktor Sitnikov and Avdotya Kukshina. Although Turgenev did not refer to either as a nihilist, they nevertheless became stereotypical images of nihilists from whom “progressive Russian youth would try to distance themselves for the next decade.”134 Bazarov was well aware of the superfluous nature of both of these characters. When Arkady had expressed annoyance over Sitnikov’s uninvited appearance at Odintsova’s estate, Bazarov retorted: “Sitnikovs are indispensable to us. Understand this: I need dolts like him. Not God, but man makes pot and pan!”135 This difference between Bazarov and Sitnikov later became a cliché in Soviet criticism, an example of which can be seen in L.A. Irsetskaya’s comparison of the nihilist characters within Fathers and Sons: “There is nothing in

134 Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 123.
135 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 86.
common between the nihilism of Bazarov and that of Sitnikov and Kukshina. Bazarov is a worker, a man dedicated to medicine who is able to experience deep feelings. Kukshina and Sitnikov are, in their nature, worthless and squalid. Their nihilism is that of worthless people who falsely imagine themselves to be the creators of a new society."\textsuperscript{136} Antonovich, however, defended Kukshina's role in his review by contrasting her activities with the frivolous engagements of Pavel Petrovich: “After all, Kukshina is not such an empty and narrow-minded person as Pavel Petrovich…her thoughts are directed toward more serious subjects than ties, collars, toiletries, and baths; she clearly does not care about such things. She subscribes to journals and does not cut them, but this is still better than ordering vests from Paris and morning suits from England as Pavel Petrovich does.”\textsuperscript{137}

\section*{2.9 A Novel in Caricatures}

Six years after the publication of \textit{Fathers and Sons}, one of the satirical left-wing magazines, the \textit{Spark (Iskra)},\textsuperscript{138} published a series of 43 cartoons by A. Volkov. Three of these caricatures are shown below in Figures 2-4. Bazarov is shown dressed in rags, with Turgenev painting his face with “stirred mud” (\textit{Figure 2}).\textsuperscript{139} The same Turgenev appears to be “pandering to the fathers” in the next image (\textit{Figure 3}).\textsuperscript{140} In Volkov's third image, Bazarov depicted as Mephistopheles, sarcastically smiles, as Arkady “throws himself into his father's arms” (\textit{Figure 4}).\textsuperscript{141}

\bibitem{136} Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 305.
\bibitem{137} Ibid., 120.
\bibitem{138} This journal was founded in 1859 and ceased publication in 1873. It served as an “organ of political satire in verse, prose and cartoons.” Its editors and contributors included N. A. Stepanov, Vasiliy S. Kuročkin, Vladimir S. Kuročkin, and Dmitriy Minaev. See Moser, \textit{Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's}. 186.
\bibitem{139} Berlin, \textit{Russian Thinkers}. 324.
\bibitem{140} Ibid., 325.
\bibitem{141} Ibid., 326.
Отношения романиста къ дѣтямъ, истинно-отеческія. Посмотри, съ какой заботою къ своему герою онъ приготовилъ для него и парикъ «Степки-Растенки», героя дѣтской повѣсти, и смазное дегтемъ сапоги, совершенно не нужными и дурацкой «балахонъ — однимъ словомъ «кисть художника надъ нимъ играла» вынутая изъ взбаламученной грязи....

Figure 2: Ivan Turgenev painting Bazarov’s face with mud
Figure 3: Ivan Turgenev pandering to the fathers
2.10 Revisiting Bazarov

In his Apropos of Fathers and Sons, Turgenev reflected back on his use of the term “nihilist,” which had led to such an uproar, particularly among the radicals: “The term, ‘nihilist,’ which I launched, was at that time used by many who only sought an incident, an excuse, to stop
a movement that had taken possession of the Russian society. The term was not used by me as a reproach nor with the intent to insult; but as an exact and appropriate expression of a fact that had materialized, a historical fact; it was turned into a weapon of denunciation, of irrevocable condemnation, —almost as a brand of shame.” In a letter to his friend, Mikhail Saltykov, dated January 3, 1876, Turgenev wrote that he regretted not using his artistic talent wisely:

I’m ready to confess (and I’ve already done so in print in my “memoirs”) that I didn’t have the right to give our reactionary scoundrels the chance to latch onto a tag—a name; the writer in me ought to have made that sacrifice to the citizen—and therefore I recognize as justified both the young people’s alienation from me and every sort of censure… The question that arose was more important than artistic truth—and I should have known that ahead of time.

_Fathers and Sons_ had a deeply polarizing effect on its readership as they “groped for direct, immediate identification with the life around them.” Turgenev's own ambivalence and his tendency to give different answers to different people did not serve him well. Turgenev wrote two more novels on the same theme, _Smoke_ (1867) and _Virgin Soil_ (1877). Neither of them was received well and led to accusations that Turgenev was increasingly becoming out of touch with the Russian society. In the foreword of the 1880 edition of his published works, Turgenev wrote:

“The author of _Rudin_, written in 1855, and of _Virgin Soil_, written in 1876, is one and the same man. In the course of all that time, I tried, within the limits of my power and ability, conscientiously and impartially to describe and incarnate in appropriate types both what Shakespeare calls, “the body and pressure of time” and the quickly changing countenance of educated Russians.”

Towards the end of his review of _Fathers and Sons_, Pisarev had pointed out that “as an honorable man and as a true artist,” Turgenev had portrayed Bazarov as remaining true to

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142 Turgenev, “Apropos of Fathers and Sons.” 171.
144 Brown, “Pisarev and the Transformation of Two Russian Novels.” 152-53.
himself and his beliefs (as a nihilist), even on his deathbed. For Pisarev, “the whole meaning of
the novel [was] contained in the death of Bazarov.” He concluded his review with a rhetorical
question: “what is to be done? Is it possible to infect ourselves on purpose just in order to have
the satisfaction of dying beautifully and tranquilly?"\(^{145}\) Chernyshevsky seemed to pick up on this
when he named his novel—arguably written in response to Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons—What
Is To Be Done?* We will be exploring this novel in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

3 Nihilists and the “New People”

Chernyshevsky’s *What Is To Be Done? (Chto délat’?)* is a “novel of ideas” that describes the pursuit of happiness by his “new people” based on utilitarian ethics. In Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, love eventually led to Bazarov’s downfall, but in Chernyshevsky’s utopian vision, his new people are able to identify rational solutions to even problems associated with love.\(^{146}\)

Chernyshevsky wrote the novel while imprisoned in the Peter-Paul Fortress. Given the severe censorship restrictions, he decided to try his hand at fiction and, in late 1862, sought permission from the official Commission of Inquiry to work on a novel: "For a long time I have planned, among other things, to apply myself to literature. But I am convinced that people of my character must do this only in their later years. Earlier than this I would have had no chance of succeeding… A novel is destined for the great mass of the public. It is a writer's most serious undertaking, and so it belongs to old age. *The frivolity of the form must be compensated for by the solidity of the thought.*"\(^{147}\)

When Chernyshevsky was granted permission in December 1862, he wrote the entire novel in less than four months, a likely indication that the ideas and concerns he discusses had been germinating in his mind for some time.

3.1 Summary of *What Is To Be Done?*

The novel begins with a section titled “The Fool.” The fool was a person who had seemingly committed suicide by shooting himself. The authorities found a hat with a gunshot hole as evidence but could not locate the dead body. A few hours later, a woman named Vera Pavolovna received a brief note from someone familiar stating that he was “quitting the scene.”

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Vera read the message and, presuming that she had driven the man to death, wept profusely. We will come to know about the significance of this episode later in the novel.

The preface describes the central subject of the novel as “love,” and its main character as a woman, Vera Pavlovna. Her family managed an apartment building in St. Petersburg for a wealthy widow and her son. Vera's father was an assistant to the head of a government department and a pawnbroker on the side. Vera's overbearing mother, Marya Aleksevna, managed the household and was looking to have her daughter marry the landlord's wealthy son. Marya was aware that the prevailing system was based on “filching and fleecing,” but she expressed no qualms about fully participating in it. Vera described her situation and sought advice from Julie Letellier, a French woman and a former prostitute, who regarded marriage as a “yolk” and “prejudice.” While Julie shunned the mercenary ways of Marya, her own advice to Vera was not much different; she related the benefits of marrying the landlady’s son: “you’ll escape from your mother’s persecution; you’ll end the danger of being sold off; … a man who’s not evil yet not too bright makes the best kind of husband for a clever woman of character.” But Vera’s vision for love had no element of submission or obligation; she wanted her love to transcend the calculation characteristic of her mother and the “will to dominate” characteristic of Julie. In response to Vera’s noble aspirations, Julie confessed that she was a corrupt woman who had become accustomed to a life of “idleness and luxury.” Her notion of love was based on need and stood in contrast to Vera’s, which was rooted in free and independent love. Comparing marriages of earlier times with ones based on the new people’s vision, Chernyshevsky observes

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149 According to Katz, Julie’s character is modeled after Rousseau’s heroine from his novel Julie: ou La Nouvelle Héloïse as well as one of the mistresses of Nikolai Dobrolyubov.
150 Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done?, 63.
151 Ibid., 74.
that in “old days,” people had to “reconcile themselves to mediocrity,” but that is no longer the only option available since “decent people have begun to meet each other.”¹⁵² This is where Lopukhov enters the plot.

Lopukhov was the tutor for Vera's brother, Fedya, and was a student of medicine hailing from a "petty-bourgeois" family. His competence and knowledge were well known among the medical students. However, in terms of finances, Lopukhov struggled and barely got by giving lessons and copying documents. Lopukhov first met Vera while tutoring Fedya. Over time they opened up to each other and even began exchanging ideas. When Vera shared her predicament with Lopukhov, he offered to help her. He first tried to find her a job as an actress but realized that such a job bred dependence and was consequently not suitable for Vera. His attempts to find her work as a governess did not materialize either. While the two worked on making plans for her escape, Vera had the first of her four dreams. She saw that she was paralyzed and locked up in a cellar. Here, Vera's paralysis represented "her family, upbringing, environment, and social milieu."¹⁵³ The door is suddenly flung open, and she runs into an open field. Vera then sees her liberator, also a young woman, walking across the field. The liberating woman assumes the appearance of several European nations and asks Vera to call her by her actual name, "Love of Humanity." Vera suddenly finds herself in town, where she sees herself as the liberator, freeing other paralyzed women from their cellars. When Vera woke up, she realized she is not yet freed from her family but concluded that the person freeing her will be Lopukhov (though the liberator in her dream was a woman) and that she will be marrying him. She put together a vision of how her marriage should be structured, which included complete economic independence from one

¹⁵² Ibid., 88.
¹⁵³ Katz, Michael R. "Vera Pavlovna’s Dreams in Chernyshevskii’s What Is to Be Done?" Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, 1989. 151.
another. They were to have separate rooms; neither was to enter the other’s room without permission nor ask questions about the others’ private affairs. Maintaining different living spaces implied that the relationship was based on reason and not “passion.” Lopukhov was fascinated when he heard Vera’s proposed marriage structure. The two secretly married a few days later and moved into a furnished apartment. Their landlord, an old couple, noted that Vera and Lopukhov seem to live more like brother and sister than husband and wife. Vera’s mother, Marya, came to know about the marriage shortly after the couples’ elopement, and she was deeply shocked and felt humiliated.

Shortly after her marriage, Vera began her work to establish a dress-making establishment. She identified three women to hire for the cooperative after spending months searching for candidates who were “genuinely honest and good.”154 The business was to accept orders for ladies’ dresses at reasonable rates, and her friend, Julie, helped Vera drum up business among her circle of friends. This was when Vera had her second dream, which is discussed in section 3.4. As her business thrived, Vera was able to earn the complete confidence of her employees. After working for a long time without compensation, her fellow workers insisted on having her draw a salary. The workers also established a bank using the excess profits, so if a worker was in need, she could borrow from those funds. As the profit increased, Vera wondered how to divide the profits between the workers. Her goal “was the greatest possible equality in distribution of the fruits of labor for participants in the enterprise, regardless of their personal characteristics.”155 For this purpose, she opened up a second location for her cooperative, where she also added a school for her workers' education. Vera and Lopukhov also began hosting parties, especially for younger people. Chernyshevsky observes that these young people

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154 Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done?, 173.
155 Ibid., 193.
respected Vera "more than most people respect their older sisters, as even a good mother isn't always respected."\[156\] Here, it becomes evident that when hosting such meetings, Vera and Lopukhov were looking to prepare a new revolutionary vanguard, which was to live out the ideals of the “new people.”

Once, when Lopukhov fell ill, Vera forced him to call on Kirsanov, a medical doctor who had once been Lopukhov's roommate and close friend. Vera's concern for her husband was putting her own health at risk, so Kirsanov convinced her to get some rest, and he spent several nights caring for Lopukhov himself. Lopukhov eventually recovered, and the three renewed their friendship since Kirsanov had “hardly visited the Lopukhovs for over two years.”\[157\] The reason Kirsanov had stopped seeing them, we are told, was that he had developed feelings for Vera, and he considered it inappropriate to come in the way of the couple's marital happiness. After Lopukhov recovered, Vera once took Kirsanov for a visit to her sewing cooperative. One of her employees, Nastya Kryukova, turned out to know him very well and was very excited to see him. Later, Kryukova shared how she made her acquaintance with Kirsanov. Kryukova used to be morally obtuse and very ill a few years earlier, but Kirsanov had nursed her back to health. He had also engaged her in moral reform, and as a result, she stopped drinking and acting immodestly. They lived together for a couple of years, but then her consumption manifested again, and they ended up parting ways. After their recent meeting at the sewing cooperative, Kirsanov and Kryukova began living together once again. However, Kirsanov soon realized that “they were really no match for each other as far as their development was concerned… He could be tender to her for memory's sake or out of compassion,” but no longer felt the same affection

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\[156\] Ibid., 201-02.
\[157\] Ibid., 207.
for her.\textsuperscript{158} Kirsanov stopped visiting the Lopukhovs once again. Lopukhov did not immediately see this as a matter of concern until Vera related her third dream to him.

In Vera’s third dream, Angiolina Bosio appeared and requested to read Vera’s journal.\textsuperscript{159} Vera had no recollection of maintaining a diary, but as she flipped through the pages, words magically appeared before her. Vera read page after page and came to realize that her feelings for Lopukhov were more "gratitude to her liberator, than love for her husband."\textsuperscript{160} When Vera woke up from her distressing dream, she rushed to Lopukhov to be comforted. For Lopukhov, this was when he realized that he is incapable of satisfying Vera’s emotional needs. In the next few days, Vera too came to believe in the accuracy of her dream, and she became certain that Kirsanov could provide for her all that Lopukhov had not. Meanwhile, Lopukhov suggested opening up their marriage to others:

One large household is more advantageous than several small ones, isn’t it? … If we began to live with someone, then the two of us as well as those who lived with us would begin to save almost half of our expenses. I could give up these damned lessons that I detest so; my salary from the job at the factory would be sufficient. I could relax, pursue my scholarly work, and renew my own career. Of course, we must select only people we could get along with.\textsuperscript{161}

He had proposed this in terms of economic advantage, but for Vera, this was a patronizing attempt on his part to bring Kirsanov into the household. A few days later, Vera finally admitted her affection for Kirsanov before Lopukhov, who, after some thought, came up with a plan. He told Vera that he was unhappy and sick of giving lessons. He felt fed up with his work and did not seem to achieve much. Moreover, he had not seen his parents for the last few years and needed to take a break. Lopukhov decided to leave for an extended journey across Russia, to

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{159} Angiolino Bosio (1830-1859) was a celebrated Italian mezzo-soprano who regularly performed in St. Petersburg.
\textsuperscript{160} Katz, "Vera Pavlovna’s Dreams in Chernyshevskii’s What Is to Be Done?" 154.
\textsuperscript{161} Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done?, 264.
which Vera reluctantly agreed. As he parted, his last words to Vera were: “affection for a person means desiring his happiness, as you and I know full well. Furthermore, there's no happiness without freedom. You didn't want to restrain me, nor I you. If you ever felt restrained by me, you would hurt me. Don't do that; do only what's best for you.”

We then get the flashback scene from the beginning of the novel: the suicide had turned out to be staged. It is at this point that Rakhmetov enters the plot. Chernyshevsky introduces Rakhmetov as an “extraordinary person,” who belongs to an exclusive category of characters. Rakhmetov had come to Petersburg at the age of sixteen and started to make himself physically strong. By the time he turned 18, he had worked in different capacities and had developed extraordinary strength; he could even tow boats all by himself. Rakhmetov met Kirsanov in Petersburg, and on his recommendation, actively started reading. He proved to be an extraordinary student and, at one point, read for eighty-two hours straight. Rakhmetov lived a spartan way of life; he did not need much rest and only ate what ordinary people ate. He even decided to forego alcohol and women. He read the original works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and Malthus and became an expert on modern economics. At one point, he saved a young lady’s life who then fell in love with him. When she proposed marriage, he claimed to be the kind of man who had no right to marry, no matter how much the thought appealed to him. Whereas Kirsanov was instrumental to Rakhmetov’s education, Rakhmetov appears in the plot to play a decisive role in taking Vera to a higher level of development.

Rakhmetov had come to Vera and Kirsanov and brought a note that Lopukhov wrote describing why he was “quitting the scene.” Lopukhov's kindness genuinely moved Vera, but then Rakhmetov shared his opinion on why he thought Lopukhov should have realized sooner

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162 Ibid., 270.
that Vera was drifting apart. He should have taken precautionary measures to prevent their relationship from intensifying in the first place. Rakhmetov also confronted Vera on other accounts. He questioned why her husband had to stage his suicide to free her from him? The suicide was good for her since she was the one who needed the space to move on. Rakhmetov also chastised Vera for handing leadership of her cooperative to another person while she dealt with her grief: “I’ll bet ten to one that there’s really no one to replace you and that your departure would destroy the whole enterprise. Is that fair? You’d be subjecting the well-being of some fifty people to almost certain, inevitable ruin. And for what? For some small personal convenience!”

For Rakhmetov, Vera attending to her grief at the expense of the cooperative enterprise “could have harmed the cause of all mankind and betrayed the idea of progress!”

Rakhmetov made Vera aware that in such circumstances, more developed people would allow themselves to grow apart without any hard feelings since jealousy, being “a distorted emotion,” is inconsistent with a developed person. However, Vera’s jealousy was only part of the problem; she had also compromised her independence by depending on Lopukhov’s free will. Her position became so painful that he had to stage a suicide to free her from his will. Describing her situation in a letter, Vera wrote: “My position was based only on his free will; it wasn’t independent…. I don’t wish to depend on anyone’s will—no matter whose—even a person devoted to me, one I respect highly, one I trust as I do myself, one who, I am certain, would always gladly do what I required, one who values my happiness no less than I do.”

Here, Rakhmetov was pointing Vera to a new possibility: a love without jealousy based on individual independence.

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164 Ibid., 299.
165 Ibid., 301-302.
166 Ibid., 326.
After Vera’s marriage to Kirsanov, the couple moved in together and began living according to the marriage structure that Vera had earlier proposed to Lopukhov. However, while her new relationship with Kirsanov thrived, she soon started to become increasingly dissatisfied. For Vera, Chernyshevsky writes, the dissatisfaction was not just personal, but that "these thousands and millions of people were dissatisfied with themselves through her."\(^{167}\) Vera noticed that her discontentment always followed a comparison between her and her husband. After some thought, she was able to articulate her cause to Kirsanov: "I want to be equal to you in all respects."\(^{168}\) To attain this equality, Vera decided to pursue her education and become a doctor.\(^{169}\) Vera and Kirsanov were now at the center of a large circle of young families who lived harmoniously and happily together. Chernyshevsky refers to them as “contemporary people” or “new people," and suggests that their secret lies in the "contemporary notion of the rights of man as well as respect for the freedom of the individual."\(^{170}\) These contemporary people are entirely independent, and their independence is acknowledged and supported by others. This is when Vera Pavlovna has her fourth dream, which consists of two parts and is presented in eleven sections. Section 7 is where supposedly the revolution happens since there are no words in that part.

The first half of the fourth dream includes an introduction and sections 1-6 and uses a "series of tableaux" to reconstruct how the role of women evolved throughout history. It begins with the Greeks, passes through the middle ages, and culminates with the modern woman, who was the first woman that has truly “existed.” Earlier, women were admired for their beauty, but

\(^{167}\) Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, 337.
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 345.
\(^{169}\) Michael Katz observes that when Chernyshevsky wrote his novel, the government had barred women from entering the medical profession. Those interested in a medical career had to pursue their studies in Switzerland, where they often became radicalized. See Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, 347 n228.
\(^{170}\) Ibid., 354.
over time the goddess of “equal rights” helped perfect women and made them independent. In each of the scenes, Vera encounters a woman who represents “womanhood” for that era. These women are shown to progressively acquire more freedom at each stage of human civilization. In section four, Chernyshevsky shows Julie, the heroine of Rousseau's novel, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). For Chernyshevsky, Rousseau had "initiated" the modern phase of woman's development, and Julie was the "first heroine possessing genuine dignity, strength, and intelligence." He hoped to build on where Rousseau had left off, so in the fifth scene of the dream, he reveals Vera to be “the latest incarnation of the spirit of women's emancipation.” When Vera requests the mysterious woman to allow her to see her, she introduced a new quality in Vera Pavlovna, that of “equal right between lovers,” i.e., freedom and equality. The modern woman is “sensual, beautiful and pure,” but most importantly, she is “free and equal to man."

The second part of Vera's fourth dream consists of sections 8-11 and employs a different narrator for interpretation. The dream portrays Chernyshevsky's view of two future societies: one in the near and the other in the distant future. Section 8 depicts “the theme of work” and combines both urban and rural characteristics. The main structure is made of glass and steel and refers to the Crystal Palace built for the exhibition in London in 1851. There is much emphasis on labor, which is visible in the portrayal of young men and women singing while working in the fields. There are visibly fewer older men and women in Vera's vision. Chernyshevsky attributes this to the quality of life: "life is so healthy and peaceful that it preserves one's freshness"; consequently, people grow old much later. For Chernyshevsky, the underlying principle is the “scientific organization” of human life, emphasizing labor. Michael Katz observed that

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171 Katz, "Vera Pavlovna’s Dreams in Chernyshevskii’s *What Is to Be Done?*" 156.
172 Ibid.
174 Katz, "Vera Pavlovna’s Dreams in Chernyshevskii’s *What Is to Be Done?*" 158.
Chernyshevsky’s vision of the near future, as depicted in the combination of technology and a “romantic yearning for the virtues of pre-industrious, rural life,” presents a paradox.\textsuperscript{175} This contradiction gets carried over to Chernyshevsky’s vision of the distant future, where the focus shifts from labor to leisure. Vera’s fourth dream ended with an “impassioned appeal” to the residents of “Old Russia”: “Tell everyone that the future will be radiant and beautiful. Love it, strive toward it, work for it, bring it nearer, transfer into the present as much as you can from it.”\textsuperscript{176}

Vera and Kirsanov aspired to work towards this new ideal. With the help of her friend and associate, Natasha Mertsalova, Vera set up a new workshop on Nevsky Prospekt with a sign that read “Au bon travail.”\textsuperscript{177} Their business at the new establishment thrived. Together, they dreamt of expanding the number of sewing cooperatives to perhaps "four or five, then even ten or twenty."\textsuperscript{178} However, their success soon caught the attention of the local authorities, and within three months, Kirsanov received a visit from them to have him explain his wife's enterprise. After some discussion, the government allowed them to keep the two establishments open but had them change the sign to read "A la bonne foi," which translates as "a conscientious shop." Chernyshevsky mentioned that the visits from the local authorities continued, and consequently, Vera and Natasha "concerned themselves more with preserving what they had already achieved than with forging ahead."\textsuperscript{179} Not surprisingly, given concerns around censorship, this whole episode is described rather succinctly in section xvii of chapter 4, but its implications are far-reaching. The experience of dealing with tsarist authorities was significant.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Chernyshevsky, \textit{What Is to Be Done?}, 379.
\textsuperscript{177} Literally: “At the [sign of] good work.”
\textsuperscript{178} Chernyshevsky, \textit{What Is to Be Done?}, 379.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 380.
for developing the Kirsanovs since it helped them understand the limitations of cooperative initiatives and underscored the need for revolutionary change.

Next, Chernyshevsky related the story of a young girl, Katerina Vasilieavna (Katya), who fell in love with a man deemed unworthy by her rich father, Vasily Polozov. After the father forbade the match, the girl fell ill. Several doctors were called in, but they were unable to diagnose her illness. Kirsanov finally diagnosed Katya's ailment as psychological and put together a plan for her recovery. The plan included the need to expose the young suitor's selfish motives to Katya, which in turn required the father to renounce Katya's access to her father's fortune. Polozov reluctantly followed through, and upon hearing such a pronouncement, the suitor withdrew his proposal. This whole episode led to Katya's recovery.

Meanwhile, Polozov, who had decided to sell his factory, found a buyer in a man named Charles Beaumont, an American national looking to buy the stearine factory on behalf of his London-based employer. Beaumont made Katya's acquaintance when Polozov invited him for dinner. With his subsequent visits, their relationship became increasingly personal. Beaumont was a progressive man who had stood with the "illiterate blacks against their civilized owners in the Southern states."180 He was also a staunch supporter of women's rights, and Katya once jokingly called him “the Harriet Beecher Stowe of the woman’s question.”181 He had celebrated recent experiments in communal living based on advanced economic science. When Katya inquired how she could participate in such an experiment, Beaumont referred Katya to “Madame Kirsanova.” Buffeted by these visions, Katya visited Vera to look for an opportunity to work in the sewing cooperative and found her life's work there. She became inspired to become a “new woman,” partly because she could see Vera and Kirsanov living together in an amicable and

180 Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done?, 413.
181 Ibid., 425.
equal relationship. With her growing affection for Beaumont, she wondered if she could have a similar relationship with him. Beaumont was looking for a woman who aspired to the virtues of independence and was progressive in her attitudes. Beaumont once accompanied Katya to the cooperative to meet with Vera. Seeing him, she exclaimed, “Verily He is risen.” Beaumont was, in fact, Lopukhov! Katya and Beaumont got married soon after, and the Kirsanovs moved next to them, forming a sort of commune together. Describing the life of the two couples, Chernyshevsky wrote that the two couples lived "harmoniously and amicably, quietly and boisterously, playfully and industriously."

Towards the end of the chapter is a scene popularly known as the “winter picnic.” This scene is understood as an allusion to subversive, revolutionary activities that culminated in the development of the new men and women. Kirsanovs and the Beaumonts had been longing for an opportunity to have a winter picnic: “Just when all hope had been abandoned, there was a genuine winter snowfall. It was followed not by a thaw, but by a nice light frost. The sky was bright; the evening would be splendid—a picnic, a picnic! On the spur of the moment, no time to round up the others—a small picnic without invitations.” The two couples were joined by a lady in mourning—a likely reference to Chernyshevsky’s wife, Olga Sokratovna—and a few younger men. In the winter picnic scene, when Vera and Katya saw the lady in mourning's unfortunate situation, they asked their husbands about the terrifying possibility of suffering a similar fate. The allusion is to Chernyshevsky’s imprisonment and the women’s anxiety that their husbands may experience the same as a result of their subversive activities.

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182 Ibid., 427.
183 Ibid., 431.
184 Ibid.
185 One of the younger men named Mosolov was based on Yury Mikhailovich Mosolov (1838-1915), one of Chernyshevsky's students at the Saratov gymnasium and an active member of the revolutionary underground from the 1850s through the 1870s. See Katz, 434 n315.
In the novel's epilogue, the lady in mourning makes another appearance; this time, she has changed into a “jubilant pink” dress and appears with her husband by her side. We are told that she had waited for her husband's release for two years, which seemingly became possible after the revolution.\footnote{186}

3.2 The Writing of What Is To Be Done?

The story of the novel’s publication is that of “typical Tsarist bureaucratic bumbling.”\footnote{187} The police commission investigating Chernyshevsky’s case “read the manuscript, and sent it to the literary censor with a letter to the effect that the manuscript had no bearing on the legal case at hand,”\footnote{188} and needs to be censored by some other part of the bureaucracy. The censor assumed that the police had approved the manuscript for publication, and not willing to “overrule” their judgment, approved the manuscript for publication. When the manuscript was sent to Nekrasov, the editor of the \textit{Contemporary}, he lost it in a cab and only managed to recover it “after advertising in the official gazette of the St. Petersburg police.” Ironically, “the novel that the police helped to retrieve turned out to be the most subversive and revolutionary work of nineteenth-century literature.”\footnote{189} For Chernyshevsky's novel \textit{What Is to be Done?}, all that remains is the manuscript and the published version in the \textit{Contemporary}. While the novel was being published, the tsarist authorities did not allow Chernyshevsky to read or edit the proofs. Consequently, many "mistakes may have crept into the novel without Chernyshevsky's own knowledge."\footnote{190}
While the novel's literary merit is questionable, it nevertheless gained wide acceptance, particularly from the generation of the sixties. Joseph Frank, a prominent literary scholar and a leading expert on Fyodor Dostoevsky, described Chernyshevsky’s novel as one that had the “greatest influence” on Russian society in the nineteenth century for “Chernyshevsky’s novel far more than Marx’s Capital, supplied the emotional dynamic that eventually went to make the Russian republic.”\(^{191}\) The Marxist theorist and radical critic Georgy Plekhanov (1856-1918) found the novel’s appeal in its moral code for the revolutionaries:

> Who has not read and reread this famous work? Who has not been charmed by it, who has not come cleaner, better, braver, and bolder under its philanthropic influence? Who has not imitated the purity of the principal characters? Who, after reading this novel, has not reflected on his personal life, has not subjected his personal striving and tendencies to a severe examination? We all draw from it moral strength and faith in a better future.\(^{192}\)

This influence was one reason why Dostoevsky had Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, the “old liberal idealist of the 1840s” from his novel *Demons*, look into Chernyshevsky’s work to better understand the radical elements that were converging on his town. In the words of the narrator of *Demons*: “On the table lay an open book. It was the novel *What Is to Be Done?* … I guessed that he had obtained and was studying the novel with a single purpose, so that in the event of an unquestionable confrontation with the “screamers,” he would know their methods and arguments beforehand from their own “catechism,” and, being thus prepared, would solemnly refute them all in her eyes. Oh, how this book tormented him!”\(^{193}\)

The generation of the forties generally regarded Chernyshevsky’s novel to be a failure. However, while the verdict on the novel's artistic merit was unanimous, its ideas were received with ambivalence. Writing to one of his friends (Nikolai Scherban) on June 2, 1863, Turgenev

\(^{192}\) Mathewson, *Positive Hero in Russian Literature*. 104.
expressed deep revulsion after reading the conclusion of Chernyshevsky’s novel, published in the May 1863 issue of the *Contemporary*: “I almost read all the pieces in the *Contemporary*… but—pardon me!—I could hardly get through Chernyshevsky. His style arouses physical revulsion in me, like wormseed. If this is—I won't even say art or beauty—but if this is intelligence and something worthwhile—then all I can do is crawl under a bench somewhere. I hadn't yet met an author whose characters stank: Mr. Chernyshevsky turns out to be such an author.”

Alexander Herzen, who did not read the novel until 1867, was among those moved by its central idea, although he too was seriously disappointed with its aesthetics. He shared his impressions with his co-editor, Ogarev, in a letter dated July 29, 1867: “I am reading Chernyshevskii’s novel. Good Lord, how basely it is written., how much affectation…. What style! What a worthless generation whose aesthetics are satisfied by this…. The ideas are beautiful, even the situations—and all this poured from a seminarian-Petersburg-bourgeois urinal à la Niederhuber.”

In his novel *What Is To Be Done*, Chernyshevsky alternates between “narrative” and “metanarrative” and divides his readers into two distinct categories: a larger group of readers that Chernyshevsky “reviles” and a smaller one whom he “flatters.” The former is referred to as the "perspicacious reader" and the latter the "ordinary artless reader." While reading serves as a leisure activity for the ordinary reader, the perspicacious reader takes up a book only “to bully the author and critically inspect his ideas.” Addressing the perspicacious reader, Chernyshevsky writes: “I find it both pitiful and amusing to look at you. You are so impotent and

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198 Ibid.
spiteful, all because of the extraordinary quantity of nonsense stuffed between your two ears… You’re nasty out of intellectual impotence.”\textsuperscript{199} Chernyshevky reserves his respect for the ordinary reader: “there is among you, dear readers, a particular group of people—by now a fairly sizable group—which I respect… There is no need to offer them any explanation. I value their opinion, but I know in advance that they’re on my side. Good, strong, honest, capable people—you have only just begun to appear among us; already, there's a fair number of you, and it's growing all the time. If you were my entire audience, there'd be no need for me to write. If you did not yet exist, it would be impossible for me to write.”\textsuperscript{200} For the contemporary literary critic Gary Saul Morson, "the explicit division of the audience functions as a provocation to choose one side or the other. The logic of both traditions is that of the excluded middle: there can be no innocent bystanders at the apocalypse, no disinterested contemplators of the revolution.”\textsuperscript{201}

Chernyshevsky's characters can be divided into three types. The first group is villainous characters; Vera Pavlovna's mother, Marya Aleksevna, and Katya's suitor, Solovtsov, are part of this group. The second set of characters consists of the “new men” (and women), the “good, strong, honest, capable” people,\textsuperscript{202} which include Lopukhov, Kirsanov, Vera and others. The third group is more exclusive and only has Rakhmetov, whom Chernyshevsky describes as "the flower of the best people, the movers of the movers, the salt of the salt of the earth.”\textsuperscript{203} Chernyshevsky does not regard these groups as static in nature and allows for characters to move between groups. He alludes to this earlier in the novel: "each year the number of decent people is growing. In time it will be the most common option; in even more time it will become the only

\textsuperscript{199} Chernyshevsky, \textit{What Is to Be Done?}, 48.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Chernyshevsky, \textit{What Is to Be Done?}, 49.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 293.
option because all people will be decent."\textsuperscript{204} As to where the newer, decent people are coming from, one may presume that they were part of the first group of nefarious characters that went through some program of “development.”\textsuperscript{205} Marcia Morris, a contemporary literary scholar, observed that despite the possibility of individuals with low nature status to "ascend to the level of the decent," Chernyshevsky fails to provide an example of a permanent change in the status of a low individual. Vera's friend, Julie, never rose above her base physical desires. Similarly, Kryukova, one of Vera's seamstresses at the sewing cooperative, apparently made the transition to a higher level of being by abandoning prostitution but died due to a relapse of consumption.

Many scholars saw Chernyshevsky's novel as a response to Turgenev's \textit{Fathers and Sons}. In an anonymous review published in September 1863 in \textit{The Annals of the Fatherland}, the author identified Chernyshevsky’s “polemic” with Turgenev to be rooted in the differences between Bazarov and Rakhmetov: “Chernyshevsky’s novel is written against \textit{Fathers and Sons}; that is why even the last name Kirsanov appeared in it. In this novel, Rakhmetov is set off against Bazarov… there, Bazarov, a medical student, dissects frogs; here, Rakhmetov saves people.”\textsuperscript{206} While one can draw parallels between Bazarov and Rakhmetov, if we are looking to analyze \textit{What Is To Be Done?} as a response to Turgenev’s \textit{Fathers and Sons}, a more appropriate comparison would be between the characters of Bazarov and Chernyshevsky’s “new men,” Lopukhov and Kirsanov.\textsuperscript{207} The following comment by a censor from the 1860s reflects how contemporary critics perceived the relationship between the two novels:

\begin{quote}
From that which has appeared in print up to this point, one can already guess the main idea of the novel. Apparently, it is written as an answer to the famous work \textit{Fathers and Sons} and forms a counterweight to the characterization of nihilism,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 88-89.
\textsuperscript{206} "Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 145.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 150.
embodied by Turgenev in the form of Bazarov. *What Is To Be Done* is an apology of nihilism, an exposition of its true doctrine, with its good sides. Mr. Chernyshevskii’s Lopukhov, in his main features, is just like Bazarov, supplemented and ennobled by motivations of higher humanity, which, according to the opinion of the author, is the distinguishing feature of the new people (they are nihilists, as one should infer).²⁰⁸

We can identify four instances of Chernyshevsky either borrowing or alluding to some element of Turgenev’s works. The first of these is Chernyshevsky reusing the surname Kirsanov for one of his “new men,” Alexander Kirsanov. Secondly, like Bazarov, he had Lopukhov and Kirsanov pursue their studies in natural sciences, and both of them had the habit of dissecting enormous quantities of frogs. Thirdly, Lopukhov’s name finds its origin in the burdock (*lopukh*), which grew on Bazarov's graves. Finally, Chernyshevsky based the title of one of his chapters, “First Love and Legal Marriage,” on Turgenev's novella, “First Love,” the plot of which includes allusions to Rakhmetov falling in love with one of his father's mistresses.

3.3 Nihilists vs. the “New Men”

The two most popular labels used for the “literary hero of the period” were “nihilists” and “new men,” each corresponding to a “literary representation” of the younger generation. Each of these had a standard-bearer against which newer literary heroes were compared or judged against; for the “nihilists,” this was Turgenev’s Bazarov; for Chernyshevsky’s “new men,” this included Rakhmetov, as well as Lopukhov and Kirsanov. Both shared a common social background (that of *raznochintsy*) and a system of values (atheism and scientific materialism).²⁰⁹

In his essay, “The Thinking Proletariat,” Pisarev observed that "if Chernyshevsky had to represent new people in Bazarov's situation, that is, surrounded with all sorts of old junks and rags, his Lopukhov, Kirsanov, and Rakhmetov would have behaved in almost exactly the same

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²⁰⁹ Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 133-34.
way as Bazarov." But despite the overlap, the “nihilists” and the “new men” were considered polar opposites. Chernyshevsky, for example, viewed Turgenev’s depiction of Bazarov as a “new type in Russian life,” a gross mischaracterization of the radicals. The images of the “new men” that he created in response were meant to appeal to the radicals both as “flattering self-portraits” as well as “idealized men of the socialist future.”

Drawing a contrast between the depiction of nihilists by Turgenev and Chernyshevsky, the famous Russian anarchist, Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) wrote: “Bazarov did not satisfy us, but in Chernyshevsky’s nihilists, presented in a far less artistic novel What Is To Be Done?, we already saw better portraits of ourselves.” Unlike Turgenev, Chernyshevsky saw in Bazarov a “singular character” instead of a type, which significantly undermined Bazarov's “social utility.” However, he positioned his “new men” as a distinctly new type, which he believed did not just consist of a “fairly sizable” group, but their numbers were rapidly increasing. Writing several years later, Herzen saw how the generation of the sixties was able to internalize these types:

This mutual interaction of men on books, and books on men, is a curious thing. A book takes its whole stamp from the society in which it is conceived; it generalizes, it makes it more vivid and sharp, and afterwards is outdone by reality. The originals caricature their sharply shaded portraits, and actual persons grow into their literary shadows. At the end of the last century all young Germans were a little after the style of Werther, while all their young ladies resembled Charlotte … The young Russians who have come on the scene since 1862 are almost all derived from Chernyshevsky’s What Is to Be Done? with the addition of a few Bazarov features.

Marcia Morris considers Chernyshevsky’s work to be responsible for reintroducing a “simplistic ascetic hero” into the Russian literary tradition. In the context of Chernyshevsky’s

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211 Thorstensson, "The Dialog with Nihilism in Russian Polemical Novels of the 1860s-1870s." 154.
212 Ibid., 155.
novel, this raises several possibilities. Some would argue that Vera Pavlovna is the main character since “her liberation from society’s anti-feminist tyranny is meant as a metaphor for Russia’s inevitable liberation from tsarist rule.” Others may suggest situating the hero in the “new man,” which is understood as “a collective hero consisting of those traits held in common by Dmitri Sergevich Lopukhov, Aleksandr Matvevich Kirsanov, Vera Pavlovna, and Katerina Vasilevna.” Another candidate for the hero is Rakhmetov, who embodied a role for others to emulate and whose actions were “ancillary to the main relationship worked out in the novel.”

For Morris, none of these characters personally combine “self-assertiveness” together with centrality in the “structural design of the plot” to be able to identify as a singular hero and concludes that Chernyshevsky likely wanted these characters to “be viewed in comparison with each other.”

Chernyshevsky described the purpose of introducing Rakhmetov into the narrative in one of his conversations with the perspicacious reader:

> I wanted to depict decent, ordinary people of the new generation, those I meet by the hundreds. I took three such characters: Vera Pavlovna, Lopukhov, and Kirsanov. I consider them to be ordinary people … A person who’s never seen anything except hovels would look at a picture of an ordinary house and mistake it for a luxurious palace. How can one ensure that such a person should perceive the house as a house and not a palace? In the same picture one must depict at least one corner of a palace … If I hadn’t shown you the figure of Rakhmetov, the majority of readers would have misunderstood the main characters of my story. I’d bet that up until the last sections of this chapter most of the public considered Vera Pavlovna, Kirsanov, and Lopukhov to be heroes, people of a higher nature … No, my friends, my mean, base, pitiful friends, you’re quite mistaken: it’s not they who stand too high, but you who stand too low.”

Moreover, using a host of religious imagery, Chernyshevsky presented Rakhmetov “as a modern-day, secular saint, who is to be emulated.” As Andrew Drozd observed, “Rakhmetov

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214 Morris, Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature. 137-38.
216 Drozd, Chernyshevskii's What Is to Be Done? A Reevaluation. 120.
and his story have all the hallmarks of medieval hagiography. Rakhmetov is given an extended
genealogy… like a traditional ascetic, he drinks no wine, follows a special diet, needs no rest,
and rejects women… he subjects himself to self-mortification of the flesh.”

3.4 In Response to Turgenev’s Parody of Liebig’s Theories

In Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons, we find several references to Justus Liebig, the
nineteenth-century German scientist known for his significant contributions to agricultural
chemistry. When Liebig’s ideas filtered into the “charged political climate” of mid-nineteenth-
century Russia, they soon became “a site of political contest between supporters of the Romantic,
anti-reductionist trend in science and the radical positivist-materialist trend” that followed. For
the radicals, discussions of Liebig and his materialist soil chemistry presented an opportunity to
focus “on how Russia’s distinctive national spirit arose from its ‘native soil.’” Turgenev took
this as an opportunity to counter the radical discourse by depicting Liebig in Fathers and Sons as
an “empty idol” of the younger generation. During one of the earlier conversations between
Bazarov and the Kirsanov brothers, Nikolai Petrovich had sought Bazarov’s advice on how to
use Liebig’s theories for help with his own “agronomical work,” but Bazarov rebuffed him: “I’m
at your disposal, Nikolai Petrovich; but we have a long way to go to reach Liebig! First we need
to study the alphabet and only later learn how to read books; we haven’t even begun our
ABCs.” In another scene, Kukshina, in her “amateur enthusiasm” for chemistry, also brought
up Liebig in her conversation with Bazarov:

“A piece of meat’s better than a piece of bread, even from the chemical point of view.”
“Do you study chemistry? It’s my passion. I’ve even invented a new resin.”
“A resin. You?”

217 Erley, Laura Mieka. "Reclaiming Native Soil: Cultural Mythologies of Soil in Russia and Its Eastern Borderlands from the 1840s to the 1930s." Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2012. 31.
218 Turgenev, Fathers and Children. 22.
“Yes, me. Do you know what it’s for? To make doll’s heads that won’t break. I’m also practical. But it’s not quite finished. I must still read Liebig.”

Laura Erley argued that through his parody of the “lady chemist,” Turgenev meant to declare the generation of the sixties to be puppets, who were “uncomprehendingly replicating European materialist discourse.” For Turgenev, Kukshina and her dolls also represented “a parody of the mechanist view of the human body—a mannequin held together not by a vital spirit, but by chemical glue.” Turgenev's mockery of "Liebig and his materialist principles" served as a “provocation” for the generation of the sixties. In response, Chernyshevsky uses Vera Pavlovna’s second dream to refer to Liebig’s theories on the fertility of different types of soil to suggest that undergoing a “revolutionary transformation” of such conditions “will ensure social justice and prosperity by fostering appropriate personality traits.”

The evening before her second dream, Vera had guests over for dinner who discussed, amongst other things, “the current debate about the chemical basis of agriculture according to Liebig’s theory,” as well as “the laws governing historical progress.” In Vera’s dream, the discussion continued during which Lopukhov and Aleksei Petrovich discussed materialism in allegorical terms and established a “causal connection between the richness of the soil and the quality of produce grown.” For Francis Randall, the seeds growing in different soil “express Chernyshevskii’s materialist convictions about the importance of chemical nutrients to the growth of living things, and the importance of scientific nutrition for human welfare.”

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219 Ibid., 53.
220 Erley suggests that the name Kukshina is inspired by kukla, the Russian word for a puppet.
221 Erley, Laura Mieka. "Reclaiming Native Soil" Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2012. 35.
222 Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done?, 181.
223 Ibid., 180.
225 Randall, N. G. Chernyshevskii. 115.
Aleksevna also appeared in her second dream and gave her a glimpse of what Vera's life would have been like had Marya pursued a life of honesty and piety. In other words, she attributed Vera's goodness to her vile character: “You’re learned now, educated with money that I stole. You dream about the good, but if I hadn’t been so wicked, you wouldn’t even know what the good is! Do you understand?” Verochka wept and trembled as she heard this.

The central philosophical problem of the second dream is to explain Vera Pavlovna’s origin.226 As an ardent follower of Feuerbach and an “avowed materialist,” Chernyshevsky himself was a strong proponent of the determinist position, which emphasized the role of socioeconomic conditions in shaping an individual’s character.227 However, Chernyshevsky appears to make an exception here, allowing for “bad soil” or “phantasmic dirt” to occasionally yield good produce. Chernyshevsky presented Marya as a representative of the old order and maintained that she could have been a different person had she lived under different circumstances: “You’re now engaged in a bad business because your environment demands it; but if we were to provide you with a different environment, you’d gladly become harmless, even beneficial… You’re not to blame that this capacity is inactive in you, and that antithetical capacities are active instead.”228 Such an exception seemed necessary since only an anomaly could explain the emergence of the “new people” within Russian society.

Andrew Drozd presents an alternative interpretation of the second dream. Drozd questioned whether Lopukhov’s arguments on rigid determinism, which appear inadequate in Vera’s dream, could rightfully be identified as Chernyshevsky's own. He argued that Chernyshevsky also uses dreams in his novel to “give further insight into his character’s

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226 Katz, "Vera Pavlovna’s Dreams in Chernyshevskii’s What Is to Be Done?" 154.
227 Morris, Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature. 139.
228 Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done?, 169.
personality.” Consequently, he identifies the importance of the second dream not in “ideology or philosophy but [in] psychology,” through which Chernyshevsky reflected Vera’s “internal psychological struggle.”

3.5 Pisarev’s “The Thinking Proletariat”

Dmitry Pisarev first published this essay as a review of Chernyshevsky’s What Is To Be Done? in the radical journal the Russian Word in October 1865 under the title, "A New Type." The essay received intense scrutiny from the censors, who sent a notice to the editors of the Russian Word in December 1865, warning them that it “rejects the concept of marriage and carries through the theory of socialism and communism.” The article was published later during Pisarev’s life in his collected works as "The Thinking Proletariat."

In his review of Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons, Pisarev had greatly appreciated the novel’s artistic merit: “Turgenev’s novel, in addition to its artistic beauty, is remarkable for the fact that it stirs the mind, leads to reflection… precisely because everything is permeated with the most complete and most touching sincerity.” Pisarev had also come to the defense of Turgenev on accusations that he did not “conceal his hero’s blunders” from the reader and questioned the need of having idealized representations; “realism is indeed a fine thing; but let us not, in the name of this very realism, idealize either ourselves or our movement… All around us is nonsense and backwardness, but, God knows, we are far from perfect.” He had anticipated that critics would blame Turgenev for the absence of a “positive character”; he defended Turgenev on this account and rejected the accusation that Turgenev had drawn a caricature of a

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230 Ibid., 161.
233 Ibid., 203.
“liberated woman,” Kukshina instead of portraying a truly emancipated Russian woman: “But that would have been a pleasant lie, and a lie in the highest degree unconvincing. I might ask, where would Turgenev have found the colors for the representation of such things as do not exist in Russia and for which Russian life offers neither the proper soil nor enough room?”

Pisarev’s apparent rejection for the need for literal representations of a “positive hero,” who could be imitated, raises the vexed question of his favorable review of Chernyshevsky’s novel, which abounds in such representations. Edward Brown argues that this is likely because Pisarev not only places What Is To Be Done? in a different category from Fathers and Sons but emphasizes that the novel is not about the present but the future:

At no point does Pisarev ever bestow on Chernyshevsky the honored title of artist. Rather he treats the novel as a valid and important essay, with concrete fictional illustrations on several themes: the rational organization of human relations, the establishment of just social order, the liberation of women, and the magnificent future that will surely result from the application of good sense to all human affairs. Pisarev identifies… an ingredient in the novel that does save it from fatuity: the author's unashamed belief in the future and his enthusiasm for the human enterprise.

Pisarev, according to Brown, regarded the “new people” as “elements in a kind of experiment: if a human being can learn to act as they act, then what might our life be like?” Rufus Mathewson, a prominent literary scholar, brilliantly identifies how fictional representations of characters are conceived differently by great novelists and radicals: “For the great Russian novelist ideas and doctrine were not excluded, but were contained in character, and made a function of the whole man . . . The radicals, on the other hand, were interested in ideological

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234 Brown, “Pisarev and the Transformation of Two Russian Novels.” 160.
235 Ibid., 160-61.
236 Ibid., 161.
man. In their view of literary truth—and undoubtedly in their own private moral code—character was a function of doctrine.”

Pisarev summarized the essential characteristics of the "new men" as follows:

- New people have acquired a passion for work for the benefit of society.
- The private benefit of new people coincides with benefit for society and their selfishness contains the broadest love of humanity.
- New people’s reason is in perfect harmony with their feeling because neither reason nor feeling are distorted by chronic enmity for the rest of the people.

Chernyshevsky's "new men" presented a model that could be emulated by the younger generation and that, together with his vision of a utopian society, inspired generations of revolutionaries in Russia. His work also engendered several literary and critical responses, the most significant of which came from Fyodor Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky's initial response appeared in a brief novella called *Notes from the Underground* (1864), which we will turn to in the following two sections.

### 3.6 Rational Egoism

One of the most controversial themes within Chernyshevsky’s *What Is To Be Done?* is that of “rational egoism,” which holds “that life could be perfected solely through the application of reason and enlightened self-interest.” For Chernyshevsky, the driving force behind human behavior was the striving for “personal advantage, personal pleasure, [and] personal well-being, it is the feeling called egoism.” Thus, egoism provides the impetus for us to act in a manner that would maximize our “pleasure.” Chernyshevsky believed in the innate goodness of man who once brought together and “enlightened as to his true interests … would be able, with the help of

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reason and science, to construct a perfect society.”240 In Chernyshevsky’s vision, the use of reason and science would preclude the possibility of any conflict.

The first of the several instances in the novel where Chernyshevsky applies his rational egoism is Lopukhov’s elopement with Vera. Lopukhov’s original plan was to get Vera a job as a governess and marry her two years later after he had completed his medical degree. However, when Vera could not find a job, Lopukhov gave up his brilliant academic career in medicine to “liberate” her. Chernyshevsky understood that for a rational egoist to make a sacrifice for another is rather difficult to justify, so he assured the perspicacious reader that Lopukhov had in mind that he could earn more money by “giving lessons and doing translations” than he could by being a doctor. He also had Lopukhov consider that Vera, who was willing to marry him under those circumstances, may not be willing to marry in two years. Thus, from Lopukhov’s perspective, giving up a medical career was a winning proposition for him. Another instance of rational egoism within the novel can be seen when Vera breaks the news of her affection for Lopukhov’s friend Kirsanov. Instead of jealous outrage as one might expect, Lopukhov advised Vera to consider her feelings: “Don’t think about me; think about yourself instead. Only in thinking about yourself can you prevent me from experiencing unnecessary anguish.”241

Insofar as the innate goodness of man is concerned, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) agreed with Chernyshevsky, but he considers man to be equally driven by “irrational, capricious, and destructive inclinations.”242 This led Dostoevsky to write *Notes from the Underground*, in which he rebelled against the idea that human beings can be governed using laws of science. His first-person narrator countered Chernyshevsky’s “naive optimism”:

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241 Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, 266.
Oh, tell me who was first to announce, first to proclaim that man does nasty things simply because he doesn't know his own true interest; and that if he were to be enlightened, if his eyes were to be opened to his true, normal interests, he would stop doing nasty things at once and would immediately become good and noble… he would realize that his own advantage really did lie in the good; and that it's well known that there's not a single man capable of acting knowingly against his own interest; consequently, he would, so to speak, begin to do good out of necessity.  

For the underground man, Chernyshevsky’s argument has a crucial flaw in that it does not take into account that man has a “supreme interest,” which lies in “being able to exercise his free will.” The underground man refers to this as the “most advantageous advantage.”

3.7 The Crystal Palace

Constructed for the First London World’s Fair in 1851, the Crystal Palace was a “huge cast-iron and glass building, covering nineteen acres and located on high ground just outside the city.” In 1859, Chernyshevsky visited London for five days and from his description, it seems likely that he had the opportunity to see the Crystal Palace:

There stands a building, a large, enormous structure such as can be seen only in a few of the grandest capitals. No, now there’s no other building like it! ... But this building—what on earth is it? What style of architecture? There’s nothing at all like it now. No, there is one building that hints at it—the palace at Sydenham.”

Dostoevsky also wrote about the Crystal Palace in his Winter Notes after his visit to the second London World’s Fair in May 1862. He too had marveled at the structure: “All this is so majestic, victorious, and proud that it takes your breath away. You observe these hundreds of thousands, these millions of people, obediently flowing here from all over the world…and you feel that

244 Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation 1860-1865.* 323.
245 Ibid., 239.
something has been finally completed and terminated.” But in this triumph of modernity, Dostoevsky also saw “the fate of its victims.” He criticized the utopian vision that Chernyshevsky presented in Vera Pavlovna’s fourth dream, more specifically his description of the Crystal Palace as the “pinnacle of scientific ingenuity and technological potential,” and wrote: “Here you no longer see a people, but the systematic, submissive and induced lack of consciousness.” Dostoevsky attributed the apparent contradiction to “the depravity of Western European culture” and, like Herzen, saw within this an opportunity to leverage the collectivism.

Figure 5: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham

rooted in the peasant commune. However, as Joseph Frank observed, their vision differed significantly in one important aspect:

   The radical Russian Socialist Herzen and the pochvennik Dostoevsky\textsuperscript{251}... thus shared the same aversion to Western society and placed the same hopes in the presumed Socialist proclivities of the Russian peasant. But for Dostoevsky these Socialist proclivities were rooted in an exalted conception of Christian self-sacrifice which the enlightened atheist and liberated man of the world Herzen would hardly have been willing to accept as an ideal.\textsuperscript{252}

   In the following chapter, we will turn to Dostoevsky's Demons, which Ronald Hingley regarded as the "greatest onslaught on Nihilism."\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{251} Pochvennik literally means "soil" or "ground," and in the ideological sense, its plural, pochvenniki is translated as "people of the soil."

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid., 241-42.

Chapter Four

4 Dostoevsky's Demonic Nihilists

Dostoevsky's *Demons* (*Bésy*) has been translated into English under different titles: *The Possessed* (Constance Garnett, 1916), *Devils* (Michael Katz, 1992) and *Demons* (Richard Pevear, 2000). The novel’s title was borrowed from Alexander Pushkin’s 1830 poem *Bésy* from where Dostoevsky also quoted the first of the novel’s two epigraphs. For the purpose of my analysis, I have used the translation by Richard Pevear, who argued that while some characters of the novel indeed behave as if they were possessed, the title *Bésy* implies active subjects "possessors" and not passive objects "possessed." In a letter to Alexander Romanov (the future Tsar Alexander III) dated February 10, 1873, Dostoevsky described his novel as a "historical study," through which "I wished to explain the possibility of such hideous phenomena in our strange society as the Nechaev crime." For Dostoevsky, this was the direct consequence of the "age-old divorce of all Russian enlightenment from the native and distinct principles of Russian life…. Our Belinsky and Granovsky would not believe it if they were told they were Nechaev's direct fathers. It is precisely that kinship and continuity of thought which has evolved from the fathers to the children that I wanted to express in my work." 

4.1 Summary of *Demons*

Dostoevsky set the novel in 1869 in a provincial town called, Skvoreshniki. We are introduced to Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, an intellectual whose name, the narrator relates, was at par with the great Westernizers of his age: Belinsky, Granovsky, and Herzen. Stepan preached the French radical George Sand to his Petersburg students and was looking to

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254 Dostoevsky, *Demons*. xiii.
translate the works of the French utopian socialist, Charles Fourier. He appeared an exalted figure with grand ambitions and high-minded aspirations. He also considered himself under surveillance though no one had ever surveilled him. He had a son from an earlier marriage, Pyotr Verkhovensky, but this son had not grown up with him. For the last twenty years, Stepan had resided at the estate of Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina. Varvara Petrovna was a wealthy landowner who had hired Stepan Trofimovich as a tutor for her only son, Nikolai Stavrogin. She regarded Stepan Trofimovich as "exceptionally gifted," but her delusion only "magnified her own importance as his sponsor and benefactress."²⁵⁶ Both Stepan Trofimovich and his patroness, Varvara, tried hard to stay relevant, and after hearing about newer ideas, they visited Petersburg to participate in this new movement. The young revolutionaries they met in Petersburg described their ambitions as being:

about the abolition of censorship, about spelling reform, about replacing Russian letters with Roman … about the advantages of dividing Russia into a free federation of nationalities, about abolishing the army and navy, about restoring Poland up to the Dnieper, about peasant reform and tracts, about the abolition of inheritance, the family, children, and priests, about women’s rights.²⁵⁷

When Varvara shared her idea of publishing a magazine with them, she was accused of being a "capitalist" and an "exploiter of labor."²⁵⁸ The following day, she was visited by an elderly general, an old friend of her late husband, who expressed his pride in having served his sovereign and in an argument with one of the young radicals called him "a brat and an atheist." The incident was leaked to the press, and a caricature "caustically portraying Varvara Petrovna, the general, and Stepan Trofimovich together as three retrograde cronies,"²⁵⁹ appeared the next day in an illustrated magazine. It wasn't long before both Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Petrovna

²⁵⁷ Dostoevsky, Demons. 23.
²⁵⁸ Ibid., 24.
²⁵⁹ Ibid.
gave up the thought of working with the young radicals. As they prepared to leave Petersburg the following morning, they were visited by five writers who had looked into the case of her magazine and decided that “after founding the magazine, she should at once turn it over to them, along with the capital, under the rights of a free co-operative; and she herself should leave for Skvoreshniki, and not forget to take along Stepan Trofimovich, ‘who was obsolete.’”\(^{260}\) This incident is likely based on one Herzen described in his autobiographical account *My Past and Thoughts*. Herzen had been entrusted with a large sum of money for his “propaganda efforts.”

When a group of young radicals who had been living in England got wind of this, they demanded that the funds should be turned over to them to help support their revolutionary efforts in Russia: “Some needed the money in order to send emissaries; others for establishing centres on the Volga; others still for the publication of a journal. They were dissatisfied with *The Bell*, and did not readily respond to our invitation to work on it.”\(^{261}\) When Herzen refused, he was threatened that they would go after him in the papers, which only served to confirm his apprehensions about the young radicals: "I have always and in everything feared 'above all sorrows,' mészalliances; I have always tolerated them, partly through humanity, partly through carelessness, and have always suffered from them.”\(^{262}\)

Varvara had sent her son, Nikolai Stavrogin, to Petersburg for his education, where after completing his studies, he entered military service. At the same time, he started leading a life of "savage unbridledness" and "beastly behavior.”\(^{263}\) Stavrogin was promoted for his valiant service but suddenly retired from the military and returned home. The town was divided about the young

\(^{260}\) Dostoevsky, *Demons*. 25.


\(^{262}\) Ibid., 557.

\(^{263}\) Dostoevsky, *Demons*. 41.
man: "one party adored him, the other hated him to the point of blood vengeance… Some were especially fascinated by the possibility of some fatal mystery in his soul; others positively liked his being a killer." His face was often said to “resemble a mask.” On his return, Stavrogin caused several scandals; he pulled the nose of an older man in the officer's club; when called on to speak to the mild-tempered governor about his misdeeds, he bit the governor's ear. The governor had the boy arrested, but Stavrogin got off after some doctors confirmed that he had an acute brain fever which led him to act insanely. As for Stavrogin's relationship with his tutor, the narrator related that “Stepan Trofimovich managed to touch the deepest strings in his friend's [Stavrogin's] heart and to call forth in him the first still uncertain sensation of that age-old sacred anguish which the chosen soul having once tasted and known it will never exchange for any cheap satisfaction.” Thus, Stavrogin's deep conscience was a crucial aspect of his character; while he did pursue “cheap satisfaction,” we are left to wonder if such pursuits were genuinely gratifying for him.

Stavrogin’s “love interest” was Lizaveta Nikolaevna Tushin (Liza), the daughter of Varvara's friend, Praskovya. Liza's aunt, Yulia Mikhailovna, was the new governor's wife. Stavrogin met her family in Paris and had accompanied them to Switzerland. After her first visit to Stavrogin in Switzerland, Varvara thought Stavrogin and Liza would soon be married. However, the two broke up, and Stavrogin went back to Petersburg. Liza got engaged to her step-cousin, Mavriky Nikolaevich Drozdov, who was an artillery captain. There were rumors that Stavrogin had married a lame girl, Marya Lebyadkina, who was of questionable sanity. When Stavrogin returned from Petersburg, the narrator noted that this time there was something different about him: "I don't know why, but he appeared to me, at very first sight, as decidedly,

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264 Dostoevsky, Demons. 43.
265 Ibid., 41.
unquestionably handsome, so that it could in no way be said that his face resembled a mask.\textsuperscript{266} Stavrogin was a changed man, but he had a mysterious air to himself. We also learned that Nikolai Stavrogin had connections with many of the new characters: he had known Kirillov, an atheist, a nihilist, and a civil engineer; he was well-acquainted with Pyotr Stepanovich as well, rumored to be a member of the socialist revolutionaries; he was also on intimate terms with Shatov, the student and the Slavophile.

Shatov used to be Varvara's serf, but he and his sister, Darya (or Dasha), were freed and raised by Varvara. He knew Stavrogin as a young man, presumably since they grew up in the same house. He went to the university where he developed “socialist convictions” but got expelled following an incident. Together with Kirillov, he traveled to America to experience what life was like in America. He later became a tutor for a merchant's family and traveled with them to Switzerland, where he married an "enlightened" Russian girl. Their marriage only lasted for three weeks, after which Shatov returned to Russia. We are told that Shatov's sister, Darya, served as a confidant and nurse for Nikolai Stavrogin. After Darya's recent return from Switzerland, Varvara suddenly decided to have her marry Stepan Trofimovich, who only agreed due to the financial terms associated with the proposal. Still, he remained concerned that he was getting married to cover someone else's sins. There are other characters in the novel, most of whom had been a part of Stepan Trofimovich’s circle. These included Liputin, a man without a patronym, “a great liberal and known around town as an atheist.”\textsuperscript{267} Liputin was also an undisguised gossip. Two other members of this group were Virginsky and Lyamshin; Virginsky

\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 29.
was a civil servant whose sister and wife were revolutionaries and entertained the latest "convictions"; Lyamshin was a “petty postal clerk” and “a good hand at the piano.”

Our narrator relates that Varvara once went to church to attend the Sunday liturgy, where she met the new governor's wife, Yulia Mikhailovna, and her niece, Liza. As Varvara left the cathedral, a lame girl, Marya Timofevna, approached her and requested to kiss Varvara’s hand. Varvara gave Marya a ten-rouble bill and, on inquiring about her whereabouts, was informed that she was one of the Lebyadkins. Varvara decided to take Marya along to Skvoreshniki. Liza, who had witnessed the encounter, insisted on joining Varvara for the ride. By the time they arrived at Skvoreshniki, Stepan had arrived with our narrator, and Liza's mother, Praskovya, had also come with Mavriky Nikolaevich. As they engaged in conversation, Darya entered the room, and Marya Timofevna commented that her brother, Lebyadkin, “goes around swearing” that Darya had stolen some of his money. Darya clarified that while in Switzerland, Nikolai Stavrogin had sent three hundred roubles to Marya Timofevna's brother, Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin soon arrived looking for his sister. When asked to qualify his accusation against Darya and clarify the purpose for which he received money from Stavrogin, Lebyadkin made vague comments about enduring family disgrace rather than proclaiming the truth. Shortly after, Pyotr Stepanovich and Nikolai Stavrogin also arrived. Varvara demanded Stavrogin to confirm if indeed he was married to the lame girl, Marya. Stavrogin did not answer and led Marya out of the room, telling her that he is her "most faithful friend… not a husband… nor a fiancé." While Stavrogin escorted the lame girl home, Pyotr Stepanovich gave additional context to this surprising revelation. He mentioned that while in Petersburg, Stavrogin and the Lebyadkins shared a rented space and had become acquainted. Marya soon fell in love with him and, in her delusion, began to believe that he was...

268 Ibid., 34.
269 Ibid., 183.
engaged to her. Stavrogin played along and set up an allowance of three hundred roubles for her, which, Pyotr claimed, her brother had been "appropriating." Pyotr then had Lebyadkin corroborate his story. Stavrogin soon returned, and as he congratulated Darya on her upcoming wedding, Pyotr seized the opportunity to reveal that he had received a letter from his father, Stepan Trofimovich, asking him to be saved from a marriage that he was dragged into to "cover up someone else's sins with his honorable name." (104) Varvara Petrovna was enraged and ordered Stepan to leave her estate immediately and not to return. Shatov, who had been standing quietly, walked up to Stavrogin and slapped him hard on the face. The narrator related that though capable of reciprocating and even killing in response to such an infraction, Stavrogin exercised “complete self-control.” It was Shatov who walked away, seemingly crushed. Following this, Liza let out a scream and collapsed on the floor.

Part II begins eight days after the eventful day at Skvoreshniki. Stavrogin was preparing to go out for the night when Pyotr Stepanovich dropped by for a visit. Pyotr had been spreading rumors surrounding the recent events and was looking to involve Stavrogin in some radical political scheme of his making. Pyotr also offered to have Stavrogin use Fedka, the convict, to murder his wife, Shatov, or even Gaganov, the offended son of the man whose nose Stavrogin had pulled years ago. However, Nikolai Stavrogin remained unresponsive to Pyotr's overtures. Stavrogin then stepped out to go to the Fillipov's house, where Kirillov and Shatov lived. He stopped by Kirillov's first and showed him an insulting letter from Gaganov that Stavrogin claimed had left him with no choice but to propose a duel in response. He requested Kirillov to be his second in the duel and to help him make the necessary arrangements. On Stavrogin's inquiry, Kirillov told him that he is looking to commit suicide but has been putting that off until his suicide could somehow serve the revolutionary cause. Describing the underlying reason for
his suicide, Kirillov identified the human will as the single source of all meaning and insisted that such a realization can lead us to become Gods. However, this necessitates that our love for life does not have any bearing on the actions of our will, the logical consequence of which is that to become God, one needs to prove one's freedom of will by committing suicide. Kirillov had known Stavrogin when they both lived in Petersburg and had gotten his atheism and views on the human will from Stavrogin.

From Kirillov’s, Stavrogin visited Shatov, who explained that he had hit him out of anger on Stavrogin’s “fall.” Shatov had rightly identified Stavrogin’s relationship with Marya Timofevna. He then describes his inability to reconcile God with Socialism: “Socialism by its very essence must be atheism, because it has precisely declared, from the very first line, that it… intends to set itself upon the principles of science and reason exclusively… It has never yet happened that all or many nations have had one common God, but each has always had a separate one.” When Stavrogin told Shatov that his statements reduced God to a mere attribute of nationality, Shatov’s response revealed his Slavophile bias: “On the contrary, I raise the nation up to God. Has it ever been otherwise? The nation is the body of God.” From Stavrogin's conversations with Kirillov and Shatov, we come to understand the influence Stavrogin has had on each of them. Ironically though, they were polar opposites, with Kirillov representing the Westernizers and Shatov, the Slavophiles. As their discussion drew to a close, Stavrogin warned Shatov about Pyotr Stepanovich's plan to murder him. Shatov could see Stavrogin's anguish, and out of great personal concern for him, he suggested that Stavrogin visit Bishop Tikhon to bear his soul because something is troubling him deeply.

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271 Ibid., 250-51.
From the Fillipov's house, Stavrogin walked to Marya Timofevna's house, and on his way, he ran into Fedka, the convict. Pyotr Stepanovich had already informed Fedka about his conversation with Stavrogin, so Fedka was quick to offer his services to Stavrogin, albeit in somewhat couched terms. However, Stavrogin strongly dismissed any possibility of requiring Fedka's services. Once at Marya's, Stavrogin first met with Lebyadkin. To Lebyadkin’s horror, Stavrogin informed him that he would be making the news of his marriage to Marya Timofevna public and will no longer make payments to him in the future. He stopped by Marya's room, who seemed apprehensive of Stavrogin. He offered her a life with him in Switzerland, which she scornfully rejected. She began yelling at him, calling him an imposter, and claiming that he was there to kill her. Angered and disconcerted, Stavrogin pushed Marya aside and left. On his way home, Fedka approached him yet again, this time simply engaging him in conversation. Eventually, Stavrogin burst out laughing and threw all the money he had at Fedka, a sum of fifteen hundred roubles! Although Stavrogin had not mentioned that he required any services in return, Fedka made his own assumptions. Stavrogin’s journey into the night is in fact a “symbolic pilgrimage,” during which he communes with “the two halves of his own nature,” and attempts to discover “his real attitude to his marriage.” This will be discussed further in section 4.8.

The following day, Stavrogin and Gaganov fought a duel, and while there were no casualties, to Gaganov's agitation, Stavrogin deliberately missed all three of his shots. Here, the duel between Stavrogin and Gaganov, fought as a result of Stavrogin's earlier insult of the latter’s father, Pavel Pavlovich Gaganov, is likely adapted from the duel fought between Bazarov and Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*. On returning to Skvoreshniki,

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Stavrogin met with Darya and informed her about the duel and his encounter with Fedka. He also asked Darya if she would still come to him if he had paid Fedka for the murder. She covered her face with her hands and left the room without responding. Earlier, she had told Stavrogin: if it were not for you, “I’ll become a sister of mercy, or a sick-nurse, or a book-hawker and sell Gospels.”

The governor’s wife, Yulia Mikhailovna, had been planning a day of entertainment (fête) for “the benefit of the poor governesses” of the province.\textsuperscript{274} She planned the fete to begin with a literary matinée in the morning followed by a ball in the evening. For the literary matinée, she had invited Karmazinov to read what was his last piece of writing, \textit{Merci}. Yulia also requested Varvara Petrovna to engage Stepan Trofimovich for a brief reading as well. Varvara Petrovna, who had been upset with Stepan Trofimovich, called on him, and after lecturing him on his outdated ideas and blaming him for letting her fall behind the times—“Yulia is a hundred miles ahead of me”—she finally shared Yulia’s invitation for him to read at the literary matinée, which Stepan Trofimovich reluctantly accepted.

Meanwhile, Pyotr Stepanovich had been working on establishing relationships that he could use for his political gain. He had singled out Yulia Mikhailovna for this purpose and utilized flattery for good measure to gain power over her; he even began to eat, drink and all but sleep in the governor's house. However, Pyotr demonstrated “a decided disrespect” for the governor, Andrei Antonovich von Lembke, and “assumed some strange rights over him.”\textsuperscript{275} Andrei Antonovich once read him two chapters from a manuscript of a novel he had written. Pyotr listened with “unconcealed boredom, yawned impolitely, uttered not a word of praise,”\textsuperscript{276}

\textsuperscript{273} Dostoevsky, \textit{Demons}. 293.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 301.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 312.
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid.
but asked for the manuscript to read in his leisure. He did not return the manuscript, claiming he had lost it in the street. On another occasion, when Von Lembke showed Pyotr Stepanovich his personal collection of revolutionary tracts that he had been gathering since 1859, “with the innocent aim of disarming him with his liberalism,” Pyotr Stepanovich rudely declared that “there was more sense in one line of some tracts than in certain whole chanceries, ‘perhaps not excluding your own.’”  

Andrei Antonovich frequently brought up Pytor's offenses to his wife, but she dismissed his concerns citing Pyotr's extended connections with the youth, which she was hoping to tap into to expand her own influence: “he came to me with excellent recommendations, he has abilities, and occasionally says extremely intelligent things. Karmazinov assured me that he has connections almost everywhere and is extremely influential with the youth of the capital. And if through him I can attract them and gather them all around me, I can divert them from ruin by showing a new path for their ambition.”  

Pyotr also adopted a similar approach with his father, Stepan Trofimovich, deliberately driving him to despair by frequently undermining his relationship with Varvara Petrovna. In one instance, Pyotr taunted him for "milking her like a nanny goat."  

The action then moves to Virginsky's house, where a meeting was called for those involved with the revolutionary cause. The revolutionary cell consisted of Lyamshin, Liputin, Virginsky, “the knower of the people,” Tolkachenko, and the preeminent intellectual, Shigalyov, though others were also in attendance. During the meeting, Shigalyov shared how he had imagined the recreation of the socialist world: “I got entangled in my own data, and my

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277 Dostoevsky, *Demons*. 313.
278 Ibid., 316.
279 Ibid., 306.
conclusion directly contradicts the original idea from which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I conclude with unlimited despotism.”

As a final solution, he suggested:

One tenth is granted freedom of person and unlimited rights over the remaining nine tenths. These must lose their person and turn into something like a herd, and in unlimited obedience, through a series of regenerations, attain to primeval innocence, something like the primeval paradise—though, by the way, they will have to work.

Pyotr Stepanovich, who had been cleaning his fingernails throughout the conversation, finally spoke up: “I ask the whole honorable company not even to vote but to declare directly and simply which is more fun for you: a snail’s pace through the swamp, or full steam across it?”

The members enthusiastically declared their support for the latter. Pyotr then posed a question, the response to which, he claimed, was to decide the fate of their revolutionary cell: “If any of us knew of a planned political murder, would he go and inform, foreseeing all the consequences, or would he stay home and await events?”

Before anyone could respond to Pyotr Stepanovich's question, Shatov, who had been sitting by himself in a corner, left the meeting looking somewhat troubled. Stavrogin and Kirillov soon followed him. Pyotr adjourned the meeting shortly after and rushed to meet with Stavrogin and Kirillov at the Filippov's house.

Once they arrived, Pyotr asked Stavrogin if he would provide the money to take care of the Lebyadkins. Stavrogin refused to provide funds and also declined to let Pyotr have Shatov. He then pointed out that Pyotr was trying to have Shatov murdered by his cell members, only to bring them together under his complete control. When Stavrogin left, Pyotr followed him and suddenly began raving like a mad man. It didn't take long for Stavrogin to realize that Pyotr Stepanovich himself had no commitment to the socialist cause and was only a "political upstart."

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280 Ibid., 402.
281 Ibid., 403.
282 Ibid., 408.
283 Ibid., 410.
Here, Dostoevsky alludes to the notion that nihilism is some form of madness or, in its full manifestation, leads to madness. He describes the behavior of a certain sub-lieutenant of a nearby district who, upon being reprimanded by his superior officer, charged at him and bit his shoulder. Earlier, this sub-lieutenant had thrown two icons, belonging to his landlord, out of the apartment and had "placed the works of Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner on stands like three lecterns," with church candles burning against each of them. When taken into custody, they found in his possession a bundle of the "most desperate tracts." A few other characters exposed to nihilism in varying capacities also experience similar fates. One of Shatov's murderers, Lyamshin, had bouts of madness after participating in the murder. The third reader in the literary fête, the "detractor of Russia," was also depicted as a mad man. It's important to note that these depictions are not whimsical caricatures but measured descriptions based on real characters. For example, both radicals who inspired Karakozov's attempted assassination of Alexander II, Nikolai Ishutin and Ivan Khudyakov, had shown clear symptoms of madness.

After a restless night, Stavrogin set out to visit Bishop Tikhon. When he arrived at the monastery, Stavrogin appeared distracted, and the conversation began slowly. He told Tikhon that he sees certain visions and believes that he is possessed by demons. Tikhon did not deny the possibility of that but suggested that Stavrogin likely suffered from some sickness. On Stavrogin's inquiry, Tikhon confirmed his belief in demons and God and also added that "total atheism was more respectable than worldly indifference," as the latter "has no faith, apart from a bad fear." Stavrogin handed Tikhon a letter of confession, which he was looking to distribute.

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284 Dostoevsky, Demons. 346.
285 Ibid.
286 Venturi, Roots of Revolution. 349-50.
287 This paragraph summarizes the two chapters that Katkov had refused to print due to concerns around censorship and were added as an appendix in later editions.
288 Dostoevsky, Demons. 688.
to make his crimes known to everyone. Tikhon read the letter aloud with much trepidation; Stavrogin had confessed to raping an 11-year-old girl, Matryosha. Overwhelmed by guilt, the little girl had fallen ill, and for several nights, she raved about having killed God. Eventually, she took her life by hanging herself. The guilt from Matryosha's rape and her subsequent suicide had led Stavrogin to marry the lame girl, Marya Timofevna.

Meanwhile, Andrei Antonovich had asked his subordinate, Blum, to investigate the cause of the social disquiet in town. Blum mistakenly attributed the chaos to Stepan Trofimovich. He ordered perquisition officials to raid Stepan's house, and they carted off many of his papers. In his conceit, Stepan assumed that someone had finally recognized his greatness. He marched down to the city hall to protest the violation of his rights and found that seventy workers from the Shpigulin factory were also present to protest their factory's closure and dismissal from work. When Stepan began explaining the situation to the governor, Andrei Antonovich, his wife, Yulia Mikhailovna, accompanied by Karmazinov, Varvara Petrovna, and Liza, arrived from Skvoreshniki after being tipped off about the situation. Yulia publicly snubbed her husband and led Stepan Trofimovich away to introduce him to Karmazinov. Pyotr Stepanovich and Stavrogin soon joined them as well. Liza accosted Stavrogin, telling him that she had received "indecent letters" by Captain Lebyadkin, who claimed to be the brother of Stavrogin's wife and offered to reveal some secrets. Stavrogin finally broke the news that he has been married to Lebyadkin's sister for five years and assured Liza that she would not be harassed by Lebyadkin any longer. Varvara Petrovna was horrified by this revelation, but Stavrogin left the room, leaving a stunned audience behind.

Part III of the novel begins with the fête. Although the entry to the fête was by subscription, most people from town had subscribed and had arrived on time for the literary
matinée. The program, however, did not start as planned. Liputin took the stage and began the event by an unscheduled recital of an offensive poem by Captain Lebyadkin, which reviled and insulted provincial governesses. The narrator took him to task for this, but Liputin remained defiant and unrepentant, causing the narrator to suspect foul play. Next, Karmazinov read his piece, *Merci*, which lasted for well over an hour and came to an end only after some audience members exchanged barbed insults with Karmazinov. Stepan Trofimovich was next to take the stage. To everyone's astonishment, he began by speaking about revolutionary tracts and segued into a discussion on his aesthetic ideals: "The enthusiasm of modern youth is as pure and bright as in our time. Only one thing has happened: the displacing of purposes, the replacing of one beauty by another! The whole perplexity lies in just what is more beautiful: Shakespeare or boots, Raphael or petroleum?"289 While Stepan Trofimovich was speaking, the crowd became increasingly disorderly. Disconcerted, Stepan briefly broke into sobs before cursing the audience and leaving. A third reader, some "maniac" professor from Petersburg, was the last of the scheduled speakers. Reveling in disorder, he launched into a tirade against the Russian state and had to be forcibly removed from the stage. Yulia Mikhailovna was devastated. Pyotr Stepanovich, who had been absent from the literary matinée, only appeared later and, having laid the blame for the earlier disasters on Yulia Mikhailovna, convinced her to proceed with the ball. He also shared news of another scandal; Lizaveta Nikolaevna had abandoned her fiancé, Mavriky Nikolaevich, and had left with Stavrogin to Skvoreshniki! The ball began at the scheduled time, but fewer people had turned up. While the quadrille was going on, someone yelled, "Fire!" Panic ensued, and soon other cries were heard: "Arson! The Shpigulin men!" Andrei Antonovich ordered the police to prevent people from leaving. When Yulia Mikhailovna

289 Ibid., 485.
objected, he ordered her to be arrested. While the firemen were working hard to put out the fire, Andrei Antonovich, in his demented state, instructed the firemen to be taken off the rooftop, declaring, “The fire is in people's minds, not on the rooftops.” Shortly after, a broken board fell on him and left him unconscious. While the blow was not fatal, the narrator mentions that this signaled the end of Von Lembke's political career. Then more news came in: Fedka, the convict, had murdered Captain Lebyadkin, his sister, Marya Timofevna, and their housekeeper.

Meanwhile, Stavrogin and Liza spent the night together. The following day, as Stavrogin declared his love for Liza, she told him that she did not want to spend the rest of her life as his sick nurse, signaling that she was not looking to stay. Pyotr Stepanovich soon joined them and broke the news concerning the Lebyadkins. Shocked by the report and equally by Stavrogin's reaction to it, Liza asked if he had anything to do with the killing. He denied any involvement but acknowledged that he did not do anything to stop the killing after becoming aware of the imminent murder. Hearing this, Liza left Stavrogin, and as she ran out, she found Mavriky Nikolaevich waiting for her outside. She urged Mavriky to take her to the Lebyadkins: “I myself want to see the ones who were murdered … because of them he stopped loving me last night.” Together, they arrived at the scene of the murder, where someone identified Liza as "Stavrogin’s woman"; another yelled, “they don’t just kill, they also come and look!” The angry mob struck her several blows and killed her.

The following day, it was rumored that Stavrogin had taken a train for Petersburg. Members of Pyotr's revolutionary cell were furious, but they calmed down when Pyotr showed them the anonymous letter Lebyadkin had sent to Andrei Antonovich. He also reported that Shatov was planning to expose them to the authorities and shared his plan for Shatov's murder,

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290 Ibid., 516.
for which Kirillov had agreed to take the blame. Everyone agreed. Meanwhile, Shatov's ex-wife Marya, who was pregnant with Stavrogin's child, arrived at the Filippov's. Shatov was delighted to see her and brought in Virginsky's wife—a midwife by trade—for assistance with the delivery. To Marya's delight, he expressed willingness to father the newborn. The following night, Shatov was escorted by one of the cell members, Erkel, to the site where he had buried the printing press. He was strangled by his cell members then shot dead by Pyotr Stepanovich. Shatov's body was weighed down with stones and dumped into the river. The following morning Pyotr went to Kirillov's house, where he dictated a letter of confession to Kirillov. Shortly after, Kirillov committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. When Shatov did not return, Marya went out looking for Kirillov and seeing his dead body, she had the premonition that Shatov too was dead. She ran out into the cold with her infant, desperately seeking help. The authorities came in, and though they found Kirillov's letter of confession for the murder, they suspected a larger group of revolutionaries behind all recent killings and arson. Marya and her infant fell ill and died within three days. As the town was gripped with fear and paranoia, Lyamshin came forward with a confession. To the question on why all the murders and arson were perpetrated, he replied:

> for the systematic shaking of the foundations, for the systematic corrupting of society and all principles; in order to dishearten everyone and make a hash of everything, and society being thus loosened, ailing and limping, cynical and unbelieving, but with an infinite yearning for some guiding idea and for self-preservation—to take it suddenly into their hands, raising the banner of rebellion, and supported by the whole network of fivesomes, which would have been active all the while, recruiting and searching for practically all the means and all the weak spots that could be seized upon.\(^{291}\)

Lyamshin blamed everything on Pyotr Stepanovich and cleared Stavrogin from any wrongdoing.

The other cell members were soon rounded up and taken into custody.

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\(^{291}\) Dostoevsky, *Demons*. 670.
Meanwhile, Stepan Trofimovich died of illness after leaving town on a journey of self-discovery. Prior to his Varvara Petrovna, who attended to him before his death, was terribly shaken and had settled in her town house. Darya received a disturbing letter from Stavrogin that described his anguish and invited her to join him in Switzerland. She showed the letter to Varvara, who made plans to accompany Darya. As they prepared to leave, they were informed that Stavrogin was spotted in Skvoreshniki. They arrived too late to find that Stavrogin had hanged himself in the attic. The autopsy “completely and emphatically ruled out insanity.”

4.2 The Writing of Demons

During the 1840s, like Turgenev, Dostoevsky was also strongly influenced by the Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky. His first novel, Poor Folk (1846), had made a strong impression on Belinsky for the sympathy it expressed for the downtrodden. By 1847, however, Dostoevsky had parted with Belinsky's group, “not to go against the master's teachings, but to go deeper into revolutionary activity.” He joined the Petrashevsky Circle, a group of progressive-minded intellectuals who were inspired by the teachings of the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, and met regularly at the house of the revolutionary, Mikhail Petrashevsky (1821-1866). In one such gathering, Dostoevsky read to the circle Belinsky's “blistering letter” to Gogol, which was “full of insolent expressions against the Orthodox Church and the Emperor.” Belinsky died a few months later and thus escaped official persecution. However, Dostoevsky was arrested and sentenced to death for circulating this letter. His death sentence was commuted at the last minute to exile in Siberia. For the next ten years, Dostoevsky was cut off “from the

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292 Ibid., 678.
293 Dostoevsky, Demons, ix.
literary and cultural life,” and was only allowed to return to the capital cities of Moscow and Petersburg in 1859. As Peace observed, “his ordeal appears not to have engendered bitterness, but rather to have reconciled him to the status quo.”

In 1867, tormented by his creditors, Dostoevsky left for Europe. He was in Dresden during the summer of 1869. With the growing political unrest, Dostoevsky convinced his mother-in-law to send his brother-in-law—studying at Petrovskaya Agricultural Academy in Moscow—to Dresden. His wife, Anna Dostoevskaya, related this in her memoirs, describing the events of 1869 as the inspiration for Dostoevsky’s *Demons*: “Fedor Mikhaylovich had always liked my brother and was interested in what he was doing; he was interested in his acquaintances and in the life and ideas of the student world in general. My brother enthusiastically told him everything in detail. It was from this that Fedor Mikhaylovich conceived the idea of depicting the political movement of the time in one of his novels and of taking, as one of the chief heroes, the student Ivanov (under the name of Shatov), who was later to be killed by Nechayev. My brother spoke of this student Ivanov as an intelligent person, remarkable for his firmness of character, who had radically changed his former convictions. How deeply shaken my husband was when he learned later from the papers of the murder of Ivanov.”

Although Dostoevsky conceived of *Demons* as a "pamphlet novel," directed against the revolutionaries, he later introduced a new central character:

in spite of the fact that this whole incident occupies one of the novel's primary planes, it is nevertheless just a prop and set for the actions of another character who could really be called the novel's main character. This other character (Nikolay Stavrogin) is also a gloomy character, also a villain… In my opinion, he is both a Russian and a tragic character.

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296 Ibid., 140.
The novel was to serve as a “polemic against the nihilists” while also exploring “religious and philosophical problems.”\(^{298}\) As Richard Peace observed, it was the latter that Dostoevsky ran into difficulties with. Two of his chapters from Part II of *Demons*, where the protagonist, Nikolai Stavrogin, confessed to his crimes from the past, were rejected by the editor, Mikhail Katkov, and despite Dostoevsky's edited resubmissions, those remained excluded from the novel. However, the resulting delays in its publication worked to Dostoevsky's advantage as he was able to revise it based on "factual details culled from the extensive newspaper reports of the trial" between July and September of 1871.\(^{299}\)

*Demons* was published serially in the *Russian Herald* between January 1871 and December 1872. There was a gap in its publication between November 1871 and November 1872, caused first by the unwillingness of the editor, Mikhail Katkov, to publish two chapters, fearing a backlash from the censorship board, and subsequently by his decision to delay publication until Dostoevsky had completed the remainder of the novel.\(^{300}\) In terms of structure, we see that the first part of *Demons* is visibly slow-paced compared to the other two. Even the two main characters, Pyotr Stepanovich and Nikolai Vsevolodovich are not introduced until the end of the first part. However, this appears to be by design as is indicated in Dostoevsky's notes:

Don't do as other novelists do, i.e., blow your horn at the very beginning, announcing that 'here is an extraordinary personage.' On the contrary, conceal it, and reveal his true character only gradually.\(^{301}\)

The novel is “centered on the Verkhovenskys,” a name that finds its origin in the word *verkhovenstvo*, meaning supremacy. In one of his notebooks, Dostoevsky noted the father was

\(^{298}\) Peace, *Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*. 140.
\(^{299}\) Ibid., 141-42.
\(^{301}\) Weickhardt, "Book I of Dostoevsky’s Demons: A Slow Start?". 58.
"engaged in continuous altercation with his son over the question of supremacy." (RP, 142) In this manner, Demons can be seen as a continuation of earlier Russian novels, like Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons, that set the father generation of the forties at odds with the son generation of the sixties. Dostoevsky, however, took this a step further and laid the blame for the younger generation’s radicalization on their “intellectual fathers.” In a letter to Nikolay Strakhov, dated May 1871, he wrote:

If Belinsky, Granovsky, and that whole bunch of scum were to take a look now, they’d say, “No, that’s not what we were dreaming of, that’s a deviation, let’s wait a bit, and light will appear, progress will ascend to the throne, and humanity will be remade on sound principles, and will be happy!” There’s no way that they could agree that once you have set down that road, there no place you can arrive at other than at the Commune and Felix Pyat.

This is stated more explicitly later in the novel when Stepan Trofimovich censured Chernyshevsky’s What Is To Be Done?:

“I agree that the author’s basic idea is correct,” he said to me feverishly, “but so much the more horrible for that! It’s our same idea, precisely ours; we, we were the first to plant it, to nurture it, to prepare it—and what new could they say on their own after us! But, God, how it’s all perverted, distorted, mutilated!” he exclaimed, thumping the book with his fingers. “Are these the conclusions we strove for? Who can recognize the initial thought here?”

After reading the first part of Demons, Apollon Maykov wrote to Dostoevsky concerning the role of Stepan Trofimovich: “These are Turgenev’s heroes in their old age.” In his reply, Dostoevsky fully endorsed Maykov’s characterization: “That’s brilliant! While writing I myself was dreaming of something like that; but in three words you have designated everything, as with a formula.”

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302 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 142.
303 Dostoevsky, Complete Letters 1868-1871. 3:361.
304 Ibid., 304.
305 Ibid., 324.
Dostoevsky's notebooks from this period give us further insight into the plot, sketches of scenes, and analysis of characters. Most of the characters are referred to in the notebooks by different names. Stepan Trofimovich is throughout called “Granovsky,” Pyotr initially as “the Student” and then “Nechaev,” and Stavrogin is, for the most part, referred to as “the Prince.”

Not all of these choices were random; Granovsky, for example, was a reference to T. N. Granovsky, an “influential historian and liberal Westerniser, who reached the height of his fame with a course of public lectures which he gave at Moscow University” in the early 1840s. In a letter to Nikolay Strakhov, dated February 26, 1870, Dostoevsky requested Strakhov to urgently send him A. V. Stankevich’s book *Timofey Nikolaevich Granovsky: A Biographical Sketch* (1869): “I need that book like air and as soon as possible, as most essential material for my work—material that I absolutely cannot get along without.” Dostoevsky drew heavily on that book for his portrait of Stepan Trofimovich.

Outwardly though, Dostoevsky tried to disassociate his character of Stepan Trofimovich from the eminent scholar, Granovsky; describing Stepan Trofimovich in the introduction, the narrator related that “for a time … his name was uttered by many hurrying people of that day almost on a par with the names of Chaadaev, Belinsky, Granovsky, and Herzen.” However, to emphasize that Stepan Trofimovich was in fact “a liberal westerniser,” Dostoevsky had Lyamshin produce a caricature of him at a party hosted by the governor's wife, describing him as “A Liberal of the Forties.” True to his westernizer instincts, Stepan is the only character in the novel who insists on speaking French even though that serves to alienate him from others. Once

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307 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 144.  
308 Dostoevsky, Demons. 8.  
309 Ibid., 323.
Shatov, the freed serf and former student of Stepan, picked up on this and confronted his former mentor as he praised Belinsky:

These men of yours never loved the people, never suffered for them or sacrificed anything for them, no matter what they themselves imagined for their own good pleasure! … All of them, and you along with them, turned a blind eye and overlooked the Russian people, and Belinsky especially… Not only have you overlooked the people—you have treated them with loathsome contempt, which is enough to say that by people you meant only the French people, and even then only the Parisians, and were ashamed that the Russian people are not like them.310

Pyotr is the character equivalent of “Nechaev” in the novel. However, Dostoevsky clarified that while Nechaev may have been the original inspiration for the novel, he was not interested in the “historical Nechaev,” but in “what Nechaev represented.”311 In a letter to the editor of Russian Herald, Mikhail Katkov, he wrote:

One of a number of major events in my story will be the well-known murder of Ivanov in Moscow by Nechaev. I hasten to make a disclaimer: I did not and do not know either Nechaev or Ivanov or the circumstances of that murder except from the newspapers…. My imagination may differ to the greatest extent from what actually happened, and my Pyotr Verkhovensky may not resemble Nechaev at all; but I think that in my stunned mind there has been created by imagination the person, the type that corresponds to that villainy.312

The social origin of the twenty-seven-year-old Pyotr Stepanovich was quite different from the real Nechaev, and the narrator in Demons describes him in utterly contradictory terms:

Dressed in clean and even fashionable clothes, but not foppishly; a bit hunched and slack at first sight, and yet not hunched at all, even easygoing… No one would call him bad-looking, but no one likes his face…. The expression of his face is as if sickly, but it only seems so. He has a sort of dry crease on his cheeks and around his cheekbones, which makes him look as if he were recovering from a grave illness. And yet he is perfectly healthy and strong, and has never even been ill.313

310 Ibid., 38.
311 Dostoevsky, The Notebooks for the Possessed. 7.
312 Dostoevsky, Complete Letters 1868-1871. 3:274-75.
313 Dostoevsky, Demons. 179.
To fully appreciate the character of Pyotr Stepanovich and to better understand how it converges and diverges from the real Nechaev, we will next turn to a brief biographical account of Sergei Nechaev.

4.3 Sergei Nechaev

Sergei Nechaev was born in September 1847. His father was a painter; his mother the daughter of peasant serfs, who died while Nechaev was still very young. He spent his earlier years working different odd jobs. At nine, he found work as a messenger boy at a factory. He taught himself how to read and befriended a few writers who served as his earlier mentors. He moved to Moscow in 1865 and to St. Petersburg the following year, where he became a schoolmaster. After receiving news about the failed assassination attempt on Alexander II, Nechaev wrote: "the foundations of our sacred cause were laid by Karakozov on the morning of 4th April 1866 … His action must be regarded as a prologue." 314 In 1868 he became an "external student" at the university, where he tried hard to influence the student body. The ninth anniversary of the emancipation reforms was approaching on February 19, 1870. Venturi described the significance of this date as follows:

The law had provided that during these nine years the peasants were to farm, besides the holdings granted to them, a strip of land, the rent for which they owed to the landlord. At the end of nine years they could choose between giving back this extra land or carrying on paying for its redemption. This would mark the end of the reforms of 1861. 315

Nechaev was confident that the peasants' grievances caused by the limited scope of the reform could be exploited to advance the revolutionary cause. Targeting the spring of 1870 for the revolution, Nechaev worked with a fellow revolutionary, Tkachev, 316 to put together a plan in “A

314 Venturi, Roots of Revolution, 361.
315 Ibid.
316 Pyotr Nikitich Tkachev (1844-1886) was a Russian writer, critic, and revolutionary theorist.
Programme of Revolutionary Action.” They planned to incite students first in the two capitals and later expand into the provinces. They envisaged “a union with all ‘European revolutionary organizations,’” and setting up a center outside Russia. For these goals, Nechaev left for Geneva in March 1869. Since most revolutionary leaders were émigrés based out of Switzerland, he sensed an opportunity to expand his own influence in their absence from Russia. He introduced himself as the representative of the Russian revolutionary movement and was warmly received by the émigrés, including Bakunin and Herzen's close associate, Ogarev. Bakunin even created the Russian section of "The World Revolutionary Alliance" and issued Nechaev with a document certifying that he was 'Representative No. 2771.' He also urged Ogarev to dedicate a poem to Nechaev, which was then “published in a leaflet and by October was already circulating in Russia.” Bakunin and Nechaev also collaborated on a booklet titled “The Catechism of a Revolutionary,” which was “published in Latin characters, in code, and taken back to Russia by Nechaev on his return to Moscow.” One can sense Bakunin’s excitement regarding Nechaev from a letter he wrote to his friend Guillaume on April 13, 1869:

I have here with me one of those young fanatics who know no doubts, who fear nothing and who have decided quite definitely that many, many of them will have to perish at the hands of the government but who will not let his stop them until the Russian people arises. They are magnificent, these young fanatics, believers without Gods, heroes without rhetoric.

In this manner, Bakunin made Nechaev “the ‘revolutionary prototype’ par excellence.”

Nechaev returned to Russia in August 1869 with his bolstered credentials and immediately "set about organizing political activity at the Moscow Agricultural Academy," the very same institution where Dostoevsky's brother-in-law was studying. In an article titled "The Basic

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317 Venturi, Roots of Revolution. 363.
318 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 147.
319 Venturi, Roots of Revolution. 364.
320 Ibid.
Principles of the Future Society" that Nechaev published in the second issue of the People’s Revenge, he outlined his conception of a communist system—one that Marx later referred to as “barracks communism.” This article inspired Dostoevsky’s portrayal of the revolutionary intellectual, Shigalyov, and his ideas of Shigalyovism. Nechaev also proposed setting up revolutionary cells consisting of five members (quintets), with one leader and four ordinary members. The leader of each cell was supposed to be an ordinary member of a higher quintet, while the remaining four ordinary members were tasked to set up their own revolutionary cell, in which they would be leaders. Such a structure “offered the advantage of a wide base for recruitment, whilst at the same time it restricted the effectiveness of police penetration.”

One of Nechaev's cell members, Ivan Ivanov, refused to give Nechaev his blind obedience, who, together with his cell members, murdered Ivan on November 21, 1869. The police soon recovered the dead body and were quick to round up the murderers. By then, Nechaev had left the country for Switzerland. While in Switzerland, Nechaev worked with Ogarev to publish six editions of Herzen's the Bell (Kolokol) between January and May. By the summer of 1870 though, Nechaev’s relationship with Bakunin and Ogarev had strained to the point that they severed all ties with him. Meanwhile, in the absence of Nechaev, the trial of the other murderers was delayed until July 1871. Dostoevsky's return to Russia coincided both with the trial and his writing of Part II and III of Demons. As Nechaev's activities were published in the news, Dostoevsky drew on them and used them for his portrayal of Pyotr Stepanovich. By now, Nechaev was actively pursued by the tsarist government, so he went into hiding, first in Paris and then in Zurich. It wasn't until August 1872 that the Russian secret police arrested Nechaev in Zurich after being tipped off by one of the émigrés. The Swiss government extradited

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321 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 147-48.
322 Ibid., 148.
Nechaev to Russia "on the condition that he be tried as a common murderer and not as a political criminal."\textsuperscript{323} He stood trial in January 1873 and was sentenced to twenty years of "penal servitude" in Siberia but fearing he would influence other political prisoners, the Russian government kept him imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg. Eventually, he was able to resume contact with the revolutionary underground from his prison cell. The radical organization, the People's Will, was in communication with Nechaev when they carried out the assassination of Alexander II in March 1881. However, they "did not issue the false manifestos and proclamations that Nechaev designed for them."\textsuperscript{324} His accomplices among the prison guards were identified and rounded up soon after the Tsar’s assassination. Nechaev died in prison on December 3, 1882.

As evident from Nechaev’s brief biography, he was undoubtedly “a man of magnetic personality.” Although such a figure was likely to fascinate a writer like Dostoevsky, “there was a danger that under his pen Nechaev could turn into something of a sympathetic character,” like Raskolnikov from \textit{Crime and Punishment}.\textsuperscript{325} Richard Peace identifies this as the primary reason Dostoevsky was dissatisfied with his earlier plans for the pamphlet novel and introduced a new hero, Nikolai Stavrogin.

\subsection*{4.4 The Catechism of a Revolutionary}

During the trial of Nechaev's followers, the "Catechism" was brought as one of the incriminating documents against them. The Catechism was written as a manifesto that sketched out a program of action for new and prospective revolutionary movement members. Venturi notes that "the clear, ruthless style with which Bakunin expressed these ideas ... gives them a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 3.
\item Peace, \textit{Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels}. 150.
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new and exceptional power." (FV, 364) The first part of the Catechism outlines the "attitude of the revolutionary toward himself," and begins with a chilling statement:

The revolutionary—is a doomed man. He has neither his own interests, nor affairs, nor feelings, nor attachments, nor property, nor even name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single, exclusive interest, by a total concept, a total passion—revolution.326

Much of what we observe in the character and behavior of Pyotr Stepanovich can be traced back to the Catechism. As an example, the Catechism aims to undermine authority through blackmail, for which one of the catechisms states: “We must exploit them in all possible ways and by all possible means, entangle them, confuse them, and having found out everything we can about their filthy secrets, make them our slaves.”327 For this purpose, we see that Pyotr Stepanovich first borrowed the governor’s manuscript of his novel and then maintained possession of it. He also encouraged Von Lembke to show him his collection of revolutionary pamphlets leaving him in a compromised state. Nechaev himself had secretly searched for compromising information in Bakunin's apartment while he was away.328 One of the other catechisms suggests using flattery to win the trust of the leadership: “We can conspire with them according to their programs, making it appear that we are following them blindly, but all the while taking them in hand … hopelessly compromising them.”329 Pyotr Stepanovich led the governor’s wife, Yulia Mikhailovna, to believe that she had a strong following among the younger generation and used her position to his advantage. Pyotr Stepanovich also echoed some aspects of Nechaev's vision of a communist system through his "alter-ego," Shigalyov:

327 Ibid., 549.
328 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 149.
329 Ibid.
Shigalyov is a man of genius! Do you know he's a sort of genius like Fourier, but bolder … he's invented 'equality'!... He's got each member of society watching the others and obliged to inform. Each belongs to all, and all to each.330

This vision of society seems to fit well with the description of the Crystal Palace from Notes from the Underground. Dostoevsky even has Shigalyov anticipate the underground man’s objection that life in such a perfect place will be dull and boring:331

there is also a need for convulsion; this will be taken care of by us, the rulers.… once every thirty years Shigalyov gets a convulsion going, and they all suddenly start devouring each other, up to a certain point, simply so as not to be bored. Boredom is an aristocratic sensation; in Shigalyovism there will be no desires. Desire and suffering are for us; and for the slaves—Shigalyovism.332

4.5 Confronting a Revolutionary Past

In his Diary of a Writer, Dostoevsky has an entry from 1873 titled “One of the Contemporaneous Falsehoods,” in which he responds to an article published in The Russian World, claiming that radicals of the “Nechaiev pattern” are able to “recruit proselytes only among idlers, defectives—and not at all among the youths attending to their studies.”333

Questioning the veracity of such a claim, Dostoevsky writes:

what if it should happen that some case of nihilism were to involve by no means “defectives”—not the unruly ones swinging their feet under the table and not merely idlers—but on the contrary diligent enthusiastic youths precisely attending to their studies even endowed with good but only misdirected, hearts?334

Acknowledging his own revolutionary past as a “Petrashevetz,” he describes how well-educated others in his revolutionary circle were: “I also stood on the scaffold, condemned to death; and I assure you that I stood there in the company of educated people. That whole group had graduated

330 Dostoevsky, Demons. 418.
331 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 174.
332 Dostoevsky, Demons. 418.
334 Ibid., 146.
from the highest institutions of learning.”

Dostoevsky even raises the possibility that a "Petrashevtsi" could have become a "Nechaivetzi." However, he distinguishes between the "theoretical socialism" of his youth with the "political socialism" of the younger generation.

Dostoevsky's loathing of political socialism is seen manifested in his description of the Peace Congress and the Paris Commune.

While Dostoevsky was in Geneva in September 1867, he attended the Congress of the League of Peace and Freedom, which was “a general socialist gathering,” but was partly called “in the hope of averting the Franco-Prussian war.”

Its chief “luminaries” included revolutionaries like the Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, both of whom condemned militarism and war. Reporting for the London Times, one correspondent reported: “[Garibaldi] delivered a speech on the Peace Congress, declaring himself a lover of peace, but desiring in the first instance the destruction of the Papacy and the dethronement of all tyrants.” Bakunin spoke the following day and called for the “destruction of large centralized states,” since they fostered nationalism. Dostoevsky expressed his contempt for these radicals in a letter he wrote to Apollon Maykov:

Have I written you about the Peace Congress here? Not only had I never seen or heard such nonsense in all my life, but I had not even imagined that people were capable of such stupidity. Everything was stupid: both the way they assembled and the way they began conducting their business, and the way they decided… They started with a proposal to vote against any large monarchies and to make them all small, then that no religion was necessary, and so on.

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335 Ibid., 147.
336 Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's. 76.
338 Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's. 76.
339 Moss, Russia in the Age of Alexander II, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. 135.
In another letter to Maykov that Dostoevsky wrote several months later, he went on a rampage against the Russian radicals living abroad: “It’s disgusting even to meet our clever fellows. Oh, poor people, oh, worthless people, oh trash, swollen from vanity… H[erzen] and I met by chance on the street, talked ten minutes in a hostiley polite tone, with little gibes, and went our separate ways… how they’ve swollen up!”

While the war between France and Germany was averted in 1867, tensions flared shortly after, and in July 1870, the two countries went to war. The war ended in a humiliating defeat for France and the capture of Emperor Napoleon III. The collapse of the Second Empire led to widespread chaos and paved the way for a revolutionary socialist government known as the Paris Commune. The Paris Commune lasted for less than three months. Still, its quick rise and fall and the destruction of the city in its aftermath horrified Dostoevsky, who considered the rise of the radical left as well as the growing might of Germany a threat to Russia. Dostoevsky features the Franco-Prussian War in Demons as the title of a piano composition by Lyamshin, which he composed as a “musical battle” between the La Marseillaise and the popular German song Mein lieber Augustin, to make an impression on Yulia Mikhailovna. At first, Marseillaise is “at the peak of her intoxication with her own grandeur,” but then Augustin begins “gaining strength,” and its measures “begin to fall in with the measures” of the Marseillaise. This is followed by Augustin becoming increasingly “joyful” and “insolent.” Eventually, Augustin drowns out La Marseillaise completely: “one hears hoarse sounds, senses measureless quantities of beer being drunk, a frenzy of self-advertisement, demands for billions, slender cigars, champagne, and hostages; ‘Augustin’ turns into a furious bellowing … The Franco-Prussian War is over.”

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342 Dostoevsky, Demons. 323.
4.6 Dostoevsky’s Parody of *What Is To Be Done*?

When Pyotr Stepanovich found his father, Stepan Trofimovich, reading Chernyshevsky’s *What Is To Be Done?*, he contemptuously said he could bring something better for Stepan to read. For Peace, the implication is that “the men of the sixties, the ‘Nechayevs’, have gone beyond even the nihilism of Chernyshevsky.” Dostoevsky alludes to this in Shigalyov’s reference to "aluminum columns" that the Crystal Palace of the "future phalanstery" in Vera Pavlovna’s fourth dream was adorned with: "Plato, Rousseau, Fourier, aluminum columns—all this is fit perhaps for sparrows, but not for human society.” Dostoevsky also included a brief description of a cooperative for women based on what Vera Pavlovna had set up in Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* When Shatov's wife, Marie, returned from Switzerland, she proposed opening up a “bookbinding shop… on rational cooperative principles.” Dostoevsky even mocked the “rational sexual relationship” portrayed in Chernyshevsky’s novel and described how that worked for the Virginskys. The narrator relates that less than a year after her marriage, Mrs. Virginsky announced that “he was being retired and that she preferred Lebyadkin, who soon moved in with the couple.” It was rumored that when Virginsky’s wife announced his retirement, he had responded: “My friend, up to now I have only loved you, but now I respect you.” Virginsky’s reply was a parody of how Chernyshevsky’s “new people” spoke to one another. Two weeks later, while the trio was having tea with friends in the countryside, Virginsky grabbed a terrified Lebyadkin by his hair and dragged him around for no apparent reason. This brought a quick end to the love triangle, modeled after Vera Pavlovna’s arrangement with her two husbands, Lopukhov and Kirsanov.

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343 Peace, *Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*. 163.
345 Ibid., 32.
Dostoevsky did not limit his parodies to Chernyshevsky's novel and also targeted his theory on aesthetics, first introduced in Chernyshevsky's dissertation titled "The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality." Varvara Petrovna once brought up Raphael's Sistine Madonna during her conversation with the governor's wife, Yulia Mikhailovna. In response, Yulia lectured her on the “newer” ideas of the younger generation, which she claimed rendered classical art irrelevant: "No one now, Russian or English, finds anything in it. All this fame was just the old men shouting… Believe me, Varvara Petrovna, only we of society, by our beneficial influence and, namely, by indulgence, can keep them [the younger generation] from the abyss they are being pushed into by the intolerance of all these old codgers." Varvara felt humiliated and, in turn, vented off on Stepan Trofimovich, accusing him of deliberately keeping her in the dark on newer ideas and blaming him for hanging on to outdated ones: “No one nowadays admires the Madonna anymore or wastes time over it, except for inveterate old men… She serves absolutely no purpose.” Varvara then proceeded to lecture Stepan on “Chernyshevsky's dictum that the creations of art are on a lower aesthetic plane than those of reality.” “This mug is useful, because water can be poured into it; this pencil is useful, because everything can be written with it… Try painting an apple and put a real apple next to it—which would you take? … This is what your theories boil down to, once the first ray of free analysis shines on them.”

4.7 The Crocodile

In 1865, Dostoevsky published the first part of a satirical story, The Crocodile, in his journal, the Epoch. The story described a “pretentious” and “conceited” Petersburg bureaucrat, Ivan Matveich, who, together with his “flirtatious” wife and his "inseparable" friend, went to

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346 Dostoevsky, Demons. 300.
347 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 164.
348 Dostoevsky, Demons. 338-39.
view a crocodile on exhibition in the Arcade. Ivan is swallowed alive after he failed to exercise caution and got too close to the crocodile. To everyone's surprise, he survives and comfortably settles down in the crocodile's belly. The crocodile's German owner refused to consider "excavating" it to pull out Ivan Matveich and felt it was far more advantageous to have him continue living inside its belly since the two together would draw more people to the exhibition. Ironically, Ivan himself agreed with the German proprietor citing “the principles of economics.” Conceited as he was, Ivan viewed this as an opportunity to “develop his lofty ideas for the betterment of mankind” and “become a new Fourier.”

He even invited his wife to join him inside the belly of the beast, but she declined on account of all the attention she was receiving from other men. As Ivan’s absence extended, his wife considered asking him for a divorce. The theme of The Crocodile was to draw attention to the absence of humanity in the responses that emerged in the wake of the incident. Except for the narrator, no one felt genuinely sorry for the victim.

Shortly after its publication, however, Dostoevsky was accused of using the story to ridicule Chernyshevsky, who had been sent to Siberia after a humiliating civil trial in Petersburg just a few months earlier. The comparison was drawn since Ivan speaking from inside the crocodile's belly was presumed to be an allusion to Chernyshevsky writing his novel What Is To Be Done? from his prison cell. Moreover, Chernyshevsky’s wife, Olga Sokratova, was known to share the flirtatious behavior of Ivan’s wife, which further strengthened the case against Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky denied “any allegorical intention” in an entry in the Diary of a Writer, which he wrote eight years later. In his entry, titled “Something Personal,” Dostoevsky claimed that Chernyshevsky’s convictions had never offended him: “One can very much respect a man, 

350 Ibid., 363.
even though radically disagreeing with his ideas.”

Reminding the reader of his own imprisonment and exile, Dostoevsky protested against the accusation that he would “rejoice in the exile of another ‘unfortunate.’”

Joseph Frank suggested that Dostoevsky wanted to use The Crocodile to ridicule “advocates of unchecked capitalist exploitation of Russia.” Dostoevsky had identified a “political radical” in Dmitry Pisarev, the leading publicist of the Russian Word, who was also a partisan of “rapid capitalist development” and “large scale industrialization.” As Frank sees it, this signified a shift in Dostoevsky’s overall relationship to “radical ideology,” and he traced its origin back to Pisarev’s “interpretation of Bazarov as a sort of left-wing Superman, whose conscience admitted no ‘moral regulator,’ and who thus existed outside the bounds of good and evil.”

4.8 Stepan Trofimovich’s Last Peregrination

Stepan Trofimovich’s last journey was one of self-discovery and paralleled Stavrogin’s earlier “pilgrimage” in several respects. Stavrogin had boldly stepped out into the dark stormy night; Stepan Trofimovich, though timid in the undertaking of his “daylight journey,” nevertheless thought of himself as raising “the banner of a great idea” and “going to die for it on the high road!”

Stavrogin had set out for the house of Marya Lebyadkin but found himself (inadvertently) acquiring the services of Fedka; Stepan Trofimovich claimed to visit “ce marchand,” but ended up finding the “Gospel woman,” Sofya Matveevna. Here, the reference to Sofya, meaning wisdom, was not without significance since she served as a catalyst through which he found faith.

The “vehicle” that Dostoevsky uses to deliver Stepan Trofimovich to

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351 Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer. 1:29.
352 Ibid., 28.
354 Ibid., 630.
355 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels. 204.
“the Russian of the common people,” and subsequently, the source of wisdom, is the peasant cart.\textsuperscript{356}

In one of his conversations with Sofya Matveevna, Stepan Trofimovich brings up a passage from Luke 8: 32-36, commonly known as the parable of the Gadarene swine, and which is also the second epigraph of the novel:

You see, it’s exactly like our Russia. These demons who come out of a sick man and enter into swine—it’s all the sores, all the miasmas, all the uncleanness, all the big and little demons accumulated in our great and dear sick man, in our Russia, for centuries, for centuries! \textit{Oui, cette Russie que j’aimais toujours}.\textsuperscript{357} But a great will and a great thought will descend to her from on high, as upon that insane demoniac, and out will come all these demons, all the uncleanness, all the abomination that is festering on the surface … and they will beg of themselves to enter into swine. And perhaps they already have! It is us, us and them, and Petrusha … \textit{et les autres avec lui},\textsuperscript{358} and I, perhaps, first, at the head, and we will rush, insane and raging, from the cliff down into the sea, and all be drowned, and good riddance to us, because that’s the most we’re fit for. But the sick man will be healed and ‘sit at the feet of Jesus’ … and everyone will look in amazement.\textsuperscript{359}

Though the parable primarily applies to the nihilists and revolutionaries, Stepan Trofimovich does not exclude himself (and by extension, his generation) from the Gadarene swine.

\subsection*{4.9 A Caricature of Ivan Turgenev}

Dostoevsky parodied Turgenev through his character Karmazinov, who appears sympathetic to the radicals in his attempt to win over the younger generation's sympathies. When the narrator recounts his first meeting with Karmazinov, he describes how Karmazinov, who appeared to embrace him, simply offered his cheek to be kissed. This description was inspired by Dostoevsky's actual experience, reported in a letter to his friend, Apollon Maykov.\textsuperscript{360}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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narrator describes how he used to be a “devoted reader” of Turgenev in his youth: “I reveled in them; they were the delight of my adolescence and youth. Later I grew somewhat cold to his pen; the tendentious novellas he had been writing lately I liked less than his first, original creations, in which there was so much ingenious poetry; and his most recent works I even did not like at all.” The accusation of writing “tendentious novels” was based on the perceived “anti-Russian theme” of Turgenev’s 1867 novel, Smoke, in which, through long monologues of the character, Potugin, he described the nature of Russia from the perspective of an uncompromising westernizer. These monologues also attacked “the Slavophile notions of the distinctive nature of Russian national culture,” denigrated “Russia’s past or present achievements,” and “advocated complete Westernization of Russia.” In his letter to Maykov, Dostoevsky quoted Turgenev as having said: “If Russia disappeared, there would not be any loss or any agitation among mankind.” Later in the conversation:

He said that he was writing a long article against the Russophiles and the Slavophiles. I advised him, for the sake of convenience, to order a telescope from Paris. “What for?” he asked. “It’s far from here,” I replied, “Train your telescope on Russia and examine us because otherwise, it is really hard to make us out.”

Turgenev had already become obsessed with the fear that his absence from Russia was adversely affecting his writing, so Dostoevsky's comments only aggravated his fears. Other bits of their conversation made it into the novel as well. Turgenev had declared his atheism during their conversation, and Karmazinov does the same in the novel. Also, based on Dostoevsky's account, Turgenev was personally offended when Dostoevsky criticized Germany and retorted back: “You should know that I have settled in here permanently, that I consider myself German, not a

361 Dostoevsky, Demons. 84.
362 Schapiro, Turgenev: His Life and Times. 212.
364 Ibid., 258.
Russian, and I’m proud of that!” Karmazinov expresses similar sentiments: “it’s seven years now that I’ve been sitting in Karlsruhe. And when the city council decided last year to install a new drainpipe, I felt in my heart that this Karlsruhian drainpipe question was dearer and fonder to me than all the questions of my dear fatherland … during all the time of these so-called reforms here.”

Despite this cruel caricature of Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Turgenev came together several years later at the Pushkin monument's unveiling in Moscow in June 1880. This was a historical moment where a monument honoring a “hero of culture, rather than arms or politics,” was being erected. Both Turgenev and Dostoevsky delivered speeches, which were received by the crowd to thunderous applause. Dostoevsky captured the excitement of the moment in his letter to his wife, Anna:

> When I spoke at the end, however, of the universal unity of people, the hall was as though in hysteria. When I concluded—I won’t tell you about the roar, the outcry of rapture: strangers among the audience wept, sobbed, embraced each other and swore to one another to be better… Turgenev, for whom I put in a good word in my speech, rushed to embrace me with tears. Annenkov ran up to shake my hand and kiss my shoulder. “You’re a genius, you’re more than a genius!” they both told me.

The evening concluded with an “apotheosis” of Pushkin, where “Turgenev ceded to Dostoevsky the honor of crowning Pushkin’s bust.” Dostoevsky passed away a few months later while at the pinnacle of his fame.

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365 Ibid.
366 Dostoevsky, Demons. 452-53.
5. Conclusion

The Russian nihilist movement, led by the generation of the sixties, in opposition to its parent generation of the forties, began to unravel within a few years of its inception. While this is partly attributed to the evolving social and political circumstances, at the heart of it was the very character of nihilism, whose power of negation knew no bounds. Even Dmitry Pisarev cautioned against it: "When a person negates utterly everything, this means he negates precisely nothing and even that he knows and understands nothing."\(^{370}\) The earliest manifestation of this structural unraveling could be traced back to 1862, when a series of revolutionary tracts were published and distributed in Petersburg. When Dostoevsky received one such pamphlet titled “To the Young Generation,” he was taken aback and visited Chernyshevsky that evening. Dostoevsky showed him the tract and requested him to use his influence to bring an end to this “abomination.” To his surprise, Chernyshevsky himself appeared unsettled: “Do you really suppose that I am in sympathy with them and that I could have taken part in the compilation of this scrap of paper? … I know no one among them.”\(^ {371}\) By the end of the decade, the top brass of the nihilist movement had either died (Dobrolyubov and Pisarev) or been banished to Siberia (Chernyshevsky), leaving behind an unfillable void. Moreover, the revolutionary currents within the movement led to a shift in the overall strategy, from propaganda to subversive activities and finally, to terrorism. This shift in focus alienated a part of their support base. After Karakozov’s unsuccessful assassination attempt of Alexander II in April 1866, the government responded with the counter-revolutionary wave of the late 1860s, also known as the “White Terror.” Sergei Kravchinsky, a Russian revolutionary writing under the pseudonym Stepniak, claimed that after

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\(^{370}\) Moser, Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860’s. 24.
1866, one had to be “either blind or hypocritical to believe in the possibility of any improvement, except by violent means.”\textsuperscript{372} For Kravchinsky, the Paris Commune of 1871 supplied the spark, which brought the transformation from a nihilist movement to a revolutionary movement. Interestingly, Kravchinsky’s definition of a nihilist does not even include political agitation: “a passionate and powerful reaction, not against political despotism, but against moral despotism that weighs upon the private and inner life of the individual.”\textsuperscript{373}

In \textit{The Decay of Lying} (1889), Oscar Wilde presented a dialogue between two characters, Cyril and Vivian, who debated the relationship between life and art. Vivian argued for the position that “life imitates art” by borrowing “situations and characters” created by writers and drew on the example of a nihilist: “The Nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is a purely literary product. He was invented by Turgenev, and completed by Dostoevsky.”\textsuperscript{374} The idea that the representation of nihilists within Russian literature helped create the nihilist movement is problematic in several respects. First of all, looking at the works of Ivan Turgenev, we see that he was renowned for his ability to embody existing trends within society into suitable types. His novel, \textit{Fathers and Sons}, which popularized the term nihilist, wasn’t published until early 1862, yet he set his novel back in May of 1859. In other words, Turgenev had already noticed that the radicals had the younger generation of Russians under their sway as early as 1859. For Dostoevsky, both novels, \textit{Notes from the Underground} and \textit{Demons}, are seen as his reaction to the nihilist movement. In the case of \textit{Demons}, he openly admitted to this in a letter to a friend:

\textsuperscript{372} Kravchinsky, Stepniak. \textit{Underground Russia - Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life}. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1883. 17.
\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., 4.
“What I’m writing is a tendentious piece; I want to state my opinions fervently. (The nihilists and Westernizers will start yelling about me that I’m a reactionary!) But … I’ll state all my opinions down to the last word.” Finally, Chernyshevsky’s depiction of the “new people” in *What Is To Be Done?* was never intended to be seen as a portrayal of nihilists but more as a program for development and social action for those involved in the revolutionary cause.

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